

News they can use vs. news they can lose
Article provided by HMA Public Relations

For businesses, understanding what stories make news, and what stories make editors and reporters snooze is critical. Even companies with limited advertising budgets can often gain publicity through media coverage.

There is an old adage that news is whatever editors say it is. However, news is more than simply a random selection of stories. At its heart, news is the essence of a community's concerns, fears and joys. Even as the Valley grows, news continues to bind Arizonan together and serves as a unifying thread.

For public relations professionals, identifying newsworthy story ideas is one of the most challenging parts of our job. The ability to accurately judge the news value of a possible story can mean the difference between instant interest, and missed opportunities.

So what makes good news anyway? Generally, true news is considered to have one or several elements including: timeliness, proximity, conflict, impact and human interest.

Timeliness is exactly how it sounds. For most daily news organizations, something that happened yesterday is considered old news. However, smart public relations practitioners can often develop new and enticing ways of furthering a news story thereby extending its value to the media.

For stories that take place in geographically remote locations, proximity is one of the toughest challenges. How do you make a story interesting to local media if it's happening a thousand miles away? Again, skilled PR professionals can help you localize these national stories, tying in you and your organization as expert sources.

Conflict is another important element in judging newsworthiness. Clearly, most organizations would rather avoid stories dealing with conflict. Having skilled spokespeople in your corner can help defuse otherwise explosive stories, while ensuring your side of the story gets told.

While the media has traditionally focused heavily on stories involving conflict, today's journalists are often eager to help readers and viewers explore how a story will affect them. As a result, they often look to evaluate the impact of a possible story. These types of stories can range from how a proposed layoff may affect a community, to how a business' charitable contributions will impact a non-profit organization.

Finally, there are human-interest stories. While some stories focus primarily on telling a compelling human-interest tale, such as how someone coped with a rare medical disease, the human-interest element is at the core of every good news story. Public relations professionals can help identify and highlight the human interest in almost any newsworthy story.

For PR professionals, the challenge is identifying the most important elements to help convince a reporter to cover your story. To help tell your story, practitioners rely heavily on their relationships with the media.

Top public relations agencies are respected by members of the media as sources of valuable information and credible experts. Agencies tend to be in constant contact with reporters and editors who desire their input and ideas. These strong relationships help them accurately gauge the news value of stories and identify the most appropriate media outlets to convey your message. As a result, clients are routinely positioned as knowledgeable leaders in their industry, capable of discussing current trends and relevant issues. This strong working relationship uniquely enables an agency to help ensure their clients have appropriate forums to discuss their products, ideas or political views.

However, it is often common for an organization contemplating hiring a public relations firm to question whether their organization is news worthy enough. While news may not always be positive, companies, regardless of their size, almost always have compelling stories to tell. A public relations agency specializes in identifying these opportunities and helping gain positive recognition for their clients. And while clients discover the power of the media, the media discovers a reliable source they can continue to turn to again and again for knowledgeable commentary and accurate information.

HMA Public Relations is a full-service marketing communications agency whose experience encompasses work in the traditional marketing communications disciplines including public relations, media relations, marketing communications, issues management, community relations and special events.

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