

GIVE THE MEDIA A HELPING HAND

If you set a Press Release out clearly and concisely the chances of its being used will be greatly increased.

Different media will require different approaches. The story angle you use to engage the press will be different from the angle you use for radio, which in turn will differ from TV and so on. Don't make the mistake of using a blanket release for all media. Re-writing copy to suit each media group takes time but it's time well spent if it gets the results you want. If you can, write a separate release for each outlet, so that if your story appears in several papers, or is heard on several radio stations, it looks and sounds differently each time.

Advance Information

When planning for news coverage of a special event, be sure that you send your contacts any advance information that you may have. With this, send any information you can provide about special speakers, guests and those people taking part in it's organisation.

- Say ..
- a. Who they are
 - b. Where they are from
 - c. What their qualifications are
 - d. Details of what they will be talking about or why they are there or what their responsibility is in relation to the event.

That is - to tell the media that someone is going to talk on Farm Management does not convey nearly as much as saying that they are going to talk on the advantages of double-entry booking for Dairy Farmers and how this will benefit them at tax times.

If you have any idea how many people are likely to turn up at your event let the media know in advance. This will help the reporter judge the relative importance of the event and prepare them for arranging the appropriate coverage.

Be sure that you have duplicate copies of all information and programmes, etc, available at the event. Inevitably someone from the media will have forgotten to bring theirs with them.

Make sure that all seats reserved for press are kept free. Sometimes they are unable to arrive on time and apparent muddles over such things can create a bad impression.

REMEMBER: How well the media can see and hear will dictate how much they report and what their attitude will be.

If any of the media wish to use electronic equipment, be prepared. This may mean making sure that there are power points handy for such things as cameras, lights, recorders, etc. Don't get caught out. You may have to rush madly round trying to find somewhere they can plug their gear into!

INTERVIEWS

MEDIA WOMEN initially proposed this workshop because our members working in the media found too many women were difficult to interview. An association may have had significant things to say, but the spokesperson would refuse to be interviewed because she was shy, coy, modest, or some other emotional reason.

"Silly housewife" is how they are described by others in the media.

MEDIA WOMEN felt the power of their message shouldn't be lost just because of the inexperience of the publicity officer.

Here's a classic example:

A major women's group put out a hand-written press release that the local radio station chief reporter immediately threw out. Senior Female reporter fished it out of the rubbish tin and tried to salvage the message.

Radio prefers interview to written stories so Reporter telephoned the contact person.

"Oh no, I just couldn't possibly talk into a tape-recorder, giggle, giggle", said Contact no. 1.

Reporter unsuccessfully tried to talk Contact no. 1 into it, but in the end got the name of another member.

"Oh, not little ole me, I couldn't possibly," said Contact no. 2.

Contact no. 4 didn't know if she could say anything without the committee first vetting the questions and answers.

Contact no. 4 was afraid she wasn't important enough in the association to be a spokesperson.

This was time consuming and frustrating for the reporter. She finally got an interview, but more than likely she won't bother trying to process another one of their press releases.

The group violated all the major rules in publicity releases, including the major one that says: NEVER, NEVER REFUSE TO BE INTERVIEWED WITHOUT A GOOD REASON.

Of course it's hard to bring yourself to do it the first few times, but do it anyway. Before putting out the release, practice with another member some of the questions you might be asked.

Another tip is to talk to yourself about the subject a lot so you have all your ideas verbalized.

The reporter will ring you to set up a time and place for the interview, perhaps suggesting that he/she comes to your home or office. At this time ask for the general line of enquiry. The reporter may even give you the exact questions, but don't count on it. They may not have the questions prepared in advance, or they may not want your answers to sound "too polished" if you know exactly how the questions will be asked.

If it's a television interview or a print medium with a photographer suggest someplace that will give visual impact to your message. If it's about children's health, the reporter may want to interview you at a local plunket room, or on the footpath in front of children playing in a kindergarten yard. If you head a campaign against the Wellington Town Hall offer to meet in front of the old Town Hall or the site of the new one.

