

# Tips on Getting Good Press (and avoiding the alternative)

By Jeff McDonald, San Diego Union-Tribune

## Know and understand local media

- Learn what's out there (print, radio, TV, Internet): U-T, CityBeat, VoiceofSanDiego; SD Reader, SD Magazine, community weeklies; KPBS These Days; Channel 4's Forefront, TV news morning and weekend shows
- Get to know bylines, beats, assignment and weekend editors and bureaus; invite reporters to your shop; become an expert they can quote on issues
- Be an advocate; keep in contact with key players on issues that affect your agency
- Figure out which news organizations and reporters cover what types of events; don't pitch an investigative reporter feel-good or feature stories
- Look to community weeklies or TV for lighter stories; pitch weightier stories to daily enterprise reporters or alternative media, tell them why it matters

## Press releases

- Must be concise, best if single page, with Web addresses for follow-up info, boilerplate description of agency and contact info for someone who will be available
- Give at least two weeks' notice before scheduled events
- Remember, press releases are glorified sales pitches, not stories; the idea is to sell editors or reporters on pursuing the story themselves
- Recipients should be targeted; don't blanket newsroom
- OK to call to confirm they got materials, but never pester

## Develop events for TV or newspaper coverage

- Organize walks/runs/benefits; building repairs or clean-ups
- Issue white papers, studies, polls or calls to action
- Nurture and promote partnerships with other NPs; more likely to garner attention

## When reporters call

- Develop talking points in advance (elevator speeches), stay on message, do spin but always tell the truth
- Don't avoid returning calls; invite them to tour agency
- Figure out what they really want; sometimes reporters are following a tip, other times they already have information and simply need a response; if you genuinely don't know, ask them upfront why they are asking what they want to know
- Maximum disclosure/minimum delay regarding unwelcome publicity; OK to admit mistakes, talk about corrective actions taken; public is quick to grant second chances
- Don't debate reporters; it's unnecessarily confrontational and undermines your credibility; if a reporter is asking around, it's because he or she is seeking answers; help them understand your point of view; tell them why things are the way they are.