



# WORKING WITH MEDIA

## 1. What is 'the media'?

1. **Types of media:** newspapers, magazines, television, radio and internet.
2. **Commercial media:** as businesses, their primary goal is to earn money for shareholders. To do this, it focuses on attracting large audiences in order to attract advertising revenue.
3. **Public media:** eg. ABC is funded by public revenue, and is required to broadcast programs that inform, entertain and educate the community.
4. **Community media:** eg. community radio stations or newspapers are not driven by profit and are often focused on specific issues, group or geographic location.

## 2. Getting your message across using the media

1. **Paying for media time or space:** This gives you complete control over your messages. All the detail you want to include can be put into an advertisement. However, advertising is costly, and may not be affordable for many local groups.
2. **Attracting media:** This is where your story or issue is given editorial coverage by a media outlet (eg. a radio interview, a television story, or a printed article in the newspaper). Be aware that you can't control what the media will say, and how they will present your issue.

## 3. Useful tips to attract media attention

Consider the following when trying to attract media attention:

- Does your story have a human angle? How does it impact on people's lives?
- Does it tell anything new?
- Is there new data? Use statistics to present something new.
- Is there conflict? (Be careful not to blame or criticise others too much here – this is a last resort!)
- Will there be good visuals for television or photographs?



### 3. Useful tips to attract media attention (cont.)

Also consider:

- What's the angle? Can it be explained simply? Apply the 10 second rule: if you can't explain it in that time, you won't get a run.
- Who is affected? Try to find a human interest aspect to the story. Is the issue you are targeting affecting kids walking to school? Or the safety of people walking to the shops?
- Is there a broader issue impacted by your story?

**#Tip:** *Once you've worked out what your issue is, and how you would like to present it, consider what action, response or solution you want. Journalists will want to know what you plan to do next, so be prepared.*

### 4. Identifying the right form of media to use

Pitching your story to the right media is critical for getting coverage.

1. Local issues are most likely to appeal to local media (eg. local newspapers or radio). Local media is read by many people in the community, and monitored closely by authorities such as councils. A local newspaper may take up your issue as a campaign, which could mean you receive ongoing coverage of your progress.
2. Metropolitan daily newspapers have state-wide coverage. They'll often want to have an exclusive – ie. the first media outlet to cover the story.
3. News radio isn't interested in exclusives – they want to make sure they are not missing out on stories already running elsewhere. Once a story has been covered by print media, you can pitch it to every radio newsroom with a media release and a phone call.
4. Talkback radio looks for interesting talent and is also good to pitch to after a story has run in the newspaper. When calling, ask for the producer of these programs, not the presenter.
5. Television news and current affairs is after strong visuals, a news angle and good “on camera” talent.

The best way to identify possible programs and outlets to cover your story is to listen, read and watch as much media as possible. Keep notes on the stories covered, the journalists covering them and the approach they take. That way you can build up your knowledge and target the right people at the right media organisations at the right time.

## 5. Style, tone and content of media release

Prepare a media release that tells and sells your story. Use the format of a news story to write up your issue. Make sure you:

- Keep it accurate, clear and brief (no more than one page);
- Convey key elements: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How (see sample media release, below);
- Use a catchy, concise headline for interest;
- Start with the most important issues and follow with other details in descending importance;
- Keep paragraphs to two sentences or less;
- Use simple words and phrases;
- Have a spokesperson for your group who is available to talk with the media and include a punchy quote from them, and put their contact details at the bottom.

However, don't expect a media release alone to get you coverage in the media. Journalists and news editors receive hundreds of media releases every day. Without follow up, yours won't necessarily be noticed.

## 6. Tips on getting your media release noticed

- Before you send your media release, ring or email the media outlet/s first. Tell them about your story/issue, then offer to send them a copy of the media release.
- When calling the media outlet, ask for the news desk if you haven't identified a particular journalist or program.
- In some circumstances, it may be a good idea to start with your preferred media outlet and let them know your story is an 'exclusive'. Ensure you follow up with any extra information they have requested, but if after several phone calls or contacts they are not taking action, ask them if they are happy for you to take the story to another media outlet.
- Think about a picture that might accompany the story. Most newspapers won't take images supplied by you – they'll want to take their own. So setting up a photo opportunity – with local people (talent) can help to sell a story.
- Newspapers will check to ensure letters don't contain misinformation and don't libel anyone. They will sometimes limit to one published letter from a writer within a time period, and may not publish letters that have also been sent to competing newspapers.

## 7. Other ways to get your story in the news

**1. Writing a letter to the editor** of a newspaper is another way of achieving free media coverage. Letters should be short, and many newspapers require that they be under a certain number of words. They generally don't let anonymous letters be published, so include your name and contact details with your letter (we've included a sample letter to the editor at the end of this document).

