

Strategies for effective outreach via traditional and social media





I am a nuclear physicist.

You are reporters.

There's been an "incident" at a nuclear plant.

The press conference begins ...

(Waaaaait for it ...)

Now!

State of the “traditional” media today?

- It ain't good!
- 1950: 1,878 dailies; 2005, 1,452.
- The newspaper industry has lost 25.6% in daily circulation since 2000. Newsrooms are 30 percent smaller than in 2000; 1,500 newsroom jobs lost last year alone.
- Local TV news is even worse! Local television news is now seeing rapid audience declines beyond those in network, and those numbers appeared to accelerate in 2009. Viewership of the late news fell an average of 6.5% in 2009, four times the rate of a year earlier. (Source: Journalism.org)
- Radio? Not so bad. 236 million listened per week in 2009, a number that has been basically static for the past five years. But ad revenue dropped 18 percent.



Does that mean “traditional” media is passe?

The notion that the news media are shrinking is mistaken. Reportorial journalism is getting smaller, but the commentary and discussion aspect of media, which adds analysis, passion and agenda shaping, is growing — in cable, radio, social media, blogs and elsewhere. For all the robust activity there, however, the numbers still suggest that these new media are largely filled with debate dependent on the shrinking base of reporting that began in the old media. Our ongoing analysis of more than a million blogs and social media sites, for instance, finds that 80% of the links are to U.S. legacy media. The only old media sector with growing audience numbers is cable, a place where the lion’s share of resources are spent on opinionated hosts. One result may be the rising numbers in polling data that show 72% of Americans feel now most news sources are biased in their coverage and 70% feel overwhelmed rather than informed by the amount of news and information they see. Quantitatively, argument rather than expanding information is the growing share of media people are exposed to today. (Source: Journalism.org)

What does all that decline mean?

- Fewer resources.
- Reporters covering more.
- Reporters are not the experts they once were.
- All of which means, we have to work harder to get coverage. Why?
- But it's also an opportunity! Why?

Why a shrinking media is an opportunity ... and a challenge

The challenge: Newsrooms tend to chase “bigger” and “easier” stories like fires and city hall meetings, leaving less time for difficult stories like the struggles of local children.

The opportunity: May be more willing to run your material verbatim or with a quick, no muss, no fuss local insert. More likely to accept “guests” who volunteer themselves and have a compelling story.

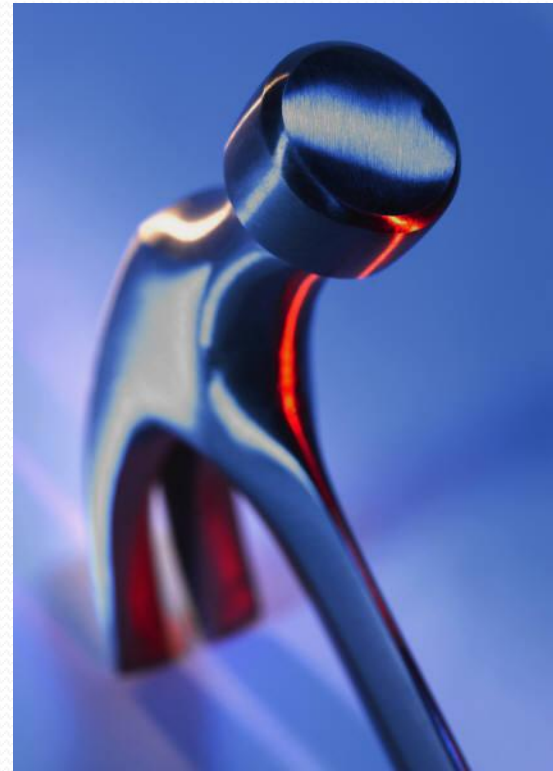
So what is news anyway?

- News is ... ?
- Merriam Webster: “A report of recent events.”
- Merriam Webster II: “Previously unknown information.”
- Merriam Webster III: “Matter that is newsworthy.”
- David Zeeck on Poynter: “News is information I need. It’s intelligence that gives me an edge on the competition. It’s knowledge to help me prepare for the worst. It’s facts that set me straight, trends that show me where things are headed, predictions that may (or may not) come true. It’s wisdom that helps me live better.”
- Heller on the true definition: “News is a departure from the norm, a flashlight shined into a dark room. It is what I say it is.”

Sheer genius!

