

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

News can be classified as “anything that other people are interested in.”

To be newsworthy you need to let the right people know. Editors and Producers are always looking for stories. The trick to media exposure lies in becoming an ally of these people and putting your contacts to best use.

Always be aware of things which could be deemed “newsworthy”

- Are you running an event or exhibit, inventing or offering a new product or service, implementing the use of state-of-the-art equipment?
- Has your business or staff received a prestigious award?
- Keep an eye on newspapers and industry magazines; can you announce a new development or have you procured the services of a specialist staff member?
- Does your story bear any relevance to a topical news item?
- Are you observing an unusual trend or activity within the wine industry?
- Would you like to refute a recently voiced opinion?

These are just a few “angles” which could gain your business some media coverage.

The “angle” of a story is all important. Many editors and producers may shy away from blatantly promotional stories but can be persuaded by a good angle.

Let's take a hypothetical example of a media release:

Sunday Trading for Cellar Door

The Black Cat winery at Lyndoch in the Barossa Valley is now open to the public on Sunday afternoons. “We wanted to attract more tourists to our cellar door to sample our wines,” said Joy Seekamp.

A media release about this could also read:

Wine tourists beating a path to Lyndoch!

In response to the enormous popularity of their regional Barossa food platter, the Black Cat Winery at Lyndoch has extended its opening hours.

Recent visitor figures released by the Barossa Wine and Tourism Association confirm that visitor numbers to the historic valley town have increased over the past six months. “There's no doubt that our famous platter and great wines are bringing people back time and time again,” said Joy Seekamp, “and we're finding that customers are also taking time to stroll the streets and explore Lyndoch's craft shops and galleries”.

With their new Sunday trading hours from 10am until 5pm, the Black Cat Winery hopes to attract more day trippers from the City. “We're less than an hour away from Adelaide,” says Joy, “and now we can offer people an authentic Barossa food experience seven days a week”.

You can see from the above examples that potential exposure for this story isn't the story itself but how it's pitched. The first example is all about gain for the operator whereas the second example cites references to statistics which help to validate a story, along with a positive “spin” overall.

Writing a successful Media Release

The easier you can make a journalist's job, the more likely you'll get exposure. To that end, the simple and most effective way is to send out press releases.

In short, the media want to know WHAT the story is, WHY it's newsworthy, WHEN it's happening and WHERE and WHO is involved. Make sure your message is clear, and keep it simple and interesting if you want to attract attention.

Here are some tips:

- ❑ Be concise and use key points. Avoid jargon and stick to the facts. A press release of 500 words could easily end up filed in a bin
- ❑ Remember that the first ten words of a press release are the most effective so ensure that your opening sentence commands attention
- ❑ Use quotes where possible to underline your story and enhance credibility
- ❑ Ensure that facts supplied are accurate and can be validated
- ❑ Use the Internet to support your story. If a journalist can find further information on a website, perhaps with supporting images then include the link - it will only make their job easier.
- ❑ Provide as much contact information as possible. Check that the press release includes your spokesperson's email, phone number and fax details. Ensure that the person named as first point of contact will be readily available to provide information for at least two days subsequent to issue of the release
- ❑ Always use the BCC (blind carbon copy) field when sending email press releases
- ❑ Avoid the temptation to make your press release an advertisement. Be factual not promotional.
- ❑ Always provide a name for the recipients of your releases wherever possible. A release without a name could easily end up on the wrong desk or in the wrong department (see contact list).
- ❑ Ensure location, dates, times and cost are included in releases about events
- ❑ Have someone proof read your release – bad grammar or spelling is unacceptable

Once your press release has been sent out, some public relations experts advocate a follow up call. You may choose to do the same, but always bear in mind that generally the media prefer to adopt the practice of "Don't call us, we'll call you". If your story is newsworthy and you've sent it to the right people, rest assured they'll contact you. Remember that in the big fishbowl of stories yours could be the guppy of the day and there will be nothing you could do or say in a telephone conversation to alter that fact in the minds of a busy newspaper editor or TV news producer.

