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How to Make Your Opinion Everyone's Business

By Drucie Andersen
Strategic Communication Team

Take a look at a recent copy of *The Washington Post*. It's close to 100 pages. Of those 100 pages, only *two pages are devoted to editorials and op-eds. That's two percent of the entire paper. And, consider most of those column inches are already taken up by editorials by the paper's editorial writers, letters-to-the editor, regular nationally syndicated columnists, the paper's own columnists, the masthead, and an editorial cartoon!*

Space is precious on these pages and competition for placement is fierce. But, getting your story and your message out in op-ed section can be done. There are three things that are critical to remember about op-eds:

Be pitch perfect,
Know the word count, and
Timing is everything.

Your first—and biggest—hurdle is getting the paper to consider placing your op-ed. Convincing the editorial staff that your story is important means spending time crafting your pitch. Work with your communication staff to develop your objectives, messages, your statement of why it would be important for this paper at this time to print your op-ed and give one or two anecdotal stories or facts that make your pitch compelling.

In crafting your pitch, use the first principle of journalism: Put the news in the lead.

The second major consideration is: Know your word count. You will likely have the heady total of perhaps 325-350 words! If you don't stick to the word count of the paper, the editorial staff *will* edit. Don't ever put yourself in the position where the newspaper is editing your words for you. You might not like the outcome.

Finally, take your time. Crafting a strong op-ed piece is a process and one that requires careful thought and planning. Firing off a rapid response can offer a sense of satisfaction, but rarely does any good. If you do have to defend something the paper has published about you, consider writing a first draft and get all your anger out. Then toss it and begin to take the high road. In your second draft go back to the objectives and messages that you developed for the pitch. Stick with them—consistency is what makes messages work. It's usually more persuasive to readers. Plus, taking a shot at someone who buys ink by the barrel is never a good working strategy.

Throughout the process, always remember the old adage taught in journalism schools:

Tell them what you're going to say.
Say it.
And say it again.

So, to sum up, here are the steps to a successful op-ed placement:

- Be outraged, but let it go,
- Convene meetings to talk about strategy with your communication staff,
- Develop objectives, messages and a pitch,
- Study up on the editorial page group and try contacting them,
- Send emails and write multiple, multiple drafts of your op-ed, and
- Get everyone's approval on the content.

The point is that this can't take a week. You'll have much better success if you're patient and thorough.

Presentation Tip: **The Power of Telling a Story**

Want to make sure you immediately grab and hold your audience's attention during your next speech or presentation? Then, open by telling a story.

When someone tells a story the listener cannot help but form mental images of the person, the scene and the situation. Suddenly the spoken scenario becomes real to the listener. As the story unfolds the speaker has accomplished the most essential tool for capturing and holding their audiences' attention: They have mentally engaged the audience.

Here are few a “storytelling” tips that guarantee to capture your audience’s attention:

1. Immediately upon taking the podium or stage, pause, look at the audience, smile and begin telling your story.
2. The story must be relevant to the topic of the speech or presentation and should be delivered from memory. Do not read a story.
3. Stories can come from personal, real life incidents, newspaper and magazine articles, movies, television, etc. Give proper attribution if telling a story pulled from a published source.
4. Keep opening stories short—no more than 3 minutes.
5. Rehearse telling your story in front of others before delivering it during your presentation. Ask for honest feedback and take to heart the feedback you receive.

Try opening with a brief story for your next presentation. They are powerful attention-grabbers, no matter who the audience

Media Tip: **Just “flag it”!**

Have you ever given a phone interview and later asked, “Why did they print that? I gave them a lot of good stuff and they didn’t even use it?” Most likely you did give them a lot of good information, maybe too much. You probably thought the reporter would just pick out what was obviously most important. Can you minimize this confusion for next time? Yes. You can use a technique called “verbal flagging.”

In your preparation before the interview, identify your three or four key messages. Then, preface one with a statement like, “*The most important idea/point/task/decision/next step/ is,* (then fill in with an appropriate message.)” You just “verbally flagged” to the reporter that the next statement you uttered had more value than the last thing you said.

Here’s another one. “*The three most critical issues are, (then simply list them.)*” Reporters love ideas broken down into two or three key points. It makes your message easy to follow. More importantly, deliver a “flagged” message at slightly slower pace than you have been talking to the reporter. Why? The contrast in your vocal delivery makes it jump out more to the listener.

While you can never guarantee the reporter will use what you want, you can take more control of the phone interview. So, use “verbal flagging” and increase your odds that your message will get in print!

Latest Buzzwords

Next time you're browsing through the newspaper, be on the look-out for quotes with negative emotionally-charged words, otherwise known as buzzwords. Check out our latest findings.

"The Army is a long way from being broken and we're not on the path to breaking it."

-- Gen. Peter J. Shoomaker, in regard to all 10 of the Army's divisions surpassing retention estimates.

"I feel people are looking at me like I was born into money, like I'm some rich snob. You know, because you don't want to live in an old, dirty house, people think you're a prima donna."

-- a Chevy Chase, MD resident responding to local criticism about her "McMansion"-style house.

"It's never fun being the fall guy, and I'm not certain I'm being made to be the fall guy. But if being the fall guy gets done everything I want to get done, fine."

-- Former FEMA Director, Michael Brown during an interview with AP Radio prior to his resignation.

News from The Communication Center®

The Communication Center® is expanding our services to include a Strategic Communication Team. Made up of highly-qualified, communication experts, this group offers their personal counsel and consultation to clients around the country in the following areas:

Strategic Communications: Counsel on the development of a communication plan to include needs assessment, goals and objectives, message development and implementation.

Crisis Communication: Preparation for all aspects of a crisis situation including a crisis plan as well as professional in-the-moment counsel in times of crisis.

Communication Department Reorganization: Help with strengthening and staffing an effective and efficient communication operation. Ideal for new heads of communication.