The tools of the trade

- Press release
- Advisories
- Letters to the editor
- E-blasts
- Story pitches
- Op-eds/commentaries
- News conferences
- Editorial board meetings



Focusing your message (or how to write the dreaded press release)

Childhood poverty and neglect rates continue to climb in Michigan

Advocates: Kids Count report shows need to focus on, invest in state's youngest learners

LANSING – Twenty seven percent of children in Michigan between birth and age 5 lived in poverty in 2009, according to the Kids Count in Michigan Data Book 2010: The Education Connection released today.

That overall percentage continues a steady increase in the poverty rate among the state's youngest children since 2000, when the rate was 17 percent. Poverty rates are much higher for children of color, according to the report. Nearly one out of every two African American children in Michigan and more than one out of three Hispanic children live in poverty.

The report also indicated a sharp rise – 25 percent – in the rate of confirmed victims of childhood abuse and neglect between 2000 and 2009. A federal report finds that 90 percent of the cases are due to neglect, often made worse by poverty.

“This is a call to action if ever there was one,” said Judy Y. Samelson, chief executive officer of the Early Childhood Investment Corp., a public/private initiative working to improve early childhood factors in Michigan. “This is the state's future workforce we're talking about, and the research is clear that years spent in poverty during childhood affect education and employment.”

Traits of a good press release

- Headline that answers the question, “Why should people care?”
- Dateline.
- A “lead” or first paragraph that restates the headline and emphasizes your key point (i.e. early childhood programs are important.)
- Short sentences, one or two sentences per paragraph.
- Uses AP Style if at all possible.
- (Hint: go buy an AP Stylebook. Yes, really.)
- A short, lively quote free of bureaucrat-speak.
- Keep it short. One page max. Why?
- Because there are 272 words in the Gettysburg Address.
- And because when William Holden won the 1953 Best Actor Oscar for "Stalag 17," he simply said "Thank you!"
- Use the Inverted pyramid: The Marcia Principle.

Child poverty grows: Number of poor youth rises locally

February 9, 2011

ESCANABA - Poverty among children has worsened dramatically in Michigan since 2000, according to a new report. More than a quarter of very young children (0-5) and a fifth of all children now live below the poverty line.

Locally, the report found that 17.1 percent of children in Delta County and 24.9 percent of children in Schoolcraft County lived in poverty during 2008.

"The Kids Count in Michigan Data Book 2010: The Education Connection," released recently by the Michigan League for Human Services, details a rise in childhood poverty between 2000 and 2009.

In 2000, 17 percent of all children birth to age 5 statewide lived in low-income households. By 2009, that rate had increased to 27 percent.

Poverty rates are much higher for children of color, according to the report; nearly half of all African American children and a third of Hispanic children living in low-income settings.

The statewide report also indicated a sharp rise - 25 percent - in the rate of confirmed victims of childhood abuse and neglect between 2000 and 2009. A federal report finds that 90 percent of the cases are due to neglect, often made worse by poverty.

In Delta County 7.7 percent and 14 percent of children in Schoolcraft County were found to be victims of abuse or neglect. This is an increase in both counties.

"It is very concerning that cases of abuse and neglect are rising," said Tara Weaver, Delta-Schoolcraft Great Start Collaborative director. "We are working at the local level to provide education and supports for our families during these difficult economic times."

How to write a good commentary

- Don't be afraid.
- Again: Short sentences, short paragraphs.
- State your point in your very first line.
- The first and last lines are the most important.
- The “circle.” (Begin and end with the same thought.)
- Don't forget the feeling.
- Write something *YOU'D* get all the way through.
- Mix in some key facts/statistics. The more local the better.
- Make it about people, not concepts. “Keep it real.”
- The cardinal sin: Being dull. Dare to have a point.



A big election for the littlest children

BY DAVID LAWRENCE JR.

Beginning: Other than the weather, of course, **Florida and Michigan have much in common** these days. Painfully in some ways. Great in other ways.

For example, the end of the Great Recession has come more slowly to both states than elsewhere.

Both states also have witnessed the rise of movements that offer fresh thinking on ways to create long-lasting economic reform by focusing on the future workforce: our children.

Ending: States like Florida and Michigan need all the smart, productive, innovative adults we can get. We have all sorts of longitudinal research to tell us the path to get there. That means early and wise investment in the basics: child care, health care, pre-K, screening and treatment for children who may have special needs, parent skill-building and mentoring programs. All must be high-quality, because only real quality leads to real and positive outcomes.

If we elect leaders who embrace that path, **our two great states** -- both of which I've been proud to call home -- **may before long share another commonality:**

Economic revitalization.

