

How to work with the media

So, you have organised a cultural event and now you need to let everybody know about it? Here are some basic points to help you get your event in the media.

What's your point?

Firstly, regardless of the style or language you use in your media release, think about what the point of your release will be.

- What do you want people to do with the information? Do you want them to come to an event, submit artworks, write a letter to your mayor or join your group?
- Remember that a media release is usually going to everyone in town and all ages – how does your event appeal to the general public?

A nose for news

While your information is exciting for you, you have to look at what it will mean to the broader community. There are five factors that your information will be measured against:

Timing – Depending on the scale and reach of your event, you may need to contact media with information anywhere from six months to 4 weeks beforehand.

If you tell an editor your event on 4 *days* beforehand it is highly unlikely there will be space or time to fit you in. Make sure you know the publication dates of your media contacts and get in touch with them well ahead of time.

* Note that sometimes it is necessary to contact the media at short notice, for example, if you have been granted money to work on a project, and you've only just found out, that's news *now*, not in three months time.

Prominence – Prominence is why we find out that a celebrity has broken their arm, but not your next door neighbour. If the readers are likely to know the person in some way, they will be more interested in their news.

Impact – How many people will this information affect? If you are holding an event that is open to your whole town and surrounding areas, it is more likely to be printed than if you are holding an event for two people, or talking about an issue that only affects a small group.

Proximity – The best news angle for any community. If a media outlet is supposed to be covering your town, then your news has already ticked this box at least. Understandably, the larger the area, the less this factor applies. For example, if you are in Biloela, it should be much harder to get coverage in Rockhampton, than in the Biloela Central Telegraph, as the Rockhampton paper will cover events in Rockhampton first, then surrounding areas, and more people means more choice in what they include in their paper.

Human Interest – a funny little factor which includes something a bit different, a bit quirky, which newspapers will include as a bit of a light piece. If your event makes people go “oh, that's weird/unusual/cute” then you could end up getting a lot more coverage than you expect. People love reading about anything out of the ordinary. What's different about your event or issue?

Get to know your local media

If you are not familiar with the paper/TV or radio station, really find out what they are about. –

- What area do they cover – your town and surrounding areas?
- What issues do they really seem to talk about a lot?
- Do they have an arts journalist?
- What kind of columns and liftouts do they have?
- Does it come out daily, weekly or monthly?
- Know which days the journalists work, and who to send the information to: their producer, their editor or straight to them.
- Find out what day their deadline is (so you can get information to them on time AND so you don't contact them when they are at their busiest)

For example, there is a local paper where a young journalist runs a segment where she asks readers to dare her to do something new. In this example, you could get her to do a workshop that you've organized. Your information needs to fit your media format – so tailor it to suit.

Also, the benefit of being in a smaller town or regional area is that you could have personal contact with the journalists/presenters, which is a huge benefit compared to most people who will send them media releases.

Now for the fun part – writing the release

Writing for media is extremely different to other writing forms. For a start, the key is to keep it simple and succinct. Most newspapers use simple, factual language. Don't use words like 'manufacture' when 'make' will suffice. Don't use ten words when three will do.

Structure

Not only do you have to attract the reader's attention straight away, but you have to allow for the possibility that editors may not have enough space for your entire media release. They will cut your story from the bottom if they don't have enough space. The solution is to write in an inverted pyramid: simply put, most important information first, least important information last.

Your media release should be no more than one A4 page, and should be in at least size 11 font. It's also best to include any necessary logos and acknowledgement of sponsors and partners.

Headline

It's best to write the headline last so you can sum up the release in less than ten words. While the story might read, "today, a white Caucasian male was attacked by an Alsatian, who bit the man's thumb off," the headline would be "dog bites man".

Introduction

The introduction is a really important part of the story. If you have caught someone's attention, they are likely to read the introduction and stop there. Your introduction should be no more than 22 words and should include answers to the following questions:

Let's use an example where the Kenilworth Arts Council is writing a release for their event Kenilworth Celebrates.

Who – Kenilworth Arts Council

What – A festival called Kenilworth Celebrates, which has music, performances, arts markets and workshops.



Where – Kenilworth’s main street

When – 21 – 24 September

Why – To celebrate living in Kenilworth/ to have fun/ etc

How - With funding from xxxx OR support from local volunteers

Decide which answer is the most exciting or most prominent and put this to the front.
So, from this, we should end up with something like:

Kenilworth’s main street will come alive with music, markets and fun for Kenilworth Celebrates this September, presented by Kenilworth Arts Council.

Quotes

Decide who your spokesperson is, in most cases, it should be your event coordinator or group leader. Be sure to introduce the person before their quote. For example:

Brisbane Valley Arts Council President Andrea Oxenford said the event should be great fun.

