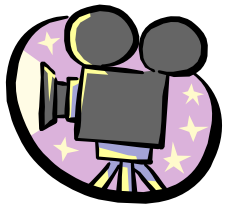
CHAPTER ONE: ALL MEDIA ARE NOT THE SAME

Different media are looking for different things. It is important that you understand these differences, so that you can give reporters what they need for fair and accurate stories.

Television

There are two things to remember when dealing with television reporters – keep your message short and think in terms of pictures cameramen can use to illustrate the story. Pictures are critical!



TV reporters are looking for short, to-the-point soundbites. You'll rarely see a person talking for more than 20 seconds in a TV news story. Spare the detail and SPEAK IN SOUNDBITES.

If you're writing a press release on a new court program, for example, you'll need the following:

- A program expert who is ready to do on-camera interviews
- A person who has been or will be affected by the new pronouncement, or who is a strong supporter of the effort.
- Photographs or other illustrations demonstrating what will occur or why the new initiative is needed. You might want to consider setting up a tour of a specific location and allowing cameras to cover that tour.

With these three elements, you have taken steps toward moving your story from a mere "possible mention" to a full story on television news. The easier you make it for television to get pictures, the more likely you are to get a complete story on the air.

"Talking heads" in television language is a head and shoulders shot of a person doing an interview. Television reporters need other video. If you're doing a news conference, you might want to consider making the location of your news conference part of the story. If you're going to announce a new program, say the Worthless Check Program, then do the announcement at a local business that supports the effort.

Most television reporters are general assignment reporters. They often work on as many as three or four stories in one day. You could very well be dealing with a reporter who just left the scene of a fatal wreck and is scheduled to do a live shot from a football stadium later in the day. Unless a television reporter asks for lots of background information, be as quick and concise in your remarks as you can, getting across your main points. Television reporters are looking for the simple facts and a 20-second sound bite. A handout listing useful facts is a very helpful tool to reporters in situations like this.

Whom do you call to talk about television coverage? In general, the best person to call is the assignment editor. The assignment editor is responsible for deciding which stories are going to be covered and by whom. Assignment editors are multi-taskers--listening to police scanners, monitoring other station's signals, juggling reporters and photographers in the field and taking calls from people with news tips. Be sure to call at the right time and be brief.

Most stations have a day assignment editor and a night assignment editor. If your event is going to occur during the day, talk to the day assignment editor. If your event is going to occur during the late afternoon or evening, talk to the night assignment editor who arrives at around 3 p.m.
Call when assignment editors are least busy. The best times to call day assignment editors are 7:15-8:15 a.m. and 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. If you're having an event or press conference, place ONLY two calls. Give the assignment editor a heads-up about the event a few days before it happens; make that call in the afternoon. The day of the event make an early morning call as a reminder. The best times to call night assignment editors are 3-5 p.m. or 8 to 9 p.m. Place the heads-up call in the evening, a few days before it is scheduled and the reminder day-of-event call in the afternoon of the day before it is scheduled.