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4.2 MEDIA RELATIONS



WHY YOU SHOULD READ THIS CHAPTER?

Inform, inform, inform!

In the last chapter, we saw what branding can do for the sport and for your organization. We have also seen that successful branding relies on proper communication: Spreading the good news.

Branding is not only deciding on what basketball should represent to the people in your country but also communicating this message to the public. Good Media Relations will of course enable you to do this.

The creation of stable and transparent relationships with media and journalists is essential. Capitalizing on these relationships will ease your job by facilitating the promotion and visibility of your sport.

You need to constantly inform the media in order to control their sources. Instead of having them speculate and spread unreliable information around enable them to get information direct from the source, you! This chapter will tell you how to achieve this.



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1. Introduction

Working with the mass media is a very complex and time consuming task, but a very important element in the promotion of the sport and the general marketing strategy. Interest from Partners and Sponsors will only rise if public interest rises. In providing information to the mass media and offering co-operation to their professionals you will enter a very competitive field. Sports journalists are over flooded on

Interest from Partners and Sponsors will only rise if public interest rises.

a daily basis with oral, printed or electronic information, with invitations to press conferences and sports events, with agency news, and with the incredibly rich source of the World Wide Web.

a long lasting, trustworthy and fair partnership between your federation and the mass media. Too often the mass media is regarded as “enemy” or as “promoter”. Neither of that is their role. Journalists report on certain facts, because they believe it is interesting for their audience. And sometimes they comment and criticize on certain facts, not always to the pleasing of the sport’s stakeholders. That is part of their role and one has to understand, that controversy is a much better “seller” than harmony. Even the more important it is to make the journalists life easier and provide them with the proper information so that

The principle in the business should remain – inform, inform, inform!

However, the principle in the business should remain – inform, inform, inform! Certain rules should be followed in order to build up

the media doesn’t have to speculate or get your facts from another, maybe unreliable and imprecise source.

scope. We will try in this manual to give a generic recommendation of the do’s and don’ts. We are aware, that many of the advices might be already common knowledge, but hope that you still find the document useful and applicable in your case. We would also encourage you to comment on this document and share with us your experience and know how.

That requires human and financial resources and we fully understand that the financial possibilities vary heavily from federation to federation. So does the local infrastructure and the media landscape.

2. Communications Master Plan with Hierarchy of Objectives

According to a Master Strategy Plan, which is lately developed by more and more federations, in which you have defined your major objectives, you can develop a master plan for your communications policy. Important part of such a plan should be a hierarchy of objectives, because that will reflect on the resources you will have to put on their implementation. As the objectives may vary heavily from federation to federation it would be very difficult to establish a recommendation in this document, however, some objectives could be viewed as universal.

2.1 Event Information

Sport events are the soul and live blood of your organization. The schedule, the results and statistics of single games as well as the group and final standings are the fundamental content of your event information. You should aim to be always the first and most reliable source and thus obtain the status “official” for it. Schedule, results and statistics is content which, according to legal cases in some countries, not a media value which can be protected. However, you can make sure, that you control access to the official results and stats through your accreditation policy for your events and you



could take legal action, if somebody tries to use them in an unauthorized way. The results and statistics and their archiving it is a major asset of your organization and should be dealt with in all sincerity.

The information on events starts much earlier than with the first tip off of a national team game or a club or youth competition. You should provide the media with information on how your federation

The information on events starts much earlier than with the first tip off of a game.

decides on the assignment of an event, i.e. the bidding procedure, who is bidding, which body makes the final decision and when. This will create further interest in the lead up to the event. Connected to this is the information of the event schedule, which will also help the media on planning in covering the event. By informing the media on an

early stage, you could learn about possible clashes with other events. Another example of a two-way co-operation with the media.

2.2 National Team Programs Information

The international sports calendar does not allow the exposure of national team games as often and consistent as club and league basketball. However, with the exception of the North American countries there is no doubt, that the national team programs are the main promoters of the sport in any given nation. Print media coverage and television ratings in the past show the overwhelming interest, when teams gather to represent their country. We should take advantage of that and feed our partners with every possible information on that. Even if games of the national team may not happen too often, talk about the team could be interesting all year around. Nomination of the head coaches and the assisting national team staff, short and long term objectives of the team, interviews with core and potential players, training camps, invitational tournaments and games are just a couple of sample, which will keep the soup boiling on a 12 month basis. It is important to cover all age and gender categories without forgetting to put a priority on those teams, which will draw the biggest attention.