‘The Arts Council have been working hard to make this yet another enjoyable and enlivening event for the whole town,’ said Ms Oxenford.

‘We hope to see everyone getting the most out of the music, dancing and markets on the day,’ she said.

Acknowledgements/additional information

At the end of the release, include any information about funding or other acknowledgements you need to include. e.g. BAMBOIN Inc. is the Local Arts Council of Bundaberg City and Burnett Shire and is proudly affiliated with the Queensland Arts Council.

This is also a good place to put a line such as “BAMBOIN Inc supports and promotes arts and cultural activities to enhance the social and economic development of the Bundaberg and Burnett District”

Call to action

There should always be a call to action at the end of the release, whether it be “please call [publicity person’s name] on [phone number] for media interviews and photo opportunities” or “Kenilworth Celebrates is on from 21 – 24 September. Book your ticket for the workshop at [ticket agent] at [address].

Use our template and guide

Make sure you also download the ARTSYAKKA Media Release Template and our guide on writing media releases from www.qac.org.au to assist you.

Images

Aside from your well-written media release, think about image options. High resolution, well shot images that show people’s faces or works will always help you get more coverage in a newspaper.

A media photo should be about people and events. For example, many newspapers would not print the cartoon image of Bette Davis for the production *Me and Jezebel*, preferring to print the image of Katy Manning or Barry Crocker instead. It’s also a good idea to organise for the paper to come out and take a photo if they are able, but if you want to tell people in advance of your event, best to have images to send a few weeks beforehand.

Time to send your release

Now you've written your release and identified the right time to announce your event to the media, it's time to send it out.

Create your media list: Most media contacts now use email as their main form of communication, and you'll always need to call each contact to bring attention to your information. Create a contact list so you can keep track of who you to send information to. Here is a basic example, but you could add columns for each activity and to record notes from your phone calls:

Journalists	Media	Title	Email	Phone	NOTES
Alastair Silcock	Pittsworth Sentinel	Journalist	mediareleases@newspaper.com	(07) 4693-2911 /	Sent release 11 Feb. Will promote the performance with bus info on TARS to organise a group.
Jenny Swan	ABC Southern Qld	Breakfast Announcer	Swan.Jenny@abc.net.au	(02) 4631-3811	Sent release 11 Feb. Also covers Stanthorpe, Mungindi, St George, Roma, Mitchell, Charleville
Vicki Thompson	ABC Southern Queensland	Producer - Mornings	thompson.vicki@abc.net.au	(07) 4631-3811	Sent release on 11 Feb. Also Stanthorpe, Mungindi, St George, Roma, Mitchell, Charleville

Send your media release: Copy the content of your release directly into the body of an email so that it is very easy to open the email and see immediately what it is all about. Remember that most journalists and reporters receive hundreds of emails a day - you need to make it quick and easy for them to read your information. Attach any additional materials.

Follow up: When you distribute the release, ring up and explain briefly what it's about and check you are sending it to the right person.

Understand that the media don't have to put anything in their paper/on their radio/TV station if they don't think it's newsworthy enough. While you can chase it up and ask politely, a media outlet is not worth their salt if they put everything they receive in their paper as requested by anybody. They have to ensure that their work is still relevant and attractive to their audience. So, give the journalist/presenter some time to consider it, then call them back and follow up once they've had a chance to read it. Don't be afraid to talk about different options for a story and try to identify the type of information they are interested in.

Coverage possibilities

Think more closely about the media you have chosen. Different media have different opportunities and problems.

Television

Often, text based media material is not suitable for television, unless you can provide footage to send TV stations. Think about how your TV station will get the footage they need and what you can offer them that will look visually attractive.

Radio

As most of you would already know, the ABC is a wonderful supporter of the arts. Local ABC stations often cover local cultural events, so arrange with your local ABC team for a lively and engaging person from your team to visit the studios for an interview.

You might even suggest to your local producer that someone go in to the studio, not just for an interview, but to sing a song from the event, read a poem, play an instrument or conduct a panel debate – the list is endless. If you are further out of the town where they are based, it's still possible to do a phone interview, and this can be either pre-recorded or live.

Commercial radio is also an option, but beware, many radio stations will not promote your event unless you are advertising with them. In saying that, many will still be happy to interview your artist/speaker.

Newspapers/magazines/newsletters

Print is the best method for getting the most information across to your audience. This differentiates it from television where the focus is on creating interest without the detail.

Many regional newspapers are desperately understaffed and are likely to put in your information without any editing or interviews.

Ticket giveaways

Commercial radio and newspapers are particularly happy to give away tickets, and will often give away a double pass each morning for a week. This is a good way to gain some regular coverage in the lead up to your event.

Over to you

Good luck with your media releases and publicity seeking!