



Event-in-a-Box

ABC's of News

1. What to start with: PLAN ALL MESSAGES – well before you contact the media.
 - a. Use the News Organizer (located in the Start Spreadin' the News file) to organize pertinent facts (who, what, when, where, why, how ...).
 - b. Identify two or three strong, separate facts that should “sell” your event to the media, as well as to your ultimate audience. Doling out these facts over time, as new information (i.e., news leads), will allow you to repeat your pertinent facts.
 - c. Check and re-check to ensure slogans have no hidden meanings; no mistakes in spelling, times, addresses; and that you're not trying to pass opinion off as fact.

IMPLIED RULES:

1. You must have a well-informed, enthusiastic spokesperson (See Tips for Choosing a Spokesperson).
 2. You must focus on what others will think is important, beneficial – or fun.
 3. Having other eyes read your materials before going public is always best.
2. When to get started depends on the types of people you hope will learn about the event through the media.
 - a. How long of a lead time will your audience need to be able to attend?
 - b. How short of a lead time will they need in order to remember to attend?
 - c. Which media are likely to reach them?
 - d. Do those media need lead time, too – for example, time to produce a set of radio PSAs (public service announcements) or to find the space to print a story?

IMPLIED RULES:

1. Getting your message out once will not get the job done.
2. Using just one medium may not get the job done.
3. Planning your promotional campaign needs to start early.

NEXT NEEDED STEP: Make the media part of your promotional campaign. Get your message out in ways that involve different senses and lead to multiple exposures (six times per version is best).

Seeing – TV, billboard, signs, window displays, skit, demonstrations ...

Hearing – Radio, word of mouth, speeches, announcements, discussion groups ...

Reading/Writing – Newspapers, newsletters, church bulletins, brochure, fact sheet ...

Feeling, Smelling, Tasting – Usually conveyed through descriptions and/or illustrations ...

3. How to get started depends on your particular papers and stations. Possibilities include:
 - a. Call to tell your favorite contact at each news outlet about what's coming up.
 - b. Call and ask to drop by to talk about an event that you're planning – that you hope the paper/station will let people know about. Take along a news organizer or fact sheet for the “interview.”

c. Write and distribute your own story to your favorite contacts at local media. Call, to let those contacts know the story is coming.

IMPLIED RULE: Take/Send news to a person, not to a medium. If you don't have good contacts, get started developing them, months or even years before your event!

IMPLIED NEXT STEP: Invite that person to come to the event, too – for free.

Writing for the Media: The Basics

1. The RULES

- a. Use third person only, unless you're directly quoting someone. Third person = he, him, his, she, her, hers, they, them, theirs, it, its – plus the nouns and pronouns they refer to.
- b. Use accurate facts only – no unquoted opinions or unsupported analyses.
- c. Write simple paragraphs, sentences and words. Make reading easy.
- d. Include no unnecessary facts, and leave no unanswered questions.
- e. Make your writing interesting to read, active.

- 1) Choose specific words (stretch limousine or rattletrap, not car).
- 2) Use appropriate comparisons or quotes or humor (dangerous as a chain saw or ... said, "Being 98 isn't too old!")
- 3) Write in active, not passive voice, so the subject of a sentence does the verb's action. Sentences in passive voice typically have some form of the verb to be, used as a helping verb. They also have at least an implied answer for the question By whom?

Examples:

- a) State Climatologist Mary Knapp announced the results. (Active) This sentence includes no form of to be. The subject – Mary Knapp – is up front and doing the verb's action.
- b) Survey results were announced. (Passive) This sentence includes were (a form of to be), helping the verb announced. If you follow up on the sentence's thought by asking the By whom? question, you quickly realize you have no answer. But, you should/could have one.

The sentence's survey results certainly didn't do the announcing. And, their being in the real subject's place can create uneasiness in readers' or listeners' mind. Research shows that if a passive sentence does not include the real subject, the sentence can "read" as being a subtle form of hiding information or even lying. (A classic example: "Mistakes were made.") If a passive thought does include the real subject at the end, it can seem unnecessarily difficult to understand or pompous. (Survey results were announced by the firm's spokesperson. Mistakes were made in the chain of command.)

- c) State Climatologist Mary Knapp is on the program. (A different kind of active)

In this sentence "is" is a form of to be. But in this case, the is doesn't help another verb. And, Mary Knapp is the obvious subject. Plus, the subject traditionally is placed before the verb.

