Guide to Managing Media and Public Relations in the Linux Community

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This guide provides useful information on how to generate positive public relations and news media coverage for Linux.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Who Should Be Reading This Guide?

This document is intended for people who want to learn practical and cost–effective ways to raise the profile of an organization or promote new programs.

This guide provides useful information on how to generate positive public relations and news media coverage for Linux. By no means does the guide intend to teach all there is to know about public and media relations, but it does support you in building and maintaining a healthy public image.

1.2. What is Public Relations?

You have news to share information that would benefit the Linux community. You have some idea of the people you want to reach with your news and views. Now the problem becomes: How to reach them in the most effective way? The better the communications between you and your audience, the higher the profile of your organization.

Generating publicity is not as complex as you might think. Most of the success of public relations centers on knowing what to do and when. Implementing these initiatives can dramatically increase awareness of your business.

Public relations (PR) is often confused with advertising, merchandising, promotion, or any of a dozen other buzz words in the marketing communications vocabulary. (By the way, *marketing communications* is a broad term that encompasses all of these disciplines.)

Public relations is about doing something newsworthy that you want to communicate, and then telling your audience (or very likely, several audiences) what you have done.

One of the most common public relations vehicles is the brief "New Product" announcement you see in magazines and trade publications. Often only a few lines or a paragraph in length, these announcements herald the launch of future products or services. These short announcements are typically triggered by a new product release, which may be accompanied by various forms of communications such as internal announcements to the organization's employees and external news releases to the media, stockholders, user community, and other groups. News releases trigger a chain of events that result in visibility.

There are some important terms that may help you understand public relations. *News media* refers to all the places where people read or hear about news, including newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and the Internet.

A *news release*, sometimes referred to as a press release, is a printed or electronic document issued by organizations who want to communicate news to editors, journalists, industry writers, or other media groups. Journalists write about the story for publication (if it is considered newsworthy), while editors control whether the story actually appears in a newspaper, magazine, website, or broadcast.

A news release contains important facts, quotes from key people, dates that the news happened (or will happen), and contacts for additional information. The news release is concise and usually runs no longer than two pages.

Public relations, then, can be thought of as the process that delivers your news to the people you want to reach through a broad, influential, and far−reaching news media community.

1.3. How Public Relations Differs from Advertising

International humorist Stephen Leacock defined advertising as: "the science of arresting the human intelligence long enough to get money from it." But the textbook definition of advertising is: "a form of persuasion that informs people about the goods and services they can purchase."

Advertising is very different from public relations. One key difference is that you always pay for the space and time of an advertisement (or commercial, which is an insert appearing on radio, television, or the Internet). By contrast, editorial coverage generated through public relations is not paid for by the organization issuing the news release. The media will pick up and publish the story because they consider it newsworthy, not as a paid advertisement.

Another crucial difference is that, in advertising, you have virtually full control over the message. Because you are paying for advertising, the ad or commercial runs your exact text (called copy), provided the copy complies with generally acceptable standards for advertising. In the case of public relations, the media outlet you are targeting is under no obligation to run the story in any form. If a media outlet does decide to run the story, an editor will generally rewrite the news release, or use pertinent information from the news release to create the news. (For instance, your news release might be used as part of a larger story on players in your industry or profession.) In addition, you have no control over when the release or news will run. All decisions are made by the editor.

As you can see, public relations is a cost−effective way of getting your story out. Taking the trouble to write effective news releases and to build a relationship with the relevant media will, in time, pay dividends in the form of exposure and prestige. Best of all, public relations probably costs less than a single advertisement.

1.4. What Public Relations Can Do

Since public relations communicates your messages through the news media, all the power of the media is brought to bear when the public those viewers, listeners, or readers you want to reach learns about your news.

Think of what this means: high interest level, credibility, implied objectivity, and possibly implied endorsement by the journalist or publication reporting the information. There is also an urgency conveyed when news is reported in the media and that news has the potential to reach a tremendously large audience.

With exposure comes awareness. An important goal of public relations in any medium is to make people aware of what your organization is, what it offers, and what it does. Never underestimate the value of such awareness. In flashier terms, it's called *buzz.*

Creating awareness for your organization is important for the development and utilization of its programs and initiatives. You must inform the public and educational and training institutions about what you offer and how you can meet their needs. Public relations is probably the most valuable tool in accomplishing this. A well−implemented public relations initiative will help present your organization's offerings to their best advantage.

Public and news media relations also positions you to enter new marketplaces and exposes new Linux programs to new audiences all without the expense associated with an advertising program. A sustained public relations program allows you to ensure your programs are in front of appropriate decision−makers. This continuous flow of information creates a constant awareness and a constant influx of inquiries especially when integrated with other powerful marketing communications tools such as brochures, trade shows, and so on.

1.5. The Benefits of a Public and Media Relations Program

Public relations is vitally necessary, perhaps even critical, in today's competitive marketplace. There are many ways a sustained public relations program can benefit your organization:

- Public relations should not be a "we will do it if we have the time and resources" kind of effort. A sustained initiative can build your organization's profile in the news media and the local community.
- Editorial coverage gives your organization better stakeholder attention compared to paid advertisements.
- Editorial copy generated through effective public relations is far more believable and credible than paid advertising, due to media objectivity. Recent studies in North America suggest that positive editorial coverage generates up to nine times more visibility than paid advertising.
- Public relations is an economical means of promoting your organization.
- Regular and effective news releases can make your organization a "news media source" on the state of Linux. It is critical to develop relationships with the news media in the same way it is a good idea to develop other kinds of friendships in the community. Writers and reporters are always looking for reliable and respected sources to quote.
- Regular media exposure legitimizes your organization's work and enhances its reputation. There is a subtle but nonetheless real perception that mention in a newspaper or on television must be important. Media coverage communicates to the business community that your organization's qualifications and programs are worthy of "a serious look."

You must also be cautious when dealing with media outlets. Being overconfident or overly aggressive in trying to place stories with the news media can have damaging results. It is a lot easier to lose goodwill than to gain it back. The safest position is to understand what you are doing, work hard to accomplish predetermined and realistic goals, be courteous and respectful when dealing with your media contacts, and expect some disappointments along the way. After all, hard as you may try, the results of your public and news media relations initiatives are never predictable. But if planned and implemented correctly, the benefits are enormous. Chapter 2 explains how to determine what you really want to accomplish.

Chapter 2. Public and Media Relations Planning

When you want to promote your organization, you are provided with a variety of options. The first step is to develop a plan. You must determine the following:

- *What do you want to accomplish?*
- *Who do you want to reachneeds to know about your organization?*
- *What do you want to say??*
- *What kind of information is newsworthy?*

2.1. What Do You Want to Accomplish?

The first and most important step in public relations planning is to understand and define what you want to accomplish through public relations. What are your objectives? Just as importantly, how will you determine (measure) your success in accomplishing these objectives? Creating a list of concrete goals can help you maintain direction in your efforts.

2.2. Who Needs to Know About Your Organization?

Now that you know what you want to do, the second step is to determine who you need to talk to.

The best way to gain insight into this question is to look from the other side of the communications channel: Of all the people that your organization deals with, who do you need to tell about new programs and products? Often your most important contacts will be your current and future partners, IT professionals in your local area, human resource managers, training and development personnel, and organizations offering competing products.

To reach your organization's public relations goals, there are many key audiences and stakeholders that your organization should regularly communicate with to gain higher visibility. The following list details a few of the most important audiences:

- *News media.* Includes print, radio, television, and Internet outlets for business news, information technology news especially related to Linux and open source, vertical media (directed at a people with similar interests such as a hobby or business), human resources, colleges and universities, and organizations and enterprises dealing with Linux or Linux information management solutions.
- *IT professionals.* Includes practicing IT professionals, students, and prospects such as people considering a career change.
- *Influencers.*
- *Other LPI affiliates.*
- *Business partners and suppliers.* Includes communicating to strategic partners such as independent software vendors, training providers, and suppliers, which helps your organization become a valued business partner to these groups, each of which bring specific value to your business.

2.3. What Do You Want to Say?

The third step in public relations planning is to understand what you want to say. To attain your objectives, it is critically important to maintain message consistency when delivering you organization's messages, vision, mission, and core values to your target audiences. Consistency creates a stronger impression and helps people remember your core messages.

Although a given message may be "tweaked" or "massaged" for different audiences, the core messages should not vary.

2.4. What Kind of Information is Newsworthy?

These are examples of great happenings that generate interest.

- *Locations and launches.* This kind of news is obvious. For instance, a new branch of your organization may have just opened, and you want to make people aware of the new location and offerings. Also, if you are launching a new product or have hired a local figure well−known to the Linux community, these things are of great interest to the public.
- *Industry developments and human interest.* Sometimes newsworthy information is a little less obvious. Every day happenings can be in the news. Whenever there are changes or new developments in the industry, this clearly presents an opportunity for positive exposure and media coverage in appropriate publications. For instance, how and why the change is being undertaken may become a story in itself. Perhaps the change is being driven by a dynamic Linux guru, worthy of a magazine profile. Sometimes these stories are called "case studies" and typically are given favourable consideration by editors because of their considerable human interest appeal.
- *Numerical data and trends.* Society is fascinated with numbers. The more impressive or interesting the figures (relative to competitors and the rest of the industry), the more likely media outlets are to use those numbers in their reporting.
- *Organizational announcements.* Notable changes in staff or volunteers are another way of getting media exposure. The more important the position, the more newsworthy organizational announcements become.
- *Partnerships.* Especially partnerships with far−reaching effects across the industry create a major news story.
- *Industry recognition.* When your organization wins an award or is recognized by peers, let the world know!

