

Direct Action Media Guide

A compilation of the media
guides of

The Ruckus Society
-and-
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THE MEDIA

Coordinating media for a direct action is more art than science, and probably owes more to luck than either. News is a quirky, complicated, unpredictable endeavor - much like an action itself. Put the two together, and it can seem like a miracle when an action actually communicates the intended message to the desired audience. As media coordinator, your job is to work miracles.

There's no formula for this, but there are certain things you can do that will greatly increase your chances of getting good media coverage. You have to stay flexible and willing to do whatever works, but following the basics will put you in position to respond most effectively if you have to change course. Much about media work, up to the point when the action finally goes down, is tedious, exacting, and detail-oriented. (Even when it's exciting as hell.) But if you ignore the fundamentals, you're giving the news media - who are already naturally disposed to regard activists as naive amateurs - one more reason to ignore your action.

This chapter includes a checklist of what you should do, and when you should do it to have the best shot at getting your action's message out. But these steps can be for naught if not done with thorough professionalism. Journalists are professional cynics, and if you're sloppy they will notice it and it will color their coverage. So go the extra mile; proofread the press release again; make the extra phone call. Never cut corners.

And always remember this advice from Wes "Scoop" Nisker, a legendary countercultural journalist of the 60s: "If you don't like the news, go out and make it yourself."

How the News Media Works (or Doesn't)

The structure of the US and global news media is currently undergoing rapid change that may soon make outdated the concept of news (as opposed to entertainment or other "soft" information media).

Much of this change stems from the trend towards media conglomerates- vast empire that

may include a chain of papers, lifestyle magazines, radio and TV stations, a cable network, a movie studio, a book division and an on-line service. News outlets are no longer run as public trust, with a unique responsibility to society, but as pure consumer products, marketed like soft drinks. (In the news business, cities aren't cities any more; they're "markets.")

As recently the 1970s, newspapers dominated news coverage, with TV and radio playing catch-up on whatever stories the papers broke. No more.

Go into any newspaper these days, and you'll find the editors keeping a close watch on a bank of TV sets tuned to local newscasts and CNN. With the exception of a few prestigious national papers- The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times - US papers are driven by the same values that prevail on TV. Short simple, reader-friendly reports, heavy on crime and celebrities. (More on these trends can be found in Ben Bagdikian's invaluable *The Media Monopoly*. Still, it does no good to whine. If you want to reach a mainstream audience, learn to work with the media structure that exists.

Wire Services

In the US there are three main wire services: Associated Press, United Press International and Reuters. AP is by far the dominant player, with UPI struggling with near-bankruptcy in recent decades and Reuters, based in Britain, still building its American base.

Each has its quirks, but all wire services are alike in one way: Almost all reporting is done by phone, with very few reporters available to go to the scene of a breaking story. They must work fast- they have a deadline every minute- and their stories are not very long, so the more skilled you are in concisely and accurately describing your action over the phone, the better. Wire services also offer a great opportunity for getting coverage when no reporters show up: If

you have a responsible, skilled photographer on hand, he or she can take an action photo and offer it to the wire as a freelancer. If it's an

interesting breaking-news photo, the wires often aren't that picky about who took it.

AP reaches nearly everywhere and seems to have reporters everywhere as well. Dozens of major American cities, and all state capitals, boast AP bureaus, and smaller cities and towns usually have an AP "stringer" - typically, a reporter for the local paper. In most metropolitan markets, AP also circulates the Daybook, a listing of news events happening that day, consulted religiously by all other news outlets. The Daybook is a great place to get a press conference or demonstration listed - send a press release a day in advance to "Daybook Editor, then call to confirm - but obviously, you don't publicize a direct action this way.

UPI's remaining strengths are two: Its reporters, although harried, are often more accessible to unusual stories and a majority of its remaining clients are radio stations. In some states, UPI operates its own radio network.

In Europe, **REUTERS** is as dominant as AP is in America. For now, US papers use it as a secondary service, often emphasizing business news. But if your action has an international angle - for example, stopping a shipment of rainforest plywood - there's a good chance Reuters will move a story (In the largest markets, check also for bureaus of other foreign services, such as Japan's Fiji Press. Anytime you're doing an action against an international corporation, make sure you get word to the press in the company's home country.)

Many cities now have a **LOCAL WIRE SERVICE** - City News Bureau in Chicago, Bay City News in San Francisco - that covers stories that big papers and TV stations don't have time to get to. They also publish daybooks.

Newspapers

Conglomeration is shrinking the number of dailies so that most cities support only one main metropolitan paper. There are very few afternoon papers left so newspapers are often reporting stories broken the day before by TV and radio. This can work against action coverage. What seems exciting on like radio or TV may be shrugged off by the newspaper as old news.

As breaking stories, actions are usually covered by a general assignments (GA) reporter. GAs are versatile, but don't expect them to know much about environmental issues. They'll focus more on the police aspects of the action - what law are you breaking, who got arrested -all the more reason to refine and deliver a simple, unmistakable message.

Is a picture worth a thousand words? Yes- A dramatic newspaper photo of your action will draw many more readers than an article -and the wire services may pick it up and move it around the world.

An essential step in planning your action is to work backwards from the photograph you would like to see in the day's paper. (This imagery should ideally translate well to television.) Ask yourself if the only coverage of this action is one wire service photo, what single image will best convey our message? Consider everything: fighting, camera angle, visibility of the target, size of the banner, even the clothes your activists are wearing. In the absence of a banner, effective messages can be delivered by, symbolic costumes.

News radio is in some ways the most desirable coverage for an action. It's live and dramatic; during morning and afternoon drive time" it reaches large, captive audiences; and radio reporters live for catchy sound bites (as opposed to TV reporters, who value good video footage.) These days, equipping your activists onsite with a cellular phone is a must. News radio loves those "live from the scene of the action" interviews.

Most cities now have one or two all-news stations, but a lot of music formats also do local news. (In a number of markets, alternative rock stations promote a "green" image, and will give environmental actions prominent and favorable coverage. All news stations generally belong to one of the national radio networks-ABC, CBS or Mutual. The networks' staff are almost all based in New York, but for an action with national impact you should call them.

News reports on commercial radio are quite short- a minute or less. More thorough are the non-commercial station and network including

National Public Radio (NPR) and Pacifica Radio news.

NPR, supported in part with tax dollars, has, to the general public, a liberal image. Activists joke that it stands for National Pentagon, or National Petroleum Radio. Still, NPR stations tend to take local news seriously, and the network is one of the more thoughtful and objective national news operations. They and their audience are interested in the environment. (NPR is the main source of news for contributors to Greenpeace.)

PACIFICA is unlike any other news operation in America. It's a string of six listener-supported stations (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Boston, New York, Washington and Houston) with an unabashed leftist viewpoint. The production value, and reporting skill may lag, but the audiences are sizable, and KPFA (Berkeley) and (WBAI) New York put on credible news shows.

The most famous description of American TV is "a vast wasteland" - and that was 40 years ago. Now it's much worse: A study by Rocky Mountain Media Watch found that the average local TV station runs so much mayhem and fluff - crime, disaster, pets, sex, showbiz - there's almost no time for real news. The networks are more serious, but focus heavy on Washington politics. Still, a creative, timely direct action with good visuals can get coverage - and the vast wasteland has a vast audience.

Local TV:

Very few local television stations, even in the largest cities, have reporters assigned specifically to cover the environment - or any other specialized topic, for that matter. Almost all TV reporters are generalists and, while exceptions do exist, they employed more for their hair than for reporting ability.

Add to this the fact that TV reporters are often assigned to cover two or even three stories a day, forcing them to race from story to story with only the most cursory research and preparation. You're begin to see why local TV news is so shallow - forcing you, the activist to make your message as simple and easily understood as

possible in order to have any chance at accurate coverage. The gatekeeper at the local station - the person you want to get your press release to and make your pitch to - is the news assignment editor. But since this is TV, it's not enough to have a relevant story and coherent soundbites. TV needs pictures-preferably pictures of people in action.

A creative direct action should, of course, provide such pictures - but even that's not enough unless it's staged well. Choose a setting for your action that's not only visually interesting, but also symbolize your issue. For example, if you're protesting a federal law that prohibits citizens from filing appeals of clearcut logging, stage your action on the steps of the US courthouse. But if your main message is the irresponsibility of the company responsible for the clearcutting, take your action to company headquarters.

