



Building The Best Media Relationships

How To Draw Journalists For Events And Keep Them Coming

The information article that we provide here draws upon many of the tools created and tactics employed to create a strong draw for the Regolith Excavation Challenge. That event brought notable media organizations such as the Discovery Channel, BBC Radio, Planetary Radio Society, *New York Times Magazine*, *Launch Magazine*, *WIRED Magazine*, *New Scientist Magazine*, KCOY-TV, KSBY-TV, MSNBC Cosmic Log, Associated Press, iNewswire, NewswireToday, PRZoom, PRBuzz, SANEP, Space.Com, *Jersusalem Post* and more.

Making A List And Checking It Twice

Media Kit

Create a media kit that essentially addresses the most common questions for journalists. Give additional information on what resources are available to them as they travel or cover an event. Double check all information in spelling, quotes, prices, and statistics used. The more information you provide in advance of an event helps a journalist to create a robust story—especially true for magazine reporters or stringers that tend to have extended deadlines in contrast to their electronic news source counterparts. Here are the basics on the media facts sheet:

1. Name of event, acronym, and colloquial reference
2. Location of event with map instruction
3. Names, titles, and roles of key players at the event
4. Contact lists with names and titles: teams, judges, anyone who is part of the event but not among the key players hosting, coordinating, or running the event
5. Primary media contact(s) associated to the event
6. Costs on parking and food
7. Location and costs of hotel reservations and local restaurants
8. Prior history snapshot of the event
9. Quotes form major participants or credible sources (about 3 to 6) that relate to the event
10. Photos: mock ups of models, location, participants both past and present (300 ppi for print images, and 72 ppi for online)
11. Addresses for online downloads and essential information

The Geometry of Reporting Stories

Angles and Perspectives

Journalists love an angle. What's the story? What's the angle? Is there more than one angle to a story? Does the angle have teeth? Does it bite? is it provocative and gets the average consumer to stop and say, "I never thought about that one."

For example, the California Space Authority (CSA) and the California Space Education Workforce Institute (CSEWI) managed NASA's Regolith Excavation Challenge in May of 2007 with great success. It was a competition to create a lightweight lunar excavator, running on 30 watts of electricity that could extract a certain amount of lunar regolith (mock moon soil) in 30 minutes. The competition was open to anyone in the world. The winning purse totaled \$250,000 that was provided for by NASA because the Regolith Excavation Challenge was part of the Centennial Challenge competition series.

Here are a few of the many angles pursued or could be pursued:

- **NASA focus:**
Why the Centennial Challenges and why Regolith Excavation Challenge is different?
Is NASA having a communication disconnect with the public and needs to use third-party sources to help in that regard?
- **Inventor focus:**
Why did students try to inventor a lunar excavator?
Why did an entrepreneur try to invent a lunar excavator?
- **Judge focus:**
Why are the Centennial Challenges so hard to win?
- **Family focus:**
Why are kids interested in robotic-looking landers?
Is rocketry dying and robotics the in-thing with youth?

When you help a journalist develop the angles, you are helping him/her with the creation of the story and that is very appreciated by the reporter. For independent reporters and stringers, it may also mean the difference between a single story and several or a main story standing alone or one with a fascinating sidebar.

You can even suggest a journalist pursue an entire series or news arc on a subject. The Regolith Excavation Challenge could be a part of a larger whole with stories in the local area that make up for a series. While pitching a story for Huell Howser's documentary series, we suggested doing a series on the California Central Coast Exploding Space Interest. The stories involved were the Chumash Indians love for star watching and the new hope to build a California Space Center on their ancient land; the Regolith Excavation Challenge; the Mechatronics degree program at Allan Hancock Community College (a unique program involving mechanics, software, and electronics) where students were encouraged to work in space careers; a special teachers recruitment in San Luis Obispo to help engineers become system engineers (i.e., super engineers), etc. You get the point—thinking through the possible storylines is something journalists appreciate.

When you think about the modern nature of collaboration, creating other story perspectives works extremely well in the California Innovation Corridor. If one participant is having an event, you can use that event to note the achievement or association to another Corridor participant. The news reporter will take that lead and hopefully follow it.

A Little Zoom Makes A Big Boom—Act Quickly

Response Time

When any journalists contact your office, respond to their need quickly, especially if they need a quote. Beat reporters and journalists work on daily deadlines and are under pressure to get the story out. If you can help them in a crunch, you raise the possibility they will return to you in the future because you are credible and quick. In some cases, even writing up and getting clearance on a few quotes in advance can help. Albeit, those quotes are designed to anticipate inquiries and comment on upcoming issues where your office or organization plays a critical role.