With large stories or product launches you may like to prepare kits for your contacts. These kits can include a sample of the product where relevant plus "background" sheets which list more detailed information. For print media you should include an image CD. Generally for a launch you would send out press releases and invitations to announce the event and provide information kits for media who attend on the day.

Image Library

An essential tool for any marketing exercise is an image library. Spend the time and effort to secure the services of a professional or accomplished amateur photographer and it will pay dividends. Images should be high quality (6 megapixels +) and shot using the best possible light conditions. You will find once you have these images that they will be invaluable for your website, brochures and customer inquiries. You instantly make a magazine editor's job much easier when you provide a CD of quality images.

A basic image library should include:

1. Exteriors of cellar door and winery
2. Road signage or corporate logo
3. Views from your property and/or cellar door
4. Vines/ grapes/ vintage/ vats/ barrels
5. Product (bottles/ labels)
6. "Colour" shots. These are the images that convey the spirit and nature of your business, such as rustic walls and climbing vines for an older winery, modern shelving and product for a more contemporary one.

Make the Media your Friends

Why does it always seem that the same people are continually approached by the media for comment? Quite often these people are no better qualified as experts than many others in their field, yet they are always the ones who seem to receive publicity. The answer is quite simple – they have contacts.

Chances are they're on first name terms with an editor, journalist or producer and know the value in making themselves available for comment. It's far easier to complete a story quickly if the journalist can simply ring a friend or, in the case of television, get the necessary shots at a winery that welcomes cameras. The people quoted in magazines and appearing on television have made themselves approachable and reliable to the media. They know that editorial content is always perceived as being far more credible than a paid advertisement.

There are a few essential points to recognise when it comes to dealing with the media:

1. They are time-poor

Journalists often don't have the time to seek out new stories, but they will follow up suitable "leads". Once you have their attention, make it as easy as possible for them to do their job.

2. Never avoid the media

This is particularly important if they are investigating a "bad news" issue. By declining to comment you not only run the risk of appearing insensitive to the topic at hand, you won't be given a second chance. Far better to proffer a diplomatic comment which may or may not be used than to avoid the subject altogether.

3. Don't overdo it

Once you have established a relationship with someone in the media, maintain it without becoming annoying. It takes time to build a win-win relationship but it is well worth the effort in the long run.

4. Cultivate media contacts and maintain an ongoing list

This is vitally important. Ensure that your list includes full name and title (check spelling!), email, phone number and a brief description of their role within the media. Include everyone you come into contact with who work within the media. Your list should also include industry magazines, their editors and writers, tourism publications and any Internet websites with wine industry news content. Keep this list continually updated but don't delete the details of your contacts if they resign or move on. Keep in touch because there's every chance their next job could be in a related field. Remember that your Media Directory is a valuable strategic weapon in your public relations armoury.

Example of a media entry in your database:

NAME:	Traci Ayris
ORGANISATION	Vislex Pty Ltd./Channel 7 Adelaide
ROUND:	Tourism
TELEPHONE:	0411 1111111
FACSMILE:	08 81111111
EMAIL:	Traci@seven.com
DEADLINE:	Works one month ahead - weekly half hour tourism show "Discover"
NOTES:	Always looking for new tourism developments re cellar doors etc.
HISTORY:	Contacted 24/5 re new patio area. Indicated interest in story once landscaping completed

5. Be hospitable and never underestimate word of mouth

The television crew who spend a day filming your business in 40-degree heat are not likely to be well disposed to the manager who doesn't offer even a glass of water. Many media professionals are unable to accept gifts (generally in the form of product) as it could infringe upon "cash for comments" rules. Different media organisations may adopt different guidelines in this respect, but there's no harm in inviting a wine journalist to sample your range if they intend to write an article about your business. When in doubt, offer, and allow the journalist to accept or not, depending on the situation.