Here are some other ways to add visual interest to your direct action:

--Banners of course. Banners should not only express your message, but should be designed for easy reading at a distance. This means that not only should all the colors and symbols used be legible, but the banner itself must be big enough to be seen against whatever backdrop you're hanging it on

--Clothing. Sometimes, what your activists are wearing can tell the story as well or better than a banner. For example, for a protest at a toxics facility or nuclear dump, dress everyone in hazmat suits. If you're raising hell at a stockholder's meeting dress up as a caricature of fat-cat capitalists. Or skip the banner altogether, and have your message spelled out in letters on the protesters' T-shirt.

The Networks:

Much of what we just said about local TV applies also to the networks although, thankfully, national news broadcasts tend to have somewhat less fluff and filler than their local affiliates, and reporters may actually have time to research a story. But because the networks have only 22 minutes a day to cover the world (or pretend to), it's much less likely that then, will cover a direct action as breaking news. You may see a snippet

of an action included as part of a larger feature story, on the issue, or a very brief mention of an action made international news. But in such instance, the networks are most likely to have gotten their footage from a local affiliate. Therefore, concentrate on getting your action covered by local TV, but send press releases and make follow up calls to the networks and let them know a local affiliate was present. If they want the footage, they'll let the affiliate know.

Cable:

The great exception to the rules of local and network TV is, of course, Cable News Network. CNN has an enormous news hole to fill - 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year-so if

HOW TO PLAN AND EXECUTE A STRONG MEDIA PLAN

What Is News?

The media is in the business of covering "news." If you don't give newspapers, radio stations and TV stations 'news,' you're not going to get covered. So, What Is News?

The best working definition of What Is News is one simple word, 'CHANGE.' News is 'change.' Think of why you glance at the front page of a newspaper, why you view or listen to broadcast news. You do it because, at a very basic level, you want to see how your world has changed from the last time you checked in with it.

This is a very, very important thing to keep in mind. It governs how much news coverage an environmental group gets. An environmental group putting out another report or hanging another banner, in some places, is no longer news. We must think more creatively these days and look also to more local coverage where the presence and involvement of an environmental group is more novel and more welcome.

Theme

In the simplest theoretical terms, the mass media is a conduit for delivering a message. You start with a focused and clear message

your action feature has a relevant message and good visuals, it has a pretty good chance of getting on.

Although CNN's audience, at any given moment, is only about 1 million (compared to 5 to 10 million for the ABC, CBS or NBC evening news), it is a tremendously influential audience - journalists, policy makers and news junkies. Try to bring your action to the attention of either the local CNN bureau chief or to the Environment Unit at world headquarters in Atlanta. CNN is more likely to send a crew to your action than the networks, but remember, they also have the capability of borrowing local footage.

and you determine the path of least resistance to your target audience.

Television, and the electronic media to a certain degree, has changed this simplistic scenario. We shouldn't just come up with a predetermined message, but must begin our planning by carefully considering the response we want to elicit.

How can we develop a theme and a message that strikes that responsive-chord?

Clearly identify the response you want to elicit. What would success look like? What do you want tomorrow's headline to say? What do you want the newspaper photo and television footage to look like? Is your story national, regional or (in most cases) local.

Carefully consider your audience. Who do you need to reach to accomplish your goal?

Keep the theme understandable and the message clean and simple. Can you say it in bumper sticker style?

Know Your Audience

One of the best ways to come up with the theme or message that works is by determining who your target audience really is. That has never been our strength, because far too often we fall into the trap of preaching to the converted, catering our message to an audience that already agrees with us or trying to talk to everyone in the 'general public.'

Think about your lifestyle. You work with an environmental group, which probably makes you sympathetic to a host of liberal causes. Most of your friends are probably sympathetic to liberal issues. -Generally these are not the people we need to do much talking to; -they are already on our side and often aren't the ones who have been directly impacted by the issues on which we work.

Now, think about how differently you would talk about our issues if you were talking with a conservative friend of your parents or industry representative. In tailoring your message to this different audience, 'everything from your vocabulary to your inflections would probably change.

This is affected by geography as well. Each region is comprised of many areas and even more attitudes. Be mindful of who you're talking to and how to be accessible and relevant to their lives. Explain why anyone should care about what you're saying. And, be open to present solutions.

Timing Can Be Everything

Be ever mindful that, to a certain extent, we function in a vacuum, surrounded by people who share our knowledge of, and passion for, the environmental movement. But there's a whole other reality for the general public. To capture the attention of the public, we must be sensitive to their state of mind and plan our events accordingly. For example, releasing a report during the World Series or doing an action when the Pope is in town are bad choices. Timing can be everything. The other events may not be important to you, but they might be to others, thereby rendering your efforts moot.

When planning a report release, press conference or action, peek out of the 'foxhole' and see what else is going on. Just because the report is back from the printer doesn't necessarily, mean that it's a good time to release it. Is there a competing event? Perhaps there is a political moment you can latch onto to enhance the appeal of your image

or to ride a wave of interest, rather than starting cold.

Sometimes timing conflicts are unavoidable. If something like this happens, either reschedule or get on the phone and start doing follow-up calls and interviews.

Visually Packaging The Message

Generally, when people think about environmental groups, certain images always pop up: A harpoon being blasted over the head of a Greenpeace inflatable exploding as it tears apart a helpless sperm whale, or maybe a harp seal pup staring up in terror as a hunter swings a club toward its head. In the annals of groups such as Greenpeace, the list is long and colorful.

What is so memorable about our best images is that a single still photo contains all the elements of the conflict and what we're trying to achieve. The successful images communicate universally without the need for captions or explanations.

When panning actions, it is helpful to begin by thinking of the image you want to project. Thinking visually will help you come up with that simple, easy to understand theme that is key to any good action.

Video and photo are the most powerful communications tools we have and we must realize that often we have the ability to construct the image we want to present to the Public. We must do so with the greatest of care.

BANNERS: MAKE SURE YOUR BANNERS SAY YOUR GROUP NAME AND MAKE SURE THEY ARE READABLE TO EVERYONE!!

- Are the letters are big enough to read from a distance? Are the words spelled correctly? If the media can make us look stupid, they will'

Think before you act. Nothing can Undermine Our message worse than spelling errors or careless behavior at actions. If you've ever worn a survival suit in the sun, you know how hot they can get. On one action, a couple of pipe pluggers, bothered by the heat, stripped

off their suits and proceeded to be doused by the very effluent that our campaigners were saying was highly toxic.

Do not take photo and video for granted. Finding a cameraperson should not be an afterthought, but an absolute priority.

Beside quality problems, make sure that if you hire photographers/ videographers, get a full understanding of contractual obligations so that you own the rights to your own images.

Budget considerations are another influence on not just what visual services are needed but only if they're needed. Shooting actions for no other purpose but posterity is expensive and wasteful. To evaluate whether a photographer or videographer on site, consider the following questions:

Do you expect news reporters to be-on the scene? If your action is planned in a remote area or at unusually early or late hour, the media may not be present, making your own shooters that much more important.

Might this event be of national or international news worth? If so, sending footage up on satellite is an option (however, it can be very expensive). TV stations and wire services have this capability, though it is always at their discretion.

Are there additional uses for the photos or video for which you have planned and budgeted? It is easy to assume that your action film will be useful after the fact, but burgeoning photo and video archives prove differently.

Will having photo or video on the scene provide more safety for the people doing the action? If there is a chance that a confrontation might occur, a camera documenting events removes anonymity, making people less inclined to incriminate themselves on film.

Finally, it is important to remember that we do not have free and unlimited access to photos and video shot by commercial media operations. Just because a newspaper photographer or TV crew documented our event does not mean that we can use their photos and video for our own purposes. If we

wish to use a newspaper or wire service photo in a publication or incorporate local or network television footage into a PSA or documentary, we must obtain written permission and often pay licensing fees which can be equal to or greater than the cost of having a photographer or videographer on the scene in the first place.