If it's radio you may have the option of being interviewed in the studio, if it's convenient for you to get there, in your office/home, or over the telephone. The telephone is less acceptable to both you and them as the quality is poorer and you may sound stilted talking to a receiver rather than to someone's face.

If the interview is in your house:

Get rid of the kids. They distract you, annoy unsympathetic reporters, and ALWAYS act up at the wrong time. Get someone to take them for a walk, or contain them to a back room or back garden.

Take the telephone off the hook. It's only for a couple of minutes so you won't miss too many earth-shattering calls.

Leave the front door open. Anyone dropping by will walk in, rather than ringing the doorbell right in the middle of your most profound statement.

You can suggest information or material to the reporter if you think she/he isn't aware of it. Don't give interviewers the idea you are doing their job for them, though. They are likely to resent it and perhaps that could ruin what might have been a much better relationship.

A newspaper interview is easy, because your stutters or corrections are heard only by the reporter. The broadcast interview must be more polished. The main thing to remember is that radio and television want short, concise answers. Don't drivel on and on waiting for someone else to stop you.

The New Zealand Chamber of Commerce has some good tips for people being interviewed by television or radio:

- Don't fidget
- Don't slouch
- Don't move
- Don't use half truths or fibs
- Don't be smart or funny
- Don't try to vet the interview
- Don't expect the red carpet treatment
- Don't use jargon or words or more than three syllables
- Don't use long sentences
- Don't pretend to be anyone else .. be yourself
- Don't pontificate
- Don't sit behind your desk or table ... sit informally alongside the reporter

Little noises that you may not notice can come across very annoying on tape, so watch the clicking of your pen or lighter. Also, little idiosyncrasies like rubbing your ear or blinking your eyes can distract the viewers so much that they can't concentrate on what you are saying.

If you move around too much your voice may go 'off mike' and won't be heard. And there's another reason to avoid movements ... television crews curse the over-active interview as the microphones and cameras can't move easily to keep up with her.

For radio:

Once the button is pushed talk normally. The reporter may all of a sudden start sounding like Jenny Goodwin, but she's had voice training and you haven't. Just be yourself.

Women tend to get higher and higher pitched as they get nervous, so force yourself to relax. Try those yoga exercises to make sure your chest muscles aren't tensed.

If you start stuttering or lose your concentration .. stop .. start again. More than likely it'll be edited out before going to air. Don't worry about long pauses or little questions you might want to ask the reporter after the tape recorded is turned on. A great deal of the interview has to be edited out anyway.

Talk in a normal pitch. The recorder can pick up soft whispers clearly, so don't shout at the microphone.

Avoid getting out of your depth. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know" ... "Let me think about that"... I'll have to get that information for you".

For television:

If the interview is pre-recorded many of the radio rules also apply, as the film and tape have to be heavily edited back at the studio.

Only the most pertinent or colourful pieces of the interview will be taken out, even if you repeat it. So don't refer to what you've already said or plan to say later. The phrase, "As I said before". or "I'm coming to that". will generally make the rest of that particular answer unusable.

If you are being interviewed inside, the room will need to be lit, so if you can find a way to be interviewed outside it may make you more relaxed.

If the interview is in the studio it may be live or played-as-recorded so there is no editing and you have to do it right the first time.

Don't glance around at the floor manager who will be giving peculiar signals to the interviewer. Mostly they are to do with keeping within the time period. The camera might be on you when you glance around. If the interviewer is fumbling with notes, keep going, as again the camera may be on you at that time.

If the interview is half over and you haven't made your most important point yet, find some way of getting the subject back to your point.

Moving back and forward in your chair doesn't make you look relaxed, and makes it difficult for the camera to follow you.

Studio interviews are usually recorded with a number of cameras running at the same time. This gives several angles on what is essentially a static situation. Looking relaxed 'all over' is important. A close-up of you wringing your hands is certainly not going to make you look relaxed, no matter how much you smile.