2. The TRADITIONS

- a. Your main "sell" point and the most important facts must go in the first paragraph or two – called the lead. That may be all the "time" your story gets. The beginning also determines whether readers go on reading further.
- b. Put the most important facts first, then include other details and facts.
 - 1) Put information in descending order of importance for print news stories. Editors traditionally start cutting story length from the end.

- 2) Lead up to a nice finish for broadcast news stories. Listeners tend to remember the last thing they hear.
- c. Quotes can tell your story, but they must be accurate and a statement, rather than an opinion.
- 1) A direct quote requires quotation marks. Example: “Students who participate in the contest typically develop a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities in food production,” Adams said.
 - 2) An indirect quote will typically rephrase something that has been said.
Example: Awards to top entries in the 4-H-FFA Wheat Plot Variety Contest will be presented at noon, Sept. 9, in the Pride of Kansas Building on the Kansas State Fairgrounds, said Jim Adams, K-State Research and Extension 4-H Youth Development specialist and contest coordinator.

Writing for the Media: Samples, Examples

A simple event announcement:

Released: August 23, 2006

Headline: K-State Grain Production Field Day Slated for September

YOUR TOWN NAME, Kan. – The 2006 Grain Production Field Day will be held at the Kansas State University Southeast Agricultural Research Center in Parsons on Sept. 14.

The program will include a series of topics including: Wheat rotations and soil fertility research update; Why potassium deficiency in corn; K-State soybean breeding program update; Alternative crops research update; Utilization of crop residues for livestock feed following a drought; and Considerations for planting wheat in 2006.

Registration and breakfast will begin at 7:30 a.m., with the main program starting at 8:30 a.m.

The research center is located on Ness Road (North 32nd Street). For more information, call the K-State Southeast Agricultural Research Center at 620-421-4826.

Goal: Start generating interest.

Ist sell point: Grain production update

Who: K-State Southeast Agricultural Research Center

What: Grain production update

When: Sept. 14

Where: Research center

Why: Discussion on what's new

How: Updates

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Event announcement/reminder:

Released: August 23, 2006

Headline: 4-H-FFA Wheat Plot Variety Contest Awards Ceremony Scheduled

HUTCHINSON, Kan. – Awards to top entries in the 4-H-FFA Wheat Plot Variety Contest will be presented at noon, Sept. 9, in the Pride of Kansas Building on the Kansas State Fair grounds, said Jim Adams, Kansas State University Research and Extension 4-H Youth Development specialist and contest coordinator.

The annual contest, during which 4-H and FFA members track five or more different varieties of wheat from planting through production and harvest, is usually one of the most challenging 4-H projects, he said.

“Students who participate in the contest typically develop a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities in food production,” Adams said.

Goal: Start generating interest.

Ist sell point: 4-H/FFA Wheat Plot Variety Contest

Who: 4-H, FFA and sponsors

What: Challenging 4-H project with agribusiness and grain production ties

When: Sept. 9

Where: Pride of Kansas Building

Why: Challenging 4-H program, awards program

How: Awards program will start at noon.

Participating in the contest requires about a quarter acre of land, but living on a farm isn't a prerequisite. Some who participate in the contest may farm with a grandparent, friend or neighbor.

Partners in the educational project include the Kansas Wheat Office, Kansas Crop Improvement Association, and Kansas Grain and Feed Association.

Contest entry reports and wheat samples will be on display in the Pride of Kansas building throughout the fair. For more information on the contest, contact Adams at 785-532-5800.

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A follow-up news release:

Released: May 24, 2006

Results from Blood Pressure Check Surprise Some

YOUR TOWN NAME, Kan. – Of the 257 county residents who got their blood pressure checked on May 20 at the daylong Health Fair celebration, more than half registered readings that doctors consider too high.

“That’s dangerous,” said Molly Begin, agent with the county’s Kansas State University Research and Extension office, which hosted the event.

High blood pressure can be a silent killer, Begin said, and it often ...

Information is available by contacting Begin at 785-222-3333, dropping by the K-State Research and Extension - Garden County office at 926 Main in Lettus, Kan., or searching under “blood pressure” on the Web at www.oznet.ksu.edu/.

-30-

Goal: Continue raising awareness of office/ programs; take opportunity to tie in with on-going education.

Sell points: News tie to recent local event, where serious and on-going health problem was identified

Who: Many county or area residents (Ext. Agent Molly Begin)

What: Should go to doctor

When: ASAP

Where: Family doctor

Why: Check/control high blood pressure

How: Follow up!