The bottom line is that you can find news in almost any event. Your responsibility is to ensure that your organization becomes known and respected by editors, journalists, educators, and other stakeholders with whom you are communicating. Remember, the more respected your organization is, the more (and better) coverage you are likely to receive. The determining factor in that judgment will be the audience the readers, viewers, and listeners who you reach.

Effective and well−organized public relations efforts require news releases and correspondences to reach an appropriate editor. Chapter 3 details what you need to do to get news media contacts and, ultimately, positive visibility.

Chapter 3. Contacting the News Media

All contacts with the news media create an impression of you and your organization that carries into the public perception. Creating and updating a media contact database is the first step towards developing good relationships with editors and writers. When you are contacting editors, remember that editors are busy professionals, so being polite and to−the−point are vitally important. Customizing your pitch for different editors and types of media will also give your information a better chance of being published. Effective media contacts will make your public relations campaign a success for your organization and the publications that you are featured in.

3.1. Creating a Media Contact Database

You cannot underestimate the importance of maintaining and continually updating a database of editorial contacts who have an explicit or implied interest in Linux and your organization. Directories available in your local reference library list publications of every description, giving the full particulars of their readership, editorial staff (often with contact information), circulation, publication frequency, areas of coverage, and other relevant information. Consulting these directories is the first step towards building your media database.

Time must be spent in researching names and contact information for your database. You will need to know the audiences of each publication, names of key editors, these editors' responsibilities, the dates of special−focus issues concerning Linux, and more. This information will allow you to do a better job of targeting your news to the right media contacts. For instance, there may be occasions when you want your news to reach certain editors but not others. Your news may only concern a portion of your database, such as the educational community. Your research (and later, direct experience) will tell you that only certain editors will be interested. In short, there is a lot of homework to be done identifying the news media related to your area and learning the specifics about them. The more information your database contains, the more valuable the information will be to you.

Before you contact any editor, you need to know where to call, email, or write. Fortunately, there are dozens of published directories of editorial contacts. While you could easily spend thousands of dollars buying or subscribing to them, you do not need to. As mentioned above, your library probably has several subscriptions on hand.

Some of the more popular directories for North American and international contacts include the following news media organizations. There is likely a membership fee (depending on the service level requested) to access the databases of these groups.

Table 3−1. News Media Organizations

Media Group	Web Address
Bacon's Directories	www.bacons.com
Bowden's	www.bowdens.com
Burrelle's/Luce	www.burrellesluce.com
BusinessWire	www.businesswire.com
Canada Newswire	www.newswire.ca
CCN Matthews	www.ccnmatthews.com

Media Map	www.mediamap.com
PR Newswire	www.prnewswire.com

Another way to find local media contacts and organizations is to look in your local telephone directories. Here are some categories to start you on your way (your local Yellow Pages may list these under different headings):

- Broadcasting companies
- News publications
- News services
- Newspaper feature syndicates
- Newspapers
- Publishers − periodicals and magazines
- Radio stations
- Television stations

Once you have created a list of potential editors to contact, find out as much as you can about their publication, coverage areas, and special interests. Become familiar with their publication, their website, or their broadcast. Get to know the beats (coverage areas) of specific reporters.

3.2. Maintaining Your Database

Whether you keep your editorial contact information in an electronic database (such as an ACT or DBF file) or in a traditional Rolodex, your contact information *must* be kept up−to−date. Editors come and go, reporters are reassigned to new beats, and publications merge or create spin−offs. You need to stay on top of these changes. Review your media contact list at least every three to four months. Contact appropriate people in each organization to get updates of names, email addresses, and phone numbers. Through this exercise you may discover new targets to whom you can pitch your story.

3.3. Contacting the Editors

3.3.1. Letter of Introduction

When contacting an editor for the first time, you should take pains to get your relationship off to a good start. This is best accomplished by sending a well−crafted letter (or email) of introduction prior to issuing your first news release.

Even if you have been involved in media relations in another capacity, a letter of introduction can help establish a "new era" of cooperation between you (in your new public relations role) and the editor. After all, a successful public and media relations program is all about relationships successful ones.

What must your letter accomplish? Consider your goals carefully, because this letter can do a great deal for your organization.

First, reaching the right editor or reporter is extremely important. Then, you will want to get that editor's help in identifying other professionals who may be interested in receiving and conveying Linux news. These professionals include freelance writers (who write speculatively or on assignment, then sell specific stories to publications), editors in related areas (business and feature editors), industry spokespeople, and so on. Your letter also needs to articulate why this editor will likely be interested in your organization's story and why his or her audience will be interested.

The primary purpose for the letter of introduction is to open the lines of communication and to make yourself or your designated spokesperson available. Be sure to give your full name and contact information. *Most importantly, do not forget to include your email and website addresses.* Email is the preferred method of communication in the journalistic community. Make corresponding and dealing with you easy for your media contacts. This is critical to the success of any media and public relations program.

If you include broadcast in your public relations program, you will need to adjust the terminology accordingly. Instead of editors, you will be corresponding with news directors and producers; instead of readers, you will be referring to listeners, viewers, or an audience. No matter what their job description is, remember that you are dealing with actual people. The more personable you are in your correspondence, the more likely you are to see results.

3.3.2. Using the Phone

Regardless of the size and scope of your media relations program, look for an opportunity to directly contact at least some of the editors and journalists important to your organization. The telephone is a tremendous ally in any public relations program. A phone call establishes person−to−person contact, lends credibility to your public relations effort, and helps your contact to associate a name to the news releases you subsequently send to them. A few moments on the phone, either as a prelude or a follow−up to a news release, not only draws attention to your organization but can also impart a sense of immediacy and urgency that may provide the edge you need to acquire editorial coverage of your story.

When calling an editor, always immediately identify yourself and your organization. Next, ask if the editor is on deadline. If their answer is "Yes," don't tie up their time but offer to call back in a day or two and then do so. Editors are known for their extraordinary memory they never forget a nuisance or a courtesy.

If the editor is not on deadline, then state immediately why you are calling, saying something like this:

> "Hello, I'm (name) with (my organization), and I'm calling to alert you to our announcement of (news topic). I want you to know that I'm available to you for any additional information or an interview, now or any time in the future. Give me a call at (phone number) or email me at (email address)."

Look what the dialogue above accomplishes. You have identified yourself and your organization, stated your business succinctly, and offered your services as a liaison. Now let the editor decide what to do. If they seem to want to get off the phone quickly, don't worry. They may have something urgent demanding their attention or a story that needs to be filed immediately. You can always call back or have the editor return your call later. Listen carefully to the editor's recommendations for calling them at another time.

While most editors and reporters are busy, they are seldom rude (in fact, the contrary) and usually cooperative. If the editor asks why you are calling, or has other questions, be prepared to answer. As in any business situation, always do your homework. If necessary, write down potential questions and answers and rehearse beforehand. Nothing irritates a busy editor or reporter more than dealing with a public relations representative who is unprepared to answer basic questions.

If you cannot answer all the questions, promise to find the answers and send the information by email. *Be sure to do this in a timely fashion.* Editors appreciate quick responses and will give more attention to people who can give them the information they are seeking in a timely manner. This is a very important consideration.

If the editor gives you a "No thanks, not interested" response which may happen quite frequently at the beginning you should ask if there is someone else on staff who would be interested in your information. If there is time, and the editor seems receptive to sharing information (listen carefully to their tone of voice and phone manner), you might also ask if there is anything special about Linux they are looking for, now or in the future. After all, the less you waste of each other's time, the more productive your relationship will be.

Once editors know of you and your organization, there may be times when they contact you directly. For example, the publications you have targeted may occasionally feature an editorial focus on Linux. Check the editorial calendars of these publications on a regular basis. Periodicals plan their issues two to three months in advance of the publication date, so you need to be proactive in pitching (telling) your organization's story ahead of time. Editorial calendars are often made available on the publication's website. They are also usually available free of charge from the publication's advertising department. If all else fails, contacting the publication's editorial assistant and making a polite request should yield positive results.

Another important way to use the phone is to find out who you should be contacting at a specific publication. The receptionist is usually cooperative and very knowledgeable about this. You may end up talking to a lot of different people before you get the answers you need, but public relations is far more effective when you deliver your news to the right people.

3.4. Making the Pitch

"The Pitch" (that is, "selling" your story) has changed over the years. Pitching is often not done just by regular mail, telephone, or even fax anymore. These days, most contacts are made through email.

Before sending anything, you should try to find out how a particular editor or journalist likes to receive pitches and in what format the pitch should be presented. In−depth database research on numerous publications and reporters is available from companies like LexisNexis and Dow Jones and can be a real asset to public relations professionals looking for contact preferences.

Every editor or journalist has their own preferences for receiving news releases and pitches. Knowing whether to call, fax, or email makes a world of difference and may even be the difference between getting your news read and covered, and not. While sending the same email to 20 editors is quick, easy, and painless, your pitch may not get the attention your organization deserves.

