

Notes from Media Workshop with Melita Dennett, BBC Southern Counties Radio (Oct 06)

Human Interest

Local media want a strong story, and that means strong human interest. Any issue needs to be hung on a personality (whether we like it or not). Actively offer the media a personality in the news release... "Joe, a lively speaker, is available to tell you his story"

General

- Local media like success – 70%+ positive stories
- Not so good at following up on stories/issues/campaigns, so there's a need to up the stakes all the time and offer them something new
- Competition between local media outlets (e.g. local rag v local radio), so radio often won;t touch a story already covered in the press. Offering radio an exclusive a day or two before the deadline of local paper well worth while. Offer different speakers/personalities to different media outlets to give them a new angle on an existing story – so if Joe spoke to the press, offer radio Josephine.
- Peak times are 1) Breakfast, 2) mid-morning and 3) Drive time
- Local radio has a high disabled/ carer listenership (as they're more likely to be at home and listening to the radio) so they like stories that appeal to this demographic

News Release

- Local radio plans about a week ahead, so can't cope with 'forward planning' news releases sent further in advance than that. Breakfast and Drive Time shows book interviews/guests on the day or the day before. In general send news release 5-7 days in advance for general programming.
- Target relevant journalists and offer them a strong story. If possible send your news release to a named individual and build up a relationship. They receive c 50-60 stories by email a day and are more likely to follow up the personal ones. Producers will also forward stories on to other relevant people
- Send info in the body of the email and don;t just say "please see the attachment for our latest news release". That won't even get read.
- Can be quite informal – short hello, reminding of relationship if it exists, then a paragraph summarising the story from a human interest point of view and offering a strong personality, stating when they're available if relevant.
- Journalist will want to deal direct with your personality if possible. They don't want to communicate via a 'middle man'. So either put personality's contact details in the news release, or expect to be called and asked for them. That will be the end of your involvement unless you're giving the interview too
- Much more interested in a user of a project than in the MP/ local nobility that chairs it
- Weblink is good to facilitate background research.
- Avoid statistics – focus on people

Interview

- Fear of hostility from an interviewer is unnecessary. They want the story to get told and are not interested in tripping people up. Stupid interviewees isn't good radio, so they don;t want to make you look stupid. They may ask 'devil's advocate' questions, but only to provoke an answer. See these as

an opportunity to state your arguments

- Most local radio interviews will be live and over the phone. They interview in person rarely (not enough resources).
 - They might do this where they're unsure they can get good enough quality live e.g when interviewing children and unsure whether they'll be monosyllabic, or when interviewing someone with a disability that in some way affects their speech
 - They might send out reporters when it's a big story that covers the entire region
 - Interviews won't be live when they want to create an effect such as a balanced vox pop, or make a montage that includes music/ sound effects
- Don't rely on statistics – they bore people. Say 'almost half' rather than '46%'.
- Avoid jargon/ acronyms
- Cut to the chase