

PREPARATION IS NO GUARANTEE THAT YOUR MEDIA EVENT WILL SUCCEED

If The Pope doesn't get shot... We've got an Event!

A colleague of mine tells a true story about a PR event that he managed several years ago. As an expert PR guy, his plan and execution were flawless, but the event received almost no media coverage. Here's that story.

In a small city in the Northeast, my friend planned a media event like none the area had ever seen. It was a perfect scenario -- great media draw, heavy hitters on the program, willing media, reputable client, good weather, limousine service and valet parking, and lots of catered food. The governor of the state was the keynote speaker, and numerous political figures (mayor, city council and even Norman Schwarzkopf) were inked to participate.

Upfront media promotion was extensive, including local radio talk show interviews, local newspaper and local community sponsorships through the usual Chambers and Civic Clubs - all were engaged.

Over five thousand personal invitations were mailed to local citizens, with two thousand confirmations. So far, it sounds perfectly wonderful.

As the event drew closer, all of the puzzle pieces came together. By all estimates, a good time would be had by all, and the event would achieve the desired effect, which was to get as many media to cover the event and gain vast amounts of INK, locally and statewide.

The magic day arrived; all of the dignitaries were dressed and ready for action; the guests were arriving and eating up a storm. To any onlooker, they were on their way to a great day and a successful event.

One small problem began to brew. There was no media anywhere in sight...no cameras, reporters, local news cameras - nothing. Even the diehard reporters who never miss anything were nowhere in sight. Quick thinking by my experienced friend brought out several staff members sporting "Press" badges using cameras with the longest lenses they could find, who wandered around snapping photos and impersonating the media.

By now, my friend began to make some calls to find out what was going on. Much to his chagrin, he was informed that Pope John Paul II had been shot just moments before and that all media had been redirected to cover the story locally.

Even though everyone present understood the grave situation, my friend was faced with a real dilemma. How to get the story told without any media to cover it. Even worse, what could he say to the client?

All was not lost. As a result of quick thinking and extraordinary post-event efforts, the event eventually gained some media coverage, and the client was placated. Using the photos taken and a follow-up press release, that was immediately sent to all media outlets, the story did receive coverage the next day.

But through this experience, my friend was exposed to the stark reality that he never really had control of the media event even though by the book, he had done everything exactly right!

This story simply points out that you just never know what is going to happen where the media is concerned. The best planning and execution in the world may not ever get you the desired INK you expect or desire.

Moral of the story: Always be prepared. Plan for glitches and make sure that you are ready to self-promote to the media (have good photos, a pre-written editorial covering the event, and friendly editors) to quickly blitz the media and ensure comprehensive coverage.

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