Studio lighting is most unflattering. If they want to put make up on you, do it. It's to help you look "natural", rather than to look glamorous. It's said that Richard Nixon lost his first bid for the presidency because he refused to wear make-up in his televised debate with Kennedy. Nixon's dark-rimmed eyes and five o'clock shadow distracted from his message.

Make sure your clothes don't distract. Watch out for clashing stripes and plaids, or odd colour combinations. Pastel colours look best. Avoid wearing all white.. it glistens in the lights.

HERE'S SOME TIPS FROM AMERICA, PRIMARILY FOR TELEVISION INTERVIEWS THAT MAY BE "HEAVY" TOWARDS YOU!

Don't expect a "no Comment" to get you out of an awkward situation.

Know the case for the opposing point of view as well as your own.

If you get an awkward or embarrassing question, play for time by asking the interviewer to repeat the question.

If you make a prepared statement at the beginning of a T.V. interview look at the camera as much as you can.

Don't talk over the heads of your audience.

Keep your cool. Don't take everything personally.

Be candid.

Try to turn a negative question into a positive reply.

Be as brief as you can.

You're always on record. The reporter wouldn't be talking to you if she didn't want to make a story out of it. Don't assume in an interview warm up or a telephone interview that you're not on the record. You are, unless you specifically state you are off the record and the interviewer understands that and agrees.

Tell your story from the public's point of view.

Stay off the defensive.

A final wordDON'T FALL INTO THE TRAP OF THINKING EVERY INTERVIEWER IS OUT TO GET YOU.

They are not out to make you nervous...quite the contrary. If you are nervous it's their job to try and relax you.

Ask before hand where the interview is to be used. If it's for news make sure you can make your most important point in 30 to 40 seconds as that's all they'll use.

Try it at home. You'll realise that 30 seconds is actually a very long time if you have a worked out, consise way of putting things. Watch some of the most experienced politicians and you'll see they talk in 30 second phrases, often eminently quotable.

That goes for radio, television and the print media. You reduce the chance of being edited if you can package your point in short sentences.

WHAT IS NEWS?

It takes journalists many years of training to write perfect news stories, so no one expects perfection from non-professionals. But you will look silly and won't be taken seriously if you consistently turn in releases that aren't considered "newsworthy". The subject must be of interest to people other than those in your group.

Here is one set of guidelines:

NEWS IS:

- A report of an event
- Something one has not heard before
- Something of interest that's new or novel
- That has emotional impact

NEWS CAN BE:

- Something that you believe is in the public interest to know and that concerns a wide body of people
- A response or reaction to some current news event or statement
- A report of the actions or opinions of a celebrity or public person
- News often has the quality that appeals to the gossip or busy-body in us all, it's the stuff that can provide the basis for conversation

Bad Example

"A workshop for women's groups wanting to learn how to use the media is being run this month by Media Women. The course started yesterday and was limited to 15 representatives of groups in the Wellington area. The first meeting was at Press House and the speakers were"

(Who cares, except those already in the course! The workshop is already fully enrolled and has started, so the information has limited appeal and sounds more like an advertisement than news).

Better Example

"Sexual discrimination will never dissolve until women get on the ball and learn how to get their information into the media", said Ms Carole de Colville, winner of the Mobil Award for radio journalists.

'Women-oriented news frequently is squeezed out of newspapers and broadcasting programmes, often by news that is less interesting, but is presented by slick public relations people who have more skills at their disposal, than do voluntary women's groups', she said.

Ms de Colville, who is a journalist with the Close Up television current affairs programme, was speaking last night to the first of a series of workshops aimed at teaching women how to use the media effectively.

The Wellington-based group, Media Women, is sponsoring the four-week workshops. The enrolment is limited to 15, but Media Women co-ordinator Cathy Strong says more courses will be held this year to cater for those who weren't able to get into the current one.

Top female editors, programme directors and reporters are speaking at the courses ... etc etc"

Don't pass off as a news story something that really should be a paid advertisement. You will be branded as a group trying to get free space at the expense of the news operation.