Cultivating the Press (“The Personal Touch”)

Make a point to know the press. One of the best ways to be able to favorably influence the quality of the coverage you get is by educating the press on the issues before an event happens. This is known as ‘softening up the press.’ Giving the press background information on an -issue and letting them know that you have a presence and a serious commitment to the issue will also help overcome the perception that you are in it only for the publicity, and are only capable of a quick hit.

Generally, an environmental reporter is a rare commodity. Environmental issues are often covered by a general assignment reporter who has a particular interest in the beat. That person will probably not have the time to stay on top of all the environmental issues that his/her community might face.

That’s where you come in. Keep in touch with the press in your area. Let them know what is going on. Chances are if there is an environmental story that isn’t making the paper, they just haven’t been tipped off to it yet, or they haven’t had it explained to them in such a fashion as to convince them it is both timely and relevant.’

You are not the only person aiming to get your issue covered. A typical reporter, editor or producer might get as many as 100 press releases in a day. As a result, many faxes, releases and phone messages get ignored. If an organization or individual develops a reputation for contacting reporters on trivial or irrelevant topics, that person is quickly and routinely avoided in the future. Too many press releases and a few too many aggressive media pitches to national reporters (when it

was really a regional or local story) can hurt your ability to access the big newspapers and broadcast outlets.

Be sensitive to media deadlines. Don't call a radio producer when his or her program is on the air, or a print reporter just before the 4 pm deadline. If you promise to send something or call by a certain time, do it. Professional media people will always appreciate it when you're sensitive to their deadlines.

As a campaigner working on specific issues, it behooves you to establish more personal 'working relationships' with reporters in your area. Keep them well informed through mailings, phone calls or occasional meetings, and establish yourself and your organization as reliable and credible information source.

Having working relationships with the media can be incredibly helpful when it comes time to do an action. Clearly knowing people you can trust in the media will dictate whether to give advance info to the press. Generally, leaking some info in advance gives a reporter time to prepare, and sometimes the coverage actually reflects that preparation.

Before calling a journalist, keep these tips in mind:

Never alert the media to an illegal action ahead of the action unless your group personally trusts them.

Know what you're going to say before you call and be succinct and confident when you do call. Reporters can be intimidating. That's because they get lots of calls just like yours.

What's the news? A good reporter will ask you that almost immediately.

Consider the angles of your issue. How does it affect the community? Is there pertinent legislation? What can people do?

Avoid calling at deadline time or during airtime.

Interviewing: Talking With the Press

We've all had it happen to us. A seemingly innocuous statement to the press becomes a glaring policy gaffe or factual error in print.

We rant and rave that we have been misquoted or taken out of context. That may be the case, but usually there is little that can be done about it. The best remedy for this is avoiding the situation in the first place.

Try to put yourself in a reporter's shoes. They are on the other end of a phone line with the receiver cradled against their ear feverishly typing away as you passionately ramble on about the state of the world. Of course there will be mistakes.

Speak slowly. Make sure the reporter has time to get down what you're saying, or at least catch up if you're speaking too fast. Many reporters will read your quotes back to you if you ask, so ask.

Ascertaining the direction the interview will help prevent you from being led into an area you don't want to talk about, or aren't qualified to. Remember that it is okay to say 'I don't know, but I can find out for you.' It is always preferable to plead ignorance than to shoot from the hip and be inaccurate. Ask in advance what information the reporter is looking for, or what type of questions you can expect. They will usually tell you.

Even ask what type of interview it is (live or taped), how long it will be, and how long your soundbites should ideally be. **Generally five to 10 seconds is an ideal soundbite** for commercial TV and radio. But, public broadcasting outlets prefer long-winded answers, sometimes longer than a minute.

Say your organization's name, It's been said elsewhere in this guide but bears repeating here. When doing interviews, do not say "I" or we. This is a very difficult thing to remember. Keep in mind that you are being interviewed BECAUSE you represent your group. Reporters don't care what you, Bob or Sally Environmentalist thinks. They care what you, Bob or Sally Representative thinks. When asked 'Why did you climb this building today?' They climbed this building and hung this banner because....' not 'I (or we) climbed this building because...' You get the picture.

Extreme caution must be exercised when doing radio or television interviews. Editing

can be evil. Listen carefully to the questions and anticipate what you sound like sentence by sentence. For example, a reporter says something like ‘isn’t this all just a publicity stunt?’ and you answer ‘Yes this is a publicity stunt, but that publicity is exposing the threat of this toxic polluter to the community.’ If it is a hostile reporter or editor you can be sure that your soundbite will only be ‘Yes this is a publicity stunt.’

Also, **if you don’t like the question, answer the question you WANT to be asked.** If you came on a show expecting to talk about hazardous waste and the interviewer asks you a question about finances, simply talk about what being done to clean up hazardous waste. Reporters can only use what comes out of your mouth.

Live interviews are tricky. Once the microphone is open, anything can happen and nothing can be reversed. For this reason it is imperative that you know your material VERY VERY WELL, and be prepared for ANYTHING. If the show (radio or TV) takes phone calls, it’s likely the phone calls will have nothing to do with the issue you’ve come to talk about. You’ll probably get questions like ‘you’re just a bunch of left-wing loonies. Why don’t you just mind your own business and stop wasting our time on shows like this?’

A nice trick when doing live interviews is to write down about a dozen 10 second sound bites before you go onto the show, and keep the list handy. As you spit out your sound bits, cross them off. This will ensure that you not only sound good but you also make your points.

Above all else, remain calm, remain rational. If you stick to your guns, and sound reasonable and knowledgeable doing it, you’ll win a lot of people over. Remember, these shows are all about entertainment. The hosts and the guests are times trying to goad you into a raving, wacky environmentalist. You’re better than that. Don’t fall into the trap.

TELEVISION INTERVIEWS Television interviews deserve a special mention. Not only do you have to SOUND good, but you have to

look good too. If you’re at an action, assume you will be on camera. Sure, you might not be. But, you’ll always be better playing it safe. You are a representative of your organization. Be comfortable but do not show up wearing ratty, grungy clothes and play Hacky Sack. You’ll only serve to reinforce the negative stereotypes many people have about environmentalists.

If you’ve been invited to do an in-studio interview, dress up a bit. Guys, try throwing on a coat and tie and lose the hoop earrings and nose studs. It’ll help us break away from the stereotype and ratchet our image up a notch. Even better, though, a coat and tie tend to throw off the other guest (if it’s a ‘debate-style’ show) and win over viewers because everyone expects environmental activists to look sloppy and grungy.

Television is all about image. If someone looks up from their dinner to see an environmentalist wearing a tie, it’s something they’re not used to seeing and it’s gonna catch their attention. For women, bright, solid colors work well, particularly blues, reds and greens. Watch the dangle earrings. They’re very distracting.

For men’s and women’s attire, simplicity is always best. No wild paisley ties, no wild prints, **no check prints and absolutely no blacks and whites.** All that stuff goes haywire in front of a TV camera. Remember, you want people to pay attention to you and what you’re saying.

WHEN TO LOOK AT THE CAMERA- Ninety nine percent of the time, you do not look at the camera. This is when you are ‘in studio.’ **A good rule of thumb is always look at the person who is asking you the question.** Also, look right into the camera for drama when making an important point

Have you ever watched TV and seen someone answer a question from a reporter by looking away from the reporter and into the camera to answer the question? Looks kind of awkward, doesn’t it? Exactly. It looks like the person being interviewed is preaching to you, the

viewer, and it makes you uncomfortable and it makes the newsmaker seem pompous.

Essentially the only times to look into the television camera is when you are being interviewed by a reporter who is in another studio and when you are taking phone calls.

A situation involving a reporter in another studio is called a “remote” or a “live remote.”

In that case, you will have an earpiece, Joe or Jane Newscaster will ask you a question from some distant studio and you will look at the camera to answer the question.

A little trick here is to not look directly at the lens but about an inch above it. Looking directly into the lens is extremely difficult. So difficult, in fact, that some camera technicians even have put little focal points or silly figurines on top of their camera lens for people like you to focus on.

When taking phone calls, if you’re answering a question from a viewer, do the same thing—Look at the camera (but not directly into the lens). This will simply come across as you very genuinely and personally answering the question.

