

Media Relations: a primer

The ultimate goal of media relations is to increase public interest and awareness in your organization, issue or event. The public is educated when they receive information from print, television, or radio media sources.

Keep in mind that public awareness is not achieved with a single, concentrated media “blitz” over a short period of time. Rather, educating the public through media relations is more successfully achieved through consistent, regular contact and information through various media sources. However, it is certainly appropriate to launch a concentrated campaign for a special event. After the event, your organization can easily keep the momentum going by sending the media updates, news of upcoming events and other information of interest throughout the year.

Some things to consider before getting started:

1. Make contacts with local media:

Establishing a good relationship with local media is a good investment of time and effort if media coverage is important to your goals. Try to make a personal contact at each radio, television and newspaper in your local area. After you have established a relationship, keep your media contacts informed of current and upcoming events during the course of the year.

Ask the journalist or editor several questions: the story angles they are seeking, if they prefer to receive releases via e-mail or fax, and when their deadlines are. The more you know about your audience, the better you can tailor your release to fit their needs.

When your story does appear in the media, send an official thank-you note. This simple gesture goes a long way towards fostering an on-going working relationship.

2. Designate a media spokesperson:

Designate one person in your organization as the media spokesperson. This will ensure that there is no confusion regarding whom the media should deal with.

Designating Karate BC's Executive Director or President as media spokesperson is recommended for large provincial and national events.

All media contacts must adhere to an agreed-upon communications plan so that there is consistency to all communications issuing from Karate BC and local club affiliates. The plan should specify exactly how the organization should be portrayed, the positions held on various issues, and the image, which is to be transmitted to those outside the organization.

Whenever the spokesperson talks to the media, they do so as a representative of the organization. As such, it is important to exude a professional demeanor in terms of knowledge, communication skills and appearance.

3. Issues plan:

Creating a list of the questions the media may ask--along with the appropriate answers--is highly recommended. The spokesperson should review this question and answer sheet and if at all possible, have a mock interview before the event. By doing so, your spokesperson is less likely to be caught off-guard, even if the media starts to ask pointed questions. Identifying potential issues in advance, knowing who will respond to such issues, and how to respond, will give a sense of assurance and poise. In turn, your organization will be perceived as being knowledgeable and prepared since any questions raised by the media will be answered with little hesitation or uncertainty.

What is a Press Release?

A press release is an article issued by your organization for the media use. The intent of the media release is to interest the media in printing or broadcasting your organization's story. Some editors may use your release word for word, whereas others may only use it for story idea or background information. Often, the release will prompt the media to call for an interview with a particular person, such as an athlete or spokesperson, for further information.

Press releases should contain all the relevant information but still be concise and to the point. They should be no longer than one or two pages. Make it as easy as possible for the media to use your information by sending complete information. More specifically, include all the relevant details pertaining to "who, what, where, why, and when."

A few pointers on writing a release:

1. First and foremost, write for the audience—in this case, you are writing to attract the attention of the media editor or journalist. Some ways to increase the chances of getting attention is to emphasize a connection with the local community, relevancy to the editor's readers, timeliness (the topic is of current interest), and newsworthiness (the information is interesting). The media also tends to be keen on rivalry, so include some of that information if it is appropriate.
2. Address the release to a specific person. It is not necessary to write a completely new release for each media outlet, but be sure to get the correct name and title for the most appropriate editor or writer and send the release to them directly.
3. Karate BC has had a great deal of success with media releases, which focus on local personalities and events. Editors actively look for stories which related to the local communities they serve. Help them by send them stories on local athletes, programs in the community or local events.
4. Use short sentences and keeps your writing at about the grade eight level. Keep the information simple and easy to understand.

Format—the Inverted Triangle:

Write the media release in an “inverted triangle” format. This means that the most important information should be at the very beginning of the release. All journalistic articles are written in the inverted triangle format in order to facilitate skimming by the reader and “chopping” of long articles by the editor. The inverted triangle format ensures that your key message will not be lost.

Writing a release in the Inverted Triangle Format

This is a generalized format to use as a guide.

Headline: Grab your reader’s attention with a snappy title. Be creative and have fun with it! An example: “Local Karate Athlete Ready to Rock Richmond.”

1st paragraph: The key information regarding who, what, where, when, why will be stated here. Hook the editor’s interest immediately. An example: “Jean Smith of Your town will competing in the upcoming Karate Tournament on this Date, and this Place.”

2nd paragraph: Secondary information which supports and fills out information given in the first paragraph. In this example, it would be appropriate to state the major achievements in the athlete’s career and what their athletic goals are. If you are writing about an event, you can include what people can expect and reasons to attend.

3rd paragraph: This is referred to as the ‘tertiary’ section. This is an appropriate place to introduce some personal information about the athlete. Emphasize that the individual you are writing about is a member of the community. Most media outlets are keen to support local stories and members of their community.

4th paragraph: At the end of the release, you can add any other relevant, but less crucial pieces of information. It would be very appropriate to mention something about Karate BC at this point. These are often referred to as “throw ins.” If the editor needs to shorten the article, he or she will cut out the throw INS.

-30-: It is a journalistic convention to use place this sign, centered on the page, that this is the end of the release. Any information in the release, above the –30- sign, can be used verbatim by the journalist. Information below the –30- sign is for the journalist’s use only. Include the contact name, title and phone number of your designated media spokesperson after the -30- sign.

Contact information: Be sure to include the name and contact information for your spokesperson so that the media can contact him or her for any further information.

Backgrounders:

One cannot assume that the editor or journalist knows anything about your organization or karate. You can help educate them by sending background information.

“Backgrounders” are sent as separate documents, transmitted at the same time as the media release. Some ideas for backgrounders include information about Karate BC, how to watch kumite and kata, karate terminology, or the history and significance of a specific tournament. Several prepared backgrounders are held at the Karate BC office for your use. If you wish to have a copy of a backgrounder sent to you, please contact the Karate BC office.

Media kits:

Media kits are packages or folders containing hard-copy information for the editor or journalist's use. You may include anything you deem interesting, helpful and relevant in a media kit. Some of the standard items include:

1. Hard copies of relevant releases such as athlete profiles and tournament information
2. Media passes to encourage media attendance
3. Schedule of events
4. Name and cellular phone number of designated media contact for the event
5. Location map

Including give-always—for the media staff or their listeners/readers—is a nice way to build interest in your event. Even small things, items as pens, stickers or bumper stickers, help in differentiating your organization or event from others, which are also vying for media attention.

Send the media kits to any media outlets you wish to attend your event. As a rule of thumb, the media kit should arrive in the hands of a specific editor or journalist two to three weeks in advance for a smaller community media outlet, and at least one week in advance for a major media outlet such as The Vancouver Sun or BCTV.

Timing:

Editors and journalists are always under strict publication deadlines. Be conscientious about giving them all the information they need as soon as possible. The easier it is for the media to gain the information they need, the more likely they will use your story.

In terms of timing a release transmission, the rule of thumb is this: send release to community media two to three weeks in advance of your ideal publication date; and one week in advance to major media, such as the Vancouver Sun and Province. However, it is always best to double check with the specific editor or journalist you are working.

Use momentum to building media interest. Starting several weeks before the event, send out one release per week. Each subsequent release should offer a little more information about the event. One or two days before the event, send one more release as a reminder along with an invitation and media pass to encourage the media's attendance and subsequent coverage of your event.