Sometimes, of course, an event may warrant both treatments. It is vital, however, that you never .. never .. attempt to use the fact that you have taken out an advertisement as a lever to get your information picked up by the newsroom.

Except in rare instances the editorial and advertising sections of the media are independent of each other. In fact, often one department is totally ignorant of what the other department is doing until the newspaper is already being sold in the streets, or the programme is on air.

The journalist is the professional, and is the one who is responsible for making sure the end produce is interesting and worthwhile, so don't grizzle when it doesn't come out the way you expect.

Of course you will be disappointed that all your hard work ended up in a one-inch story, or every word changed except an 'and' in the middle, but complaining to them will gain you nothing.

Don't ring the editor to complain (unless you have something very significant that needs to be corrected). Don't accuse the journalist of "missing the point". Your release is one of thousands that have to be handled, and compared to all the others, it may not have seemed as important to them as it did to you.

If the media misunderstood what you were trying to say, make it clearer next time.

NEWS RELEASES ... What They Look Like

1. Always type it. Make sure the ribbon is dark and keys are clean. Editors have so much to read each day that a scribbled note will get pushed to the bottom of the pile. Type it double space, with plenty of space along margins, and several inches at the top of the page. Use only one side of the page.
2. Clearly distinguish your organisation. Use letterhead if possible.
3. Include directive information. Include the words .. 'News Release' ... to whom it is addressed (newsroom section, and reporter if known) ... your organisation's address ... the subject of the release (but don't bother making up headlines).
4. List contacts. Give at least two names with home and business phone numbers of people in your group who can give further information and can be interviewed if the media requests it.

NEWS RELEASES ... What They Contain

5. Keep it short. Try to keep it to one page, never more than two. Use simple words, short sentences, short paragraphs. Put in the relevant facts, but don't bore them with all the background and details. If they want to know more, they'll ring you.
6. Keep the language simple. Don't use jargon, technical terms, flowery adjectives nor cliches. Watch out about superlatives.
7. Put a source on the statement. Instead of saying the association believes such-and-such put the words into the mouth of your president, secretary, or someone specific. "The Association believes such-and-such", says the President Ms Carole M Smith.
8. Be accurate. There's no quicker way to get a black name with the media than to include mistakes in a press release. Double check the spelling of names (give first names and middle initials), addresses, dates and days, and the exact title of a speaker, report, pending legislation etc. Be sure to find out if your source wants to be Miss, Mrs, Ms, and then include that title with her name in the story. The choice of Ms is to be made by the woman, not by the newspaper or radio station.
9. Include photos if possible to newspapers and magazines, but make sure they are excellent quality and identified on the back. Unless you have a real professional photographer working with you, it's best to let the newspaper know that you are willing to set up poses if it sends a photographer.

Don't be discouraged if your story isn't used. It's estimated that only 10 percent of incoming news releases are used by a medium and this includes the slick-looking ones put out by expensive PR firms. Sometimes it has nothing to do with the quality of your release, but rather on unfortunate timing of some big event that crowds out everything else. Keep trying, and once the newsroom gets to know you, and realizes your group is seriously seeking to share news with them, it will be easier.

NEWSPAPERS and MAGAZINES - Where To Take What :

Local

HUTT
NEWS

EASTERN
SUBURBS
NEWS

KAPITI
OBSERVER

KARORI AND
WESTERN SUBURBS
NEWS

UPPER HUTT
LEADER

SOUTHERN
NEWS

KAPI-MANA
NEWS (PORIRUA)

INDEPENDENT
HERALD
(Johnsonville)

Local and National

EVENING POST

DOMINION

National and International

N.Z.
PRESS ASSOC.