Most of you know this but when you see a red light lit on top of a TV camera, it means that camera is live and rolling. Be aware of which camera (if it’s a studio interview) is ‘hot’ at all times. Look into it only when appropriate.

Again ... when doing interviews ... keep answers short and thoughts concise. Know the one or two points you’re going to make in advance and stick to them. Remember that only 5-10 seconds of what you say will probably make it on the air, so be prepared with a pithy 5-10 seconds worth.

Interviewing: Dealing With Hostile Media

When dealing with the media, it is important to maintain our credibility, integrity and composure. This is always most challenging when confronted with hostile media people. The first step is to take a nice, deep breath, then ask the reporter to clarify the question. Remain calm.

Some reporters may bait you with the sole intent of getting you angry so they can capture the liberal environmentalist frothing at the mouth, or worse. Confront this sort of baiting with a relaxed, diplomatic approach. Smile. When you respond to the reporter, speak to the audience (whether it is live or on tape). Staying cool in this sort of situation is difficult for even the most polished of speakers. To improve, you have to practice, especially before doing a live broadcast or press conference.

A final word on responding to hostile people, reporters or others. Remember that you are in the right and that you speak for many. You can even take the hostility as a compliment. If your group wasn’t being effective, no one would be riled up. It’s working.

Interviewing: “KISS”- Keep It Simple, Stupid

We have much to learn about how to tap into the sentiment of the masses and boil down complex issues to simple themes with which a very broad cross-section of the population could easily identify. Does this approach belittle our campaign goals? Certainly not. Again we are talking mostly about broadcasting, trying to reach as many people as possible, which is accomplished primarily through television.

There is a saying in the media that the camera never blinks. That may be true but it doesn’t stay focused on anything for long either. When an environmental story is carried on the nightly news there is generally no more than a 10-second soundbite.

If you really want your message to strike that responsive chord, it better be concise, lucid and memorable. In that format, you must assume that you’ve got one shot - one sentence or less - to get your message across. Frequently a good guide toward communicating to fit the soundbite format is to think of what you want the next day’s newspaper headline to say about your campaign or action.

When we brainstorm with campaigners to develop a theme, we often encourage them to come up with a message short enough and clear enough to fit on a bumper sticker, or for that manner, a banner.

Once the theme of the action/issue has been decided upon and refined, everyone involved should be briefed so they are well-versed as to how to best communicate the message. And remember, there's nothing wrong with repetition. Repeating your key message - and enforcing it with a visual image—are the keys to successful mass communication.

Repeating your key message and enforcing it with visuals is particularly important on an action. The press will generally interview our spokespeople, but will always want to talk to one of the climbers/ pluggers/ blockaders etc. These people must be briefed on the campaign, the message, and on media skills. They need to understand what we are trying to say and how best to say it in the type of 5-10 second soundbites that broadcasters are looking for. Train yourself to speak in soundbites. When you are about to do an action, tell every single participant the one or two key soundbites. Speaking with one voice is of paramount importance.

The situations we put ourselves in are similar from action to action, so much so that the questions from the media are often identical from place to place. Here are some typically asked questions you should anticipate. Be prepared to deflect them to answer the question you want to answer.

- Why are you here?
- What do you hope to accomplish?
- Are you uncomfortable?
- How do you go to the bathroom up there?
- How did you get up there?
- Was it worth it?
- What can people do?
- Is this just for publicity?

Remember, you do not have to answer a question, Interviewers can only use what you give them!! If you are uncomfortable with a question or don't know the answer, simply do not answer the question, say you don't know,

or give them the agreed-upon soundbite and repeat it until they give up.

Before an action, thoroughly brief everyone who might be in, a position to speak to the media and run through several mock interviews. A home video camera can be extremely helpful as it lends the ability to dissect someone's performance. This may sound cruel, but it can be extremely constructive.

As with any interview, maintain eye contact, particularly on camera. And smile (even on radio because, believe it or not, listeners can tell when you're smiling even if they can't see you). Also, avoid using lingo or enviro jargon. Call it a protest or demonstration, not an action or hit. If you're working on the FOIA or FPC, don't speak the acronym. Say Freedom of Information Act and Forest Practices Code.

Summary

In Conclusion, when planning a media strategy, follow these guidelines:

NEWS- Know whether or not your event is even news, If it is, know where to pitch the story.

THEME- What type of response are you trying to elicit? Come up with a theme for the action/issue that will elicit that response. Preplan by establishing what you'd like to see as the headline for the next day's news story.

AUDIENCE- Set your goals, identify your audience.

MESSAGE- Design the message with the theme and response in mind, and be sure to tailor your message to your audience.

TRYING- Think about timing before you make any major decisions. Will your event conflict with any other major environmental or general news events?

REPETITION- Remember, there's nothing wrong with a little repetition of your key message. Remember there's nothing wrong with a little repetition of your key message. Remember, there's nothing ... you get the picture. Enforce it with visuals.

VISUALS- Check, double check and triple check your banners. Are words spelled correctly. Do the banners make sense to anyone outside of your group?

REHEARSE- Thoroughly brief everyone involved on the media strategy and rehearse answers to typically asked questions, ideally before a camera, but certainly with each other. Campaigners choose to prepare ‘cheat sheets’ with brief background and suggested soundbites.

OPPOSITION- Determine counter arguments to what you are saying. Figure out what type of information the opposition will be using to undermine our position and prepare responses.

PERSONAL TOUCH- Cultivate the press before and after your action/report. Do it in person or over the phone. Do not just fax.

INTERVIEWING- Know your material cold. Know what to say and know when to look at the camera. Say your group’s name, not “I” and not “we.” Speak English, not enviro jargon.

SOUNDBITES- Short, concise, visual and evocative. Five to 10 seconds.

KISS- Keep it simple, stupid

<p style="text-align: center;">EFFECTIVE DIRECT ACTION MEDIA</p>

Some Terms You Should Know

There is a great deal of misunderstanding, even among reporters, about terms such as “off the record, and “background.’ These terms are used a lot and usually used incorrectly. Confusion over “off the record” is the most dangerous. Generally, when folks grant an interview ‘off the record’ they actually mean “not for attribution.” Here are some terms you should know. Not only will your group be better off but also you’ll look a lot more impressive.

On The Record -- the reporter can publish everything that is discussed

Not For Attribution - the reporter can use the information without naming the specific person who gave the information.

On Background—the reporter can use the information, using a general title as the source (“a State Department official said...”).

Off The Record—the reporter will use the information only for personal background and perspective and will not publish the information or the source of the information.

If you want to give a reporter some information that you don’t want attributed to you or associated with your name, you can say it’s “not for attribution” and still convey that information. Technically you must preface your remarks by saying this is “not for attribution. Bear in mind some reporters will refuse to hear remarks “not for attribution” because they don’t want information they can’t attribute. Many will refuse to hear information ‘off the record” because they virtually can’t use it. Giving a reporter information, though, in conditions other than “on record’ is a good way of giving a reporter a lead on a story that we suspect is true but haven’t been able to confirm. It allows you to speak candidly with a reporter, but there are drawbacks. If you are jumping back and forth between ‘on the record” and ‘off the record” a reporter can get confused. The chances of him or her using something you don’t want used dramatically increases. It can be a dangerous gambit.

“Embargo” - If you give out information on an embargo, it means that a news operation can’t run a story until the exact time you lift the embargo. Giving sensitive information on an embargo is very touchy as all news organizations define embargoes differently. *The New York Times*, for example, won’t even honor embargoes.

So, why use an embargo at all? Simply put, it just makes a story look “sexier” and more interesting. News organizations are competitive and an embargo means the same story is available to all of them at the same time. The theory is that they’ll all run the

story for fear of being beaten by their competitors on a good story. If the story is indeed good, generally they will indeed run it. Again, be careful when doing this, though. A group once gave advance information about a banner hanging at a plant to one of the wire services. The wire service had a strict embargo not to use the information until a certain Wednesday morning. In advance of the embargo, they called the plant for comment about the banner hanging. Obviously, then, plant authorities knew of our activities in advance and the action was ruined. The problem was in the way the wire service defined “embargo.” They didn’t actually write or distribute a story until the embargo was lifted, but that didn’t stop them from simply calling the plant for comment in advance.

