

A How-to Guide on Launching a Successful Event.

Introduction.

Holding a launch event is a great way of sharing the success of your organisation or project, or marking a significant milestone.

Those planning such an event often hope the media will attend or report on it in order to publicise the occasion. Unfortunately, there are no guarantees when it comes to news. If you want to guarantee coverage and dictate specifics you have to pay for advertising. However, by planning ahead, and following these steps, you can increase the likelihood of media coverage. This is a how-to guide on how individuals and organisations can give their launch the best shot possible at free publicity.

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How Do You Plan?

Creating a basic media strategy as part of your launch preparations will help you clearly define what you want to communicate, and to who. This doesn't need to be a 10-page epic.

Your media strategy can be one page long and outline your:

- **Objectives:** what do you want to achieve? These should be as specific as possible. A good example of an objective would be: "to increase sign ups for our new project/program". A bad example would be: "to raise awareness about our new project/program."
- **Key messages:** what do you want to communicate? Choose a maximum of three messages and keep them as high level as possible. For example: Explaining what community energy is. Or, showcasing the progress being made by your community.
- **Audience:** who do you want to engage? This could range from community members who might benefit from your scheme, potential investors, or decision makers (such as local politicians).
- **Story angles (also known as "news hooks"):** why should the media be interested in your story? Another way to tease this out is answering the "So what?" question multiple times. (See the newsworthy section below for more guidance.) Provide dot points or questions you expect the media will want answered.
- **Media targets:** this is largely driven by who your audience is. Find out what your audience reads, watches or listens to. For example, if you're targeting Bendigo homeowners, then it makes sense to contact local news outlets such as the Bendigo Advertiser or ABC Bendigo studio. There's no value in having your story being published in the NT News.

What is Newsworthy?

There are many things that you might think are newsworthy but they don't make the news. That's probably because it doesn't fit the formula employed by editors to decide what and how issues are covered. An event or situation becomes news because it fits a set of criteria known as news values.

Broadly speaking, stories fall into these categories:

- **New and developing:** Bushfires rage out of control in regional Victoria.
- **Different, unusual or unique:** Protesting farmers drive cattle across Sydney's Harbour Bridge.
- **Controversy or conflict:** Thunderstorm asthma takes emergency services by surprise.
- **Emotive/feel-good:** A community power project helps a local family keep the lights on.
- **Relevant to large numbers:** Power bills to rise after coal-fired power station closure.

Working out how your event fits within these guidelines will significantly improve your chance of getting a journalist or producer to cover your event. Don't focus on what interests you but ask yourself:

- How does it impact the producer's audience or community?
- What will the resulting story mean to them?
- Why is it important, significant, different or colourful?

Now run your event through the "so what?" test. Get a piece of paper, or someone to play Devil's advocate, and tell them about your event. After every line you write or statement you make, ask "so what? What does this mean for your intended audience?". The result should be a focused statement that will make the foundation of your pitch.

Example:

My community group is launching a new project next week after 12 months' of hard work.

So what?

The project will be the first of its kind in the area.

So what?

It means my neighbours and I will for the first time own and generate the power we use.

So what?

This is revolutionary and means we are saving money, creating local jobs and cleaning up the environment all at the same time.

Timing.

Being smart about the timing of your event can help boost the chances of your launch being picked up by the media.

Clocking On

Journalists are working to tight deadlines and often write more than three stories a day. The more time you can give them to digest, write and edit a story about your event, the better. Events held in the afternoon are viewed as inconvenient and too close to deadline. Mid-morning launches work best.

Keeping Watch

The news cycle is fast-paced and nationally focused. Using your event to localise a national story can help get the media across the line. For example, when the Australian Bureau of Statistics releases data outlining the number of people employed in the renewable energy industry you could contact a reporter in your area and offer to give them a tour of your community energy project as a local example of how the industry is thriving.

How to Find the Media.

When pitching an event, you'll need to choose which media outlets you think would suit best and why. You can search for media outlets online if you know the location. For example, Google "Moree" and "newspapers" or "media outlets" or "radio stations" or "TV stations".

Their contact details are always available online, so call and ask to speak to the news desk. For newspapers this might be a local reporter, or chief of staff. For radio or TV, this might be a producer or reporter or chief of staff.