Though e−mail has simplified and certainly quickened the transfer of information between public relations professionals and their media contacts, email has some drawbacks. Email is not as personal as a phone call, as quick as glancing over a fax, or as formal as a letter sent by post. The ease and ubiquity of email can sometimes make building a working relationship with certain editors or journalists more difficult.

For example, a particular Bloomberg reporter (who shall remain anonymous) does not like receiving pitches by email. In her words: "Email tells a one−sided story in its pitch. It makes it impossible to ask questions regarding some uncertain aspects." Because of this, this reporter prefers to be contacted by phone. She will only read and accept email if the email relates to her beat and covers all the points she wants covered.

David Andelman of the New York Daily News prefers receiving pitches and news releases by fax, which he can read instantly without having to print them out. "I am [always] getting an abundance of press news," he says. "But at least with faxes, I can filter through them easier and quicker than I can with emails, deciding what is trash and what I can use. Don't waste my time. We are a daily paper."

Samuel Brittan, an economic commentator with the Financial Times in London, likes old−fashioned snail mail. "There are problems which occur with email, be it privacy issues, bounce−backs, or just an over−abundance," he says. "I simply prefer to be mailed directly through the postal service."

Carrie Donovan, an editorial assistant for The Washington Post, states: "Initially, I prefer postal mail pitches, since I receive artwork and photos for stories. Images sent via email tends to be problematic, either too small for us to run or it may look bit−mapped (jagged−looking)." She also observes that emailed releases are more likely to have missing information, something as seemingly obvious as an address to an event. Like most media professionals, Ms. Donovan wants all the facts delivered coherently and comprehensively. Failure of a public relations representative to do this is enough to turn her off completely.

Whatever method you use to correspond with an editor or reporter, always remember that media people are *extremely* busy. After all, they live and die by deadlines. Although you may want to know if your contact has received your pitch or news release, phoning them is generally not recommended. Most editors don't have the time to answer follow−up calls or engage in lengthy conversation. This again underscores the importance of giving them all the information in one "neat and clean" delivery. As Mr. Andelman bluntly states, "We aren't idiots. If you faxed it to us and you didn't get an error message back, you know we received it just fine. And if we decide to use it, chances are we will contact you for more information."

First impressions count. The best advice we can give when you are dealing with a news editor for the first time is to tailor the pitch specifically to that editor's beat. Then sit back and hope for the best. Although this approach sounds unpredictable, this is the nature of public relations.

By corresponding with editors in the way they prefer (which may not be the easiest or most convenient way for you), you will set a good impression for your organization. With persistence and good manners, you may eventually become an authority to whom journalists and editors willingly turn for commentary.

3.4.1. Getting the Editor's Attention

Editors pride themselves on keeping current with the latest developments in their field. Indeed, being current is a central aspect of their jobs and practically inescapable, considering the mountains of information delivered to their desktops. Since they take this responsibility very seriously, most editors read or at least scan every single release that comes in.

The big read usually begins as an accompaniment to the morning cup of coffee. Editors will read the release's headline, perhaps scan a paragraph or two, and decide whether the piece works for their publications. Since so much depends on passing this preliminary test, we will discuss in Chapter 4 how to give your release the best chance of being "picked up."

Not every news release will contain earth−shattering news. In fact, many will be written mainly to keep the organization's name in front of the editors. Nonetheless there will be times when an item will be particularly newsworthy, timely, or significant to at least one editor. That is the time to pick up the phone and bring the item to their attention. Editors are sensitive to significant announcements and do not want to miss them any more than you want them missed, so calling is appropriate on these occasions. However, there are a few caveats.

First, remember *never* to call during the editor's "deadline time" of the day, week, or month. Note these periods in your contact database. Secondly, use the phone strategically. Do not phone too often or for trivial news that is equivalent to "crying wolf." If you will be making several important announcements within a short period, let the editor know you will be doing this instead of calling separately about each item. Only pick up the phone when all of your ducks are in a row; that is, when the information is ready to be released, and you are prepped and primed to answer questions. Finally, remember that any phone call should be brief and to the point, with additional information sent by email (or whatever format the editor has stipulated).

Using the telephone intelligently and to maximum effect will demonstrate your public relations savvy and professionalism. This, in turn, will increase your organization's credibility, increasing the likelihood that your news will be picked up.

3.5. Pitching for Different Media

The news release, the most common way in which you will communicate news, mostly serves print−based media such as newspapers, magazines, and the Internet. Pitching stories for television and radio will be somewhat different.

3.5.1. Print−based Media

Every publication has a lead time for accepting releases and pitches. Generally, daily and weekly newspapers have quite short lead times, while monthly or quarterly magazines may have a lead time of several months. Each publication will also have requirements regarding text and graphic formats. For instance, they may accept only plain−text documents with no formatting or require graphical files (such as photos) to be submitted in a particular file type and resolution.

Although you do not need to become an expert in desktop publishing and print production, having a general knowledge of these areas will be extremely beneficial. Familiarize yourself with commonly used text formats (such as Microsoft Word for print and HTML for the Internet) and graphical formats (such as eps, jpeg, and gif). For important communications, you may wish to engage the services of a copy editor, graphic designer, or other publishing professional.

The Internet today works similarly to the print media. Speed is paramount for this medium. News can be posted immediately, without waiting for the printing presses to roll. Space limitations are not as much of a concern as they are for print, and the online edition will often publish stories that do not fit in the printed edition.

Naturally, online editors prefer to receive your news electronically. Targeting the right online editors can result in almost immediate posting of your news. Be sure to build relationships with online editors as you would for print editors. The online world is a growing segment that you simply cannot afford to ignore.

3.5.2. Television and Radio

Studies show that television has replaced newspapers as the primary medium from which people get their news. These studies also found that TV news had a much higher credibility rating than newspaper coverage. Thus, specialty TV programs may offer an excellent opportunity for communicating your story. Such shows may include: local TV news shows, programs produced by community TV stations, business or information technology shows, and educational shows.

Because television emphasizes visuals, you should look for stories and angles that permit interesting or engaging video footage. (There is nothing duller than Ã¢$=talking heads.Ã¢$) TV news producers and editors like action, especially fast−paced action. They also favor stories with a local twist. Try and localize your story, which means making the news relevant and appealing geographically to the television station concerned.

Radio interviews are another excellent vehicle for publicizing your organization and activities. Contact your local radio station and pitch yourself as an interview candidate to the news director or assignment editor. Know that you must have a compelling and convincing answer to the question, "Why should our listeners be interested?"

In Chapter 4, we further explore the characteristics of different media, so that you can customize your pitches to each one.

Chapter 4. Working with the Media

In this part, we look at how to motivate the news media to use your stories. We will review the duties of editors and producers, the characteristics of different news media, and the ways in which your organization can increase the chances of gaining visibility. We will see how to create news media interest in your story, not only through the information contained in your release, but also through contact with the editors. We will try to create a better understanding of the editors' side of the public relations channel with some insight into the little things and the big things that editors look for.

4.1. Duties of an Editor

The eventual success of your organization's public and media relations efforts depends mainly on how often your news releases are issued and, more importantly, how often the news they contain is selected to run. The latter decision is in the hands of a person whose title is usually *editor*. Understanding an editor's job will help you do your job better.

Can you name the editor of your local computer magazine or local newspaper? The editor is a very important ally in public relations. The editor (whose title might also be *managing editor* or *editor in chief*) has overall responsibility for the publication's content. Below him or her, depending on the periodical's size, are subject editors who are assigned to specific beats (often called "departments"). These editors oversee the content for their departments. Sometimes each editor has additional staff, such as reporters, freelancer writers, photographers, copy writers, copy editors, etc.

The information contained in news releases is the primary source of information for most editors. Newsworthy releases are selected and edited or worked into an article. The selected releases are the lucky ones; most never see the light of day. When you consider that the editor at a daily publication receives upwards of 500 news releases on any given day, gauging the statistical possibility of an individual release being picked up for coverage is easy.

4.1.1. Newspaper Editors

Newspapers don't mean just the regular daily newspapers targeted at the general public. There are special−interest newspapers for business, computers, information technology, telecommunications, and other fields. The specialty papers may run weekly instead of daily, but, like their daily counterparts, they are primarily news−driven rather than feature−driven (which is more the case with magazines).

Newspaper editors reject many more releases than they use. The larger the paper's circulation or the more active the area being covered, the more releases the editor has to sort through.

Most newspapers have a space budget, which is not to be confused with a financial budget. The space budget consists of the total number of pages printed, divided between advertising and news articles. Advertisements are the lifeblood of a newspaper; ads consistently provide the largest portion of income. The ads must be accommodated first, after which the issue's remaining space is allocated to specific stories and departments by the key editors.

The selection of news releases to cover is based on the editor's personal and professional judgment. The main factor in that judgment can be summed up in a single word: "newsworthiness". Unfortunately, newsworthiness is defined by individual editor's opinions. Newsworthy stories are generally those that offer the most information with the most urgency to the most people.

If a news release issued on particular day is not covered in the following day's paper, this does not mean the news will not appear at all. Releases not considered newsworthy enough to appear in a weekday edition may be suitable for the weekend paper, where there is more room and less emphasis on breaking news. Even if a news item is selected for use, the article may still get pulled at the last minute. Perhaps an advertiser cancelled a large insert just prior to deadline, necessitating a layout change, or a big story emerged late in the day. When this happens, more expendable news is sacrificed.

