

A Media Makeover *for Your Association*

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Here are four steps you can take now to make over your relationship with the news media and begin a positive and constructive earned media program. It's not as scary as it looks. Start small. Don't be dismayed if your first couple of efforts don't pan out or don't go the way you want them to go. This is a long term project, so don't expect overnight success. We did it. You can too! As with any business, the key is personal relationships -- developing trust with the reporters and editors who work in your area.

Step 1: Ask yourself how you're doing with key audiences.

Your goal is to produce an honest assessment of how others see you. You aren't asking yourself the right questions if they don't make you uncomfortable. Be honest. Ask yourself:

- How do non-REALTORS® see us? What is their image of us? Customers, policymakers, the news media.
- What values do others attribute to us? What values would we like others to attribute to us?
- When is the last time a reporter called you to engage your expertise in real estate issues?
- What do we want? Greater influence over the development of public policy? Increased sales? An end to negative news coverage?
- Do we have the time and energy for this? Is it a high enough priority? Like anything else that's valuable, this takes time and money.
- How would you know success in media relations if you saw it? What would it look like?

Step 2: Design the Architecture of Your Earned Media Program

Identify the most important audience: ("Everyone" is not the right answer.) Who has the greatest capacity to influence the way you work? To influence your bottom line?

Develop key messages: two or three sentences that describe your values. These overarching statements should apply to every function and every policy position of your organization. They won't change even when your media challenges do.

Step 3: Choose Your Tactics

Choose the messenger: This may not be your AE or your president. Key spokespeople should be comfortable with the issues and with reporters, someone who can focus on your message. Most of all, it must be someone who will take the time, even when there isn't any!

Get to know the tools you can use with print and electronic media:

- Personal contact is always the best!
- News releases for broad announcements
- Letters to the editor are one of the most-read parts of the paper
- One-page issue summaries
- Guest editorials and columns
- Radio and TV talk shows

Choose your partners! Turn up the volume and reinforce your credibility. Choose carefully: you'll be judged by the company you keep.

Step 4: Create a Work Plan

The work plan lays out the tasks that must be done to reach your media goals. Create a work plan for any initiative you wish to address: e.g. priorities before the state legislature or county council, an ad campaign, or a change in the local market.

Begin by setting up media protocol: Who approves materials that will be shared with the media and who speaks for your organization?

Next make a list of reporters in your area who report on your issues: Identify them by the “beat” or issue area they’re identified with that most closely tracks with your priorities.

Now you’re ready to make a work plan!

1. Identify goal
2. Targeted audience
3. Tasks required for reach that audience, e.g.:
 - Preparing supporting materials
 - Contacting the media & distributing materials
 - Preparing spokespeople to work with media
 - Naming a date and time for each task
4. A name next to each job

“In many cases

I can get [my editor] to run an item that he wouldn't otherwise run because of the relationship. It has taken time to build, but it has been worth it.”

Nathan Gorton, Snohomish County-Camano Executive Vice President

Tips for Developing a Successful Relationship With the Media

Respect their deadlines. The more often you return calls on time the more calls you'll get. Don't waste their time. Don't call them with a “story” idea that isn't really a news story.

Create your own news, don't wait for it to happen! Invite reporters to a tour of unique homes or a workshop that features a well-known speaker.

Keep a list of facts about your market at your fingertips — three or four easily understood stats that reporters can drop into articles. If they don't call and ask for them, you call the reporters and editors and offer up the information!



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