



# Quick Guide to Public Relations

## Contents

<b>Generating Media Coverage to Gain Community Support and Recognition</b> .....	<b>2</b>
Goal of Media Coverage.....	2
Media Interest.....	2
<b>PR Media Sources</b> .....	<b>3</b>
1. Newspapers.....	3
2. Magazines.....	3
3. News Websites.....	4
4. Online Social Networking & Company Blogs .....	4
<b>General Tips for Writing a Press Release</b> .....	<b>5</b>
1. Know the News.....	5
2. Keep it Newsworthy .....	5
3. Individualize .....	6
<b>Sample Press Release</b> .....	<b>8</b>

## **Generating Media Coverage to Gain Community Support and Recognition**

Welcome to the International Academies of Emergency Dispatch® (IAED™) family. Initiating positive media coverage now and cultivating it in the future will be a benefit to your agency in building community support and recognition. It's likely that most members of the public, excluding those who have utilized 9-1-1, are unaware of what your agency does. Obtaining positive coverage educates those who may later need to call 9-1-1. We hope this press kit will be a valuable resource in helping you launch and manage this coverage.

### **Goal of Media Coverage**

The goal of generating media coverage is to tell the community your story, sharing what your agency's staff does on behalf of members of the public faced with life-threatening emergency situations.

Most people are unaware of the comprehensive questioning process involved with calling 9-1-1, and some might even misconstrue the process as a delay in receiving help. By taking a proactive approach through explaining the purpose behind the requests for information, the public will be more aware of what to expect when calling 9-1-1.

### **Media Interest**

The work you do is instinctively interesting to media outlets because you provide an important, high-profile service to their audiences. To emphasize this role, clearly communicate to the media the scope and impact of the critical job your staff performs for the community. Since events initially handled by dispatchers are frequently reported in the news soon after they occur, you'll find most media contacts are familiar, to some extent, with what your agency does, making your job easier. The following are ideas to help you attract press coverage.

## PR Media Sources

### 1. Newspapers

Newspapers are in the business of reporting timely emergency events such as natural disasters and local news occurrences including accidents and crime. You might be familiar with at least one reporter at the local newspaper (if not others) because he or she may have come to you in the past for information for a story. Try to maintain good relationships with these reporters and their editors. If there are inaccuracies in stories they report, bring them to their attention in a respectful manner. These relationships may be the best recipe for ensuring positive media attention.

Newspapers are always looking for human-interest stories. How many members of the community really know the kind of positive stories that come out of your communications center following a highly publicized emergency situation? Start pitching ideas through e-mails or an occasional brief phone conversation. When in doubt, start with an e-mail pitch. (See General Tips for Writing a Press Release—3. Individualize.)

### 2. Magazines

Magazines are usually published on a monthly or bi-monthly basis, so they don't typically cover timely, current events in the same way a newspaper would. A magazine generally follows an editorial calendar or has an outline of the issues and topics it's going to cover. Ask the magazine's managing editor to e-mail you an editorial calendar so you can see what areas your news falls under. Magazines typically work more than three months in advance, so to get a story, for example, in the industry news section of a May issue, pitch it around January. Be persistent, but not annoying. Be helpful; editors need to fill their magazine with stories, so they might as well be yours.

Keep in mind that neither an editor nor a journalist is interested in helping you use the press to boost your image or make a profit. He or she is interested in giving the magazine's readers a good story. What is the most interesting thing about what you do? Think like a journalist. What is the human-interest angle? Remember, if you can tie your news to a current trend or event such as a recent disaster that your team responded to, it will be more interesting to an editor. (You can also cite some third-party facts or data, etc.)

### **3. News Websites**

News websites are generally an extension of a local newspaper or TV news station that posts stories online, providing information to viewers without a wait time before the next issue hits the stands or a segment airs. Websites can be updated in minutes and sometimes include additional stories beyond what appears in newspapers or on regular newscasts.

Stories from your comm. center, which might otherwise be overlooked due to lack of space, may be used to draw people to their sites by offering a wider variety of coverage with new angles on material. If you're familiar with a reporter from the newspaper or local TV news, approach him or her with the idea of generating a human-interest story about a dispatcher or team that handled an event the reporter had covered.

