

10

Communication Handbook - Factsheet 10

Version 1 – April 2012

Media Communications

- ⇒ What makes news
- ⇒ Hard news and soft news
- ⇒ The media landscape
- ⇒ The journalists' agenda
- ⇒ How to choose appropriate media for your project
- ⇒ Creative ways to get media coverage



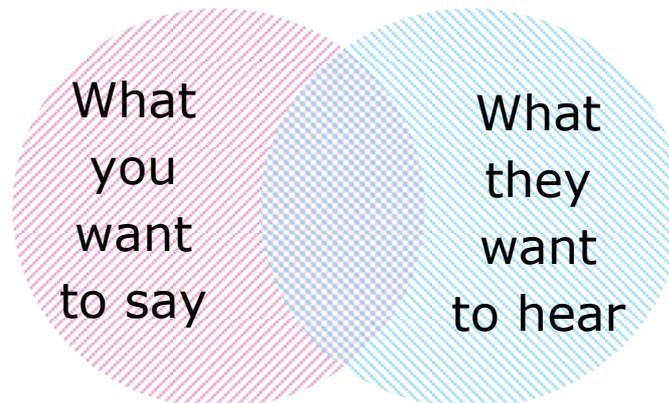
Making news

Most of what MED projects do from day to day is not interesting to most people on the outside. Most projects quite rightly devote most of their time and attention the mechanics of getting the job done: organising meetings, reporting, drawing up best practice guidelines, sharing knowledge, and so on.

It will always be difficult to generate interest in this aspect of a project's work because people outside MED Programme or your project are not interested in the **process**. They care about **results** and **meaning**.

The intersection

A key principle is to **look for the intersection** between what you want to say and what they want to hear. When this type of projects fail to communicate effectively it is often because they are talking about things – like process – that fall in the circle on the left, but not the circle on the right.



The very big and the very small

What kinds of ideas and information tend to lie in that intersection?

At one end of the scale, **the very big** issues are always interesting: the major themes like health, quality of living, jobs, the environment and climate change. These ideas are in the news and in people's minds and conversations every day. All MED projects address big issues in one way or another. Communicating about how you are part of the solution to big issues will get you into that intersection.

At the other end of the scale, **the very small** issues are the local results and impact that people feel on their doorsteps and notice in their everyday lives. These are the results, the concrete impacts and changes that MED projects make in the real world – not the theory of territorial cooperation or the process of cooperation, but tangible outputs like better paid jobs through innovation or safer houses through flood protection.

When projects find it hard to generate interest, it is often because they are talking about neither the very big nor the very small, but the process and bureaucracy by which projects turn one into the other. Important, but boring.

Making news

By the fax machine in most newspaper and broadcast newsrooms is a small in-tray for promising press releases that might become news – and a large bin overflowing with the rest. Most press releases are bad because they are not news. The same goes for electronic news delivery services and email – most messages that journalists receive are ignored or quickly deleted.

There is one reason for this enormous waste of effort: most of the stories that organisations want journalists to write and broadcast are not news. There is no point writing a press release or calling a journalist with a story idea if it is not news.

Messages will not make the news if they just say how worthwhile and important a project is. To get published or broadcast, a project must shape and adapt its messages inventively to be newsworthy.

Newsworthiness is relative, flexible and subjective. A small story can make the headlines on a slow news day; a big story can disappear without trace if somebody else makes bigger news the same day. A great local story might be of no interest to national or international media. A great story for print might be useless for television if it has no visual element. A great story for trade media might be much too technical for mainstream media. A story about industry trends may work for financial newspapers but not general press. Something that happened three days ago is news for a weekly publication, but ancient history for a newswire.

Most importantly, many developments that are fascinating and very important to people within the MED Programme world are not newsworthy outside the MED Programme world – at least on the face of it. This is where news angles become important. Think hard about how to touch your target audience. What do they care about? Why will this matter to them?

To generate interest in your project and its activities you need to develop creative PR angles that will capture the interest of your audiences over the activities of other organisations. This can be hard, especially if there seem to be no obvious creative angles that you can use.

Focus on the audience

- ⇒ The key to writing a good press release, for example, is to identify and focus on an aspect of what you have to say that will engage your target audience. This is what journalists do when they choose a “news angle”: they are looking for a way of explaining a news event that makes it relevant and interesting to their target audience. To make yourself newsworthy, you should do the same. Look for an angle that will connect your agenda to something that your audience cares about!