What happens to releases that aren't selected for immediate coverage? Some are kept for future use, but more likely they are sent into the editor's trash can.

4.1.2. Magazine Editors

Magazines operate very much like newspapers, with departments, editors, space budgets, and advertising, but magazines differ in a few important ways.

The potential lifespan of a news release is much longer for a magazine. A monthly publication might not use your news for several months. Depending on the printing and preparation schedule, your release could appear as soon as a week or two after you send the release or as late as six−months later. The nice thing is that whenever your news appears, the information remains in front of the reader for a full month instead of just one day.

The editorial focus and format of a magazine are usually more specialized than those of newspapers. "Focus" refers to the subjects a magazine covers; for instance, *Linux Journal* focuses on Linux in general while *ComputerWorld* might focus on Linux in the enterprise. "Format" refers to the way in which a magazine's news and information is presented, usually as a particular mix of regular columns, articles, features (main stories), shorter pieces, and editorials (opinion pieces). Magazine stories don't have to be as "newsy" as newspaper stories. To a greater degree, a magazine researches and creates news rather than relying on current events.

General−interest magazines try to appeal to a large segment of the population. (Examples are *Macleans, Readers' Digest,* and *People.*) Special−interest magazines target a limited, well−defined community of readers who share a particular interest along with associated activities and concerns. Special−interest magazines are good targets for the Linux community, especially those focusing on Linux, operating systems, storage, security, computers, and information technology.

Whether special interest or general interest, the closer your news release relates to the audience of a publication and the greater the impact on that audience, the more likely an editor will choose your news to publish. The key factors are editorial relevance and appeal to the publication's target audience.

4.2. Targeting Other Medias

In television and radio news shows, news editors, some reporters, and even anchors have input on the news to be aired. In other types of shows, often the producer decides which stories to cover in future broadcasts. Segment producers will produce the individual stories for a broadcast, while assistant producers may perform specialized functions, such as finding interview subjects.

4.2.1. Television

The same considerations of "newsworthiness" discussed for newspapers apply to television broadcast news, with the added element of visuals. There are several types of TV programming you will want to consider. These include educational and informational programs, local and community news programs, and perhaps a business program. Understand the types of shows being produced and aired in your regional area, and then pitch your story for an in−studio interview or a feature.

Ensuring that you are pitching the right story to the right TV program staffer will be discussed later in this guide.

4.2.2. Radio

Radio time for news stories is very limited. Usually there is only enough time for headlines and summaries of the day's top stories, but radio still has great opportunities for your organization.

Some radio stations offer expanded news coverage and features (this is sometimes called "foreground programming"). Most Linux news has a better chance of getting coverage or an interview in news programming than in regular programming. The best chance of all lies in targeting an all−news station. Approximately 45 minutes of each hour are devoted to news, sports, weather, special reports, and features. (The remaining 15 minutes are for commercials.) All−news radio stations operate more like a magazine or newspaper, with specific departments and editors, more producers, more reporters, and therefore, more available resources. Stories that interest a significant portion of their listening community or that appeal to deep−pocketed sponsors will be given the most attention. You could pitch a "Linux for business" type of story. Even if your underlying goal is to promote your organization, the story or interview must avoid advertising or commercial overtones of any kind. Nothing kills the news media's credibility faster or turns off listeners more than inappropriate jingoism.

4.2.3. Talk Shows

Talk shows, whether on television or radio, are excellent vehicles for covering a wide variety of topics. Talk shows often invite industry experts to be commentators or participants in a panel discussion. In addition, these shows often have phone−in segments, inviting listeners to ask questions or make comments. These characteristics make the talk show an ideal forum for raising your organization's visibility.

For these programs, there is usually an assistant producer responsible for lining up interesting guests, as well as a producer who coordinates the overall process. Both email and telephone contact with the assistant producer can prove rewarding. The host, interviewer, or moderator of the show does not usually choose the guests or have final say in who appears. Unless instructed otherwise, contacting the assistant producer or producer is best.

4.3. "Selling" Your Story to the Media

Clearly, editors and producers have to know the interests of their audiences. Often this knowledge comes from the editors' strong identification with their readers, which can develop into an almost paternal attitude. Editors are constantly making decisions about what their readers will and won't see any editor would correctly say that is their job. Part of this judgment is based on what the editor feels the readers are currently interested in, and part is based on what the editor feels the readers *should* or *will* be interested in. An astute editor keeps their sights as much on the future as on the present.

Keep in mind that the role of the news media has never been confined to just reporting the news, but also includes analysis and interpretation. Analysis and interpretation are considered the domain of "experts," which presents a perfect opportunity for specialists in your organization to share their knowledge and bring visibility to your organization.

Editors, being journalists, abide by the five Ws tradition of reporting: who, what, where, when, and why (with an unofficial "how"tagging along). Always include clear, engaging answers to the five Ws in all news releases. Also, you can use the five Ws as a guideline for how to most effectively catch the attention of editors.

The way in which you present this information is crucial to being accepted by an editor as newsworthy for their audience. You have to "tell a story," make the news interesting and relevant, and choose an appropriate time and place to present the story.

4.3.1. Who

"Who" usually consists of your organization, spokespersons, and authorities quoted in your news releases. Your organization and those speaking as representatives must be presented as professional, authoritative, influential, and with strong credentials for speaking on matters related to your industry. By positioning your organization in this way, you have a much better chance of generating visibility and prestige.

The goal is to make your organization a recognized authority in your field. With this distinction, any time you issue a statement, your news will draw the attention of editors whose readers are interested in the specific work you do. All things being equal, the more influential your spokesperson, the better the chance your news has of being selected.

4.3.2. What

The "what" is the subject of your release a new application, a new appointment, or any interesting event you choose to announce. Naturally, unusual or exciting announcements have a better chance of being covered. Anything you can do to make your story stand out from the ordinary will be viewed as a refreshing change and will increase the chance of your story being published.

If the "what" in your story is a personnel appointment (either paid or volunteer), look for some human interest in either the person or the job at hand. If this person is a well−known Linux expert or a pillar of their local community, all the better. The more noteworthy the individual, the more newsworthy the story.

If the "what" is an event such as a Linux trade show, that is a plus. Editors regard events as more urgent and newsworthy than other announcements.

4.3.3. Where

The "where" of your release plays a key role. As you begin to understand public relations, you will appreciate the role of staging events to generate news. Since the media appreciates visuals, try to produce events with images as well as a pertinent story.

In planning a pitch or a release, ensure that you clearly indicate the address of every event you hope to have reporters attend. Reporters' time is wasted if they have to call for directions to every event. A special media contact person is a good idea to have at all events. This person can prevent reporters from missing important or visual parts of events. Be aware of upcoming events or activities that you might be able to capitalize on or borrow interest from. Again, the goal is promote the unusual, the unique, the unexpected that will pique the editor's curiosity or sense of humor and get your story into print.

4.3.4. When

Remember that for most organizations, "when" can be just about any time. There is no need to wait for once−a−year events (like trade shows) to provide news. With creative thinking, you can come up with news stories that capitalize on current events. For example, news about the economy and what proprietary operating systems cost organizations to run can provide a background for Linux news. New computer applications running on Linux also present rich opportunities.

"When" is extremely important in terms of releasing the news. For instance, if you are publicizing special events or trade show appearances, you want to allow ample time for an editor to assign a reporter to cover the story (if the news is deemed of interest). If the editor doesn't have enough time to assign a reporter to cover your event, you can count on no reporters being available.

Fortunately, though, while timing is critically important, avoiding bad timing is easy. The first rule is always to provide a reasonable amount of advance notice. For news−breaking media such as radio, television, and some newspapers, two days is an absolute minimum, and a week is more prudent. For magazines and trade journals, one to two weeks is the minimum in most cases, and three to four weeks is even better.

The second rule is to use your common sense and avoid scheduling pitches when you know the editor is on deadline or is involved with other events. Also avoid periods when the editor is working with little or no support staff (such as when reporters are away at an important trade show). Generally, business hours between 9:30 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. is best, since this gives reporters time to write and file their stories. Mondays and Fridays are always more difficult than midweek, but don't be afraid to ask if the editor prefers specific days.

If you are requesting reporters attend and cover an event, never ask the editor to confirm their attendance. The editor will not appreciate the pressure, and besides they cannot guarantee they will have the resources (reporters and camera operators) at the appointed time. News changes by the second. A reporter may be ready to go to your event and, at the last minute, be reassigned to something else. This happens all the time, so don't take the rejection personally.

If you show respect for the editor's time, they will appreciate your consideration and may be more likely to cover at least some of your stories.

4.3.5. Why

So far, we have discussed *who* the news media is interested in, *what* news is most likely to be covered, and *where* and *when* you are going to make your pitch. Now, in looking at the "why" of your organization's story, we will address two questions. First, *why* did your news item come to pass, and second, *why* should an editor (and their readers, listeners, or viewers) find your event newsworthy?

Unless there is something terribly interesting about the who, what, where, or when, "why" is the single most compelling factor available to an editor in determining newsworthiness. Why is the news important to the audience? Why do they need to know about this? Why is your particular event unusual or out of the ordinary?

