Why media relations?

- Media are pervasive in our society
- If you don’t control your portrayal in the news media, someone else will
- Influence attitudes/opinion
- Influence behavior
Why media relations?

- Because people believe what they read, see and hear in the news
- Because your organization does not operate in a vacuum
- In most cases, the information will be out there regardless of whether or not you cooperate
- Shape the story in the beginning or lose your chance

Pros & cons of media relations

- Editorial environment = credibility
- Cost efficient
- Both short-term and long-term benefits
- Member/employee morale
- No control over content
- No control over display/air time
- No guarantee of coverage
The basics

- News media vital to society
- News media stereotypes not true (usually)
- A journalist’s job is a tough one
- Journalists deserve more respect

Quotable Quotes

Aspen Daily News:

“If you don’t want it printed, don’t let it happen.”
Quotable Quotes

John B. Bogart, *New York Sun*

“When a dog bites a man, that is not news, because it happens so often. But if a man bites a dog, that is news.”

Quotable Quotes

John Krull, ICLU chief and former reporter:

“Every media interaction is a transaction. You give something and get something.”
General William T. Sherman on reporters:

“If I killed them all today, there would be news from hell tomorrow morning.”

News values
**Impact**

- Very little impacts more people at one time than road construction (taxes, weather, health insurance costs)

**Prominence**

- Major thoroughfare, ingress/egress to major business, corporation or industry
**Proximity**

- Closing or restricting the road in front of the newspaper’s offices or in front of the TV station?
- Or the major thoroughfare in/out of town?

**Timeliness**

- Month-long?
- Year-long?
- Decade(s)-long?
Conflict

- Angry public meetings
- With the city’s plan

Novelty

- Doing something like Hyperfix where you’re shutting it down completely?
- Using a moveable barrier that’s new or innovative?
Visual

- Using a big crane?
- Using GPS?
- Bright colors?

Trend

- Is something happening that signifies a larger trend?
What they’re taught

- Accuracy
- Objectivity
- Fairness/balance
- Clarity
- Brevity
- Ethics

What happens sometimes?

- Bias
- Inaccuracy
- Lack of rapport
- Incompetence
Must-haves in order to make your story newsworthy and your audience listen to it

- Good grasp of your audience
- Key messages
- Understanding of the news media
- Techniques for different mediums
- Rules of the game

Do it well...

- Generate significant public support for the project
- Avoid hiccups and bumps that come with projects of this nature
Do it poorly...

- Put the project (and you) in the hot seat for years to come

Remember

- Who your audience is – the public
- There is an inherent bias toward bad news
- The messenger is the message – especially on TV
- The media will not quote facts and figures, they’ll quote for impact and emotion
Deadlines

- Cannot be missed
- Television news: 6-8 deadlines every day

Off the record

- Does not exist
- Microphones are always hot
- Reporters are always listening
Each story affects the tone of future coverage

- If it goes south from the beginning, it will likely stay south
- Becomes the basis for future stories about your project

What they want from you

- Materials prepared specifically for them
- Construction timeframe
- Project cost
- Project highlights
- Lane closing/restriction information
- Contact information
Incorporating effective communications into any project

- Determine your impact
- Figure out your objectives (what your communications have to make happen)
- Study your audience’s needs, wants, mindsets and concerns
- Analyze the communications environment
- Develop appropriate strategies and tactics in order to most effectively reach your audience
- Develop your messages (in terms of “you get”)

For Example: Borman Expressway (I-80/94)
Communications objectives

- Support efforts to make the construction period as safe as possible for drivers and road crews
- Help target audiences understand the need for and the benefits of the project
- Enable drivers to plan for efficient and timely travel
- Reduce anxiety and confusion about the construction period
- Leverage the construction effort into economic development and job growth opportunities

Messages

- Safety – it’s the main reason for the project
- The Borman now carriers nearly three times the number of vehicles it was designed to carry
- After the project, the Borman will be safer, smoother, faster
- The construction plan was developed to minimize hassles and delays
- The project will attract lasting economic development to northwest Indiana
Do’s in media relations on road jobs

- Anticipate the impact of your job on your audience and how they’ll receive it
- Get bad news out quickly (schedule changes etc.)
- Provide accurate information (if you don’t know, don’t guess)
- Use statistics to support, not carry your message

Don’ts in media relations on road jobs

- Lie
- Hide information
- Speculate
- Be afraid of silence
- Sugarcoat information
Final tips

- Communicate through the media *with* your audience – not at them
- Make a plan for your communications in advance and stick to it
- Know your audience
- Communicate early and often
- No surprises

Have something to say ...

... and make sure you say it.