The first thing that goes through a journalist’s mind when he or she reads your news release is always: “So what? Why should my readers care?” Think hard about what journalists and their audiences would be interested to read. Why should they care? Take the information you have, and tell it in a way that makes them care.

News values

Perhaps your project needs to promote something that is newsworthy but dull, or you want to promote something that simply is not newsworthy.

The trick is to make your audience care.

The first thing that goes through a journalist’s mind when he or she reads your news release is always: “So what? Why should my readers care?”

- ⇒ In general, news is about **people** rather than **things**, and **concrete events** rather than **abstract ideas**.

Beyond that, there are essentially two kinds of news:

- ⇒ **Hard news** is information that people need to make decisions. People need to make decisions when something has changed. Almost all news is about what is new, what has changed: so concentrate on novelty and change. Tell me what is new that will change my life and inform the decisions I need to make.
- ⇒ **Soft news** is entertainment. People like news that touches them emotionally, amuses them or stimulates their mind. Soft news is just as important as hard news and to manage it we must think in terms of human interest. Make me feel something about this story and I will remember your project.

Hard news	Soft news
⇒ Novelty	⇒ Human interest
⇒ Change	⇒ People
⇒ Controversy	⇒ Humour
⇒ Conflict	⇒ Emotion
⇒ Surprise	⇒ Fun
⇒ Secret	⇒ Compassion
⇒ Money	⇒ Children
⇒ Problems	⇒ Celebrities
⇒ Solutions	⇒ Animals
⇒ Practicalities	⇒ Romance
⇒ Current affairs	⇒ Mystery
⇒ Business	⇒ Family
⇒ Workplace	⇒ Sports and leisure

Creative news

Below are some ideas to get you and your team thinking of new creative ideas.

Hold a brainstorming session. These are great ways of generating a large number of ideas from a group of people in a short space of time.

Speak to a journalist. Ask a friendly journalist what they would consider newsworthy about your activities. You'll probably have to spend some time explaining what you do, but they may come up with something you hadn't even thought was worth a news release. They might also be able to help with news angles for the story.

Use the PR story check list. This document contains 50 news angles that you can further develop into news stories for your project. Use it as an aid to brainstorm for PR activities.

Link your activities or project to other news stories. Use other news stories as a way of generating news for your project. For example, the August vacation period means that journalists are looking for news about tourism and holidays – has your project increased the appeal of your region to tourists?

Look for other potential news stories that you can use to interest the media in your activities, for example:

- ⇒ Significant dates – public holidays, anniversaries, religious holidays
- ⇒ Sporting events
- ⇒ World events – World Habitat Day, Children's Rights Day, etc.

- ⇒ Industry events – e.g. conferences
- ⇒ Seasonal events – holidays, start of the school year, winter
- ⇒ Political news – on EU, national and regional levels

Media opportunities

From time to time, almost every person within your organisation will come across an event or an idea that is newsworthy. Sadly, not everyone will recognise it when they see it! Here are a few guidelines for spotting a PR opportunity:

- ⇒ Think interest – will this be interesting to other people?
- ⇒ Think news – how your local paper or radio station report?
- ⇒ Think local – how does it involve people locally?
- ⇒ Think people – the media are usually more interested in what people are doing than in what organisations are doing.
- ⇒ Think communities – what contribution has your project made to a community initiative or activity?

News devices

The opportunities for generating PR stories for the media and other audiences are almost endless.

These are useful 'devices' for creating stories:

1. Advice
2. Animals
3. Award
4. Bid for a tender or EU money
5. Briefings
6. Calendar events
7. Case study
8. Celebrities
9. Children
10. Columns
11. Competition
12. Conference
13. Employee activities
14. Event
15. Exhibition
16. Expansion
17. Expert opinion
18. Human interest
19. "Ice to the Eskimos" – a service to an unexpected group of people
20. Improved product
21. Improved service
22. Interview
23. Investment
24. Job advert
25. Letter to the editor
26. Link to current event
27. Link to forthcoming news
28. Man bites dog – something upside down
29. Management appointment
30. New contract
31. New premises
32. New process
33. New product or service
34. Picture story
35. Press briefing
36. Press conference
37. Press visit
38. Personal profile
39. Project profile
40. Quotable quote
41. Report
42. Seminar
43. Slow news days
44. Holidays and Sundays
45. Speech
46. Spokesperson
47. Sponsorship
48. Supplement
49. Special report
50. Survey

The media landscape

Europe is home to an enormous number and range of news media, each with a different target audience and its own news values. It is not possible or desirable to target all of them. Projects should consider two factors when deciding which media to target:

- 1) Which media do our own target audiences pay most attention to?
- 2) Which media will consider our messages newsworthy?