### **4. Online Social Networking & Company Blogs**

Though some may scoff at the new-aged forms of social networks and blogging, the power of self-published public relations through the use of the Web should not be underestimated. There are several advantages to creating a page on a social networking site such as *Twitter*, *Facebook*, the business-based network *Linked In*, or even a blog. These include:

- Content and image control
- Ability to contact a large network of people at the same time (without cost)
- Two-way communication and feedback on posted material
- Instant accessibility and updates
- Contact with other centers—building relationships with local and even distant communities
- Enhanced communications with employees (if desired)
- Ability to post a calendar with upcoming events, or even track “invites” to project and plan for turnout
- Endless space—no word limit to publishing information, quotes, and stories that do not fit into a regular press release format

However, it's easy to get overwhelmed by the technology and its many applications without a goal of how you will utilize the media source. In your search for a professional and creditable source of media, you must have a detailed plan of your intended content, audience, and outcome.

## General Tips for Writing a Press Release

### 1. Know the News

*The bottom line is to get to know the media outlet you're targeting. It's critical for every type of media: the local newspaper, the local news station, a website, a magazine highlighting your dispatch team, or a trade publication like Dispatch Monthly or Emergency Communications Professional magazine. You've got to know the media source.*

Think of it as doing your research, performing a background check on what has been previously covered and what elements reveal the nature of the publication.

1. Read a few published stories and take notice of where they fit in the publication.
  - Do they have standard sections or segments?
  - In which section could your announcement, news, or other information be featured?
  - What is the best spin or way to pitch your story so they will be interested?
2. Make a list of possible publications, TV programs, and websites and their contact information.
  - Who is the editor?
  - Who are the writers?
3. If possible, create a template with this information and keep a dated record of your interactions/correspondence with editors and reporters.

### 2. Keep it Newsworthy

*Just sending out a press release does not guarantee the success of a news source using your story. In order to appear credible, newsworthy, and professional, keep these guidelines in mind:*

- **Always use third person.** For example, "The Colorado Springs Communications Center has implemented the Priority Dispatch System to standardize and enhance quality emergency care." This is not only standard for press releases, but it is a more professional way to refer to the event that your center is featuring, providing some distance from a first-person approach that could appear like advertising.

- **Keep a professional appearance.** Avoid using all caps and exclamation points. Reading in all caps is difficult, and both the use of caps and excessively “exciting” punctuation is a sure sign of a novice writer. Use a standard font (such as Times New Roman, Arial, etc.), and let the information draw the reader’s interest, not the type. If possible, send press releases on company letterhead to demonstrate professionalism and validity.
- **Be critical when analyzing content.** Does the press release contain extra “fluff?” Taking out the excess is important for two reasons.

1—You only have about 500 words to work with (standard length).

2—Flashy words and ad-worthy phrases put a dent in your credibility. Remove hype such as “breakthrough,” “unique,” “state-of-the-art,” “best in the world/nation,” etc.

### **3. Individualize**

*Journalists and editors receive hundreds of press releases each day. To distinguish yours from the litter, tie your news to a current event or trend, or tell an interesting story through your press release. Remember to keep it newsworthy, not promotional.*

#### **A. Select the best-suited news sources to send your information**

Gather a list of publications, organizations, newsgroups, websites, and people that might be interested in the release, along with contact information. Once your media contact list is created, e-mail or fax a personal copy of the release to each contact.

Don’t send attachments. Most journalists are wary of viruses. You might also want to consider using a professional wire service to distribute your release. Check out PR Newswire at <http://www.prnewswire.com> or other available online wire services.

#### **B. Personalize your pitch**

Don’t rely on press releases alone. Contact the editor or journalist through e-mail and introduce yourself. Avoid phone calls. Always follow up. Editors are very busy. Be persistent, but not annoying. Find out what they want in terms of story ideas and if possible, give it to them, discovering ways to tailor your message to their needs. If you do call, make sure the journalist is not on deadline and keep your pitch brief. Don’t call and ask a reporter or editor if they got your press release. Assume they did.

Most publications won't publish a story exactly as you've written it. If you give them an idea, they'll assign it to a writer. If your idea is interesting enough, they may choose to use it like you've pitched it or they may decide to reinvent it.

