

Getting the Most Out of the Media

By Carol Helfenstein

First of all, who is the media?

Answer: radio, TV, community papers, daily papers and specialty papers (i.e. farm and women's magazines, shoppers, etc.)

Can you contact them all? No, not one person, it all takes too long! But try to cultivate one or two, or even three, and do a good job of knowing what they want, how to present it and their deadlines.

Here are a few hints.

Radio: From my experience radio is ready to accept short snippets of information, either given directly to them or over the phone. Find out their 1-800 number and ask the receptionist for the News Room. Explain who you are and give your name clearly.

Or send a concise news release to them by fax or email. They are going to give you about 30 seconds of time on air, so practice reading your news item aloud. And read quickly; 30 seconds of time goes by in 10!

Remember, they want news, not dull facts. Their audience is interested in learning something new that might affect their lives.

TV: Again, get a 1-800 number if long distance and ask the receptionist for the News Room. Tell them briefly why you want to send them a news item and what it is. Ask for fax numbers and email addresses. Keep these for reference. Send them information about upcoming events in a concise format well ahead of the event. They often want a two to three week notice.

Will they send a camera crew to an event? Probably not, but work on building a relationship with your local TV station through that initial phone call by being friendly and showing how enthusiastic you are and how your news will be of interest to their readership. If you have given them plenty of lead time, they will cover events that are colourful, controversial and newsworthy.

Community Papers: Add colour and facts to your submissions and skip the repetitive stuff. Readers skip over it!

Sell yourself with every column. Invite guests to your meetings and include contact names with every column. Tell readers what will be coming up next month, and the month after. Sell! Sell! Sell, yourself and your Branch, District and Area. It is free advertising space and unless it is exciting, the publisher will cut it. Write a letter to the

editor every year thanking the paper for their support of WI. Bring them a box of cookies if they do print a great picture. Trust me, all publishers have a sweet tooth, and it makes their day.

Daily Papers: These are much harder to break into. And unless we have something really newsworthy, we should save daily papers for the Ontario wide news.

Specialty Papers: This is where you can make great strides if you are willing to work. If you like to write, tell them you will write an interest column about women and their goals to make a difference in their community. Ask to include a logo and photo every month. This is not a big chore if you like to write. And I think there are a lot of good, colourful writers in our midst.

Give the publisher an outline of what you would like to do and send sample copies. It is tough to keep to a schedule. But if you are game, there is a readership and there is a specialty paper that will give the WI space. Call it something exciting, challenging, funny – Walk in Our Shoes, Up and Running, WI Not, The Bolder Generation, WI – Hooked on Community.

Advertising: Media also includes advertising. And there is no way we, as responsible WI members, should attempt to use our local papers and radio stations for our news and then never put a dollar into advertising. Many of our children, our members and our friends depend on our newspapers, TV and radio for jobs.

So, a word of advice! Plan for an advertising budget each year. Be prepared to spend \$200 to \$300 and then have a bake sale to cover the cost. Tell people why you are having that bake sale or raffle. Then, when they see your quarter page ad in the local paper, they will know they have been a part of that great ad.

This summer I organized a raffle and the sale of munchie food at our local theatre and paid for an advertising campaign in excess of \$2000. Our papers loved us because we paid our bills on time, and in return they were much more receptive to coming out to cover us and give us space for press releases.

If you get nothing else out of this column, please consider this. As WI we must pay our way and look professional. Advertising is good. Advertising is not what people skip over. It is the news of business and community. When written in a clear and concise form it reflects your professional approach to making a difference in your community.

One or two simple bake sales and you have the same power to be as professional as the next organization. Good luck! The media are a great group of people. Getting to know them is worth the smile.

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Workshops 2000 – "A Learning Experience"



Trent Valley Area Women's Institute hosted a successful two-day series of workshops called "A Learning Experience." Approximately 200 people registered for the workshops. The goal of these workshops was to educate members about and instill the confidence needed to hold executive positions. In addition, the workshops helped to make the WI visible and promote a positive image. Carol Helfenstein (standing in photo), FWIO Public Relations Coordinator, presented the Public Relations Officer Workshop to interested participants, along with Joyce Brown, Public Relations Officer for Trent Valley Area.

Submitted by Joyce Brown, PRO, Trent Valley Area.