The answers to these two questions will usually be similar, because media define news as information that their own target audiences want to know.

Audience selection

Following are some examples of how different sections of the media reach different audiences:

Local newspapers	Local policymakers, politicians, communities affected by project activities or issues.
National TV and radio	Policymakers at local, regional and national level, opinion formers, businesses, regulators, researchers
Specialist/trade magazines	Experts, proponents and analysts in a particular industry or area of knowledge, e.g. EU affairs, regional development
International newswires	Newswires supply all other substantial media with news, so their final audience is the broadest of all

Pan-European PR

The nature of MED Programme operations means that PR activities must take place on many levels: local, regional, national and pan-European. This document focuses on the organisation and management of these activities. The definition of pan-European PR is a programme of public relations activities executed in one or more countries. Usually a co-ordinator is needed to ensure:

- ⇒ There is a level of consistency in communications across all countries
- ⇒ The individual public relations programmes are executed well
- ⇒ Cross-fertilisation takes place and best practice activities are shared
- ⇒ Reporting is carried out in the required way and in a timely manner

Where just two countries are involved, the handling and co-ordination of PR activities is not usually too complex or difficult, as communications between the two can be straight forward and they can work in close cooperation. When a larger number of countries are involved things start getting more complex as lines of communication get longer.

Types of pan-European PR activities

As the cost and management of full-scale, pan-European PR activities is considerable and probably not the best way of communicating MED projects activities, here are various other options that can be used to communicate your work:

Using the foreign correspondents

Work through the foreign correspondents based in your country, who represent the media of the countries where you want media coverage.

However as with all media relations, the news must be relevant to that outlet and their respective newspaper or station. For example, for national newspaper correspondents, the news you are communicating must have some relevance to the country where the newspaper is based.

This is especially worthwhile in cities where there is a large foreign press corps. Brussels is the base for more foreign correspondents than any other city in the world. There are 700 foreign correspondents based in the city. (The second largest press corps is Washington DC with 574.)

Additionally, other major cities in Europe also have large international press corps, which are hubs for specific European regions. For example:

Vienna, Budapest and Prague are the hubs for the Central and Eastern European correspondents.

Rome, Budapest and increasingly Belgrade are the hubs for the South East European correspondents.

As most foreign correspondents are accredited by their own governments (press offices, ministry of foreign relations) or other agencies, in order to get a list contact the relevant embassies, government department or EU office or search on line.

Also big media outlets (Wall Street Journal Europe, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Liberation, Financial Times, etc.) will provide you with a list of their correspondents in any region. The only big international media that does not disclose a list of its correspondents is The Economist.

Using a news distribution service

Utilise one of the news release distribution services to issue your news releases to the key media outlets in your target countries. These companies may also provide translation services for your news release, as well as help select the appropriate

media for your news story. However they will not develop news angles for your story or write the news release – they are purely a distribution service.

Details of these services can be found on the following websites.

- ⇒ www.prnewswire.co.uk
- ⇒ www.romeike.com
- ⇒ www.businesswire.com; www.businesswire.co.uk

Bear in mind that it is always advisable to contact all the media outlets that receive your news release to further explain and help 'sell' your news story.

Targeting the news agencies and wire services

If you have a strong news angle, which has relevant cross-border appeal consider pitching the story or issuing a news release to one or more of the news agencies in your country. Remember to include the correspondents of the foreign news agencies in your country. If it appears on their service, it has a chance of being picked up by newspapers and TV stations in countries where the story has relevance.

If you have appropriate material, distributing it to this group could be your means of achieving coverage in many countries.

Road-shows

Consider arranging a road-show of similar activities, such as round-table events or news briefings with journalists, which can be taken to a number of key cities in your target countries if this ties in with your planned activities. Clearly this type of activity will need to be adapted slightly to each country and possibly each city, but fundamentally the content can remain the same.

It is important to consider the following points if you intend to carry out activities of this type:

- ⇒ The languages your spokespeople speak – they will need to be competent in the languages of each city to be visited. If they don't speak the necessary ones, investigate with local contacts if English can be used. In some areas the business communities, politicians and journalists are happy to work in English.
- ⇒ Translations of any support materials, such as invitations, media advisories, backgrounders and news releases, into the local language.
- ⇒ It is also advisable to get some local help at each venue to advise on some of the cultural expectations, help with finding a suitable venue and liaising with suppliers. A local PR agency could help with this if there is no one from a partner organisation who can assist you.
- ⇒ Take advantage of the local presence and contacts of any partners based in that area.