Do's and Don'ts

DO spend the time to investigate the shelves of a large newsagency. Look at all the magazines that could potentially publish stories about your business. Think outside the square... Environmental, Retirement, Tourism, Photography, 4WD and Business magazines could all potentially feature stories on your operation providing you can find a suitable angle. Keep a list of these magazines and their contacts (found inside the magazine's cover) in your media contacts.

DO seek out every opportunity to make contacts within the media. Hand them your business card and, without being pushy, make them aware of your business. Perhaps invite them to visit when you can provide a personal tour.

DON'T harass or harangue these people once you've met them. Make them feel welcome and send them your press releases but never expect or demand.

DO nominate ONE person to deal with all aspects of the media. Fundamentally important is this person's ability to appear affable, confident and knowledgeable about all aspects of the business. The best person for the job may not necessarily be the business owner(s); perhaps your cellar door manager or head winemaker could be a better choice.

DO work closely with your local tourism network. These people are in a position to inform their own media contacts of any new developments and should be more than happy to do so.

DO write or email any feedback you may receive as a result of an article or story. This not only enables the journalist to track the response, it helps to build a closer working relationship with them for the future.

DON'T underestimate the importance of property presentation. Always be aware of the image your business is portraying in the marketplace. Is it perceived as being traditional or innovative? Does it convey a welcoming or daunting presence? Are your staff members helpful or under stress? All of these points combine to create other people's perception of your operation.

DO maintain a web presence at all times. These days many journalists will dismiss places that don't have a website as amateur. Time is important. If a journalist needs information, they'll need it immediately and the Internet will often be their first port of call. Ensure your website includes contact information, a history of your business operation and product details.

If you are Interviewed

The basic rule if you're required for a media interview is "be prepared". Be confident in your knowledge and your ability to impart the necessary information. In the case of television and radio interviews, avoid at all costs the compulsion to keep talking and always look directly at the journalist, not the television camera when the interview is recorded. Answer each question in a concise and relaxed (if possible!) manner and politely wait for the next one. Resist the compulsion to elaborate. Avoid long pauses, as any prolonged silence will make you appear confused, not dramatic, and never, ever, answer a question with a "yes" or "no".

One-word answers are strictly forbidden when it comes to press interviews. If you happen to begin your sentence with a yes or no, ensure that you immediately clarify your answer with further explanation. Magazine interviews are less stressful because you're generally forgiven if you need to refer to notes or confirm a point with someone else. Finally, always ask the journalist for a business card and provide them with one of your own (and perhaps your image CD if they are magazine journalists) when the interview concludes.

Launches and Events

It's no coincidence that many events are linked to charities or community service. This is because canny marketing people realised long ago that it's far easier for a business to attract free publicity if they're seen to be promoting a cause. This is not a bad thing as it's a potential win-win situation for both parties. A word of caution; ensure that your motivations are genuinely altruistic if you are to go down this path, a simple "part proceeds benefit" may not be enough. You could even receive adverse publicity if it's perceived that your company was half-hearted in its charitable motivations.

Be ruthless when compiling a list of invitees to your launch. Only invite people who have contributed directly to the product (as a "thank-you" gesture) or will buy, distribute or critique it. By all means include a few luminaries if the budget allows, but above all ensure that everyone has a reason to be there. All too often organisers get caught up in the, "We should invite so-and-so" scenario. If in doubt, don't invite. Put the money saved towards your marketing campaign not the extra canapés.

When to Call in the Experts and Who to Call

If you've looked long and hard at your business and find you're still staring at a blank sheet instead of a long list of points which will gain you media exposure, it's time to call in the experts. A professional public relations/marketing person will not only be able to recognise which facets of your business they will be able to capitalise on, they should also have an up-to-date media contact list with specialty fields such as wine, tourism and business media. To ensure that your story reaches the desired audience/demographic, a professional will then precision-target the media people most likely to run it.

A consultation will undoubtedly cost money, but engaging the services of a public relations expert can be cost-effective when weighed against long term results. Consultants may choose to work by the hour, day, week, or per project. Always negotiate a time frame and rate which suits your budget and ensure that you formalise the contract in writing.

Get Professional Advice & Training

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