How to write an effective LTE

- Keep it short. (Are you sensing a pattern?) 50 words or less if possible.
- Why? The trend is toward shorter letters, not longer.
- State your point in the first line.
- Don't pretend you're someone you're not. If you're a parent, write as a parent. If you're the GSC coordinator, say that you are.
- People, people, people. Local, local, local.
- Make people care.
- The ultimate test: Would you read it?

What is an advisory?



MEDIA ADVISORY

Thousands of Michigan residents, voters attending Sandbox Party Convention

WHAT: Michigan's nonpartisan Sandbox Party – which represents the interests of the state's youngest children and was formed to bring their issues to the forefront this election season – is holding the state's first nonpolitical, political-style convention. It's free and open to the public.

WHO: Thousands of people from across the state have already registered and thousands more are expected. They believe that when the state is in a fiscal crisis, it should not be cutting programs with proven track records for spurring economic growth – those aimed at infants and young children. We can help you set up interviews with families from your area; see contact information below.

The gubernatorial candidates have been invited – Virg Bernero has already confirmed – and early childhood leaders, including Supt. of Public Instruction Mike Flanagan and others, will address the necessity of maintaining state investment in young children. A recent study by Wilder Research found that Michigan taxpayers save some \$1.15 billion annually thanks to Michigan's investment in preschool programs over the past 25 years. That can't stop now! We can tell you more about speakers and help you set up interviews, too.

WHEN: 1-4 p.m., Thursday, Aug. 26, 2010. Doors open at noon.

WHERE: Breslin Student Events Center, Michigan State University

WHY: As the state struggles to balance its budget, someone needs to stand up for Michigan's youngest children. That "someone" is the Sandbox Party. Public opinion polls show 83 percent of Michigan voters think early childhood development and education is an "absolute necessity" for their community; 75 percent want those programs spared from cuts. The Sandbox Party is their voice.

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What's a story pitch?

Dear Editor

The Kent County Children's Healthcare Access Program (CHAP) "medical home" project – which is improving the health of children on Medicaid while driving down costs – is quickly becoming a model for other communities and the state.

How big a story is this? It is estimated that the savings could be between \$150 and \$200 million a year statewide if publicly insured children had the same hospitalization rate as privately insured children in Michigan.

To give you some background on CHAP, we've attached a news story that was done for the website of the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC). ECIC operates the state's 54 Great Start Collaboratives. The Kent County Great Start Collaborative funded a study about the higher costs the state pays every year for hospital admissions of publically-insured children compared to those with commercial insurance.

You can use this article if you wish at no cost, with or without by-line, but it may prove useful simply as background. If I can put you in contact with local CHAP or Great Start experts, please contact me and I'll help you get things rolling.

Getting more coverage

- Do the reporter's job for him/her.
- Think vivid, human stories.
- Show, don't tell. Meaning: Find living, breathing, local examples who illustrate the issue you're trying to highlight.
- Think photos and visuals!
- Meet THEIR needs and you'll meet yours. Maybe.
- Invite reporters to become fans or friends of your GSC on Facebook or Twitter.
- Email reporters articles about early childhood (i.e. Wilder Report, Center for Michigan reports, etc...).
- Send reporters your communications (i.e. newsletters, mailings to elected officials, etc...).
- Anything that gets the media thinking about early childhood is good!
- Build relationships. Reporters cover people and issues they know.
- Invite reporters to your meetings, a child care center, a preschool etc.
- Clearly identify your **spokesperson(s)**. Make sure they have your cell number, home number and e-mail address handy. (Send it regularly. Frequent, friendly contact helps.)

A good example of making a story “real”

Early childhood issues subject of rally

May 17, 2009 • From Grand Ledge Independent

EATON CO. - After learning, unexpectedly, that he was the father of an infant and that the infant would be placed in foster care if he didn't step-up-to-the-plate and become an active, knowledgeable parent, a young Eaton County man turned for help to Early Childhood Connections.

Over the next several months, he faithfully attended parenting classes, including Build My Brain and Nurturing Fathers, participated in Toddler Time, a weekly parent-child group, and joined the Great Start Collaborative Parent Coalition.

Now this local dad is not only skillfully raising his toddler, but also speaking out about the importance of early education programs for the future of our children.

This father, and many other folks, will be attending the third annual Star Power Rally, on May 21, at the Capitol Building in Lansing. Policymakers have a lot of tough decisions to make regarding the upcoming budget.

Another good example:

Hundreds rally in support of early education - LSJ

When Rob Stephenson's son was 2 years old, he was diagnosed with a speech delay that was preventing him from communicating.

