

## A lesson in Media Relations 101?

Maybe it's the time of year, or maybe it's just the extra events that come in as we approach December.

Whatever the case, there's been a run on last-minute calls to the office for coverage of events, often resulting in them not getting coverage.

This is nothing new in the newspaper world, but it's just been a bit more prevalent lately.

Late Friday I received a call from a reliable contact requesting coverage of an event happening in five hours. After checking our schedule, I had to tell him there was no way we could cover it. No one was available.

Finding a staffer or freelancer available for a Friday night isn't easy under the best of circumstances, and even more so on short notice.

He accepted my apology, admitting he'd left it much too late, but 'simply forgot until the last minute.' He said he'd supply photos himself.

Monday morning, I arrived at the office, to find an e-mail message asking for coverage of a Sunday afternoon event. I checked the sent time on the e-mail— 1:15 p.m. Saturday.

Our office isn't even open Saturday or Sunday. I'm not sure how the sender expected me to accommodate her request when I wasn't going to read her e-mail until Monday morning.

Another fellow dropped in Tuesday, asking for coverage of a Wednesday night event. He was a regular and is never this late with his requests, but had been out of town on family business. As it happened, I said I'd work him in. He was lucky.

For some reason, the public seems to have the perception that staffers at a newspaper have no lives, and our sole purpose in life is to sit at our desks, seven days a week, waiting for calls to come in, then rush out at a moment's notice.

And if we can't be there, we're the bad guys.

Reporters and photographers are people too. We eat, we sleep, we shop for groceries and Christmas presents, we attend social events,

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and have lawns to cut and sidewalks to shovel.

It's not uncommon for us to be out two or three nights in a week, on top of our 9 to 5 stint.

And sometimes we simply can't juggle all the requests, particularly if they are last-minute.

I'm not trying to be nasty here— more informative. For anyone wanting coverage of an event, call in as soon as you have the specifics— date, time, location and a contact person, even if it's months away. That way we have a fighting chance to juggle our staffing and cover it.

Another side of the equation— we have had situations where someone called in for coverage months in advance, then cancelled the event at the last minute, but don't bother to inform us.

We had one on Saturday. When the photographer arrived, it seems the event had been cancelled earlier, but no one had told us.

As a result, there was a possibility that someone else who had called in for an event at the same time was turned down, simply because we had a conflict. Failing to call in not only costs the newspaper lost time, but potentially may have cost another event coverage as well.

It's downright rude and inconsiderate.

There is a saying that's been going around lately which seems appropriate in this situation.

"Incompetence on your part does not necessarily constitute an emergency on my part."

Read it— and learn from it.

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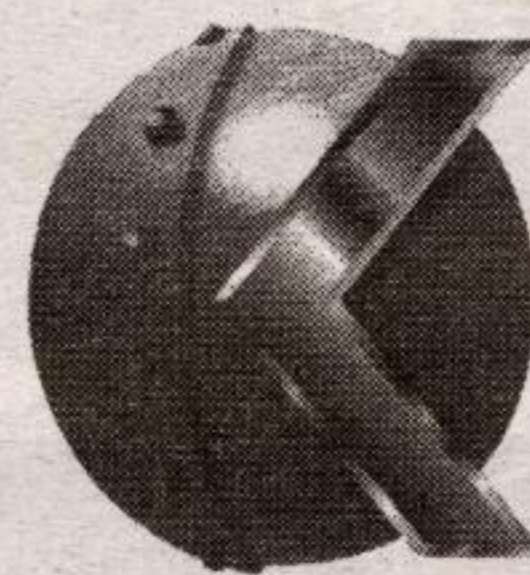
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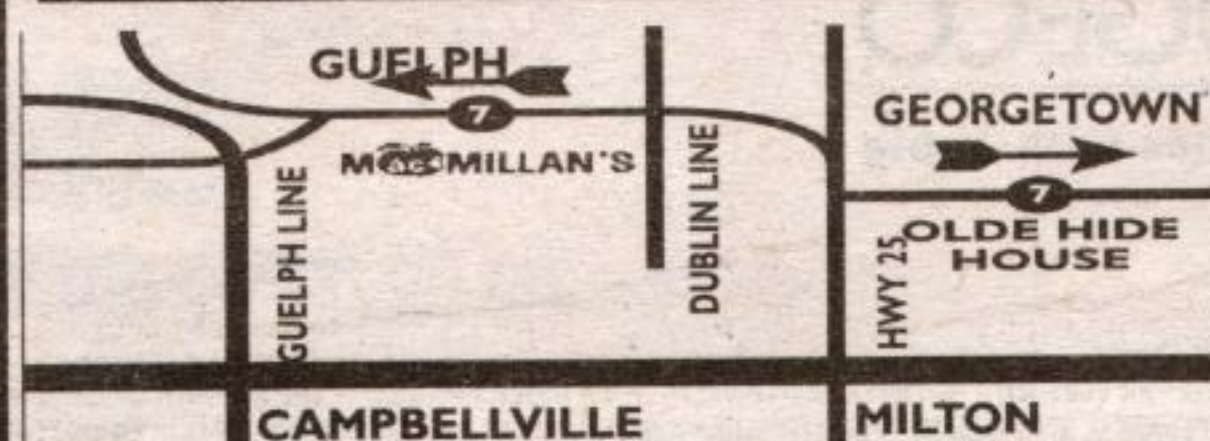
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