About an action on an embargo, be very explicit that if you are going to pass on information the embargo includes no advance calls. It is not in the media’s interests to blow an embargo. If we get caught before the banner goes up they don’t have much of a story, but the more people who know about our activities, the more chance the information will get leaked to the authorities or the company.

Embargoes are good for releasing reports and giving journalists a chance to review information in advance of its release.

“Exclusive” - Again the definition varies and you need to be explicit. Granting an exclusive can be a way of guaranteeing coverage of an event in advance. Giving a TV station or newspaper an “exclusive” is also a good way to make enemies in competing media. However, sometimes the situation dictates a limited access to an action and you need to ensure that media will get out there. Offering a trusted reporter an exclusive is a good way to secure a commitment for his/her newspaper/station to be there.

If the reporter is sympathetic to ‘your group and is trustworthy, this can be a win-win situation. He or she will shine among peers for having nabbed an “exclusive and your story

will get used prominently, plus you will win brownie points with the reporter.

Actions

Actions are a powerful and effective means of getting out our message. The media is the conduit for those messages. If we get no coverage, that message goes nowhere.

There is no way to guarantee coverage, but there are many ways to improve your chances. You must think like the media assignment editors, the folks who decide what stories reporters cover on any given day. Ask yourself why you should send one of your reporters to the scene and what you expect they will come up with.

When panning an action consider what special logistics should be taken into account in the panning stages. You are not going to make the nightly news if you begin an action at 4 p.m. Know the deadlines and constraints that the journalists are up against and do your best to accommodate them. After all, if you make their job easier, they’re more likely to give you favorable coverage.

As mentioned earlier, you need to learn your media markets. If you need assistance gathering media lists, just ask.

Tipping Off the Press

Giving the press advance information on an action is inherently risky but is, in many instances, necessary. If you have an action that reporters can only cover by boat for instance, you will need to know in advance how many reporters you can realistically expect to be there.

When you speak to a trusted reporter in advance and he or she agrees to work under an embargo, you will most probably have to give that person most of the details so he/she can run the story by the editor. For the most part this is unavoidable, so the better you know the reporter the less agonizing you’ll do over divulging the action details.

Actions tend to happen at odd hours and on weekends. Often the date and time are

completely outside our control. Don't let yourself get stuck in the position of dealing with the weekday reporters only to have the action get postponed to the weekend leaving you without contacts on the weekend staff. Compile names and phone numbers of weekend editors. Get the direct line into the newsroom, so you won't have trouble calling in after hours or early in the morning when the main switchboard will be closed. You'll also need to correct fax numbers.

On the Scene

The crucial part isn't just getting the press there but working with them on the scene. Far too often in the heat of an action, we manage to get reporters out there, but then forget to spend any time with them. Someone should be assigned to take responsibility for the press and serve as a liaison to the campaigners.

The press person should be in charge of distributing the press materials (make sure you bring them) and ensure that campaigners speak directly to the press and that they know who the campaigners are.

Also make sure that you have "fact sheets" on hand to distribute to the public and bystanders. Often, a press release is well suited to the press but a one page fact sheet on breast cancer would be a much more appropriate handout for the public. Distribution of a fact sheet on the scene of the action helps on a first amendment defense at a trial.

A second media person is needed (either at the office or by a reliable phone) as person for communicating with press not in attendance. The wire services need to be periodically updated and the photo desks of the wires and newspapers should be apprised of photo availability. Radio stations should be called as they will often ask for interviews on the spot. It is fundamental to constantly update the media person who gets stuck sitting by the phone; they need to be able to give accurate updates as well.

Following Up

Making follow-up calls can help stretch an action from a one-day event to an ongoing story. Check in with the reporters who covered the action. See if they need any more information and give them whatever updates you have another good way to follow up is to go after radio and television talk shows that might want to address a community environmental issue.

During follow-up, be cautious not to lose focus on the issue and have the story become only "Three activists were arrested."

Nuts and Bolts Pre-Action Checklist

In planning an action, determine your theme and message. Ideally that message should be catchy and brief enough to fit on a bumper sticker. Something simple and digestible.

Prepare background information on the organization you're protesting that can be distributed to the press. This information should include credible statistics that substantiate your criticisms. Make sure all info is attributed so it can be reported as the "government says" and not "Activist's claims."

Determine the accessibility- of the site. Can anyone get there, or will they have to rely on you? Inaccessibility can seriously hurt potential media coverage as many news organizations are not willing to be escorted through a story. Scout the site to determine the best points to shoot photo and video. Check out nearby Pay phones and distribute their phone numbers in case of radio or other communications problems.

Determine IN ADVANCE if you need to arrange for a photographer or videographer

Make sure you have enough personnel. It is imperative that someone qualified to speak on the issues is covering press inquiry calls. A second knowledgeable person should be on the scene to talk with the press and ensure that the campaigners don't forget to speak to reporters. The person at the scene should record

reporters' names and phone numbers to facilitate follow-up calls.

Bear in mind that news organizations prefer to have their own "objective" person on-site and are reluctant to take 'handout' photos or video supplied by a 'non-objective' source like an enviro group. However, if the event is deemed by their editor to be a big enough story and they were unable get their own person on-site, they will accept our images. If that is the case, someone then must hop in a car and make the rounds to newspapers, TV stations and wires services expressing interest in the shots. Color photos should be run through a one-hour place. Some, but not all, agencies can develop black and white film. But, remember deadlines. It takes more than an hour to develop and dry negatives. Discuss this with your photographer and media people on the scene. Also, don't ever give up your originals.

The Press Release

Far too often campaigners spend hours agonizing over a press release, treating the release as if it were the definitive document of their campaign. It is not!

A press release is distributed to the media to provide the basic facts-the who, what, where, when, why and how. It should concisely give the fundamental information that a journalist is looking for, with your group's perspective.

Above all, a press release should be brief and accurate and NEVER MORE THAN ONE PAGE. If your release is longer than one page, most of the time it will get thrown away. The rest of the time, you can bet the second sheet of your release will get lost amidst other faxes. Always have at least two other people proofread your release.

Editors and reporters won't dig to find the most relevant information. They're busy and spend only a few seconds evaluating the worth of a release, frequently reading just the headline and the first sentence. Yours should read like a news story in inverted pyramid style, with the most important, obvious information at the top followed by quotes and background. Start with a compelling, clear

headline and a strong, short lead paragraph. Follow with a couple juicy quotes and, finally, contact names and phone numbers.

No good journalist is going to take much information out of a press release. As in all interactions with the press, you must try to anticipate what journalists are looking for. The better you do that, the more likely it will be that some of the press release content makes it into the story.

What's Better Than a Press Release?

A personal phone call to pitch a story to the most appropriate reporter is ALWAYS better than the blanket faxing of a release. You know your issue. Think of the news hooks. What makes this news? IS this news?! Why is it relevant? Write down your thoughts then call and sell it.

Types of Press Releases

There are basically four types of releases activists use.

1. Action release
2. Reaction release
3. Study or report release
4. Press Advisory

The ACTION PRESS RELEASE should get right to the point saying what we did and why we did it in the lead paragraph. Give a lot of specifics, such as the number of participants, and size and message of the banner. If the release goes out after the fact, include how blockaders, etc. did their thing. If there were arrests, list the name and what the charges were, and any other pertinent details (such as bail, scheduled hearings, etc.). If there was someone from another town arrested, a nice trick is to send a press release to that person's hometown paper. The story will almost always get printed.

Include background information that substantiates our position and details our campaign efforts prior to the demonstration (i.e. testimony, lobbying). Again, try to use independent information. Also offer solutions (i.e. Eco-action is calling on company XX to reduce the amount of waste it produces by adopting existing technology). The ACTION

RELEASE is handed out and faxed out AFTER the action is well-underway. The REACTION RELEASE is an effective way to get a mention or quote into news stories about issues on which we work. If an event occurs that affects one of our campaign areas, we should be prepared to respond immediately.

This release is generally very short less than one page and features pertinent quotes. It must be released AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE (minutes count), while the story is breaking to have any effect at all. Generally, we don't need to provide any background, just give the reaction that journalists will need to balance their story. Major oil spills, like the Exxon Valdez, are good examples of when we would issue a reaction release.

