



a million voices for nature

## Getting your message across with local media

The more people who know about what you are trying to achieve, the more support you will get and the more likely decision-makers will take your case seriously.

By being organised, making your story clear and targeting the right people, it is possible to get good media coverage. Find out how to make your story get noticed by local media so they can support you too.

### **Involving local media**

Start by doing some research. Do not underestimate the importance of local media. Your most useful media contacts are likely to be local radio, particularly phone-in shows, and your local newspaper. You may even be able to get them to support your campaign.

Planning a series of media activities and gaining regular coverage across different types of media will give your campaign prominence. Make sure you emphasise positive messages, such as what will be saved, rather than focusing on the negatives, such as what will be lost. Research shows this is the more effective way to promote your message.

Do use social networks, such as Twitter or Facebook, to post updates on your campaign or activities. It's a simple interactive way to keep your story fresh, but do remember to set time aside to post regular updates.

### **Local press**

Find out what papers cover your area; evening, daily or weekend versions. Find out what type of stories they cover and what style they write in.

You may have more success asking for someone personally. If you look through the newspaper, you will find contact numbers and possibly names of journalists or the news editor. This information can often be found on newspaper websites too.

Give them a telephone call or send an e-mail to let them know what you are doing. Send a press release or concise statement of the facts. Include your contact details and make sure you are available to respond to their enquiries.

Your local MP may have a column – arranging a visit for your MP to the site of concern is one way of getting the issue covered in your local paper, especially if you arrange for a photo to be taken. The MP may be keen to do this too.

Images for publication need to be digital and high resolution (more than 1MB) but lower resolution images can be used online.

### **Tips for writing a letter to a newspaper editor**

The letters page is one of the most read parts of a local newspaper.

- Read the letters page and pick up the style of the paper to enhance your chances of getting a letter printed.
- Keep your letter short (150 words maximum) and make your message clear and simple.
- Be aware of copy deadlines – you will find these on the letters page.

### **Writing a press release**

A press release is a useful tool. It captures your story and tells the media how to get in touch to find out more.

In most newsrooms, each release is only considered for 10 seconds before it is followed up or binned. The key to writing a good press release lies in the first paragraph.

It must grab the news editor's attention. You should aim to sum up your story in around 30 words – answer the following questions – who, what, why, where, when?

- Put the most important point in the first sentence.
- Create a headline that is eye-catching and describes the story.
- Use a quote that can put across the concerns passionately and from an individual's perspective. Don't use formal language in a quote.
- Remember to include contact details at the end. If possible, include a daytime contact or e-mail address so someone can contact you straightaway – don't lose a journalist's interest by being difficult to get hold of.
- Photos often sell a story. Do you have a good photo to accompany the story, such as a stunning picture of the site or species at risk? Or can you arrange a photo of your councillor, MP or campaigners at the site, eg with placards or doing something active such as a walk or conservation work?
- Be topical and timely. The media is a fast moving beast and moves quickly on to the next big thing.

### **Local radio and TV**

Local radio can be an easy way to reach large numbers of people in your area.

A direct approach is usually best, with a phone call to whoever controls the radio station's newsdesk. Ideally, also send a concise statement of the facts or a press release. It is best to e-mail this if you can and follow it up with a phone call.

Regional TV programmes often have a 'closer to home' section. This can be another useful way to promote your story.

TV requires good visual images or some activity element to your story. The more you have to offer the programme, the more likely they are to feature you. Could you get lots of people supporting your campaign together, or is there a local celebrity who would want to save a particular local patch or favourite species?

Often a human interest story will capture their interest. Watch the programme and see what types of stories are covered.

TV requires more time and people to compile a report compared with radio or newspapers. Ensure you dedicate enough time to meet their requirements.

If you get an interview, think about the following so that you get the most out of it:

- Being interviewed can be nerve-wracking, so make sure you prepare well.
- Check beforehand if the interview is going to be live or pre-recorded.
- Enquire about the questions you are likely to be asked.
- Find the best person for the interview – this should be the person who can speak most clearly and confidently, not necessarily the most knowledgeable person – although, of course, they must be well-informed.
- Rehearse in advance – say the words out loud.
- Plan your key messages(s) (two or three maximum) in advance and don't allow the interviewer to deflect you from what you want to get across.
- Prepare your response to any potentially difficult questions.
- Always assume the microphone is switched on.
- Keep your hands and papers still during the interview and make sure potential distractions, such as mobile phones, are switched off.

### **Other media**

Social media and your own webpages are increasingly important media tools. All traditional forms of media also operate webpages alongside their printed or broadcast output.

Social media offers the opportunity for instant updates and can be a very effective method of calling supporters to action. Journalists often follow social media for updates or unguarded comments. Remember, posting to social media is publishing.

Social media, online maps, blogs and video or photo sharing sites can all be interlinked to offer a multi-media experience. New media offers you the chance to publish your own news as well as the opportunity to keep traditional media updated.

Good online media work demands short, precise and clear messages with clearly sign-posted steps towards your desired outcome. The easier it is to support your action, the more likely people are to help you.

### **Maintain interest in your campaign**

Your campaign will take various twists and turns. The more angles or interesting developments to a story, the more likely it is that a journalist will give you ongoing publicity.

Try to break down your story into bite-size chunks, rather than giving everything in one go. For instance, you could report on:

- the threat to the site – what will the local community lose and what could be saved.
- the formation of a group of like-minded people with a catchy name.
- a site visit by local councillor, MP or local celebrity – remember to take photos.
- a demonstration walk or fundraising activities.
- a petition being handed in to the town hall.
- the various official stages of your campaign, eg putting in your objection within the consultation deadline.
- anniversaries and numbers. These always go down well with the media, eg 58% of villagers use this site once a week, or next Thursday is the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of x and instead of celebrating we're having to fight to save it.

### **Conclusion**

The local media are there to cover local news. Be creative and you will be generating the news they will want to cover.

Remember to keep a record of your press cuttings to show decision-makers that local people they may represent are interested in your campaign.

Ensure you are easy to contact and available to meet journalists deadlines.