

Media Relations

An action guide from IMMC

Establishing a positive media relations program is a valuable promotional tool that can be quickly and inexpensively implemented by your church. A church can designate a single person to serve as the *media relations contact*; however some churches establish a *media relations team* of 2 to 5 people.

Media relations can be handled effectively by volunteers or staff, but the person(s) assigned to cover media relations should have solid writing abilities, some journalistic traits, and organizational skills. Not everyone on the team has to be a Twain, Graham, or Hemingway, but the primary media relations person will need to focus on maintaining journalistic and organizational integrity.

The media relations team should establish an e-mail contact list for the religious, community and local news media in your area. This list should include the editors of local newspapers, shopping guides, and community newsletters, as well as contacts at the local radio, TV, and cable stations. The media relations team leader should verify formatting requirements, deadlines, and editorial preferences of each media outlet and develop press release templates to fit each.

Once these are set up, the media person or team can forward press releases on a regular basis to inform the community of upcoming activities, guest speakers, and special events. Remember to include good (B&W) photos when possible.

The following guide should help the media relations team get started:

1. **Is it is newsworthy?** The information that your church finds important may not be as valuable to the community. Always look at each item from the public's perspective, and ask yourself if this important to the general public in your community? If the answer is yes, then forward the press release.
2. **Remember to open with who, what, when, where and why.** The opening sentence of the article should lead with the "five-W's". Always lead with the facts at the front, don't make people search for the information. Also, if key information is located deeper in the article, the chance of it being cut during editing is greater.
3. **Use inverted-pyramid style of writing.** Traditionally, people write from the foundation up, building to a conclusion in a pyramid style. Specifically you start (1) Problem statement, (2) Related work, (3) Methodology, (4) Results, and then (5) Conclusions. Journalists use an inverted pyramid style. They start with their main conclusion and then descend into the details: (1) Conclusion, (2) Supporting information, and then (3) Background and details.
4. **KISS - Keep it simple & short.** Remember to always use simple and clear words, terms, and phrases. Try to keep your media releases to one page, and never more than two. Each page should be double-spaced and include identifying information.
5. **Connection.** Make sure the appropriate contact information, e-mail addresses and phone numbers are provided at the top of the release.
6. **Easy on the follow-up.** Don't become a pest, but do keep in touch. E-mail is a good way to follow-up with your media contacts. Remember that a well timed phone call drawing attention to your release will generate more results than just e-mailing the release. Build a rapport with your local media that is mutually beneficial, and they will come to see you as a valuable resource for information, quotes, and ideas within your community.

IMMC provides media and public relations assistance, including training and program development.