By putting a release out immediately or even in advance of an event, you put information in a journalist's hand that you know they will need. If they have our release it's one less element the reporter has to look for.

The STUDY RELEASE is a straightforward document that we distribute in conjunction with a report or study. It should summarize the most salient points of the report so that a reporter, if pressed for time, does not have to read the entire document. This is generally the case.

The ADVISORY is a quick one or two paragraph item that is sent or faxed to reporters, wire services and news agencies several DAYS before an event. Obviously, we don't use advisories in conjunction with most actions but if there is a planned event that we're involved with, and the timing is done in conjunction with phone calling, this will greatly increase chances of an event getting covered.

Because this is just a tool used by assignment editors, the advisory should include just basic information: what; where; when; and who. The four 'W's' should be listed just that way (what, where, when, etc.) at the top of the sheet, followed by a couple sentences recapping what the event is and, hopefully, making it sound compelling enough to cover. We generally only send out advisories when

preparing for a public demonstration (not for a direct action.)

The BACKGROUND RELEASE is also known as a fact sheet. It is generally used at large conferences and is generally a one-page rundown of information that a reporter can refer to for background about a particular issue.

Background releases are nearly always handed out in person and are simply a nice, low-pressure way to let reporters (and the opposition) know that you're around and available to answer questions about a particular issue.

On all press releases and advisories, be sure to list several "contacts" with names and phone numbers so reporters can track you down for post-event interviews.

Sample Press Release

U.S.-Canadian Border/Niagara Falls -- A Greenpeace team of international climbers, representing Canada, the United States, Germany and Australia this morning hung a banner over Niagara Falls protesting the destruction of ancient forests in North America. The banner, measuring sixty feet high by thirty feet wide reads "Save Ancient Forests," and displays the Canadian and U.S. flags.

"More than 80 percent of the earth's ancient forests have been destroyed," said Scott Paul, Greenpeace forest issues specialist. "We're here at Niagara Falls, on the border of the U.S. and Canada, because both countries are contributing to the destruction of thousand year old trees."

The U.S. is one of the largest consumers of wood products from Canada's Great Bear Rainforest in British Columbia, purchasing nearly two-thirds of the wood.

Greenpeace is calling on the U.S. and Canada to save the remaining ancient forests in North America. Canada's Great Bear Rainforest, in coastal British Columbia is North America's largest remaining unprotected Rainforest.

Greenpeace is calling for:

An immediate end to industrial logging and road building in the Earth's remaining ancient forests;

An immediate end to clearcutting in all forests, and Businesses to eliminate their uses of products that destroy or degrade ancient forests.

“When people purchase wood products they should demand to know if it came from an ancient forest, and if it did, refuse to buy it,” said Paul.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

FOR VIDEO, PHOTOS AND MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

In Washington, D.C. Dwight Mims, Media Officer +1 (202) 319-2436

Press Release Notes

The release date is the date you issue the press release in the case of a direct action, almost always the morning of the action. If you want to send out a press release before an event you're publicizing but want the information held until a certain date, you can label your release “EMBARGOED MATERIAL: Not for release until 10 a.m. Dec. 12, 1996.” But remember this about embargoes: If there is a legitimate way for the reporter to break the story ahead of the embargo- i.e. calling other sources who can verify your exclusive” information - the reporter will try to do so. Therefore it's recommended that you avoid embargoes-and it should go without saying that the technique doesn't work for direct actions.

Make sure to clearly identify contacts for reporters to call and get the story. The whole point of our release is NOT to get the release printed verbatim, but to entice reporters to call you for the full story. It's always a good idea to include a couple of names and number in case the reporter is on deadline and unable to reach the first contact. In doing actions, where cell phones can break down or run out of power, it's doubly important also be reachable by a land line.

The headline is THE most important part of the release. An assignment editor typically won't read anything but the headline and first paragraph before deciding whether to cover your story. If you have an hour to write the press release, spend 45 minutes on the headline and first paragraph. Headlines and first paragraphs - what journalists call the “lead” -should contain simple, punchy, action verbs, and should identify both the target of your action and the reason for it.

If you're shooting your own photos and video and plan to make them available after the action, be sure to advertise this important information prominently.

Give as exact an addresses for your action as possible. In this case, activists actually duplicated a page from the Los Angeles street guide and faxed it along with the press release.

The “sound bite” paragraph. Don't try to get too cute with sound bites. Again, what you're trying to do is entice reporters to cover your event. The sound bite help the assignment editor “hear” how the story can be most simply explained to readers, listeners or viewers.

After the basic description of the action and sound bite, give some background on the issue. Too many press releases are nothing but impassioned rhetoric from activists, without bothering to give journalist any context. It is especially helpful to cite sources for your facts.

Ten Steps to Better Writing

Here are some pointers for writing more effective press releases, letters, reports and other documents. Remember, good writing takes practice. Try these techniques.

1. Be brief and clear. Write short sentences, more like a telegram than a tome.
2. Know where you're going; start with a list of the points you want to make and stick to it. Use vibrant, strong language. Avoid passive verbs and voice. Write with confidence.
3. Be precise. It was 220 tons of toxic waste, not more than 200 tons. The report was released December 8, 1994, not recently.

4. Be accurate and use your dictionary. Watch out for the common errors, like confusing “effect” and “affect,” or “its” and “it’s”.
5. Don’t make spelling mistakes. To editors and writers, that is nails on a chalk board. Use your spell checker and be compulsive about proof-reading. Always have someone else proofread your writing as well.
6. Get to the point. Don’t bury the central message in the tenth paragraph.
7. Avoid writing like an attorney or bureaucrat. It is boring and confusing.
8. Eliminate “extra” words. “In the event of” should be “if”, “With regard to” is “about”, “At the present time” is “now.”
9. Never be happy with your first draft; rewrite, sharpen, revise, improve. If time allows, put your draft aside for a day and take a fresh look at it.

In a speech to the Society of Environmental Journalists, novelist Terry Tempest Williams implored journalists not to use ‘bloodless language,’ saying “The words you choose can allow people to hear or to walk away.” We must write so people hear us and do not walk away.

The Press Conference

Press conferences are one of the most difficult, risky, but potentially useful media vehicles. They’re also one of the most overused media tactics. A press conference is generally the most boring of media forums unless it is about a hot, breaking story.

Press conferences are most often held to release a significant report or to respond to a major development in your issue area. Here is a simple checklist for arranging a press conference.

Determine whether holding a press conference is the best means of getting out your story. Would phone calls be more effective? Know exactly what you wish to say and who the participants are before you commit to holding one.

Start on time !!!! Very important, And don’t let it run over 30-45 minutes. Always allow time for questions. Having someone act as “stage manager” can help keep a press conference on target. If your conference comes off as ill-prepared, reporters will perceive your opinions as ill-prepared as well.

Practice presenting your remarks in advance and role-play to get prepared for questions. Practice answers to hostile questions so you won’t be flustered if they happen and your response will be more effective. Also, know what your overall message is, and know it cold. Repeat it at the beginning and the end of your press conference.

Be considerate of different media deadlines. Anything earlier than 9:00 a.m. or later than 2:00 p.m. will inconvenience some reporters and, more importantly, increase the likelihood that your story won’t get used.

Make sure you have enough press kits or other materials (like video footage) available. Do not expect reporters on deadline to share.

Keep the number of participants to a minimum, and put strict time limits on the length of their prepared remarks. Make sure no two speakers’ comments cover the same ground. Name cards or a printed list of speakers (in order of appearance) is essential.

Identify all participants ahead of time. Name each person, spell each name, and give each person’s title. Also, avoid using conference calls when possible. They sound terrible and aren’t usable for broadcast.

Use visuals (charts, diagrams, banners, etc.), otherwise the visual will only be talking heads. Hang visuals with care or they will inevitably fall down at the most embarrassing moment.

Have a sign-up sheet for attending press (and request phone numbers).

Be on guard for industry representatives. If someone is being disruptive or asks obnoxious questions, answer them politely and tactfully ask them to give their identity. Better yet, station a seasoned person outside the room or building where you are holding a press conference. Look carefully at press

credentials and be especially wary of folks who look like college kids. Nasty PR firms frequently send interns posing as students in order to get info. Handle such situations diplomatically: groups generally can't refuse anyone access to our press conferences (many groups have been known to crash a few ourselves!), and it does our image no good whatsoever to 'make a scene' by stopping someone at the door. You can however, state politely and tactfully that we have limited supplies of press materials and they must be reserved for "legitimate" members of the press only.

