

The Virtual Activist 2.0

Tips for Effective Online Media

A NetAction Mini-Trainer

Email is an excellent tool for communicating with media. It is a cost-effective way to quickly distribute press releases and newsletters, and is also useful for submitting letters to the editor or opinion articles. Electronic press releases and newsletters can also be posted to your Web site. NetAction offers the following suggestions for communicating online.

Tips for Effective Online Media:

Distribute email press releases in plain ascii text.

Draft your press release as you would any other email message, using an email software program such as Eudora or Microsoft Outlook. Never send press releases as attachments to email, or attach other documents to email press releases. If you need to prepare a paper copy of the press release, copy and paste the ascii text into a word processing document (such as Microsoft Word) after the release is written in the email browser.

Keep the text brief and focused.

An electronic press release should follow the same "pyramid" format as any other press release. Start with the most important information (and remember the five "W's" - who, what, where, when and why). Use short paragraphs and keep it brief.

Write a subject line that's compelling or provocative.

Keep in mind that the subject line is the first thing reporters will see when they download your release. Never email a press release (or any other message) with a blank subject line. Include your electronic contact information.

Remember to include your email address and Web site URL in addition to your phone and fax number, and address. Put all your contact information at the top of the press release.

Use hyper-links where appropriate.

If there is additional information available on your Web site - such as a white paper or an event announcement - include a hyper-link so reporters can click right to it. Online publications will often include these links in their stories, making this an effective way to direct visitors to your Web site.

Send a test message before distributing your press release.

Always send a copy of the press release to yourself or to a colleague before distributing it. Check the format to make sure there are no broken lines of text, and check for any mistyped Web URLs by testing them to make sure they work.

Avoid disclosing the recipients' email addresses.

Always type the recipients' addresses in the "Bcc" field of your email message header, rather than in the "To" or "Cc" field. (See NetAction's "How to Create An Email Media List.")

Post your organization's media contact information on the home page of your Web site.

Be sure to keep the contact information up-to-date, and include information on how reporters can be added to your mailing list.

Treat email media inquiries the same as phone inquiries.

Always respond just as promptly to email media inquiries as you would to phone calls. Reporters who work for online publications are much more likely to contact you by email than by phone. If you're responsible for answering media inquiries, check your email frequently throughout the day.

Set up an online archive for your media communications.

Set aside an area of your Web site where reporters can locate past press. (If you publish a newsletter in electronic form, maintain an online archive of past issues, as well.)

Post press releases only to appropriate lists, news groups, and publications.

If you plan to post your press release to any email discussion lists, news groups or online publications, make sure the topic of your release is appropriate content for the list or Web site. If your press release announces a new report on air pollution, it would not be appropriate content for a forum for race car enthusiasts, for example.

Collect email addresses from your media contacts.

If you've been distributing your press releases by fax or postal mail, ask your media contacts if you can switch to email distribution. Commercial media directors (such as Bacon's Metro California Media) routinely include email contact information. Major newspapers frequently have separate staffs for their online versions, so you'll need to include those contacts on your list, too. There are also media directories and news services specifically for online publications that may be appropriate to add to your media list.

Limit the size of your email message window.

In many email browsers, text that is longer than the width of the message window will "wrap" to the next line. (When text is set to "wrap," you don't need to hit the "return" key at the end of every line.) If the size of your message window is set for more than about 75, the automatic "wrap" may result in broken lines of text.

This page located at: <http://www.netaction.org/training/onlinePR.html>

NetAction

601 Van Ness Ave., No. 631 * San Francisco, CA 94102

Telephone: (415) 775-8674 * Fax: (415) 673-3813

Web: <http://www.netaction.org>