Most organization's activities can be analyzed in terms of their cause and/or their effect. The more you can identify causes or effects in your story, the better chance your organization has of receiving coverage. As an example, if there is a trend of Linux being increasingly used in the enterprise, there must be a reason why. Giving the editor just a few of these reasons can make your story more newsworthy than just a simple, bland announcement. Even including some statistics to support your why will likely have a tremendous effect.

The same principle holds true for something as seemingly mundane as a new personnel selection. Why was there a vacancy? Why was this person selected to fill the spot? Adding either or both pieces of information to the release greatly increases the news interest.

One of the cardinal rules of media and public relations is: "Never promote features, always promote benefits." A feature is any specific aspect that makes a product or service unique; features belong to products or services. A benefit is an advantage gained by the user in selecting a specific product or service; benefits belong to users. What a product or service does is nowhere near as meaningful as why there is some advantage or benefit to the user.

You don't need to completely ignore describing features, but you do need to present them in the context of their benefits to the end user. The reason for doing this is simple. Readers are potential users, and the better job you do of relating to the user, the more you will attract readers. Readers, as we already know, are the editor's Holy Grail.

If your release is about an event, there are numerous "whys" you need to address. Why now? Why is your organization involved or being a sponsor? Why would anyone want to come to the event?

Be proactive and open in sharing the causes and anticipated effects of these accomplishments. Don't leave the editor wondering: "So what?" Failing to provide answers to why your activity is news is a sure−fire way of getting your release "filed" in the recycle bin.

4.3.6. How

Cause and effect, and explaining why your news is happening, will very naturally lead to the "how" of your story. How did this come to pass? How are you accomplishing this? How did your organization decide to embark on this new and exciting initiative? How will this change affect people and the marketplace? Describing the *hows* gives color and interest to your story.

4.4. Do's and Don'ts When Dealing with the News Media

When pitching your organization's story to news editors, there are fundamental do's and don'ts that you as a public relations professional should follow.

4.4.1. Do's

Do introduce yourself to different media editors, journalists, and freelancers by sending them an email note or by inviting them out for coffee or lunch. Bring along some background information or a few pages from your website to explain what your organization is all about.

Do follow up after the meeting with thank−you note, mentioning that you will be in touch as appropriate. This is important to set the stage for future dialogue.

Do let them know what your goals are and what special events, news, or programs you have coming up.

Do send out news releases by email about two weeks in advance, when you have a special event planned. Send a follow–up email a few days later. Phone again at a convenient time before the event to suggest a possible meeting or interview at the event. The bigger the event, the more advance notice should be given.

Do tailor your pitch for the needs of each medium. For example, set up plenty of photo opportunities for television media, human–interest stories for print, and interviews for radio.

Do give them the name of someone who has a personal experience to tell. Remember that the media loves a good story. Real life stories engage readers and makes for better copy than just statistics relating to Linux and open source.

Do ensure that you or your designated spokesperson is available for interviews at a moment's notice; otherwise much of your efforts will be in vain. Both of you, of course, should do your homework and rehearse questions and answers in advance. You should have facts, statistics, and anecdotes in your head, ready to use.

4.4.2. Don'ts

Don't send out a pitch or news release with vague, general statements. Your story has to show not tell, and you must convince the editor to cover the news that promotes your organization rather someone else's. Getting editorial coverage is fiercely competitive.

Don't ever tell the media what you want from them. Instead, ask them about the kinds of stories they're looking for, or if there are any other reporters in their newsroom who would be interested in Linux and open source. By learning what they want, you can tailor your communications to get what *you* want.

Don't underestimate the importance of less prominent media like community newspapers, cable TV, trade journals, and special–interest newsletters. Look at the entire spectrum of news media for different angles.

4.5. Monitoring Media Coverage

It is essential to keep abreast of the news being printed or broadcast about your organization, your competition, and the industry as a whole. A comprehensive public and media relations program must track public perception of Linux, stay informed of industry trends, and understand the impact of evolving legislation on your community.

If you have time to spare, you can monitor news coverage yourself by typing key words (such as the name of your organization) into popular web search engines such as Google and AltaVista. However, this will track only online citations. A more reliable tracking method is to use a media monitor service or a clipping service. The website *http://dmoz.org/News/Services/Media_Monitoring/* provides a long list of media monitoring services, some of which are provided in the Appendix.

In Chapter 5 we will examine the parts of a news release and discuss what can make your releases stand out from the crowd.

Chapter 5. News Releases the Major Communications Tool

5.1. Writing News Releases

Who, what, where, when, why, and how these are the six critical ingredients of all news releases. But don't forget, a little spice can make your news release stand out from the crowd. In this part, you will learn how to write a professional−looking news release, the most important tool in any public relations program.

5.1.1. The Headline

The headline is the first thing and sometimes the only thing an editor will read. Releases are often rejected as a result of a weak headline.

Create headlines with impact. The most effective words in a news release headline are eye−catching words like "announces" and "new." Comparative words like "better" or "more" can also draw attention to your article. The headline is the "hook" that lures editors and reporters into reading more. Headlines must be compelling.

Many public relations novices make the mistake of embellishing their headlines. Your organization has to earn the respect of editors. Nobody owes you a reading. Too much information, or confusing information, is a turnoff. Most importantly, you should never sacrifice accuracy for the sake of a flashy headline.

Here are some guidelines for writing headlines:

- Determine the most significant benefit your most important reader will derive from the news.
- Try and state those benefits in seven words or less.
- Ask yourself if your statement is meaningful to someone not closely involved with your business.

When actually writing the headline, try to achieve the greatest impact using the fewest words. Your headline doesn't need to be quite as dramatic as a newspaper headline. Editors are looking for information in the headline, so try to at least include who, what, and why. Whatever the headline, you must accurately reflect the content that follows.

5.1.2. The First Paragraph

Many news releases are accepted or rejected on the basis of the headline and first paragraph or two. These introductory paragraphs are often all an editor will have time to read. Many releases are rejected due a simple downfall: failure to include any *news* in the first paragraph.

An important news−writing concept is *collapsible copy.* Collapsible copy reads well from the beginning to the end of any given paragraph. The information is "chunked" to stand on its own, if need be. Each sentence could be pulled from the news release and used as a quotation. This type of copy should be used as extensively as possible in all paragraphs.

Editors expect to see the five Ws covered in the first few sentences. Here's an example:

> *NEW YORK January 22, 2003* The Linux Professional Institute (LPI) (*www.lpi.org*), the premier professional certification program for the Linux community, and UnitedLinux LLC (*www.unitedlinux.com*), an industry initiative to streamline Linux development and certification around a global, uniform distribution, have signed a cooperative agreement to market a UnitedLinux professional certification program.
>
> Under the memorandum of understanding, LPI and UnitedLinux will work jointly to create new UnitedLinux specific exams which, when passed together with the current LPI Levels 1 and 2 exams, will lead to two new UnitedLinux certifications. The new exams are expected to be available during the first quarter of 2003.

Let's look more closely at this example. The *where* and *when* of this and most releases are specified in the *slug* ("New York January 22, 2003"). The *who* is LPI and UnitedLinux. The *what* is signing a cooperative agreement. The *why* is marketing a UnitedLinux professional certification program. And the *how* is LPI and UnitedLinux working jointly to create new UnitedLinux−specific exams.

These two paragraphs alone communicate the essential points of this announcement,. In print, there may not be enough space for more than this. Some special−interest journals devote a column or a page to announcements, which are printed verbatim from the news release. Unless the announcement is deemed more newsworthy, this may be all the coverage you get.

5.1.3. The Middle Paragraphs

Limited space in publications and time in broadcasting means the first paragraph *may* get covered. Paragraphs should always be ordered by importance for two important reasons.

First, editors read through releases quickly and often will not finish entire releases. You must consider what things are most important, and place them next in the release. Often, a statement from your spokesperson explaining the expected impacts on the marketplace or something related can be catchy enough to be quoted. Follow this with the next most important thing, and so on to the end of the release.

Second, sequence frequently indicates importance (unless the story is an in−depth feature that can establish pacing and shape). Stacking your news, in what some editors call the "inverted pyramid," can show editors the relative importance of your details. By following the inverted pyramid, you will make the editor's job easier and also accomplish your goal of getting the most critical information covered.