Depending on the location of your press conference, you may need a sound system. If a large turnout is anticipated, you should get a 'mult' box (a system into which reporters can plug multiple microphones directly into the sound system). Always carry a roll of duct tape.

Make sure you've thought well in advance about where to hold your press conference. You'd be surprised how many press conferences were 'planned,' only to have the organizers realize at the last minute the place they'd hoped to hold it was reserved long ago.

Be both logical and creative when identifying a location for your press conference. Example: Are you releasing a report about radiation leakage at a nuclear power plant? Hold the press conference in front of the power plant, then. Not only does it put a "real face" on your issue, but also it makes for better photo and video for the media.

→ No matter where you hold the press conference, make sure you display a large, professional looking banner above or behind the speakers, or wherever it's guaranteed to get in sight of the cameras.

What's In A Press Kit?

Though not all events merit a press kit, the following items should be included:

Your press release (one page, remember?).

Background information, research

Relevant fact sheets or action alerts

OPTIONAL

- Photos or slides (print media), offer of footage for TV
- Favorable press clippings
- Contact name and number for opposing viewpoint. A journalist on deadline will appreciate the timesaving gesture and it will pay off for you in the long run.

Associated Press Bureaus in the US

The Associated Press is a not-for-profit news cooperative, providing state, national and international news, photos, graphics and broadcast services to newspapers, radio and television stations around the world. The AP serves 1,550 US newspaper members, plus 6,000 US radio and television stations and networks. The AP serves more than 15,000 newspaper and broadcast outlets worldwide.

The news service, with headquarters in New York City, has 236 bureaus worldwide and more than 3,000 employees. For more information:

“Associated Press Style Guide & Libel Manual.” Filled with such useful style tidbits as the difference between gamut and gauntlet or affect and effect, which and that, who and whom, when to capitalize navy, FOIA info, instructions on how to use the AP system, a list of every US AP bureau and much, much more.

Recommended Reading

- Let the World Know: Make Your Cause News, by Jason Salzman. The best book of its kind, a concise, step-by-step guide to activist media from a veteran environmental campaigner. Features invaluable interviews with working journalists and lots of case studies, of successful media campaigns. (Order for \$10 per copy (discounts for 5 or more), plus \$3.50 shipping and handling per order, from Rocky Mountain Media Watch. P.O. Box 18838, Denver, CO.; 303-632-7558.)
- Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media, by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky. Two brilliant academic theorists argue that the content of the mainstream media, far from fulfilling the journalist’s credo of “comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable,” is actually designed to lull citizens into complacency. (For a crash course in Chomsky, see the excellent

documentary, also called “Manufacturing Consent” available on video.)

- On Writing Well by William Zinsser-A highly entertaining explanation of the fundamental of good writing.
- Toxic Sludge is Good For You! Lies, Damn Lies & the Public Relations Industry, by John Stauber & Sheldon Rampton. hilarious and frightening expose of the slick tactics corporations use to “greenwash” their image and manipulate the news. (Common Courage Press, Box 72, Monroe, ME 04951; 207-525-0900.) Through the Center for Media & Democracy, Stauber and Rampton publish “PR Watch,” a quarterly newsletter devoted to revealing and analyzing greenwash and other PR propaganda. (For a sample, send \$1 to 3318 Gregory SL Madison, WI 53711.)
- The Elements Of Style by Strunk & White - In fewer than 100 pages, this handy guide covers the basic rules of usage, composition and form, and features an entire chapter on commonly misused words and expressions.
- Through the Media Looking Glass: Decoding Bias and Blather in the News, by Jeff Cohen & Norman Solomon. (Common Courage Press.) The founders of Fairness and Accuracy in Media dissect the news business’ inherent biases, and tell news consumers how to fight back. By the same authors, “Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in News Media.”
- The Media Monopoly, Ben Bagdikian. In this classic work, updated regularly, a former editor of The Washington Post shows how ownership of the news and entertainment media is increasingly conglomerates concentrated in the hands of a few
- Who will tell the People? The Betrayal of American Democracy, by William Greider. Another former Washington Post journalist makes the case that the too-cozy

relationship between the media and the powers-that-be is bad news. (He's right)

CHECKLIST FOR EFFECTIVE DIRECT ACTION MEDIA
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ONE MONTH TO ONE WEEK BEFORE THE ACTION

Decide what person or persons will be in charge of media strategy.

The benefits of consensus aside, it is nearly impossible to write a press release, focus on a key sound bite, contact key reporters, or accomplish any other media tasks by committee. So empower a media team to make these decisions and let them do their jobs without second-guessing and micromanaging.

The most logical makeup of the media team is a media coordinator, an action coordinator and the lead campaigner. During the action itself, each of these people will likely be stationed at a point where they can serve as media spokespersons. If the media coordinator is to be stationed at the action site, you need one more member of the team: Someone to stay in an office and work the fax machine (unless you have on-site fax capability).

Settle on one simple message.

Accept it: You're not going to be able to communicate all the points, subpoints, and shades of gray about the issue you'd like to. An action is like a freeway billboard, designed to hammer home one, and almost always only one, message. If you can't focus on one issue that's the main reason you're doing the action, you shouldn't be doing the action at all.

Choose a strong image that clearly communicates the message.

Remember the freeway billboard: With one glance it is (or should be) unmistakable what product or idea is being sold. Ideally, our action should communicate the message without any words of explanation -and always in as few as possible. If you find yourself saying, "They'll understand it when they read the banner," your image isn't clear enough.

But the banner, which will probably contain language very similar to the sound bite, must also be capable of communicating the message on its own. You may not pull off the image; or you may not get the banner up, therefore, each has to be able to stand-alone.

Craft soundbites that communicate the message and enhance the image.

Assemble the media team. Take out legal pad. Lock the door. Throw out short simple, declarative sentences that express our message. (Remember: The average soundbite on US TV is less than 10 seconds.) Write them down. Stay in the room until you have five that might work. From five, choose three. From three, choose one. Shape and refine it until it's as close to perfect as hard work and creativity can make it.

Choose a date and hour for the action that will maximize your chances for coverage.

Sometimes you have to do an action when it is possible to do it or when it's safe to do it. But if circumstances permit you to choose the date and time, make your choices with the media's convenience in mind. Again, there's no formula, but there are some general rules of thumb:

Morning is better than afternoon. Almost no event short of a major catastrophe gets covered on the evening news, or in the next morning's paper, if it occurs after 3 p.m.

Monday through Thursday are the best days, and Monday's best of all, because the later you go in the week, the greater the chance that some other big story will come along and blow you off the news map. Avoid Friday (lowest TV viewership Friday night; lowest newspaper readership Saturday morning; lots of competing news.) Saturday and Sunday are also not the best because news outlets operate with skeleton crews on weekends.

Combining the above guidelines, we arrive at the theoretical best time for a hypothetical action: 10:30 a.m. on Monday, after news crews have reported to work for the day, but before they've got other stories going. But that's assuming your action occurs in a news vacuum, which it won't. Try to time the action

so that it either anticipates or responds to an event the media will recognize as a story - "the news peg." If the President plans to sign the bill you're protesting on Thursday, do your action on Wednesday.

ONE WEEK TO A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE ACTION

Write a draft press release.

Circulate the draft release to the media team. Discuss and revise, discuss and revise, until it's perfect or you need to move on.

Remember the press release is not the message. It also is not the action. The action is the message. The press release is an advertisement to get the media to cover your action. The first two paragraphs are far more important than the rest of the release; the headline is even more important than that.

Make a list with phone and fax numbers, of every news outlet you can think of that might be interested in the story.

If you have time before the action, consult a media directory. The standard national references are the Bacon's News media Guides, with geographically indexed volumes for print and broadcast (Bacon's, 332 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60604.) They're expensive, but available in good libraries. Or try to find a directory for our state or region, which may be published by a press club or the like. In a pinch, get out your Yellow Pages.

