

# **Spin Me A Story – Pitching the Press**

*Theatre Alliance of Greater Philadelphia's April Spark Event of 2006  
April 10<sup>th</sup> @ Mum Puppettheatre*

\*\*\*Remember the second Monday of every month is a new Spark event hosted by the Theatre Alliance of Greater Philadelphia. Individual & Organizational members attend free, all others are charged \$10 per person. (This money may be applied towards membership dues!)

## Special Guests:

**Karen DiLossi** – Director of Programs & Services, Theatre Alliance of Greater Philadelphia (moderator)

**Tyler Melchior** – Director of Marketing & Public Relations, 1812 Productions [www.1812productions.org](http://www.1812productions.org)

**Heather Rogers** – General Manager, Mum Puppettheatre [www.mumpuppet.org](http://www.mumpuppet.org)

**Megan Wendell** – Publicist, Canary Promotion + Design [www.canarypromo.com](http://www.canarypromo.com)

## **Future Spark Event and Theatre Alliance Announcements:**

- **Whole Foods Costume Contest**
  - Whole Foods will provide a \$250 gift certificate to any costume designer/theatre company who designs and builds an outfit made from the Whole Foods bags (Potato, Apple, and now Coffee). They will supply you with however many bags you need for your build. Best Design wins \$250 in Whole Foods bucks!

## **Defining PR**

- PR is the work you do to explain to the media and the public why you're doing the work that you're doing, and to get their buy-in.
  - It is the time, emotion & stress that you put into making your marketing work
- PR is knowing that your audience is the press and figuring out how to frame a production or an event and find the right medium for your pitch. Medium: print, radio or TV media.

## **Intersection of Marketing & PR**

- What relationship does the production have to the current time and what else is going on locally. You want to give the press as much fuel as you can.
- Don't assume that the people you are contacting know anything about the show, the playwright, your company, the context, anything.
- A practical piece of advice is always to be on your toes about information. If someone calls and has a question about any aspect of the show, "I don't know" is not a good answer. You should know everything.
- Your Public Relations and Marketing efforts should all work together to give a consistent overall picture of your organization and of the current season.

## **KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE**

- Increasingly we're working in a stringer culture – freelance as opposed to staff writers. A freelance writer can be your best friend since they work for various outlets and if you sell your show to them they can then convince their editors to run the article. You can hit several publications this way.
- You need to get to know the writers: who they write for and what types of sections they write in.
- You need to get to know the writers: what they like and don't like; how they write.
- Read the newspapers, listen to the radio. You can't get to know who you're pitching if you don't.
- When developing relationships, start with the people you read/watch/listen to first. Then once you've developed relationships with them, you can branch out.
- You can't just send a press release and hope that they run it. You need to follow up with them, especially if you really think your event would be perfect for that writer. If you don't follow up you miss out on the opportunity to develop that relationship.

- Developing relationships and getting to know the press is not easy. You have to work at it, but it should be worth what you're invested in – otherwise, why are you doing it?
- The press needs you and your information in order to do their job.
- If you have a hot point in your show that you think a particular writer/paper would be interested in, then send targeted information to them. Perhaps resend the press release with a photo. Just make sure that if you do this that it is newsworthy, and of note.

### What makes a great press release?

- Formatting is key. Check your packets for some examples. No one perfect way, but these are good examples.
- A press release should tell you who, what, when, where and why it's important. It should contain quality creative writing.
- Two common problems are: not enough information and too much information. Again, you need to know your audience: there's a difference between academic/artistic language, marketing language, and press language.
- The first two paragraphs of your release are crucial. Give them the key information points and catch their attention with what's most important/interesting about the event.
- Sometimes you may want to do more than one release for different mediums. It's not about writing two completely different releases, however. It's more about creative editing of your information to catch a different outlet's attention. You want to get the right information to the right press.
- Listings outlets generally need less information. Check to see what their specifications are as they are usually very specific.
- Don't let your eyes be the only ones to see your press release. Bounce your ideas off of other people, both within your organization and with a trusted friend or colleague. This will give you perspective.
- Think beyond the theatre or arts & entertainment section. More and more the press is looking for ways to cover topics with a different angle. Examples: *Mondo Mangia* and *Sweeney Todd* were both covered in the Food section. Be familiar with the programming of the various outlets.

### Press Photos

- Lighting and a good angle can make or break a photo.
- Keep contrast in mind. Consider what will look good in black & white as well as color.
- When sending photos give them High Res photos, photoshopped if need be to adjust contrast/color.
- You can do a lot with digital camera, a drop, some lights and 3 hours.
- Get a costume for the photo – even if it isn't THE costume. As long as it gets the idea across.
- You want photos that are expressive. American Theatre magazine has some great examples of good photos.
- Web only publications don't need high res photos. 72 dpi will do for them. Print will need much higher.
- If you have a link to a press page with high res photos in your emailed release, that can work really well.
- Sometimes they will prefer you email them photos as attachments. Again – know your audience and be prepared for anything they could want.
- If you're trying to find a photographer inexpensively try looking at First Friday or contacting the local colleges.
- Be creative. If you don't have the cash you must make the time.
- If you cannot get a production photo with the actors in time for a deadline, consider different avenues. A photo of the playwright or a photo of a key actor from a previous production will also work.
- If you need permissions for a photo you want to use, just ask. They're usually pretty easy to obtain.
- Is a photo more important than the text?
  - One is not more important than the other. However, a good photo can make a huge difference.
  - You will get more space for text than you will in photos. However, if you can get an image it is good because it draws a reader's attention.
  - Sometimes you can get your photos online, even if it isn't in the print version.