Use A Combination For A Knock-Out Outreach

Alternate Press Releases And Media Alerts

Press releases are mini-stories that identify a particular angle on an event. Generally, during the last two to three weeks prior to an event taking place, it is good to saturate the wires with press releases (on different angles of the event) and to alternate with media alerts. Media alerts are not carried in attachments as a press release might be, but may be transmitted in simple text format rather than html and rely heavily on the headline to draw attention. The media alert is a no frills approach—who, what, where, how, and why basics—in contrast to a press release that has an angle and is a mini-story. Releases on wires may be picked up by other news sources especially independents; media alerts may penetrate larger news agencies where press releases fail (that's because some news sources block the bulk of emails with attachments and prefer the receipt of information by simple text with zero attachments). Either way, you are looking for ways to get the information in front of someone, and to hook them quickly to read more.

No Paupers In The Reporting World

The Freelance Journalist

Freelance journalists and writers, stringers, usually represent a host of publications, and some of their clients are major media sources. If a reporter is on staff, it does not mean they write poorly or that they are a secondary or tertiary contact. On the contrary, the freelancing journalist may well know more people than the staff writer. Treat these journalists as important as any reporter. They will appreciate it and you might be surprised as to how well you will be treated when they craft their story about your organization or event.

Pinging For Journalists

Thanks and Hello

It never escaped me when I was a journalist how everyone loves you to cover an event (because they view news as free publicity), but once the event is passed your value is only worth the positive comments you made. It is true that journalists are very busy, and often only call you when they need a story, but the reverse (you calling them when you need a story) is not always the best tact. Better to send an occasional “hello,” a ping, a pulse via phone, mail or email. It does not have to be long, you just have to remind them you on the radar and that you appreciate their coverage when a relevant story comes up.

Journalism is not public relations. It is a fluid medium that may have several different angles (how many ways a single story can be viewed or created into a connecting story) on an upcoming event or person. It may involve a pre-, post-interview, taped or live event, breaking news or feature piece format. Keep in mind reporters and wires operate differently from a columnist or a commentator with the former reporting facts and the latter giving a distinct opinion to the facts.

Regolith—That’s Easy For You To Say Brands, Teasers, Taglines

When you have an event—the name of your event or project can impact the news coverage or, at least, how effective it will be for the public to understand what you are doing.

Using the Regolith Excavation Challenge is an example of a name that is tough to understand and even recall. What’s regolith? In a marketing view, it can be tough because you have to find a way to explain it in simple terms without detracting from the limited space and/or time you have to use to promote other facets of the event. Often, the way to make an event more attractive to the newswires and the public is to link it to another name, a similar event that is recognizable, and one where you can ride the coattails of their branding to promote your own.

Riding the coattails may involve a sponsor with far more potent name recognition. In our case, with the Regolith Excavation Challenge, it served our purposes to use NASA where and when appropriate. Riding the coattails may be to connect with a similar event or a past one that people recognize and recall (although you need to be careful about any infringement issues). Use a colloquial phrase if that helps ID your event. Some of these connections can be translated into your event tagline or even a teaser (which journalists like and do use in their reporting). For instance, using Regolith Excavation Challenge as the model, you have these options:

Well Known Brands -

- *NASA and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)*

Teasers -

- *Want to Get Dirty? Try Regolith*
- *Digging for Dollars on the Moon—Attend the Regolith Excavation Challenge*
- *Someone’s Going to Make Money in a Sandbox at the Regolith Excavation Challenge*

Taglines -

- *Regolith Excavation Challenge – Everyday People Discovering Solutions for Lunar Excavation*

Each of these dynamics working in tandem make the regolith event more attractive because it explains or gives credibility to it, even though you may not know exactly what regolith is or does.

Parting Words

Final Observation

Journalists appreciate sources that are available, credible, and believable. Working with a journalist entails doing your homework, making information accessible and attractive, and in knowing the psychology of what drives the individual reporter and the larger bureau or newsroom.

In short, most journalists have to dig hard for their story material. If you understand that facet, you will understand that the easier you make it for the journalist to craft a story, the more you guarantee they will return to you. Plenty of pithy quotes, sound bites, great stats, and a refreshing angle will make you a boon for a reporter. It's a symbiotic relationship—you get positive coverage, the journalist gets a boost in his/her career, and the bureau, station, or publication makes money on telling a great story.