MAGAZINES
"LISTENER"
"N.Z. WOMENS WEEKLY"

SPECIALIST
MAGAZINES
eg. N.Z. GARDENER
N.Z. FARMER

International

REUTER

AUSTRALIAN
ASSOCIATED
PRESS

RADIO NEW ZEALAND ORGANISATIONAL CHART

CONTROLLER OF
NEWS
MR G. HARTE

EDITOR OF NEWS
MR G. NORMAN

EDITOR OF
CURRENT AFFAIRS
MR A. EMERSON

EDITOR OF SPORT
MR R. FINDLAY

EDITOR OF DAY
MR D. BAUMFIELD
MRS J. ISSAC

ASSISTANT
EDITORS

"REPORT" EDITORS

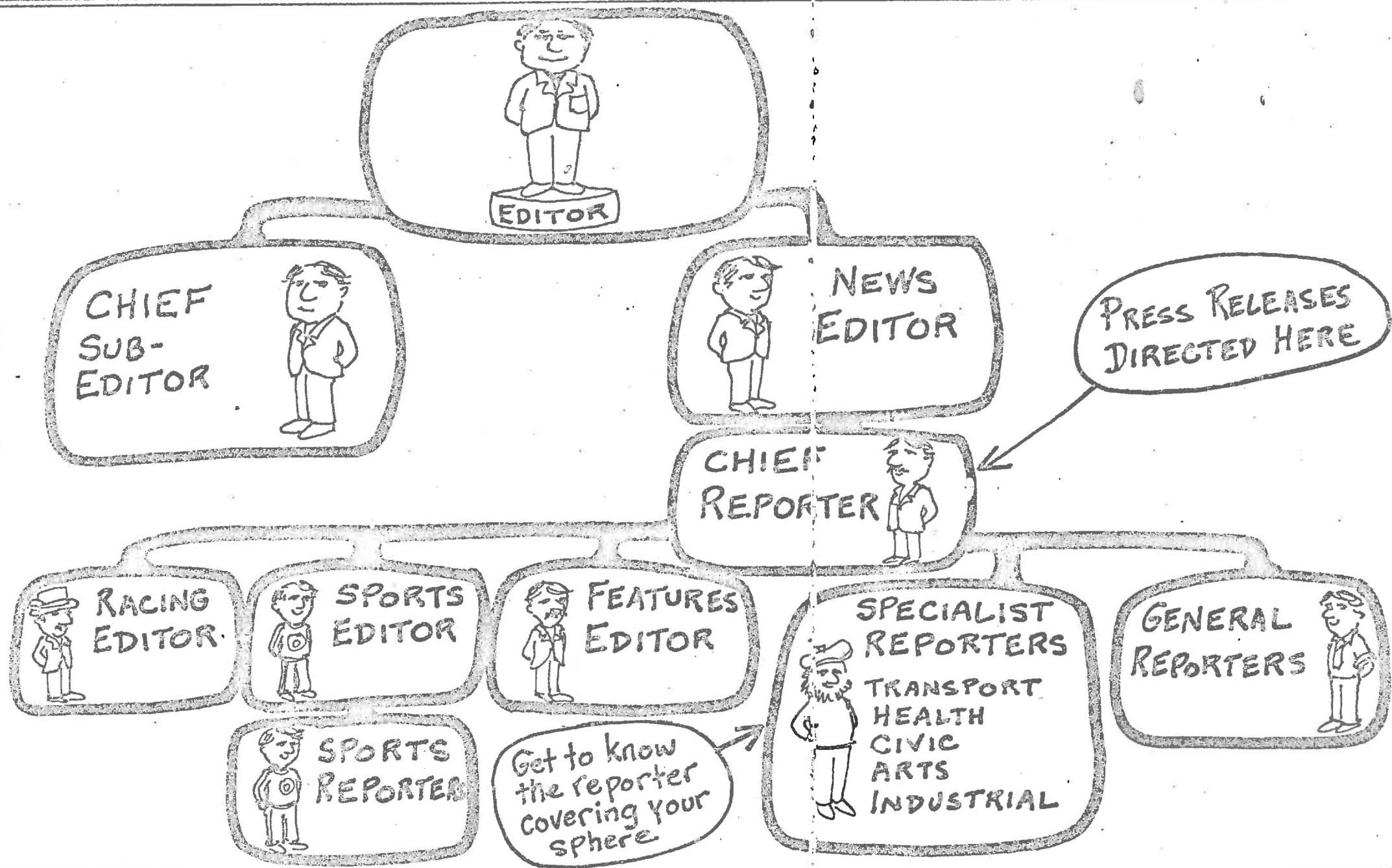
SPORTS REPORTERS

CHIEF
SUB-EDITOR

"REPORT" PRODUCERS

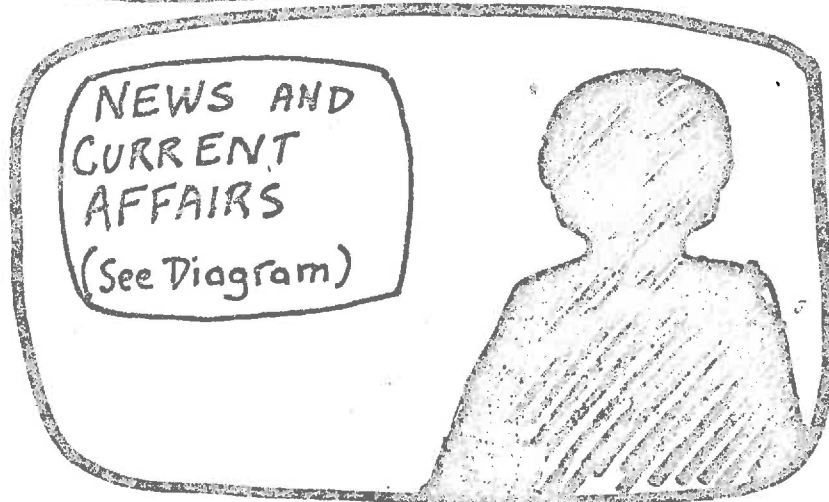
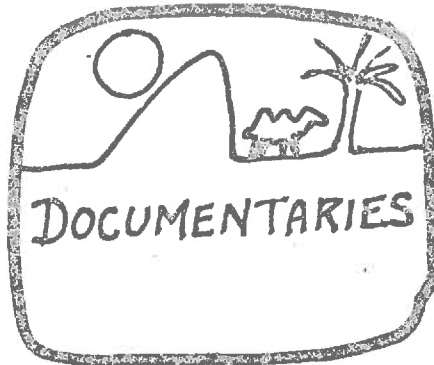
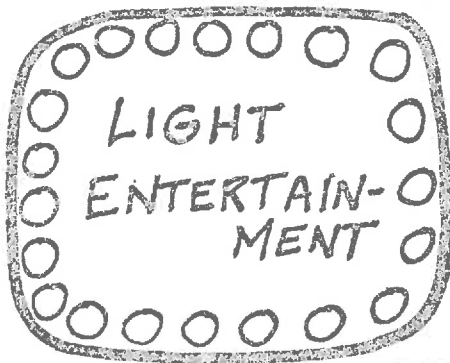
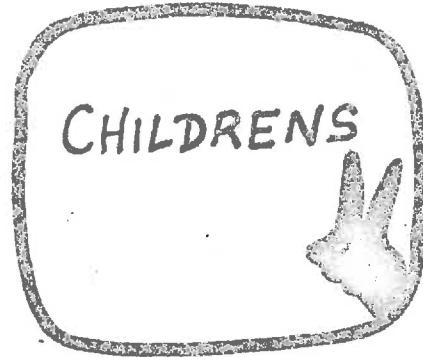
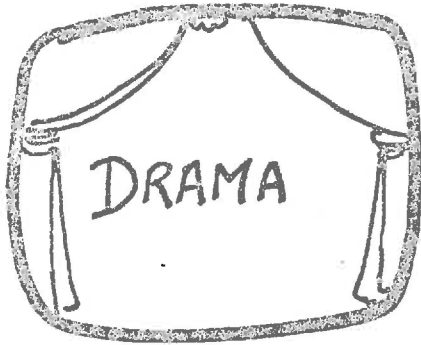
REPORTERS AND
SUB-EDITORS

NEWSPAPERS and MAGAZINES . PECKING ORDER :



T.V.N.Z.