Check the phone number and fax number listed in the directory to make sure they're correct. Prioritize this list in order of most important outlets, but remember: The Associated Press is (almost) always first.

Begin practicing sound bites and mock interviews with the media team.

If someone's never been interviewed on camera and you have one available, video each other, play it back and look carefully for anything - words, gesture, expressions, mannerisms, posture - that doesn't enhance

effective communication. Practice until you eliminate those things.

Decide what supplementary materials - factsheets, background papers, maps, etc. - are needed for the press kit

Assemble the materials and folder to put them in. Get them all ready to go, except for the press release, which you'll add after any last-minute changes.

A FEW DAYS TO ONE DAY BEFORE THE ACTION

Gut check: Decide if it's safe to tip off key reporters in advance.

If there are one or two reporters whose coverage is key, and you decide they can be trusted, approach them now - strictly off the record - and let them know what's going to happen. You may find out they'll be out of town but they can tell you who will be covering in their place. They may tell you they live two hours away so they need extra notice. They may want to cover the action from a strategic vantagepoint. Make adjustments to accommodate them if you can, but never at the expense of a safe, effective, authentic action.

THE DAY BEFORE THE ACTION

Finalize the press release.

If at all possible, keep it to one page. Spell-check it. Proofread it. Get someone else to proofread it again. Print it, copy it and add it to the press kits. (An example of a press release for a breaking-news action follow this checklist)

Alert all the media you can trust and who might possibly want to be on the scene, that the action is going down.

Obviously, there are times when you can't tell anyone. The local newspaper may be in the pocket of the industry you're hitting. The TV anchor in a small market may not know enough not to "accidentally" break a pledge of confidentiality. But in general, if you approach the news media straightforwardly

and make sure that you're off the record, they will honor your request to keep the information confidential. Sometimes you just have to take a deep breath and take a chance, because if news outlets know

what's coming you're almost certain to get better coverage. But do not under any circumstance, fax them the press release, or anything else except a map -nothing on paper until the action is safely under way. Faxes can be lost or intercepted. Ideally, you should speak directly with the reporter who's going to cover the story. If that's not possible, you should ask to speak to the city editor of a newspaper, and the assignment editor of a TV or radio station. Be prepared to tell them in 30 to 60 seconds what you're doing why you're doing it and why it will make a good story. Make sure they get the exact time and place of the action, and phone numbers where you or someone else on the media team can be reached from that moment until the action.

The best time to do this round of calls is the late morning or early afternoon before the action. Before 11 a.m., more editors are in meetings; after 4 p.m. they are on deadline and they will not want to talk to you. If you can't call before 4 wait until 7 p.m. and call the night editor.

If you do have reporters who plan to be on the scene when the action starts - or even think you might have some - do whatever you can to keep news cameras away from the actual site until the action is underway. Have them meet you at a nearby staging area and take them in once your activists are in place. Tell them to be there half an hour after you expect things to be in place, if you can control the timing that closely.

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE ACTION

At a meeting of everyone involved -action people, ground protesters, support people go over the press release, emphasizing the main message and the lead sound bite.

Spend some time with everyone who might possibly be in an arrest or interview situation, letting them practice the sound bite or

variations on it if there are too many of you, partner off and practice in pairs.

THE MORNING OF THE ACTION

Get on the phone at 7:10 a.m. (assuming it's a morning action, which is almost always best for coverage).

Call the TV and radio stations again, to make sure someone on the news desk got the message from the day before and knows what's happening. Again make sure they have the exact time, place and the correct phone numbers for contacts. Most newspapers won't have someone on the desk until 9 a.m.; call them if time permits.

Double-check to make sure that the person stationed at the fax machine has copies of the release and the prioritized list of news outlets.

AS SOON AS THE ACTION BEGINS

You "have an action" at the moment protesters are in place and/or the image and banner are deployed. If you are some distance from the action site, work out a radio signal with the action coordinator, who should notice you the instant this occurs. Then:

Contact the person at the fax machine and tell them to start pumping out the faxes.

It is ideal, if you have the capability, to use multiple fax machines or to pre-store the list of number,; in your fax machine so you can start the process with one command. Do the best you can, but anything that helps you get out the maximum number of faxes in the shortest amount of time will help.

Begin calling, in order of priority, the news outlets on your fax list.

Identify yourself by name and organization, and clearly- and succinctly, inform them that you have a peaceful protest underway, its location and the purpose. Be calm and businesslike, not urgent or lecturing. For example: "This is Susie Smith of Rainforest Action Network" this morning we are conducting a peaceful, nonviolent protest against Unocal's destruction of the Amazon. Five minutes ago, two climbers scaled to the top of Unocal's headquarters in downtown Los

Angeles, and they're going to stay there until the company agrees to meet with us."

At that point they'll usually say: "Send us a press release." Tell them one is on its way, then say something like: "I just wanted to tell you the protest is going on right now at 123 Main Street let you know how to reach us, and see if I can answer any questions for you." They'll either say no thanks, or start asking questions. For an action in a major US metropolitan area, these will almost surely be the first few calls you make.

The Associated Press

United Press International and/or Reuters

The 3 or 4 leading TV news stations

The 2 or 3 leading radio news stations

The local newspaper

If you're in a smaller town - one without an AP bureau or TV station-your first calls may be the local newspaper and radio station. But get in touch with the closest AP office as soon as possible.

DURING THE ACTION

Do not keep calling back with updates, unless they are truly big and unexpected developments. If the outlets are interested, they will be following the action through the authorities.

With cellular telephones, it is now common for action protesters to speak live to the news media from where they are hanging or locked down. News radio stations in particular love this, so if you didn't reach them at the beginning of the action, keep trying and make sure they know they can go live to the site. It's best to let the people who are actually engaged in direct action deliver the message - it adds undeniable authenticity to the coverage. As media coordinator you should of course also be prepared to deliver crisp, on-message soundbites. But our main responsibility is to help journalists do their jobs.

Reporters will ask all kinds of questions unrelated to the action's message-How do they go to the

bathroom up there? You should be ready to provide a courteous answer that nonetheless quickly turns back to the topic at hand. They wear diapers. It's inconvenient but that's nothing compared to the danger this toxic waste poses to this community,

AFTER THE ACTION

When the protesters are arrested, or leave peacefully, or whatever marks the end of the action, call the main outlets mentioned above (at least those that showed any interest at all) and tell them that the protest ended, what time it ended, and the outcome.

Again, make sure they know where you can be reached the rest of the day and often the following day. And if there were arrests and people are released later that day, call again with that update.

There are many ways to cultivate an effective media but basically it helps to be alert. Go to a news stand and see what magazines and newspapers are out there. Read your local daily papers and alternating weeklies. See what kind of stuff is getting covered, and make note of who the writers are.

Whenever you see an article that relates to issues you're working on, write down the name of the reporter and add that person to your press list. You will probably find writers in various fields that cover topics of interest to you and your campaign. Look in the local news, environment travel and business sections to start most papers have a page that lists editorial staff. Add the city editor, managing editor, and feature editor to your press list. Addressing press releases with a name requires keeping up with changes in staff. You can use titles, if you prefer and send your releases simply to "Environmental Reporters" or "Newsdesk." This lacks a personal touch, but the title is certainly more permanent than the person who fills the position.

This process applies to radio and television, too. Take note of things you see and hear that could be a 10-second outlet for your campaign. If you're at a demonstration and a TV

cameraman comes up to you and says “I’m a huge fan of trees,” get a business card.

Look in the phone book and Yellow Pages for listings. You can call up newspapers and magazines and ask who should get the press release. Call radio and TV stations too. Get the names of news and talk show producers that you might want to target. Pay attention to the kind of slant the paper put on environmental coverage. If your local paper runs an editorial on the Tongass National Forest, is it in favor of conservation or in favor of logging. If you are able to identify, a friendly writer or publication, you won’t be taking shooting in the dark when you solicit them for a story.

If you need to get addresses for papers outside your local area, try calling the Chamber of Commerce in the target city; they may be kind enough to fax you a listing of area media. Or use reference book- such as Barron’s or Burrell’s which can be found in some major libraries. Business trade associations can be a good source of information as well.

Our best resource is each other. Share your list with other activists, and call them for theirs.