

# Media 101: Inside Secrets to Press Coverage

By Dan Gould, Snowmobile Association of Massachusetts and member of the International Snowmobile Media Council



Snowmobilers do great things, so why don't they get more press? The answer is simple, most clubs and associations don't communicate with their local press.

## How Do The Big Organizations Get Press Coverage?

- Large organizations hire public relations companies
- They produce press releases on a regular basis
- They have a data base of media companies in their address book
- They are pro-active!

Nothing written above is magical or reserved for big P.R. companies, anyone can do it. The lack of a plan is the number one reason for failure within our community.

## Devise a Media Plan

- Form a media committee. A single volunteer will do.
- Build a media database. You can find all the contacts with a quick web search.
- Familiarize yourself with local reporters - read the papers, watch the news.

Oftentimes the editor the association/club newsletter and website is best qualified to lead the P.R. committee.

## Build a List of Story Ideas

- Charity fundraisers
- Military functions
- Safety programs
- Family events
- Legislative rides
- Work on public lands
- Projects that benefit the public

## Create a Press Release Template

If you want to be taken seriously, you need to create a press release template - in advance. It should have your organization's logo and basic contact information, such as mailing address, phone, email, websites, staff and officer's names. Preparing a template ahead of time allows you to send a press release at a moment's notice.

## Press Release Ingredients

Your press release should always have these basic ingredients: Who, What, Where, When, and Why. Many press releases have these very words written in bullet points with the facts following each bullet, while others are written in a less formal manner. A title is a good idea, too. Here is an example:

- "Snowmobile Ride for the Military"
- Who: The Snowstars Snowmobile Club, contact Jane Doe, 508-555-1212, jane@snowstars.com
- What: In honor of our military, the Snowstar Club is hosting a free snowmobile ride and barbeque for local servicemen and their families.
- Where: Snowstars' Clubhouse, located at 32 Marshall Street, Sturbridge, MA
- When: January 12, 2012, 10 A.M – 3 P.M. Best time for media is 11:30 A.M.
- Why: The Snowstars Snowmobile Club is proud to recognize local military families with a day of outdoor fun. Volunteers will lead vets and active duty servicemen on an exciting snowmobile adventure on local trails.

### **A few tips:**

- KISS: Keep It Simple Stupid... be brief and to the point
- Don't send your club newsletter, it will get deposited in the round file
- Include the best time for coverage and photos. Don't keep the press waiting around
- Grammar & spelling count
- Include the name and cell number of a person at the event who will assist the press
- If the location is hard to find, include basic directions

### **Send The Press Release To Everyone!**

The more editors see it, the better chance it will get covered.

- News Desk
- Regional News Desk
- Sunday Editor
- Photo Department
- Sports Department
- Features & Lifestyles
- Outdoors Editor
- Calendar / Events
- Any reporters or photographers you may already know.

Email is the best way to communicate; editors can forward it to reporters and photographers. Send the notice about a week before the event takes place. Post the press release on your website and community websites.

### **Be Prepared For The Interview, Know The Facts.**

- Prepare a club and association fact sheet. This should be on your website already.
- Be informed about the event, the reporter will ask questions.
- If there is a controversial issue be sure you are familiar with the facts.

### **During the Interview**

- Deliver your message in a concise simple manner
- Don't be afraid to use a cheat sheet
- Don't ad-lib. If you don't know the answer, promise to get back to them
- Follow-up is important, send additional information ASAP.
- Reporters have tight deadlines, respect their limited time.
- Point them to your website as a resource of information
- Get the reporters contact info for future use
- Offer hand-outs and business cards

### **Extra Credit: Handouts That Promote Snowmobiling**

- Economic impact
- Membership numbers
- Charitable fundraising
- Community service
- Copies of your publication
- Upcoming events
- History or facts
- Major projects and accomplishments

### **Photo Opportunities**

- Photos catch the reader's eye, sometimes a photo and caption say it all
- Tell your story with visuals: Photographers want to see something interesting
- Action shots are best, people sitting around a table are not compelling
- Offer the photographer a ride
- Help the photographer with I.D.s, business cards are nice

### **Cater To The Press**

- Do not make them wait around! Get them in & out in a timely manner.
- You may like the cold, the reporter may not. Gimmie shelter, coffee and donuts.

### **Small Publications: What You Should Send**

Weekly publications and community websites have tiny staffs, often one or two people. They happily accept photos and stories from the public. This is a great opportunity to promote your club. Email them your press release and...

- Digital photos with detailed captions
- Short and sweet stories
- Follow-up with a brief phone call, just to introduce yourself

Remember, reporters and photographers are always looking for interesting stories, they appreciate story ideas and photo opportunities.

*Dan Gould has been a photojournalist for over 30 years. As chief photographer of the Worcester Telegram & Gazette and telegram.com, he manages the daily assignments of the photo department.*