



EVENT LOGISTICS

Guide to a Successful Media Event

If you're going to get your message out, sooner or later, you have to make the news. And that means staging a media event. There are "press conferences," and there are "media events." We suggest being creative, thinking outside the box, and attracting media with events.

The difference we are trying to highlight is that press conferences are typically formal affairs, featuring speakers with scripted comments, usually held indoors with a staged aspect to the whole production. Media events, on the other hand, feature more spontaneity and the content surprises the reporters. The event typically features groups of people doing something visually interesting, and is often outside. Ideally, both the action and the setting symbolize or evoke the campaign message.

The first thing to keep in mind when planning a media event is that reporters will not attend unless they deliver real news. You must be announcing something newsworthy such as a controversial report, a lawsuit, a boycott or a significant new development in your campaign. These are especially interesting to reporters if you spice them up with good sound and visual images.

BEFORE THE EVENT

- **CHOOSE A GOOD LOCATION, GENERALLY OUTSIDE** —Where you hold an event can greatly impact the story you end up generating. Location tells a story. For instance, doing an event at an oil refinery would tell one side of the energy story, and would emphasize your critiques. Doing it at a wind farm would contrarily emphasize where we need to go. Ideally, you should hold your media event outside in a location that is symbolically or concretely related to your message and campaign. The location should be safe, easy to reach, conveniently located for the media, and have good access to parking. Be aware of the weather forecast if you decide to hold your conference outside. Have a rain location planned and inform the attending reporters well in advance if the location is changed. If you hold the conference inside, your room should neither be so big that it seems like nobody attended, nor so small that the reporters are packed together.
- **CHOOSE A GOOD DAY** — The best days to hold a news conference are Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Mondays are not ideal because it is difficult to do reminder calls over the weekend. Fridays are not ideal because fewer people watch the news on a Friday night or read the Saturday paper. If you choose to hold it on a Monday, remind reporters on Friday and again Monday morning. Weekends can be difficult because there are significantly fewer reporters working. If it must be over the weekend, alert the weekend assignment editors well in advance.
- **CHOOSE A GOOD TIME** — You should not plan a conference before 9:30 a.m. because not all reporters will be able to make it that early. Nor should you hold it later than 2 p.m. because many reporters will not be able to meet their deadlines for filing stories.
- **ALERT REPORTERS AHEAD OF TIME** — Send out a written advisory (preferably by fax or email) a few days ahead of time, but be careful not to scoop yourself. Use the media team's sample advisory if unfamiliar with the proper format. The advisory should include the five "W"s (who, what, where, when, why) of your event, but should not reveal the core of your news. In other words, the advisory shouldn't tell the whole story. That's what the news conference is for.
- **USE "DAYBOOKS"** — A daybook is a computerized calendar of media events maintained usually by the local newswire (Associated Press, Reuters, or regional wire service) and sent electronically into newsrooms. The assignment editors regularly consult them. You should fax a copy of your news advisory to the local newswire service and call to confirm that your event will be included in the daybook.

- **PREPARE A PRESS KIT** — A press kit should be provided to every reporter when they sign in. These should include a news release summarizing the story, a list of speakers including full name and title (and biographical information, if possible), fact sheets, backgrounders that support your position, and any other relevant material. You should also be sure to deliver or send a press kit after the news conference to reporters who did not attend.
- **PREPARE THE SPEAKERS** — Anticipate tough questions ahead of time. You may want to make a list of questions and practice delivering short, quotable answers. Hold a practice news conference to polish your statements and ensure that the speakers are not too repetitive (or, even worse, contradict each other).
- **SET UP THE LOCATION** — If possible, you should offer reporters juice, coffee, tea and ice water. You should provide a podium that has a Sierra Club sign on the front so it is in all camera shots, and should also hang Sierra Club signs or banners behind the speakers. There should be space toward the back of the room for TV cameras and a table near the front for radio reporters. Definitely have one or two greeters with a sign in sheet so you know who attended and who did not.
- **MAKE PITCH CALLS** — Call key reporters the day before your news conference and ask if they received your news advisory. If not, offer to send it again. Explain what the topic of the news conference will be but, again, do not give too much information. Convince the reporter that this topic will be of interest and is important to her audience.

DURING THE EVENT

- **USE VISUALS** —Any good visuals, including pictures, charts, graphs, or maps will increase your chances of getting coverage. Your news advisory should note that there are "excellent photo opportunities," if that's the case. You should also include a description of what the photo opportunity will be.
- **DON'T BE LATE** —Start the conference within five minutes of the designated starting time. Begin by introducing yourself and the speakers, and then move right into people's comments.
- **LIMIT NUMBER OF SPEAKERS** —When planning the conference, organize your key points and have no more than four speakers. Try to present a diverse range of voices. Four people of the same age, sex and race all representing environmental groups are less interesting than a diverse panel representing religious, health, labor and environmental organizations. Additional people can stand behind the podium to answer questions later in the news conference if necessary. Each speaker should limit his remarks to four minutes or less.
- **ANSWER QUESTIONS** —After all the speakers have made their statements, the news conference should be opened for questions. Each question should be answered at the podium so that microphones pick up the quotes. Requests for one-on-one questions after the interview are fairly standard, particularly by TV and radio stations that may want to polish up a sound bite from the news conference.

AFTER THE EVENT

- **FOLLOW UP** — After the news conference, deliver press kits to any key reporters who did not attend. Make calls to key reporters or outlets that did not attend to offer a one-on-one interview. You should return to your office as quickly as possible after the news conference so reporters can contact you with additional questions.