### **C. Take photos**

It is not conventional to e-mail photos with a press release; however, photos may be appropriate if your story is chosen to be covered by the media source. Most journalists have staff photographers who take photos to accompany stories. However, be prepared with a selection of photos of the communications center, staff, people in action, and especially a related event. Take several photos in order to prevent featuring photos with closed eyes, shadows, blocked faces, etc. Even if these photos are not included in a newspaper or magazine, you could choose to publish them on a social networking site or company blog.

### **D. Express Gratitude**

It's never a bad idea to send a note, letter, or e-mail thanking the editor for placing your news item in his or her publication. Consider it an investment in building relationships with the local media, and be sincere and brief to respect his or her time.

## Sample Press Release

(Before sending to the media, insert or select appropriate information within the red parenthetical phrases below. Keep quotes brief and concise. Omit any quotes or portions that are not applicable to your center.)

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

#### **(Name of Communication Center) announces the implementation of the (Medical, Fire, or Police) Priority Dispatch System**

*(City, State—Month Day, Year)*—The *(Name of Comm. Center)* is excited to announce the implementation of the *(Medical, Fire, or Police) Priority Dispatch System™ (MPDS®, FPDS®, or PPDS®)* to better serve the citizens of *(City/County/Region/Province)* in emergency situations.

Dispatchers using the newly implemented protocol system:

- will follow internationally recognized standards
- give universal, consistent care and service to every caller
- gather critical emergency call information for responders
- identify life-threatening situations
- safely prioritize calls for appropriate and fast response
- provide “Zero Minute” Dispatch Life Support using Pre-Arrival and Post-Dispatch Instructions

Implementing the *(Medical, Fire, Police)* protocol enables dispatchers to accurately assess each emergency situation and send the best response possible while safeguarding valuable and limited emergency services resources and increasing safety for both citizens and responders. One key benefit *(Name of Comm. Center)* will now provide is a constant stream of crucial and updated scene information to field responders en route. This information will better prepare responders to give precise assistance when they arrive at the scene.

*(Insert a quote from an agency or city/county official about his or her favorite part of the protocol and how it will benefit callers.)*

The Priority Dispatch System™ (PDS™) includes ProQA® software and/or cardsets, a three-day certification training course for emergency dispatchers, and continual quality improvement



(QI) benchmarks and training. All dispatchers who work on the new system are certified by the International Academies of Emergency Dispatch® (IAED™) and must recertify every two years, completing 24 hours of continuing dispatch education (CDE) and passing all requirements for IAED recertification.

Proactive quality improvement (QI) benchmarks are an important part of the newly implemented Priority Dispatch System. Use of the PDS allows communications centers to assess the quality of the care they are providing their communities, allowing them to make positive adjustments to training and staff in response to these assessments.

The constantly evolving Priority Dispatch System (PDS) will help provide the highest standard of care to the community, allowing (Emergency Medical Dispatchers, Emergency Police Dispatchers, Emergency Fire Dispatchers) to better manage limited resources and increase the accuracy and efficiency of the dispatching process.

(Insert a quote from an agency or city/county official about what the new system means for the public.)

(Insert important information about your communications center here: staff size, population your communications center serves, what types of emergency calls it handles, etc.)

As this system of protocol implementation, training, and quality improvement is set into place, you can be confident that (Name of Comm. Center) is earning the public's trust with every call and is your best possible source of help during times of (medical, fire, police) emergency.

#### **Contact Information**

##### **For this story and the (Comm. Center Name)**

Contact: (Supervisor or Media Contact Name)

Phone: (phone number)

E-mail: (if applicable)

(Comm. Center) website: (if applicable)

##### **For the International Academies of Emergency Dispatch**

Contact: Kris Berg

Phone: 800-960-6236 ext. 116

E-mail: [kris.berg@emergencydispatch.org](mailto:kris.berg@emergencydispatch.org)

IAED website: [www.emergencydispatch.org](http://www.emergencydispatch.org)

**For Priority Dispatch® products, training, and services**

Contact: Adam Hinckley

Phone: 800-363-9127 ext. 132

E-mail: [adam.hinckley@prioritydispatch.net](mailto:adam.hinckley@prioritydispatch.net)

PDC website: [www.prioritydispatch.net](http://www.prioritydispatch.net)

###