Larger scale pan-European PR campaigns

Consider how all your project partners can be incorporated into your PR strategy, and use the following guidelines to help you to organise it yourself.

As with any PR programme, for it to be successful there must be all the usual components: research, planning, defining objectives, strategy, tactics and evaluation, plus ensuring that the programme has continuation and consistency.

To ensure the continuation and consistency, a well organised network of people or offices (often an international PR agency with offices in all key countries) needs to be in place in the countries to be included in the programme. This team must work within the overall guidelines set out in the programme proposal, as well as develop their own localised version of the programme with appropriate adaptations and deletions necessary to make it suitable for local markets.

The network of offices should be coordinated by a lead office. The coordinator's role is usually as follows:

1. Builds understanding of the overall PR mission

- Ensures everyone contributes
- Helps with cross fertilisation of activities
- Exchange of ideas and materials
- Maximises flow of information and potential news

2. Coordinates reporting

- Compiles regular reports of all PR activity in each country
- Ensures timely distribution

3. Manages the relationship with pan-European media

- Monitors forward feature opportunities
- Initiates briefings between journalists and spokespeople

4. Runs a central press office

- Keeps and updates media materials – messages, Question-and-answer documents, releases, backgrounders and other materials
- Collects and organises material for websites

5. Develops news releases for pan-European distribution

- Ensures approval of releases and translations
- Manages their timely distribution in all countries

6. Develops specific projects

- Media briefings
- Speaker platforms
- Speech / presentation production
- Road shows

The role of each partner involved might be as follows:

- ⇒ Provide details on their country's PR strategy, objectives and tactics
- ⇒ Translate, adapt and distribute centrally produced news releases
- ⇒ Initiate news releases on local activities
- ⇒ Develop proactive PR opportunities to leverage key messages and awareness for local activities
- ⇒ Handle media enquiries from their country
- ⇒ Arrange and prepare interviews and briefings with key media and spokespeople
- ⇒ Reporting
- ⇒ Evaluation and measurement of activity

PR manual

It is a good idea to have a PR manual that lays out all the ground-rules for PR activities, but also has background information of all countries involved. Suggested contents might be:

- ⇒ Contact details of all involved in the work
- ⇒ Procedures and expectations, including approval process
- ⇒ Overall strategy
- ⇒ Key messages
- ⇒ Summary of suggested tactics
- ⇒ Target audience and media - including priorities
- ⇒ Evaluation, reporting required with associated timelines

Pan-European PR programme template

To provide consistency and aid reporting, it is useful to have templates for activities in each country. The one below is a basic example.

Programme title:

Objectives:

To promote maximum awareness of partners' activities

Use the partners' programme as a 'news hook' to generate general awareness of project activities etc.: _____

Target audiences:

- Main media in each region
- Politicians
- etc.: _____

Geographic execution

- Regions involved:
- _____
- _____

Timing:

Implementation:

- Series of press releases and other material to be developed and distributed to the media
- Media interviews – spokespeople to be put forward on programme-related topics
- Etc.: _____

Measurement/evaluation:

Analysis of media coverage

Budget:

Region contact:

Project participants:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Promoting your messages to media in different countries

Key facts you should know about when dealing with the media in other countries:

- ⇒ Local spokespeople and local angles are essential.
- ⇒ Be prepared to answer why your news is important to a specific country, however give the activity wider significance, for example in a context of collaboration between the participating countries.
- ⇒ When pitching to national media, be prepared to speak the language of the country.
- ⇒ Media materials must be in the format, style and language of the country's media.
- ⇒ Media materials need to be adapted from country to country.
- ⇒ Phone calls and e-mail are the most popular way to pitch.
- ⇒ Be ready to respond instantly with facts, statistics, visuals, spokesperson, etc. Photos of activities and pre-recorded TV footage can extend coverage.
- ⇒ News conferences are only for big announcements. One-on-one meetings with journalists work well.
- ⇒ Use the snowball effect - the most devoted readers of newspapers are journalists themselves. Use coverage in one country as a vehicle for getting it in another one.
- ⇒ There is no such thing as "Off the Record" in any country.
- ⇒ Remember to place your project in context by explaining how it fits in with MED Programme and the European Union.

IN SHORT

The media cares about results and meaning not process.

Think about the very big issues and the very local small ones.

The media will only give you coverage if you have a story.

Know the difference between hard news and soft news

You need to look for potential news that relates to your project.

This Factsheet will be updated according to the issues raised during the Communication Training in April 2012!