WHO COVERS WHAT



GENERAL AND SPECIAL

RURAL PROGRAMMES

{ COUNTRY CALENDAR
{ DOG SHOW
{ DIG THIS

PEOPLE LIKE US
PRODUCTION LINE
FAIR GO

SCIENCE EXPRESS
KALEIDOSCOPE
MOTOR SHOW

KOHA
BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
OF COURSE YOU CAN DO IT

Etc....

TELEVISION NEWS SYSTEM

NETWORK NEWS

NETWORK
NEWSROOM
AVALON
666-969
ASSIGNMENTS
OFFICER

NETWORK TOWN OFFICE

726-592
HEALTH/EDUC/WELFARE
ECONOMICS
AGRICULTURE
INDUSTRIAL
RELATIONS
ENERGY
TRANSPORT

REGIONAL NEWS "TODAY TONIGHT"

NEWS AND MAGAZINE ITEMS
COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES
EDITOR 666-969

T.V. PRESS GALLERY

PARLIAMENT
POLITICAL STORIES
749-199

SPORTS NEWS

EXECUTIVE
PRODUCER
666-969

TELEVISION CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMMES

"CLOSE-UP"

CURRENT AFFAIRS
PRODUCER
666-969

"EYE-WITNESS"

CURRENT AFFAIRS
WELLINGTON
RESEARCHER
724-142

"VIDEO DISPATCH"

NEWS FOR 7-14 YRS.
PRODUCER
666-969

"SPORTING LIFE"

SPORTS MAGAZINE
ITEMS
PRODUCER
666-969

"NEWSMAKERS"

STUDIO INTERVIEWS
PRODUCER
666-969

RADIO...TV...NEWSPAPERS... NZPA - WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE

RADIO:

Is immediate and constantly hungry for news.

Don't delay reporting something or reacting to a news item.

Radio is not interested in something that happened yesterday.

It only wants the basic facts - not reams of details.

Metropolitan centres have reporters on duty from before dawn until very late at night. Smaller stations are staffed from 6am. Get in before your news item is too stale to be used.

Most radio stories are passed on to television.

Newspapers also monitor radio, so your story stands a chance of being picked up by other media.

Use the telephone to get ahold of radio straight away, and then follow up with written release or personal approach if necessary.

NEWSPAPERS:

~~Have the space to give more details or background to a story~~

Can illustrate with drawings or photographs.

Sometimes are interested in personal dilemmas, accounts or experiences that may be turned down by broadcasting outlets.

If you miss a deadline it's 24-hours before the next issue, so know the deadlines. Get it in before noon for the Evening Post and before midnight for the Dominion.

The nearer the deadline, the less time a reporter can spend on a story.

TELEVISION:

Takes longer to process than radio, but is more immediate than newspapers.

Has less space for news than other media, so the story must be very important or imaginative to make it.

Speaks with visual images extremely well, so any story with good visual impact will be given high priority.

You are able to show them what you are talking about.

TV needs quite a bit of warning before it can cover a story.

A minimum of two hours before a deadline, but preferably several hours warning, if not days, is appreciated.

Whether you are dealing with radio, newspaper or television, try to give the media some warning that a story is coming up.

Be conscious of your audience .. is it a local, national or international story?

A story with limited geographic appeal would be sent to the local radio stations (RNZ Wellington newsroom or Windy) the city newspapers and television's regional news programmes ("Today Tonight").

If it has national or even international significance contact NZPA, the appropriate television programme (News, Close Up, Newsmakers), and RNZ Head Office newsroom, (located in Wellington).