5.1.4. Final Details

You need to mark the end of your news release, so that editors know there is no further news. In journalism, this is traditionally done by putting "−30−" or "−end−" on a new, centered line, after the last line of copy, as follows:

```
                         −30−
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After ending the release, it is important to include the *boilerplate* standard, reusable background information about the organization issuing the news and contact information for editorial follow−up. The boilerplate includes the organization's web address where the editor can go for further details. Boilerplates can be reviewed and revised periodically, but they should maintain consistency. Wildly different boilerplates are unprofessional from one release to the next.

Below is an example of boilerplate and contact information.

About Linux Professional Institute

The Linux Professional Institute (LPI) develops professional certification for the Linux operating system independent of software vendors or training providers. Established as an international non−profit organization in 1999 by the Linux community, LPI develops accessible, internationally−recognized certification programs which have earned the respect of vendors, employers and administrators. LPI's activities involve hundreds of volunteers and professionals throughout the world in many different capacities, and the group encourages active public involvement through mailing lists and its website at *www.lpi.org.* LPI's multi−level program of exams is administered globally through Virtual University Enterprises (VUE) and Prometric testing centers. LPI's major financial sponsors are Platinum Sponsors Caldera International (NASDAQ:CALD), IBM (NYSE:IBM), Linuxcare, Maxspeed, SGI (NYSE:SGI), SuSE Linux AG and TurboLinux as well as Gold Sponsors Hewlett−Packard (NYSE:HWP) and Wave Technologies.

Contact:

Sheldon Rose

Sacke & Associates Inc.

416−218−1102, ext 2191

sheldonr@sackepr.com

5.2. What Makes a News Release Good (or Bad)

Print editors and journalists are notoriously overworked and underpaid. A well−written news release will often be used word for word, with maybe a few changes for "objectivity" or to accommodate the publication's format.

The editorial staff at the *Los Angeles Times* says this about news releases:

A good news release is a concise, complete description of an upcoming event; a timely report of an event has just occurred; notification of important personnel or procedural changes in an organization; or other news or feature tips.

Bad releases the ones that don't get used often have these common mistakes:

- Lack of a local angle.
- Insufficient or inaccurate information (who, what, when, where, why, how).
- Failure to include contact information for the organization.
- Verbosity. (Try to keep the release to one or two pages, but balance brevity against failure to include necessary information.)
- Lack of timeliness the editor's deadline has passed or the news is released too long after the event.

Writing a news release does not have to be painful. What you need is a little time to gather all the facts: the who, what, when, where, why and how (and any additional information necessary to support).

Sometimes your news won't be used right away or in the form you provided. A writer may need time to rewrite your outline into a news story. Or, if a feature is being developed on Linux, the writer may use many sources for depth and objectivity. They may use quotable quotes, first–person anecdotes, statistics, and causes and effects from your releases as well as those of your competitors.

Deadlines are hugely important because the news media cannot delay publication or broadcasting. Don't bother editors with untimely information. If you can't pitch your story in time, wait for another opportune moment to come around.

5.3. Top Ten Tips for Writing Releases

To summarize what we have said so far, here are ten tips for writing an excellent news release.

1. *Use an active headline to grab the editor's attention.*

   The headline makes your release stand out. Keep the headline short, active, and descriptive, with the most positive spin. Write "Jane Doe Named Person of the Year" instead of "Jane Doe Gets Award."
2. *Put the most important information at the beginning.*

   This is a tried and true rule of journalism. Remember that the first two paragraphs should contain the salient facts of who, what, when, where, why, and how. Don't bury good information at the end.
3. *Avoid exaggeration and unsubstantiated claims.*

   A news editor can smell a sales pitch a mile away. Instead of making over–inflated statements, provide real, usable information. Find legitimate ways to set your organization apart, and stress those points.
4. *Write in an active, engaging, and concise style.*

   Use language that conveys your excitement about the news. If your release is boring or passively written, the editor may conclude the news itself is not very meaningful or you are not a good candidate for an interview. Interesting equals newsworthy.
5. *Keep your release to two pages or less.*

   Generally, if you can't state your message in two pages, you are not getting to the point fast enough. Editors are always looking for concise, easy–to–read releases that can be thrown onto a website or squeezed into a leftover space in a page layout. For highly important news with many details, you can include a third page, but this should be done sparingly.
6. *Include a contact.*

   Every news release should include a contact person who the media can reach for more information. This contact is your spokesperson and must be familiar with all the news in the release. They should be prepared to answer questions.
7. *Keep jargon to the minimum.*

   Avoid using highly technical terms and buzzwords familiar only to Linux insiders. Jargon can date quickly, and complicated language irritates people who don't know what you mean. Your goal is to tell your story to as wide an audience as possible, not to unduly limit the audience. Even special–interest publications mostly write in plain language and only use jargon and acronyms generally familiar to their readers.
8. *Stress "benefits, benefits, benefits."*

This falls under the category of "show, don't tell." Avoid claiming something is "unique" or "the best" when you can't substantiate this. Instead, provide specific examples of benefits, supported by evidence and anecdotes.

9. *Be specific and detailed.*

   Marcia Yudkin, author of *Six Steps to Free Publicity,* talks about the "Yes, but what *is* it?" syndrome. Nothing is more irritating than seeing constant references to a product name or service name, but no information on what that product or service is. The reader needs to be able to visualize a new product or understand what a service offers. This is particularly critical for launches (announcements of new offerings). You should ask someone unfamiliar with your product or service to read your release and then describe the product or service in their own words.
10. *Proofread!*

    This is easily forgotten, but extremely important. Always proofread your work before issuing the final release. Better yet, give the document to someone else (perhaps a copy editor) who can readily spot spelling and grammatical errors. Nothing signals unprofessionalism more than a typo−filled communication.

5.4. Distributing the News Release

Your media contact database is your best source for editors, journalists, and freelancers who should receive your news, but if you want to include a broader range of news media targets, you may consider using one of the many news release distribution services available. Asking one or two of your news media contacts will likely reveal a creditable service. These services can be expensive, so base your decision on how broad an appeal your news has.

In North America, the more popular distribution services include:

- PR Newswire (*www.prnewswire.com*)
- Canada Newswire (*www.newswire.ca*)
- BusinessWire (*www.businesswire.com*)

These firms will customize your distribution based on the subject matter, and can target specific media such as technology editors, medical editors, daily news editors, and so on. A customer service representative will explain your options and the cost involved.

News releases are very important in a public relations campaign. News releases give editors and the public a glimpse into your company. When these documents are done professionally, your organization will receive the recognition you deserve. Remember, though, that news releases are not the only tool of public relations professionals. In our next chapter, we will examine the variety of other tools that can be used.

Chapter 6. Other Public Relations Tools

The news release is the most important form of written communications used by a public relations professional, but not the only one. There are many other public relations tools that should be used when appropriate.

News releases may suffice for most news stories, but other, lengthier forms of communication can give in−depth coverage of an interesting news item. Feature articles, bylined articles, and emails may be written to provide human interest appeal, to explore topics and issues in more depth, to raise your organization's profile in the local community, or for other reasons.

6.1. Feature Articles

Feature articles, which explore a subject at length, are not constrained by the tight deadlines of regular news articles. Features may be submitted at any time, depending on the editor's needs. Features often stem from a regular news item.

Imagine that the Linux operating system has been successfully implemented at a large organization in your community. This story is newsworthy, but begin to look for "the rest of the story." What difficulties did they experience in the transition, or what part did your organization play in their implementation? This could be the start of a feature article.

More research and creativity will go into a feature story, but the must still be accurate. You will provide more facts, more statistics, more examples and anecdotes, and more analysis than in a news release. You can humanize and dramatize what may appear unexciting at first glance (a Linux implementation). You can openly focus on a particular angle or viewpoint, so long as you avoid outright advertising. Readers dislike advertorials masquerading as "articles," and no editor will accept an article that blatantly sells.

Another bonus is that editors are quite open to features, because they provide much needed content for filling an issue. When the feature is written by a reliable source and does not require payment (unlike a commissioned article), the article becomes a real asset.

All writing needs to engage the reader. The first sentence or two must be compelling enough for the editor to read on. Features require a strong lead something to hook your target audience. A headline or a photograph may help.

For a feature, you have a wide repertoire of leads to choose from. Some leads are designed to startle and shock, some will excite readers' curiosity, some will vividly describe a real or imagined scenario, and some will succinctly state the nature of the story.

The body of the feature then unfolds in a logical sequence, and ends with a strong and memorable close. Every feature will be different, depending on the subject, the anticipated audience, and the skill of the writer. Reading features written by others in the Linux community is a good way to learn and pick up possible story ideas.

You can direct a feature to the "feature editor" at a daily newspaper or your targeted trade magazines. Before going to the trouble of writing the article, you should pitch the idea to see if the publication has any interest at all. The pitch should include an outline, an estimated length (number of words), and a description of illustrations or photos you can supply. You could also include a selected portfolio of previously published articles about your organization.

The upfront consultation is invaluable. Since the editor knows their readership better than you do, they might suggest an angle of specific interest to their readers and indicate where this piece might fit in their publishing schedule. The more complete your package, the more seriously your work will be considered.

Another possibility is to plant the story idea with the editor, and let the publication take care of writing the feature. In this case, you can supply expertise and interview subjects.

Whatever your approach, keep in mind that the ultimate goal is to generate favorable coverage and visibility for your organization.

6.2. Bylined Articles

A byline is the line showing the author's name at the beginning of an article. Basically, a bylined article is attributed to a source rather than being anonymous.

Bylined articles can be any length, and they tend to based on opinion. They articulate views and opinions that are clearly the writer's own, without requiring objectivity.