2.3 Clubs and National Leagues Information

Probably with the exception of North America, clubs and leagues in all age categories and different levels are the main backbone of the formation of the players. National leagues are usually also playing for a 6 to 8 month period and are therefore exposed to the media for that period. A strong national league normally guarantees and strong national team and it is vivid to inform about the league. Leagues might be run by separate organizations outside, but information on the league is a promotion of basketball and therefore a common goal of the federation and the league. Vice versa, the league will have a vivid interest in the success of the national team program. The same could be said for international leagues.

2.4 Player and Coach Information

In each of the 212 federations of FIBA the number of licensed players ranges between over 300.000 and 300. Obviously, one would like to have a good database of these players with the minimum information such as date of birth, place of birth, height and club. For some players there should be more detailed information such as biography, statistical data, home stories, photos etc. For that reason it is certainly impossible to treat all players equally. It is advisable to make a selection of players which



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you think could serve well as the ambassadors of basketball in your country and secure co-operation with them. These players should be made available to the media as often as possible and the players should know the responsibility which goes along with that, both on and off the court. Children and the media alike embrace idols and heroes and the selected players can be of tremendous help, if you want to communicate to the fan.

2.5 Rules and Regulation Information

One of the key roles of each National Federation is their regulative duty such as player eligibility, doping controls, appeals, sanctions, conflict ruling, referee education and nomination, and other administrative tasks. Unfortunately, the media tends to jump on these issues only in case of disputes or scandals. However, informing the media in the most transparent way on all the procedures and actions will make them understand more easily about your duties and underline your role as unchallenged authority for basketball in your country.



2.6 Special Projects Information

As many National Federations are government subsidized or are even part of the ministry for sports and education, they have a certain responsibility versus public health as well as educational and cultural goals of the given state. Many federations, their clubs and leagues start initiatives outside of the competitive basketball such as streetball, community programs, charity events, art contests in close co-operations with schools and universities. The media is generally very interested in these initiatives and the news sometimes leave the sports section of a newspaper and enter the finance section, local news section, feuilleton section, health care section or education section. The important message is that you do not only care about your sport, but all facets of your society.

A special project could also be a long term strategy with a flashy name (“Basket 2010”) in which you define your long term goals (number of licensed players, participation or certain result at a FIBA event) in a give time frame.

2.7 Partners and Sponsor Information

This starts with the simple announcement if a company is becoming your partner, and for the reasons why both the federation and the company have entered an agreement. A partner or sponsor will request inclusion in your communication chain. Access to your database, presence at events and press briefings are just a few examples of that requirement. Common projects like camps and educational initiatives will help both the sport and the company’s public standing. You should do everything to help your partners communication with the media for a long standing and healthy relationship.



3. Budget Planning

After establishing your master communication plan with all your prioritized objectives including the measures to implement them, you should start a budget planning. There might be hard costs such as printing, telephone and fax, external cost for layout or web design, but also soft cost such as office rent, salary, and office equipment. Often heard is -“we can’t do it, because we do not have the resources”- but many things can be done within your existing structure. Obviously, a full time press officer would be best, but alternative solutions are possible and very often practiced. Your budget planning will further help you to adjust or prioritize your objectives to your resources.

4. Media Environment and Mass Media Database

In some countries there is an incredible rich media landscape with over 500 daily newspapers and other print media as well as hundreds of television and radio stations. The number of professional journalists is often way above the thousands. It is very important that you clearly understand the media environment in which you are working. That includes the collection of the

It is very important to clearly understand the media environment in which you are working.

address details of all media outlets in your country as well as the contact name of the person who deals with sports, or, even better, with basketball. To build up a precise and complete media database can be an extremely time consuming and difficult task, but it is the

basis for an efficient co-operation. The “FIBA Organizer”, a software specifically developed for the needs of our national federations and available through our office in Geneva, will assist you in this task.

In some case, it might be also advisable to do personal visits to the media outlets. A personal contact to your key media is invaluable.