Three years later, his son can't stop talking, according to Stephenson, 43. And he credits the early childhood education program that identified his son's disorder.

"Had he not been diagnosed that early, the speech delay would have hindered him in his later years," said the Okemos native.

However, his program could be one of many early childhood education programs discontinued due to state budget cuts. Stephenson was among more than 1,400 people who marched in front of the Capitol this morning.

Choose the right message ... and the right response

- Frame the problem – or they will.
- Anticipate criticism: “Parents are their children’s first and most important teachers.”
- Encourage reporters to look at the big picture. (Lack of school readiness.)
- But also the “small picture.” (Make lack of school readiness “real” by finding parents, teachers the reporter can talk to.)
- Then have “the solution.” (Preschool, prenatal care...) Focus on how it will help children, families, local and state economies.

Think beyond the headlines

- Newspaper: Letters to the editor and op-ed pieces
- Television: Morning shows
- Radio: Local news and interview shows
- Social media
- School newsletters
- Church bulletins

Ack, they want to interview me!

- First of all, congratulations! View it as an opportunity not an opportunity to embarrass yourself.
- Follow the Boy Scout motto: Be prepared. Have three “message” points you want to make.
- Use anecdotes to illustrate your message points.
- Be ready to answer the one question you most don’t want them to ask. Why?
- Because that’s the one they’ll be sure to ask. (Andy’s 14-year-old daughter: “Duh.”)
- Understand the Charlie Brown syndrome. (Bwah, bwah...)
- Avoid jargon and acronyms at all costs. Speak human!
- Do like the U.S. Coast Guard does!

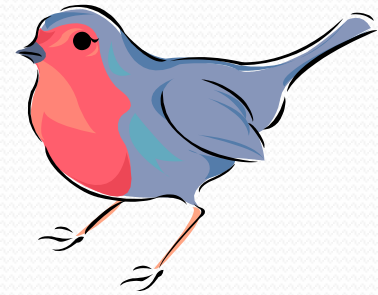
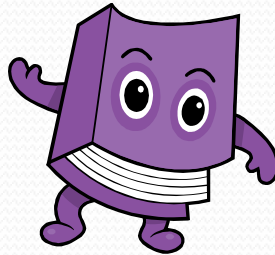


United States Coast Guard
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

- Live by your message points, the key points you feel are most important to communicate to the media and your audience. Remember: Life jackets save lives. Safe boats save lives. Educated boaters save lives. Sober boaters save lives.
- Short answers are better than long ones. Each message should be no longer than 10 to 15 words. Stop talking when you're done making your point.
- This is not a confrontational interview. Smile.
- Don't overlap the interviewer's question. Begin your answer when he or she is finished.
- Speak in complete sentences, trying to repeat the main part of the reporter's question. Example: "How should a boater prepare for the boating season?" Answer: "The Coast Guard Auxiliary recommends that boaters take a boating safety course and have their boat checked to ensure they have required and recommended equipment to operate safely." Your quote will be more likely to be used by the media if it contains a complete thought.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms. Speak as simply as possible.
- Relax by taking a few deep breaths before the interview, and remember to breathe throughout. Keep your hands free, open, and animated. Gesture as you normally would.
- Plan what you'd like to say if asked, "is there anything else that you'd like to say?" You should recap your three main message points as a response.
- Always assume the camera and microphone are operating. When doing TV interviews ask which camera is on you and be sure to face towards it. And, remember where reporters are concerned, there is no such thing as "off the record".

How about social media?

- Facebook (founded in 2004): 2004, zero users; 2006, 100 million; today, 600 million.
- Twitter (founded in 2006): Then, zero; today, 190 million users.



Opportunity!

What do I do with my Facebook page and why?

- Facebook is like telling a neighbor a secret. Within 10 minutes, it'll be all over town.
- Facebook numbers suggest an audience i.e. influence. “We have 10,000 Facebook fans and 20,000 Twitter followers! Listen to us!”
- With Facebook/Twitter, you ARE the media.
- “The most powerful force in the universe is compound interest” – Albert Einstein.
- Facebook is like that old Faberge shampoo commercial:

**“They’ll tell two friends, and they’ll tell two friends,
and ...”**



Tips for your Facebook pages

- Post links to news coverage, studies. Add a comment.
- Post quotes.
- Post statistics.
- Post videos
- Post regularly but don't overdo it. Keep it to 2-5 per day.
- Keep it short.
- Encourage discussion, comments. Reply to comments.
- Post polls/surveys

Case studies in media

So what have been your traditional media and social media related:

- Experiences
- Frustrations
- Successes
- Lessons learned

