



PR

How can sports centres, with no budget for PR and events, get their message out through the media?

It's vital to view your local journalists as a target audience. What do they want? How can you help them get that while also getting your centre in the papers? How can you build a relationship with your local journalist.

My brother is a journalist at a charity magazine and with his help I have tried to answer some of those questions here.

I hope you find this helpful. If there's anything else I can do to help please let me know at john@makesportfun.com or at 020 3239 8824.

Don't panic

One of the most important things is to not be afraid of approaching journalists, says Norma Johnston, director of Charity Comms, which advises charities on how to work with the media.

"You don't need a big strategy to approach the media," she says, "you just need a few basic things. Journalists are usually willing to help.

"Just make sure you know what they do – read their newspaper, listen to their show. Make sure that they'll be interested in what you do."

Remember journalists' names and look to develop individual relationships, she says. Getting to know a reporter is often more effective than approaching a busy editor.

"And use the national news agenda," she says. "If a subject is topical, and it affects your organisation, journalists will be glad to have you approach them with a comment."

Give them something free

Local journalists will do an enormous amount of work for a surprisingly small amount of free stuff. I cannot emphasise this enough. Local journalists don't earn a huge amount and love the fact that their job gets them freebies.

Sports centres are in an amazingly good position to provide journalists with free exercise classes and tuition as a way of building a relationship. The journalist can also write a story about it.

Norma Johnston advises "Never forget that journalists are people too. Try offering simple perks.

"Local reporters will go a surprisingly long way for some free food. And if you send in a cake to a local radio station to celebrate your charity's birthday, it's likely to get you a mention."

Become an expert

If you make sure you're the local source then journalists will come to you when they need a quote.

By providing information which the journalist finds useful when you don't need them you will find it much easier to get them to write about something when you do need it.

My brother and sister both started out as local journalists, and I never heard the end of how difficult it was to find a good story, and good local sources.

Both of them found the job much easier after working there for a few months. Yes, partly because they were better writers, but mostly because they knew more local sources. Journalists are incredibly secretive with their sources because they know that's where their value lies.

Have an opinion which they will write about. Say something interesting, funny, clever or different. Be brave. However, you will also need to be prepared to deal with your press office. They're not normally interested in increasing coverage of your centre, but are more interested in damage control. Don't let them take the lead or you'll never get anything done.

Becoming a recognized expert isn't difficult, so I want to remove that barrier now.

I am not recommending pretending to be something you're not. I can't! Expert is nebulous media-speak and so overused as to be indefinable. In modern PR terms, proof of expertise in most fields is shown with group affiliations, client lists, writing credentials and media mentions, not IQ points or PHDs.

Presenting the truth in the best light, but not fabricating it is the name of the game.

Think local

The local media should be the first port of call, says Lisa Pettifer, communications manager at Jeans for Genes, who specialises in helping the charity's supporters get local coverage.

"Approach media at quiet times," she says. "Ring a paper just after press day, and a radio station shortly after an hourly bulletin."

Stress the story's local importance, she says. And for a paper, offer images of local people doing something interesting. For radio, offer a loquacious local supporter for interview.

Do something eye-catching

Sports centres are often short of cash, but long on goodwill, and this is something they can use to their advantage.

You can stage publicity events for very little cost. Quite likely you can get everything you want for free, including manpower.

And you can start small. Don't think you have to do something huge and extravagant.

Crucially, tell everyone. Invite every media organisation you can think of.

Make sure you're also clear on what people should do next. Make sure you've got a call to action. Tell people what you want from them.

Many people like to do a bit to help out with sport, especially if it doesn't cost them anything.

- Give employees time off to organise it (they'll spend more time doing it than you pay them for because they feel valued)
- Make sure there's a good photo opportunity
- Invite the local journalists

Attract high-profile supporters

Celebrities love publicity, they work for nothing, and they have time on their hands. If you can fight your way through all the other people clamouring for their attention, they can boost your coverage enormously.

Colin Osborne, who founded male cancer charity Orchid after his own illness, said he used networking and personal connections to recruit snooker legend Steve Davis and Wimbledon winner Pat Cash.

But he also recruited others through approaching agents and writing letters. He recommends asking everyone you work with to look for celebrities with personal connections, with a known interest in what your centre does, or with a local link.

"I got several supporters because I wasn't afraid to ask," he says. "A surprising number of people said yes."

"And once you've got a high-profile supporter, be sure to make the most of them," says Jo Inskip, of media advice service Community Newswire. "Take plenty of pictures of them."



Simon Starr, the Director of Sport Nottinghamshire used many of these approaches to build a relationship with his local paper. This led to 7 full-page front-page stories in a year.

He had 7 front pages in the Evening Post, 50+ articles in the papers, 3 lots of radio that we know about, mention on the Guardian Unlimited website, has been part of 3 major events and featured on various e-newsletters.

To learn how he did it read more [here](#).

Make Sport Fun

Make Sport Fun was set up by [John Ainsworth](#) to help sports organisations market sport better.

The name Make Sport Fun comes from the 3 most effective ways to get people to change their behaviour. Make it fun, easy and popular to do so. This approach has been proven in social marketing academically and practically across the world.

John has:

- been an international consultant for the World Health Organisation - advising Brazilian and Argentinean government officials on their sports marketing
- Organised participation events for London 2012
- Built the [Promoting Sport toolkit](#) - the world's most popular grassroots sports marketing resource

If you need any help with grassroots sports marketing and making sport fun then please email john@MakeSportFun.com or call 020 3239 8824.



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