Publicizing the Event

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To publicize an event like a field day or a meeting, first consider who you want to attend. If the potential audience is small, talk to each member personally, call or write a letter. You can't beat the personal approach.

Let's say your potential audience is too big for the personal approach. How do you let people know about the event? How do you get them to come?

First of all, the event has to be worthwhile. Nothing will hurt your credibility with your audience and the media more than a highly publicized event that just doesn't amount to much.

All right. You've got a dandy event and a good sized bunch of folks to tell about it. First, look over the checklist below, then flip the page for a plan of action.

In general, you should plan your media campaign at least three months in advance if you wish to use magazines as part of your publicity effort. Determine items and people you want featured. It's a good idea to follow through on one theme. For example, the same picture used on your flier also could be used on posters, in the field day report (proceedings publication) and with a news release.

Publicity checklist

Some media/methods to consider:

- Advance news releases
- Fliers
- Posters
- Radio tapes
- Radio scripts
- Brochure/program
- Proceedings publication
- Pictures
- Loudspeakers
- Caps, name tags and other identification
- Television (public service announcements and news clips)
- Follow-up news releases

General rules of publicity

Only publicize events that deserve publicity
Pomp without substance is not appealing to media people. And it won't do your credibility any good, either.

Put someone in charge
Publicity by committee is a mess.

Make a plan
You can almost never plan too far ahead. Decide what you want to publicize and how you plan to do it.
Consider the media options you have and pick the most appropriate (checklist). If you have only a small audience, you might just speak or write personally to each person.

Make a calendar, a schedule of your publicity activities.

Be accurate

Be brief
Short, tightly written stories announcing an event have a much greater chance of being used and read.

Use a local angle
Involve local people in planning your event. Localize press releases. Involve local MU Extension specialists (and local research center staff when appropriate). They can help make contacts with media and clientele you wish to have attend your event. Sometimes you'll want to involve FFA (especially when you want high school youths to attend your event). Local groups can handle lunch and other services.

Focus on the right audience
This may be the most important rule in communicating: know your audience and write/talk to them.

Decide what is news
What is it about your event that makes it unique/newsworthy?

Establish media contacts
Be open. Let them know who you are and what you have to publicize. Learn their deadlines and other expectations. (Do they want typed stories or is a phone call enough? Do they want only that information that relates to readers or listeners in their area?)

Be business-like but friendly in your dealings with the media
Editors and broadcasters have busy schedules, deadlines and profits to make. They consider themselves professionals, experts in their business. They don't like to be told "you have to run my story."

Don't cajole or beg
"Sell" your story on its own merit (that's why the first rule is so important: make sure you have something to sell in the first place).

Don't forget to say "thank you" to the media when they help you publicize an event
I seldom do this directly to the editor or broadcaster, unless I know them fairly well or otherwise have a chance to do this without being ostentatious. But a letter to the editor, say, from you or someone who attended the event, is always nice.

Follow up
For goodness sake, if an event was worth publicizing, it should be worth a follow-up story(ies) on what happened. This could be in the form of information called or delivered to the media before the event ends. Here again, knowing media deadlines will help you get information to media in time.

Start planning for the next event before this one ends. Keep track of what happened and learn from your mistakes. Keep records or notes. Have a discussion immediately after the event with those involved to figure out what went right and how you might do better the next time.
Media calendar

- Plan the media effort. You should work directly with those in charge of the event, who in turn should keep field day participants informed.
- Send the first release announcing the event at least eight weeks in advance, or at least soon enough to meet deadlines of Missouri farm magazines.
- Write and design a flier announcing the event. University Printing Services (UPS) prefers a two- to three-week lead time to get these printed. Work with the event representative to determine number and distribution.
- Have posters printed (optional) for posting in the event area. Also remind the event representative that he or she will need directional signs, caps, name plates and loudspeakers.
- Take pictures two to four weeks ahead of the event. Photos need to be recent enough to be timely, but you also need lead time to get them printed and distributed to newspapers. Past years' files can help.
- Conduct radio interviews with participants and/or give scripts to radio people for their radio services. Again, figure a two to three week lead time to allow time for editing and distribution.
- Edit, design and distribute an "event report," a printed publication on what is presented at the event.
- Send another more detailed advanced story to newspapers two weeks before the event. If possible, it should be accompanied by a photo.
- Write stories from information presented at the event. Do these a week or two in advance so they can be released the day of or the day following the event.
- Contact television stations one to two weeks before the event. Arrange for advance filming and/or coverage of the actual event. Prior to this, determine "highlights" and possible TV "stars" who are willing to be interviewed and filmed. (Optional: Produce public service announcements. Distribute at least three weeks before the event.) Hold a "news conference" (optional) to give editors and broadcasters a "preview" and a chance to interview, take pictures and prepare stories. This usually is done the day before the event.
- Cover the event. Be available to help visiting editors and broadcasters cover it. Take pictures. Make radio tapes. Information gathered at the event can be used to write follow-up features (without a tie to the event) for magazines, to provide timeless interviews for MU Extension radio service, to document the event and to build picture file.

A good press release

Think of the audience. Will the information do them any good?

Know the media. What do they want? What can they use?

Press releases should include the date and the name, address and phone number of the person to contact for more information.

Be brief. Use short sentences, short paragraphs, simple words, active verbs. And get to the point — fast! Short, tightly written stories have a much greater chance of being used and read.

Beware of jargon ("extensionese," technical terms).

Send releases to the editor or broadcaster who decides what will be used. If you don't know the person's name, address information to "Editor" (in the case of print media) or "News Director" (in the case of broadcasters).

The following story is an example of a good press release:
Big Soil Conservation 'Action' Field Day Set

The largest soil conservation field day in mid-America — including action demonstrations of the latest in soil-saving techniques — has been set for July 26 and 27 near Weston, Mo., just north of Kansas City.

During the two-day event, 7,500 feet of broad-base, narrow-base and grass backslope terraces will be constructed, said Don Pfost, MU agricultural engineer.

"This will give farmers a chance to see these new terraces which are especially well suited for steep slopes," Pfost said. About 3,500 feet of underground outlets will be installed.

In addition, two large waterways, a 650-foot diversion and an 8,000 cubic yard dam for a lake will be built. The field days are free and run from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. both days. Food will be available.

Details are available from ASCS, NRCS, Missouri Department of Conservation and MU Extension centers. Rain dates for the event are Aug. 2 and 3.

This news release features the five Ws and the H:

**What**
The largest soil conservation field day.

**When**
July 26 and 27.

**Where**
Near Weston, Mo.

**Who**
Who says so? (Don Pfost); Who's it for? (farmers); Who's involved? (ASCS, etc.)

**Why**
"To give farmers a chance to see..."

**How**
Action demonstrations.

**There's more**

While publicity is important to get people to the event, it's even more important that worthwhile information stemming from the event gets spread — whether it's tied to the event or not.
Related MU Extension publications

- CM1305, Checklist for Planning a Successful Meeting
  http://extension.missouri.edu/p/CM1305
- CM1306, How to Have a Successful Educational Meeting on a Public Issue
  http://extension.missouri.edu/p/CM1306

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