There are media services you can pay for that have updated lists of media contacts. These include AAP, Isentia (mediaportal) and Meltwater. There are some state by state lists here: http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/marketing/marketing_article.jsp?articleId=1423.

You can also search for reporters who cover the topic you are interested in. But be warned: media contacts often get outdated quickly! Journalists move jobs often, so once you find someone who has covered a particular issue or subject matter – search for their online profile on Twitter or LinkedIn and make sure they are still in the same role.

How to Approach Media.

Publications

Think local first: the community in which you are holding your event is the one that will most likely be interested in your story.

If the topic fits, consider specialist or niche media as well. For example, online news site Renew Economy for community power stories.

You'll need a strong news pitch if you're to receive attention from the metro media. The more people your launch events impacts, the more likely you are to receive attention from the metro media.

Newsroom Targets

If a journalist, producer or radio presenter has shown an interest by writing stories on the issue you are spruiking, it is likely they will be more inclined to cover your story compared with those who haven't touched the subject before. Spending time to investigate who to target your story towards will save you in the long run. To do this:

- Keep on top of the news: read your local paper and listen to the radio.
- Twitter is often a good resource as it's where journalists publicise their stories. So if you find their account you can skim through what topics they have recently covered.

The Pitch

Pitching your launch at least a week out from the event will give journalists and producers a chance to make time and prepare to cover the story. It also gives you time to follow up your pitch, provide background or further information and negotiate with your newsroom target.

A pitch can take the form of a media alert or a short and snappy email to your newsroom target or a phone call that takes into account:

- The events main details: who, what, when, where and why

- The media hook: what makes the event newsworthy? Why should they report it?
- The picture opportunities: what photos of vision will be on offer at the event? This element should also drive where your launch is held. If you're building something new, holding a launch on the site will give the media a chance to illustrate the story. Props and case studies are also useful if your project doesn't offer up great examples. For example, having a solar panel on hand, or a happy customer who is happy to talk about their experience
- If you have some, provide photos, video and authoritative quotes relating to the story
- Who else can comment on the event?
- Your contact details.

Example A

MEDIA ALERT: NOT FOR PUBLICATION

4 January, 2017

\$30 million "solar goldmine" in Brisbane's CBD

New research into Brisbane's solar potential will be released tomorrow (Wednesday, February 8) that shows the city's businesses could save more than \$30 million on electricity bills if they put solar panels on their roof.

The research, from the Australia Photovoltaic (PV) Institute, also shows how some of Brisbane's landmark buildings - such as Suncorp Stadium, Roma Street Station and QPAC - could be transformed by rooftop solar.

The Solar Potential Map, developed by the PV Institute and University of New South Wales, is the first of its kind in Australia and is a game changer for assessing the business case of solar for any city building.

The map is free to use and enables property owners in the CBD to zoom in on their rooftop, calculate how much solar power could be generated and the resulting dollars and emissions saved.

The research will be launched at Brisbane Powerhouse, which is already cashing in on solar with a 400-panel array.

Date: Wednesday February 8

Location: Brisbane Powerhouse, Box Office 119 Lamington St, Brisbane

Time: 10:30am

Speakers: Renate Egan, Chair, Australian PV Institute

Vision opportunities: Tour of Brisbane Powerhouse solar rooftop set up; and an exclusive bird's eye footage of Brisbane's CBD rooftops.

For more information contact Joe Blow on 0400 000 000.

Example B

Hi Ruth,

Ballarat will this weekend play host to a troop of knitters taking part in an exciting new arts project that will eventually be on display in Victoria's regional galleries.

Knitters of all ages and skill levels taking part in the WARM project have six months to knit one (or more) small masterpieces, including native flowers, gum leaves and trees and miniature wind turbines. Then, in September, the individual works of art will be sewn together to create a 3D artwork at the Ballarat Art Gallery.

The project is a form of craftivism which gives people the space to slow down and, using the comfort of craft, reflect on why the Earth is warming and how people can make a positive change.

What: WARM workshop, led by pattern designer and knitting extraordinaire Georgie Nicolson

When: Saturday, May 7th 1.30-4pm

Where: Ballarat Library, 75 Ballarat St, opposite the town hall

Picture opportunities: People of all ages and abilities knitting, already-completed knitted pieces including native flowers and wind turbines.