Once you have managed to enter all relevant information into a database (name of media organization, contact person, address, contact details including mobile phones and email). It is important to maintain and update the information on a regular basis. As you know, FIBA is sending out once a year a media questionnaire for the most important media in your country, and all the 2.200 contacts collected over the past 15 years can be viewed on fiba.com under the Media Guide section. You are cordially invited to use these addresses for your purposes. And we would appreciate, if you could inform us about mistakes that you may discover in the list.

5. Establish Communication Means

Once you have defined what you want to communicate and to whom, the third important question is how do you communicate. The strategy and mean of communication is again very much depending on the media environment and technology available in your country. Telephone, fax, email & web, and mail are the common means, and it is also equally important to decide on the form into which you provide your information.

5.1 Media Release

Official information of significant content, such as decisions from your Executive Board, ruling on disputes, doping cases, are best communicated with a Media Release. Brief (10 – 20 lines) and focused on the facts it will create the journalist’s interest on a certain subject and will hopefully encourage him to follow up and cover the news. Therefore, it is equally important to have the contact details of



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a person in charge from your organization on the media release, under which the journalist could call should he have further questions. It is not the goal of this manual to explain journalist techniques, but some simple rules should always be followed.

5.1.1. The Five “W’s”:

The most important part of the press release (like in any other news story) is the beginning. The lead contains the essence of the story and should involve the five key questions:

- Who will be/is/was involved?
- What will be/is/was happening?
- When will be/is/was the time of the event?
- Where will/does/did the action happen?
- Why – possible reasons for the action or the event?

These key questions should be answered in the first paragraph of the release. The lead should be as concise as possible, one sentence is preferred, two paragraphs are the maximum.

Taking the example of a media release about a positive doping test that would translate to:

- Who (name of player including details, name of organization that conducted test and name of organization and their key members, that decided or will decide on sanction)?
- What (name and details of detected substance)?
- When (all relevant dates and hours like date of test, date of meeting of deciding body)?
- Where (all relevant details on location of event)?
- Why (further details on the reason for the decision)?

5.1.2. Core Elements

Every release should contain one (or more) of the following core elements (examples in the brackets):

- Relevance (a recent decision).
- Seriousness (the injury of a player).
- Proximity (local, regional or national news).
- Public importance (the assignment of an event to a city or region).
- Drama (a three point shot from behind the middle line on the buzzer).
- Curiosity (the eldest/youngest fan).
- Controversy (the conflict between a coach and a player).
- Progress (the opening of a new arena/office).
- Love (a charity event or community initiative).
- Emotion (the award to an administrator, player or coach).

5.1.3. The Do’s and Don’ts

- Structure the information, identify the main objective and keep the story focused on it. The main objective should appear in the headline.



- Write simple, use simple active sentences.
- Avoid obscure jargon, not every reader is an expert.
- Be brief and avoid nouns – Cesar didn't write "After arrival and inspection of the situation, the achievement of victory was possible" he simply wrote "Veni, vidi, vici!" (I came, saw and won!).
- Fewer sentences per paragraph are more restful to the eye and easier to read.
- Stay objective and avoid commentary.
- Enrich your text with names and quotes.
- Use numbers and statistics.
- Use the public figures associated to your federation such as coaches, players and executives.
- Don't mention the name of your organization more than once in the text.
- Get your news out as quickly as possible.

5.1.4. Mechanics

- Use standard paper of specifically designed media release paper, letterhead should be used for first page only.
- If the release is more than one page, write "continue" at the bottom.
- Indicate the end of a media release.
- Each page should end with a complete paragraph.
- Use triple or double space between each line to give room for editing.
- Include a release date (and time if necessary).
- Indicate a release place (GENEVA, Switzerland).
- Give every media release a running number per respective year (15/2005).
- Include a contact person from your organization with telephone number and email address for further inquiries from the media.
- Follow up with key media to make sure that they have received the release and offer further assistance.

5.2 Media Information and Press Conference

News of a more complex nature which are released after a longer decision process and news which have relevance for several public figures in your national federation are better communicated in a press conference during which you could distribute a more detailed media information.

5.2.1. Example of an Occasion for a Media Conference

Let's say your national team has prepared in training camp with a 20 player roster for a big event and the day has come to announce the final team with 12 players. That is very interesting news for the media and at the same involves up to 30 prominent figures of your organization including the players, the coaches and the federation officials. This is an ideal occasion to invite the media to a press briefing (with a media release) where the head coach and the team captain could be more



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specific on the selection process, the progress of the preparation, the goals for the upcoming event etc. Following the briefing, you could make all 20 players available to the media for individual interviews.