Issues, trends, and predictions regarding Linux and open source are ideal subjects for bylined articles. Moreover, forward−looking pieces are of high interest. Editors are always looking for "the next thing" to tell their readers about.

Opinion articles are important to position your organization as the leader and trendsetter in your field. To be a guru is to be watched, quoted, respected, and followed. Editors like highlighting celebrated members of the community because they sell more issues.

Gauging the interest of the news media is very important. What's hot? What are they writing about? Check the topics listed in their editorial calendars. Try to match their interests to the activities of your organization in the community. Then start writing your opinion piece.

Typically, the author of a bylined article should be your organization's designated spokesperson and acknowledged authority for the media. That might be you or a senior official. Sometimes a public relations professional will ghost−write the piece for the spokesperson, whose name will appear on the article. When this occurs, the article must closely reflect the spokesperson's views and ideas. In other words, he or she "owns" the ideas expressed in the article, not the writer.

An added bonus of by−lined articles is that they can be adapted into speeches for possible speaking opportunities. Conversely, any speech can be written as a by−lined article.

6.3. Email Writing

Another effective way to communicate to a targeted audience is through an email campaign. The effectiveness of a good email should not be underestimated. Some fundraising experts, for example, can raise thousand of dollars with an effective email campaign. Exceptional letters have obtained contracts, sold properties, and landed jobs.

Emails can be targeted to a specific audience for much less than you would spend on a regular mail campaign. Every email is an opportunity to effectively communicate to your target audience. For example, your organization might want to target recent graduates of local computer training courses with opportunities in their area. You will need to obtain the names and email addresses of recent graduates from the institutions offering those programs. Cooperation with their institution can often be established if you provide something in return, such as a reciprocal link on your website, a mention in your newsletter, or even free advertising.

Hopefully, your email campaign will generate interest in your organization and your programs. Be mindful of potentially spamming your intended audience this could have a negative impact.

6.4. Miscellaneous Communications Tools

There are numerous other communication tools you can use in a public relations effort. Here are just a few suggestions:

- A speech at a Linux trade show.
- A presentation at a local training institution or career development conference.
- A brochure or flyer describing the work your company does.
- A white paper describing the benefits of your company's work, posted on your website.
- A newsletter or email newsletter describing your organization's activities and achievements, aimed at current and prospective users.
- An advertisement placed in targeted magazines.
- Special events such as open houses and "media information" days.
- Regular tours of your facility.

The possibilities are limited only by your time, resources, and budget.

6.5. Don't Forget Emphasizing Core Messages

In all your public relations initiatives, don't lose sight of your core messages (described in Chapter 2). These messages are the "essence" of your organization, defining your identity for users, the media, and the general public. Remember that the core messages should be woven into everything you do as a public relations representative. Consistency creates a bigger impact for your audience.

In the next chapter, we will look at how to use a trade show as a valuable tool for promoting your organization.

Chapter 7. Working the Trade Show

Speaking engagements at appropriate industry functions will garner increased visibility and media coverage. One of the easiest ways to gain credibility is to participate as actively as possible in trade shows, industry gatherings, and seminars. You must choose these events carefully, distinguishing between those that are worthwhile and those too small to matter. Keep in mind, the larger the gathering, the more competitive the speaking application process.

7.1. Arranging Speaking Opportunities

Arranging possible speaking opportunities takes considerable effort and involves a long lead time. In most instances, you must be in contact with the conference organizers at least nine to ten months in advance of the show. You may even find that a sponsorship is required to be considered as a possible presenter.

First, do your research regarding relevant conferences that are being planned in your area in the months ahead. The website of the event organizer or of the conference itself is often a good place to start looking for information. Contact the organizers to find out their needs and application requirements for possible speakers.

Also, consider other venues in addition to trade shows focusing on Linux and open source. For example, you could offer your services as a speaker to human resources or computer training communities.

The key to successful participation is similar to pitching to the news media. You must understand your audience, you must have a compelling topic, and you must be ready and willing to impart your knowledge and experience of the industry. Most importantly, your presentation has to teach something to someone, and not just be a commercial for your organization or Linux. Give the audience the satisfaction of having really learned something from your presentation, and show organizers will want to have you as a presenter at their next show.

7.2. Getting Media Attention at Trade Shows

If you want publicity while exhibiting at a trade show, don't do what too many other organizations do. During the show, they wait patiently at their booth until they spot a reporter coming down the aisle. Then, if the reporter stops at its booth, the exhibitor moves in with the same tired pitch used on everybody else who walks by.

If this has been your approach in the past, now is the time to change. Waiting until the show begins is already too late to capture the news media's attention. You should now understand that establishing strong news media relationships weeks or even months in advance can pay off when the show begins.

Begin by finding out which news media will be covering the show. The best way to get that information is from the show's public relations department. Ask them if they can give you the names of print, broadcast, and online media they are targeting. This information is important to know, so that you don't pitch the same story ideas as the show organizers.

If you discover the organizers are pitching an idea that fits well with your organization's objectives, ask if they could include your business as an example in their pitch.

Check the editorial calendars of both the publications that will be covering the show and other publications that might have an interest. (A computer magazine, for example, is a prime target for a large Linux conference.) Many publications will issue a special report before or after the show takes place. The report may be a section within an issue or even an entire special edition. If you cannot glean this information from the calendar, you should call the publication and ask.

The special reports present ripe opportunities for media coverage. Pitch story ideas that may become part of the special report to your media contacts.

Prepare a compelling news release describing the most interesting thing that your organization will be doing at the show. Mention awards, impressive results, or endorsements by Linux experts anything that will snag the media's attention. Include the line "For more information or to arrange an interview, contact:" as part of your contact information at the end.

In devising your strategy to get media coverage at the show, always position your organization as "part of the solution," not as a mere attendee.

7.3. Planning for a Trade Show

Planning for trade shows needs to start at least a few months in advance. If you wish to have a significant presence at strategic or influential show, you should plan to set up a booth, either on your own or with a key partner. Booth space is limited and must be reserved in advance. Usually a fee is involved, which varies according to square footage and location on the exhibition floor. Designing the portable booth can take a few months, so plan ahead.

Here are some tips for getting maximum benefit from your trade show appearances.

7.3.1. Before the Show

A major trade show requires considerable advance preparation and, if you aren't ready, can present a logistical nightmare. You must develop a solid plan and monitor your progress vigilantly.

1. *Evaluate and select trade shows carefully.*

   Participating in a show can require a major investment of time, money, and resources. Be tough in your evaluation of a show's worthiness. Are the attendees likely customers for your organization? Exposure to a few hundred very qualified targets is better than exposure to thousands of generalists who are very unlikely to be interested in your business.
2. *Read the show manual.*

   Before you do anything, contact the organizers of the show to find the show's manual. Everything you need to know about the show should be there, including a proposed or final schedule, registration information and forms, floor plans, exhibit specifications, invitations for potential speakers, and other important details.
3. *Identify your goals.*

   Be specific about the things you want to accomplish as a result of your participation in the show. Do you want to increase visibility, gain exposure to a large number of customers who might be interested in your products, or check out the competition? Concrete goals are important to determine the value of the trade show to your organization.
4. *Define measurements of success.*

For each goal, determine a way to measure its success. Make these measurements as specific as possible. You could plan to hand out 1000 brochures, obtain contact information for at least 200 prospects, and take a key editor out to lunch. These benchmarks will help you decide whether the show was worth the expense.

5. *Put your show plan in writing.*

   The plan should include a workable schedule, a comprehensive list of preparation activities, and an individual assigned for each task. You cannot leave things to chance, or else Murphy's Law (Whatever can go wrong, will go wrong.) will surely prevail!
6. *Develop a key message for your booth exhibit.*

   Like good advertising, a good exhibit clearly communicates one major message. This draws in more prospects to your booth than an unfocused cacophony of messages.
7. *Design an open, inviting booth.*

   An open booth design, with no tables obstructing access, invites attendees to come in. Your logo should be big enough to be seen from a good distance. Maximize "walking around" space by mounting brochure displays on walls. Use interesting graphics to draw people's attention. For demos, laptops and flat−screen monitors are space−efficient. If space permits, provide comfortable chairs to encourage prospects to linger. A portable booth should be reasonably easy to set up and take down.
8. *Advertise your show participation.*

   Use tag lines such as: "see us at Booth 1525 at the Linux World Conference" in news releases and other communications leading up to the show (even if those releases are about something unrelated). Write a news release announcing show−related news. Invite editors to stop by the booth, or set up appointments between them and your spokespeople.
9. *Order all necessary supplies, including brochures and giveaways.*

   If your marketing collateral needs to be updated or redesigned, take care of this early. You don't want to run the risk of having no brochures to hand out. Design forms for filling out prospect information clear forms eliminate guesswork. Consider giveaways to generate attention and a sense of fun. These don't have to be expensive. Pens with your web address and a catchy slogan can be very effective.
10. *Design PowerPoint presentations and demos for the booth.*

    These will draw attendees to your booth and help them learn more about your business. Presentations will allow you to communicate information to many prospects at once.
11. *Create a unique identity for your booth staff.*

    Decide on the dress code for your staff. Matching blazers, T−shirts, or even boutonnieres will make your representatives easily identifiable.
12. *Train your exhibit staff before each show.*