Collecting high quality images, video and quotes from authoritative sources is a great way to value-add to your pitch. This gives media outlets the opportunity to write up the story even if they can't attend your event. If you know of someone who has photography skills, or the ability to film an event make sure you organise this.

The Follow Up

Journalists are a busy lot thanks to budget cuts and the demanding 24-hour news cycle. If you haven't heard back from them after a day or two, it's more likely your newsroom target hasn't had time to read your pitch rather than that they have rejected it.

This is why following up with a phone call to confirm they have seen the alert or pitch is important. Without being pushy, verbally pitch your story (using your written pitch as a guide) outlining why your launch is of interest to their readers, what the hook is and why they are the best person to write it. Keep it short and snappy - reporters are often on deadline and don't have a lot of time to talk.

If they can't be reached, leave a message reiterating that you have emailed through the idea and if they are interested they should contact you by a specific time or date.

Launch Day.

The morning of your launch, make a quick call to the journalists you are targeting to do a final check on their attendance.

Work towards a running schedule. This needs to detail who will talk to the media on behalf of your organisation. Make sure your spokesperson knows what has been pitched to journalists, as this will likely guide the reporters' questions. They also need to:

- Avoid using jargon. This includes acronyms of your organisation. Better to say: "I'm from a community group that is trying to set up a solar project that will pay local people dividends every year..."
- Be across the key messages your organisation wants to get across
- Not assume prior knowledge about the topic. For example: if you are from a community energy group you need to simply explain what community energy is!

Take your own video and pictures of the event where possible – this can be sent the day of or the next day at the latest to media outlets who may not have been able to make it to the launch.

What Next?

Your launch isn't the only opportunity for your organisation to make it into the headlines.

Follow up with journalists who came, covered or were interested in your event by giving them updates on how your organisation or project is progressing. Ways to keep the story alive with follow-up stories include:

- Marking milestones: What are your project's anniversaries? Have you received a year's worth of energy bills and savings? Have you signed up more than 1000 people?
- Localising a national issue, including offering spokespeople up as local experts on community power and Australia's transition to renewable energy
- Profiling an interesting local who is involved in the project. For example: what if you have a very young person involved (primary school aged) as well as an elderly person (someone in their 90s). Or a high-profile local person such as the CEO of a major business or a cricket champion
- Have you just found out you have won a grant from a government or scholarship scheme. This is a great opportunity to highlight how you will spend the money and how that will benefit the local community
- Are you holding a free workshop or information session?
- Has your local council or state or federal MP asked to visit the project? (This might be a photo opportunity)
- Have you hit a hurdle along the way? (If so, complain to the media and try to enlist their help in removing the obstacle).

Event Launch Checklist.

Beginning of Organising Process

- Consider picture or vision opportunities when setting the site for your launch
- Consider news context when setting the date of your launch
- Write up media strategy.

2–3 Weeks Before Launch

- Finalise a launch location and any props required (e.g a solar panel) or case studies (e.g. a community member who is benefiting from your project)
- Organise who will be the media spokesperson/people
- Write event run sheet, including estimated time of speeches or statements
- Pitch to media targets, started with any outlets that have the longest lead-in time. (I.e. A weekly newspaper) and follow up 2-3 days after initial contact.

Week Leading Up to Launch

- Write media release for distribution on the day
- Organise equipment needed to film or photograph the event yourself
- Discuss the key messages with your media spokespeople
- Continue pitching.

Day of Launch

- Call your media targets to confirm their attendance/ make sure they are aware of your launch. Pitch story again and tell them why it's a story they should cover
- Get to launch location half an hour early, making sure you have copies of media release and any photos or vision you have to distribute to media
- Send out release (including that you will have photographs and vision available)
- Immediately after launch, follow up on any outstanding pitches, providing media release, vision or pictures you've taken from the event. Offer over-the-phone interview with spokesperson.

After Launch

- Contact journalists/media outlets that covered the original story if you have an update or new milestone
- Did any journalists express interest in the topic, but were unable to cover the story at the time? Think about any other opportunities coming up that might allow them to revisit the story
- Keep track of when and where the media coverage happened. Feed that back to your supporters, or donors or other interested parties
- Share this with your community, and encourages them to read it and comment on it as this shows the media outlet that their audience is interested in the topic and encourage them to keep covering such stories.



Speak with us.

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