5.2.2. Media Kit

In a detailed media information folder (also called press kit) you could provide detailed information on the players, coaches and the team staff, as well as the schedule for the following weeks and the event and other useful information such as accreditation form, and contact numbers during the event. Here is a check list for the content:

- Fact sheet – biographical data on all featured persons or events.
- Photographs – action shots or head and shoulders of personalities.
- Artwork – event and federation logos with precise color indication supported by digital files.
- Schedule of events and locations.
- Covering media release summarizing the objective of the media conference including quotes from the speeches.
- Text of any prepared speech.
- Gifts and souvenirs such as pins, stickers and pens.
- A business card of a contact person for further inquiries from the media.

5.2.3. Mechanics

Usually you start a press briefing with opening statements by the speakers, before you allow questions from the audience. A press briefing also allows you to meet the journalists personally, before a question everybody should be asked to identify himself with his name and the organization he/she is working for or a participation list with contact details should be placed at the entrance which will help you to update your media database. Here is a checklist:

- Written invitation sent out two weeks in advance with precise time, location, subject and attending personalities/organizations.
- Follow up on invitation by telephone 2-3 days in advance.
- Ideal date of media conference is the day before (for newspapers) or during a light news day (television).
- Facility should allow head table and backdrop, seats for audience, table for registration and distribution of media kits as well as enough space for television crews and photographers.
- Equipment could include microphones for head table and audience (wireless), and video or presentation equipment.
- If international audience is addressed, foresee consecutive or simultaneous translation.
- Brief all main actors of the conference in advance – order of the speeches, critical questions which might arise, who is moderating and introducing.
- Duration – keep introductions and speeches to a minimum and allow questions to the audience.
- Allow exclusive interviews after the conference has concluded.



5.3 Newsletter and other Print Material

Many people challenge the efficiency of sending by post print material such as newsletters, media guides, or yearbooks. We believe that especially in times of electronic communication it is still important to send something “touchable” to the media once in a while. Firstly, there is still a lot of media without access to the World Wide Web, secondly, high quality print with good images will reflect on the quality of work you are doing. Surely, the cost factor sets limits. It is important to know, that editing and production cost are very often lower than the mailing cost, especially, when you do regular mailings.

5.4 Web and Online Newsletter

The World Wide Web has revolutionized the work of journalists and those who work with the media. Faster, more and easy accessible information, not necessarily always reliable or good quality information flood the editing suites around the world. Still the medium has made our life much easier and we do not really have a choice to avoid this new communication mean. For the journalists, it is a new

Emailing information to the media is a very cost efficient way to get your information to the media.

research source and replaces quite often the traditional archives of publishing houses. For the sports federations it is an ideal tool to send time critical information such as results, statistics and standings, but it is also an ideal archive container. Furthermore, it allows us communicating directly with fan. Again, the budget

will set limits to the web presence. Maintenance of the web and keeping the information fresh and accurate requires sometimes more effort, than simply going online. We hope that the “FIBA Organizer”, special software which is available to you, can help federations in both respects.

Emailing information to the media is a very cost efficient way to get your information to the media. More and more journalists can be reached via email, and online media releases, and newsletters in PDF format, as well as daily news that link to stories on your website can be easily pushed to interested media.

6. Establish a Communications Policy

Equally important than the decision on your communication objectives, the creation of a media database and certain rules in establishing your communication tools, is the form and regularity of your contacts.

6.1 Regularity, Consistency and Personal Contact

It is not advisable if you stay silent for the most of the year and intensify your action just before and during an event. Regular presence throughout the year will also help to establish personal contacts. Besides personal visits at the media organizations and press conferences, where you could personally meet the journalists, it helps to intensify this personal contact, if you call up journalists on a regular basis. These calls could be follow ups on media releases, when you could ask if further information is required, or if you could be of assistance with the set up of interviews.

6.2 Mailings, Fax, Email, Telephone

It is further of great importance, which form of distribution you chose. Mailing information by post is very costly, but has certainly value in terms of getting the edge in times of inflationary online con-



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tent. The fax machine, which has been the main communication channel in the nineties, will shortly disappear and be replaced by email. The telephone is still irreplaceable, as it allows both partners to be more explicative and detailed. Every bigger story is always based on extensive telephone research.