HOW TO WIN FRIENDS ON YOUR LOCAL RADIO STATION

CASE HISTORIES

- The Tauranga Municipal Band wanted to raise \$8000 to travel to the National Championships in Christchurch. They approached the local radio station, 1ZD, with the idea of a 'Coin Trail' which was enthusiastically received and developed by the station to be of commercial value to them as well as to the band.

A trail of coins which were eventually donated to the Band were laid out along the footpaths by passers by. At various points a commercial artist illustrated the trail by drawing instruments on the pavement. Retail stores along the road were invited to take out advertising and promote the coin trail by contributing \$10 in silver.

- A local sporting body was having a problem finding enough homes to billet guests arriving for an International Championship. They approached the local radio station asking them to organise a telephone talkback session in the hopes of appealing to the public for help. The station went one step further and played a record for every person who pledged a billet and also arranged for the programmes to be sponsored by an advertiser and therefore, be of some financial gain to the radio station.

- A school wants to raise \$20,000 for a swimming pool. In this case the announcers on the station competed against each other to raise money. If they raised more than \$1000 they were spared the horrors of the Dreaded Water Dip Machine.

To make this project financially worthwhile for the station a portion of the money raised \$500 was used to buy on air advertising to publicise other fund raising events the school was organising.

ONE FOR TWO

With straight forward advertising of an event or whatever, a station will, if they consider the cause worthy, sometimes offer one free advertisement for every two bought.

NOTHING'S FREE IN THIS WORLD

Don't expect a commercial radio station to do-it-for-nothing. Most ideas can be developed to be of financial advantage to the station. If that's not possible, but the idea is a good one - (For example an interesting guest from out of town who's available for a live on-air interview) the station will be pleased to pick the suggestion up for listener value alone. The more popular a station is with its listeners the more advertisers will be interested in space.

GET YOUR PUBLIC RELATIONS RIGHT

- If you invite radio staff to functions make sure there's someone to welcome them. At least acknowledge their presence, at best provide free passes and seating.
- If you expect radio staff to speak at an event or function, warn them in advance and don't forget a little thanks goes a long way.
- Have a good community image - the local radio station doesn't want a bad reputation rubbing off on them.
- State your goals and be sure it'll win public sympathy. The public won't be interested in coughing up for an affluent organisation always holding its hand out.
- Appoint a press or publicity officer to establish regular contact with the radio station. Don't always visit them when you want something. Become a resource for the station, be prepared to give, don't just bludge.
- If the station contacts you for a comment be prepared to speak out. Make sure your organisation has a structure in which a spokesperson can make statements without having to call a meeting. Learn how to organise and write a good concise press release.

HOW RADIO VIEWS PUBLIC RELATIONS PEOPLE

Negative: (What the media doesn't like from the community).

- Not interested in individuals riding a 'hobby horse' or organisations trying to mount a free advertising campaign through news and interviews..
- Inaccurate information will lead to an individual or organisation being automatically blacklisted.
- Anything legally actionable will automatically be rejected.
- People approaching radio for an interview are often unaware that this requires an interesting and, if possible, vivacious speaker - someone who is good to listen to and not just intoning a point of view.
- Some organisations tend to have a hierarchical hang-up and always nominate the person at the top as spokesperson on the mistaken belief that mana substitutes for entertainment.
- People being interviewed for programmes such as 'Spectrum' or local current affairs, tend not to realise the value of personal accounts and resort to a rather disassociated sermon rather than a colourful personal account. Feelings can often be far more interesting than facts and statistics.
- Handouts; unnecessary or copious material is often filed in the dustbin.

Positive: (What RNZ appreciates from the community).

- A good concise, colourful, factual speaker is a gift from heaven.
- A well written release that is no more than half a dozen paragraphs on one side of a page.
- Tip-offs of a possible story to investigate are welcome.
- Back-up research and biographical notes made available in advance of an interview are really appreciated.
- Producers and reporters are very receptive to suggestions as to who might make a worthwhile interview on a given subject or become a contributor to current affairs programmes in the future.