    This is very important! Your staff needs to know what is expected of them. They need to be briefed on all new programs and initiatives that should be emphasized. They must know how to run the demos and presentations, and they should know some basic trouble shooting. Nothing looks more unprofessional then demos that don't work.

7.3.2. During the Show

1. *Set up a rotating booth schedule for your staff.*

   Your staff needs breaks for lunch and relaxing. They will be more cheerful if they don't have stay at the booth all day long.
2. *Remind staff to record all prospect information.*

   Encourage your staff to record everything they can learn about a prospect's needs and experience with Linux. Stress the importance of getting phone numbers and email addresses. (Creating an information form as suggested above will make this easier.)
3. *Encourage staff to greet people warmly and smile!*

   Amazingly, this is often forgotten. An inviting attitude can give a valuable first impression. The staff should avoid having their backs to the entrance, or taking phone calls while on duty. A friendly greeting to passersby may encourage them to stop rather than simply walk by. Staff who are uniformly courteous and helpful, knowledgeable about all aspects of the industry, and responsive to requests will make a very good impression.

7.3.3. After the Show

1. *Send requested literature immediately.*

   Send requested material within 24 hours. A quick response is your second opportunity to make a favorable impression. (Your performance in the booth is the first.)
2. *Include a teaser on the envelope or in the email subject line.*

   Be sure to mention your organization's name and the name of the conference on the outside of the envelope or in the email subject line, so they know your letter is not junk mail.
3. *Help your prospects take the next step.*

   Make sure your literature packages make responding easy for prospects by including your web address and information on the opportunities available to them.
4. *Keep track of your prospects.*

   Nothing signals the success of your trade−show effort better than having prospects purchase your products or having the media spotlight your efforts. Keep a record of the customers who found out about your products through the trade show. Use these results to demonstrate the show's return on investment.
5. *Analyze "lessons learned."*

   After each show, evaluate what went well and what didn't. Critique each aspect of the show and ask others for comments. Pay special attention to feedback regarding communication to prospective customers. The "lessons learned" will help improve your efforts in future shows.

Next, we will review the major topics we have covered in this guide to public relations. This final chapter will serve as a quick reference guide to the major elements of public relations. Use this guide to develop a successful public relations campaign.

Chapter 8. Quick Tips for Maximizing Coverage

To conclude this public relations guide, we give you quick tips for maximizing your opportunities for media overage. This chapter provides a quick reference guide to many of the major points we've covered. If you've appreciated the importance of the previous chapters, these pointers will be a valuable summary.

8.1. How to Maximize Media Coverage

1. *Have a strategy.*

   Tailor your strategy for each public relations opportunity. Think about the audience you want to reach and how to create excitement. An effective part of your strategy should be to enforce your organization's core messages in all news releases.
2. *Have a good story.*

   A news story must have a compelling beginning, middle, and end. Journalists recognize a strong story within seconds, so tell your story quickly and succinctly.
3. *Know your audience.*

   You wouldn't follow up on a potential business opportunity without knowing something about their business, so don't call the news media blindly. Before you pitch to any media outlet, study their work. Read the publication, watch the show, and listen to the radio broadcast. Get familiar with the characteristics of the media outlet you are targeting. Find out about their main audience and their likes and dislikes. (Internet message boards are good for this.)
4. *Invest in relationships.*

   The more you know about the media organization and your target editor, the better and more confidently you can pitch to them. Building relationships *now* means editors will be more likely to take your call when you've got an important story to tell. Best of all, even if they can't offer you coverage on this particular story, they may refer you to another reporter who can. As with any relationship, building trust is critical. Keep your promises, and be on time. Be upfront about what you can and can't do. You might not be able to do everything, but reporters will appreciate your honesty.
5. *Think before you speak.*

   A word of caution: *everything* you say to a reporter is on the record, regardless of disclaimers. You are representing your organization at all times. The impression that you give has a definite impact on how the media views your organization.
6. *Monitor your media coverage.*

   Media coverage shows your success. As a media relations expert, the end goal is always positive media coverage for your organization. When your organization is spotlighted in major media outlets, you bring attention and respect to your business.
7. *Look for a unique angle.*

   Look for personal stories that can spur news media interest. For instance, if a local school board is considering Linux to save money, focus your story on the human interest angle. Unusual stories and angles that affect a media's audience are more likely to get media coverage than mundane ones.
8. *Know your story inside and out.*

Research your story carefully. This allows you to revise your pitch if the editor has specific needs. You also must be able to answer any questions that the editor may have.

9. *Be persistent.*

   There is a fine line between being persistent and annoying, but if you have a good story and know your audience, it is fine to make contact attempts until you get feedback from a reporter.
10. *Follow up.*

    Many potential leads are lost because public relations people fail to follow through. If a reporter tells you to call back another time, make sure you do! Also, if a reporter doesn't answer your email immediately, do not assume they are not interested. They might not have had time to respond to the large volume of emails they receive.
11. *Be creative.*

    Infusing your media relations plans with innovative thinking produces stronger, more effective results, so avoid recycling the same old news releases and fact sheets.
12. *Find information.*

    Do you sometimes feel like you just can't write the news release? This blockage often indicates you don't have enough information. Do outside research. Interview an industry analyst. Get another perspective. This investigation can lead to the information for a great story.
13. *Study and adopt good writing skills.*

    Use a journalistic approach. Look carefully at how reputable publications like *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal* structure a story. What is the lead? What kind of quotes do they use? Study different types of stories. Features, appointment announcements, news articles, and opinion pieces can all be useful in your public relations campaign. Often, you will see the most important information is in the lead and that the rest of the story follows. This inverted pyramid style is usually the best way to organize an article.
14. *Eliminate jargon and techno−speak.*

    Buzzwords are like bees they can be highly irritating. Write with clear language, and avoid clichÃ©s, which are another sign of weak writing.
15. *Expect results.*

    Media coverage means increased visibility, which exposes your organization to more prospective customers. The more people you can reach, the better the impact will be on your organization.

Finally, the success of your media relations efforts means success for *you* in the dynamic, engaging, challenging, and creative business of public relations.

Appendix A. Monitoring Media Coverage

Monitoring the media coverage of your organization is a vital part of tracking your success, but can be extremely time consuming. A more efficient and reliable tracking method is to use a media monitor service or a clipping service. The website *http://dmoz.org/News/Services/Media_Monitoring/* provides a long list of media monitoring services, some of which are provided here.

A.1. Media Monitor Services and Clipping Services

AirCheck News Taping (*www.airchecknews.com*) is a full−service broadcast monitor providing national and local news segments and reports.

Advance Media Information (*www.amiplan.com*) is database of events for the next 18 months, continually updated by a team of journalists and broadly divided into news and entertainment. Each item is integrated with a press directory, listing essential information, including telephone numbers and email addresses.

Bacon's (*www.bacons.com*) is a public relations supplier of media directories, media software, press clippings, Internet clipping, media lists and news release distribution.

Medialink Worldwide (*www.medialink.com*) is a television and radio news monitoring and clipping service.

Burrelle's/Luce Information Services (*http://burrellesluce.com*) is a premier monitoring service for quick and comprehensive print, broadcast, and Internet information.

ClipGenius (*www.clipgenius.com*) is a clipping service specializing in public relations news and newspaper clips as well as web and press clipping.

ConfirMedia (*www.confirmedia.com*) monitors content broadcast on radio and television.

CustomScoop (*www.customscoop.com*) is an online agency delivering a daily customized clipping service that draws from online editions of major wires and daily papers, TV and radio stations, smaller daily and weekly newspapers, magazines, trade journals, and new media publications. Free trial available.

Cutters (*www.cutters.com*) is a Singapore−based press clipping service with particular emphasis on business and information technology news. Also provides tracking on electronic media.

CyberAlert (*www.cyberalert.com*) offers fully−automated Internet monitoring and clipping of content in web publications, sites, message boards, and news groups.

E−mmediate Clipping Service (*www.e−mmediateclippings.com*) offers web delivery of articles from Montana newspapers.

JA Media Services (*www.jamedia.com*) offers broadcast television and radio monitoring, and news clipping and transcription services

Media Source (*www.memphismediasource.com*) is a full−service TV news monitoring and digital video production company, offering local broadcast monitoring for 120 U.S. cities and all major national networks.

Mediatrack (*www.mediatrack.co.uk/*) provides international media evaluation, analysis, and measurement, campaign evaluation, competitor analysis, and media research nationally or globally.

Metro Monitor (*www.metromonitor.com*) is a professional broadcast news monitoring and news clipping service monitoring over 300 U.S. stations.

Multivision, Inc. (*www.multivisioninc.com*) is a media monitor specializing in hard−to−find coverage and markets along with digital delivery of broadcast clips.

News Index Delivered (*www.newsindex.com/delivered.html*) monitors hundreds of daily news sources, and provides keyword search−based email clippings daily.

News Power Online (*www.enewspower.com*) provides comprehensive solutions to your information needs.

NewsNow Digital Intelligence (*www.newsnow.co.uk/di*) tracks news about your company, searching over 3500 sites every few minutes for relevant stories.

New Media Intelligence (*www.parallel54.com*) (previously known as Parallel54) provides research services including monitoring of newsgroups, media sites and other publicly accessible online content.

PLCom News Services (*www.plcom.net/news/index.php3*) offers customized media monitoring and analysis, automated news feeds, and newspaper and TV news abstracts delivered on the web with encryption security.

Postech (*www.postech.com*) is a design engineering and manufacturing firm specializing in broadcasting, data acquisition, and telecommunications industries.

Quickscan (*www.quickscan.net*) is a software company that provides database software and technical support to professional news monitoring companies.

SDS Media (*www.sds−web.co.uk*) scans all U.K. newspapers and trade magazines to daily extract and deliver relevant articles to hundreds of clients.

Smart Brief (*www.smartbrief.com*) provides free, email based news summaries and other content for industry associations, professional organizations, advocacy groups, and their constituents.

Video Monitoring Services (*www.vidmon.com*) is a broadcast information retrieval service

Videowatch (*www.videowatch.org*) monitors news and news magazine broadcasts, maintains a 60−day archive, and sends broadcasts to you on videotape.