**2. Television** will take more time, as they need vision to make a story work. If the story you are pitching is a local human interest one, you can be flexible with them around timing. If it is a story about an event (such as a public meeting or rally) then be clear about the times things will occur in pitching your story.

## 8. Supporting your media efforts

### 1. Campaign strategy

Earned media is most effective when combined with a campaign strategy. A campaign is a multi-faceted effort that includes a variety of materials and methods to spread your message. A campaign can include printed brochures, web-based information or a blog, newsletters, stickers handed out at events. For an effective campaign:

- Create a fact sheet that gives all the details of what you are working to achieve, why it is important, and who is involved. This can be a good support to your media release, as it doesn't have to "sell" a story, but provides detailed back up facts.
- Use social media on the internet – Facebook or Twitter are good examples.
- Create a website (or get a free webpage with Victoria Walks) to start building up examples of work undertaken (such as your walking audit), links to stories and coverage of your group's work, and facts and figures that support your argument.

### 2. Media conference or launch event

This is where you invite the media to you. Think about whether your story is strong enough to attract more than one media outlet and don't expect miracles. The biggest launch in Australia can be ignored if another major news story pops up. And keep your launch or event focused – the media won't wait around for a story to happen.

### 3. Combine different types of media

Once the story has run in print, you can target radio and TV newsrooms and talk shows. For radio news, never call around the hour or half-hour when news bulletins are going out – they won't thank you for it, and they won't pay attention to your pitch. Make sure your spokesperson is available – if you get a bite from a radio program they are likely to want to get the story fast.

**MEDIA ALERT  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**THESE STREETS ARE MADE FOR WALKING [Catchy title]**

**8 October 2010**

**[Tell your story]** Imagine a neighbourhood where the kids walk to school every day, people stop to chat on attractive, well-kept footpaths as they stroll to the shops, cars drive safely and watch for children and walkers, and everyone comments on how much better they feel since they started walking again.

That's the vision the residents of Smithvale have for their community – and it's a vision that's led them to form the Smithvale Action Group.

Smithvale Action Group isn't just about idle day-dreaming though – they're already working hard to make sure their local streets become better for walking, and they're encouraging others to get involved.

'There are so many ways that encouraging walking benefits communities,' Smithvale Action Group chairperson, Jane Jones Smith says. **[Quote people involved]**

'As well as being a healthier, greener alternative to driving, walking saves people money, gives them a chance to get to know their neighbours, encourages local shopping and helps make streets safer.

'Local traders benefit too – research indicates people who walk to the shops spend more money and make more shopping trips than people who drive. And fewer cars on our road mean less money needs to be spent on road maintenance, and it also cuts traffic accidents.'

Already, Smithvale Action Group have taken some active steps to encourage local walking, including organising neighbourhood working bees and street parties.

'We would welcome anyone who is interested in walking to come and get involved,' Jane Jones says.

'And we're also starting to think about how we can work with other groups, such as local traders, VicRoads and Smithvale Council to make our vision a reality.

'Although we can't do everything ourselves – some things will require more money and resources than our group can muster – we do believe that we can be a force for positive change in our community.'

**[Include a 'call to action' – come to xx event, call your council etc]**

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**[Spokesperson contact details, including a name, phone number and email address]**

## Sample letter to the editor

John Walker

123 Stroll Street

Neighbourhood VIC 3333

Phone: 03 9999 9999

Always include contact details so that the publication can verify that you wrote the letter.

To the editor:

Published letters tend to respond to specific articles – and you must respond right away.

Perhaps today's article about safety concerns caused by cars picking up and dropping off children outside the Neighbourhood Public School missed the point.

Gentle humour can be more effective than finger shaking or earnestness.

While I'm not a member of the 'I had to walk five miles to school in the snow with no shoes' brigade, I did wonder: why are so many children arriving at school by car?

Use facts and figures to back up your argument, if possible.

The Australian National Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey recently revealed that 23 per cent of Australian children aged two to 16 are overweight or obese. The current level of carbon emissions from cars is major current concern, too.

Offer solutions, and be polite and positive, rather than simply criticising other's ideas.

Encouraging children to walk to school might well be a solution: reducing traffic outside the school, increasing physical activity and reducing our impact on the environment. Safety is a common concern – but the more we all walk, the safer our streets become, because there are more people around and fewer cars on the road.

Include your 'qualification' for writing, and invite other people to get involved.

As the Chair of our local Neighbourhood Walks group, I'd be more than happy to work with the staff, students and families of Neighbourhood School – or anyone else – to make our area safer, more comfortable and more inviting to walk around. We might just solve a few problems in the process.

John Walker, Neighbourhood Walks

Keep it short – 200 words or less – and spell check and proof read before you send.