## Tips, Advice and Q& A

- Standard time for sending out press releases is 4-6 weeks for general local press. Larger outlets, monthly publications, etc. may need more lead time. Example: Philly Mag – 6 months lead time.
- You can fax copy to TV news rooms. However, you need to be ready to do something on very short notice.
- Mailing your press releases is a good idea so that you get the address corrections.
- It's always good to mail your release before emailing it out.
- Update your press list at least once a year.
- Do not send your press releases as attachments – unless you're sure they will go through. Attachments can get caught in virus or spam blockers. Put the text of the release in the body of your email.
- Look for potential links with what other companies, cultural institutions, etc are doing in town. Joint press releases are good for everyone involved.
- Contrary to what you may think – selling a new play is more difficult. The press has nothing to go on except the information you provide them.
- You can do plays that are topical, but what is most important whether you're doing a new play or a classic is to sell “why should people care about YOUR production of X show?”
- How do you deal with PR for a play with controversial themes or content?
  - You need to know why the play is important. You don't have to give a moral argument – just explain the type of work your company does, why you chose this play and why it is important.
- Is there a difference in how you pitch to different mediums?
  - There isn't really any difference in how you pitch them. If you have something that you think would be particularly good for a certain medium you can pitch that specifically. However, you don't need different press releases, for instance.
- Are there enough media outlets out there?
  - Yes, but it's not easy. You have to think outside the box – be creative and follow different avenues you may not have thought of before.
  - Two good examples: The Broad Street Review and AroundPhilly.com
  - It's all about repetition of your message, even if it's small
- **Idea:** Have a Spark event that specifically covers press photos. Get some photographers and reporters in to talk about what works.

Notes prepared by Natalee Hill, Office Manager for the Theatre Alliance of Greater Philadelphia.



## **Public Relations At- A-Glance**

### **What is PR and what can it do for your business?**

- Public Relations is a strategic communications process that helps manage, protect and enhance the reputation of an organization, its members, and its services.

Public Relations Can:

- Build an image
- Reinforce and further an organization's reputation
- Raise awareness
- Educate
- Increase understanding
- Change Behavior
- Build Credibility
- Influence opinion leaders
- Motivate your audience to action

### **PR Pointers**

**PR Golden Rule:** Know what you want to say

**Key messages are key** – Formally prepare key message points that relay your company's mission and the message you wish to send to the public at large. Message points:

- Define your agenda to help you focus
- Make it easy for you to "tell your story"
- Make it easy for others to remember it
- Ensure consistency throughout your organization

These are helpful in communicating with all of your audiences: employees, members, media, community leaders, organizations, business partners, legislators, etc. Key messages can be used in all forms of communications ranging from elevator conversations and one-on-one meeting to public speaking and presentations for funding.

## **When talking to the Press...**

**An interview is an opportunity** - Interviews are a forum to relay your key messages. It is integral that you realize you control the message. One of your key messages should be included in the answer to every question you are asked.

**Be informed** – When contacted by a member of the media find out the reporter’s name, affiliation, what information they wish to obtain and when their deadline is. Set up a time to call them back and use that time to prepare yourself by reviewing key messages as well as to gather the information that is being requested.

**Be ready for tough questions** – If you can imagine it, you may very well be asked it. Make a list of tough questions that could be asked during an interview, prepare your responses to them ahead of time and practice your delivery of those responses.

**Never say “no comment”** – It is okay to admit that you do not know something and get back to the reporter at a later time with the information. It is not okay to say “no comment.” That one phrase can make it seem as though you are hiding something and can negatively affect the credibility of you and/or your organization.

**Don’t go “off the record”** – There is no such thing.



## HOW TO WRITE A PRESS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**DAY OF THE WEEK, MONTH, DAY, YEAR**

**CONTACT: NAME**  
**TELEPHONE NUMBER**  
**EMAIL ADDRESS**

**HEADING SHOULD STAND OUT (USE ALL CAPS, BOLDFACE, UNDERLINE, USE DIFFERENT FONT)**

*When Used, Subheadings Should Be Written in Italics, Capitalize the First Letter of Each Word*

**YOUR CITY, STATE\* (Month Day)** – Include as many pertinent facts as possible in the first paragraph or the lead of the news release, including who, what, where, when, why and how. Stick to the facts and establish your event/announcement as newsworthy.

Present facts in order of importance, starting with the lead paragraph. Details can be spelled out in the subsequent paragraphs, otherwise known as the body of the release. Write sentences that are short and to the point. If possible, keep the release to a single page.

Include some direct quotations from spokesperson, when possible.

While writing the news release, think about what questions a news reporter might pose concerning the information, and attempt to answer them in the release.

Have the news release typed, single-spaced or double-spaced, on one side of each sheet of paper. Use news release letterhead whenever possible. Type the contact name and telephone number in the upper right-hand corner of the first page, and the day and date in the upper left-hand corner of the first page, as indicated above.

To indicate that there is more information on a second page of a news release, type **"-more-"** at the bottom of the first page (see below.) Always type **"Page 2," "Page 3,"** etc. at the top of the next page. To indicate closure of the document, type **"###."**

**-more-**

## **How to Write a News Release/page 2**

Before releasing the document, obtain approval of the release from each person quoted. Also be certain that all names in the release are spelled correctly and that all titles and addresses are accurate. It is vital to check all facts and figures for accuracy before submission.

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**Editor's note: Use an Editor's note to bring special attention to important information. For example, "photo available upon request" or "complete study/document/ paper available upon request."**

**\*The following U.S. city names should stand alone (without state:) Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dallas (Texas), Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Seattle and Washington, D.C.**