6.3 The News Agencies

News agencies have the most important impact of the distribution of news on a national and international level. Many daily newspapers do not have the resources to assign journalist to specific sports and rely heavily on the material they receive from their national news agency, which they subscribe to. These agencies are a must on each media list and a good co-operation is crucial and very cost effective in your strategy. On an international level, the “big three” (Agence France Press, Reuters and Associated Press) have branches in almost every country in the world and it is advisable to get in contact with your local representative, if you want to assure, that your news go outside of your country.

News agencies have the most important impact of distributing news on a national and international level.

6.4 Media Commission

It might be advisable to create a group of experts who could help establishing a strategy and monitor the actions of your communications policy. You could invite professional journalist from all fields (written press, radio and television, photography) to learn about their needs throughout the year and during your events. They could also advise you with latest developments in the mechanics of the making of a newspaper or a television or radio show.

7. Content Creation

Almost as important as informing the media is to be well informed about all the news of your sport, but also general sports news and everything which could have affect on your activities. This is not only a

Almost as important as informing the media is to be well informed about all the news in the field of sport.

basis for creating your own news, but also being ready, if you are questioned by the media on certain issues. Big organizations create a clipping service in which all the relevant news are collected and distributed to their members and decision makers. Even with limited resources, you can easily create such a clipping service using online search tools. The big search engines offer a variety of possibilities to get the latest news via search keywords or in simply surfing the websites of the bigger media organizations in your country.

A well established network of reliable sources from your own family (board members, regional and local federation members, clubs executives, etc.) will further help “reading the story in advance” and receiving interesting stories. You could establish a group of network writers, who prepare stories for you on a voluntary basis.

If you have the resources you could hire journalists or specialized agencies to do the job for you.

Finally, it should be underlined, that all content you find on fiba.com or on one of the FIBA Zones can be translated to your language and used for your communication.



8. Language

Language is always a very sensitive issue, especially in countries where there is more than one official language. There are 212 member countries and almost as many languages, but Fiba.com unfortunately is offered only in English, and this is purely to financial reasons. We receive a lot of requests, why not French, why not Spanish? Why not Chinese? We would always face the tough decision, which would be 2nd, 3rd, 4th language.

It is obvious, that all information to your national media should possibly be edited in the official language(s) of your country. If you want to reach people outside of your country, or if you are not able to cover all your local languages, it might be an option to offer English in addition.



9. Media Services at Events

The sports events of your federation may have been one of the core objectives of your communication strategy. Therefore, the servicing of the media at these events is equally important. The media facilities like the press tribune, the press work room, the mixed zone, the game procedures such as timing of the press conferences and the availability of the players in the mixed zone will help to make the working conditions for the journalists as good as possible. It is recommended, that you establish a check list for all facilities, services and procedures applicable to the media for the better preparation of your events. Upon request, we will gladly forward the existing FIBA checklist to you as reference.

10. “No Comment” and other Mistakes – Crisis Management

As mentioned earlier, there is no better story than a story about something which went terribly wrong. In a survey carried out by the International Olympic Committee with big news agencies and newspapers, no news item by official bodies such as National Olympic Committees or Sports Federations have

The most important rule might be to be prepared for the media.

been classified by the media as more important than news on doping cases, disciplinary sanctions and the alike. Just try to remember which news from Athens 2004 have made the headlines in every corner around the globe? Was it the story of the 43-year old Birgit Fischer canoeist winning her third gold medal in her third consecutive

Olympics or similar positive stories? Or was it the scandal about the Greek sprinters, or the judges in the men’s Gymnastics event? Controversy will always prevail over harmony and success.

We can not offer a perfect recipe for crisis management. The most important rule might be to be prepared for the media. A crisis can strike any organization, any time. “No comment” may be the worst comment you can make. In opposite, credibility, availability and transparency might end your crisis much quicker, than trying to hide facts, which may erupt from other sources any moment anyhow. If you are



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not able to disclose information, let the media know the reason. Be the source of bad news, and not its victim. The basic principles always apply – be honest, tell the truth, never lie, do not mislead, be brief and simple in your answer, show compassion, and don't hide behind "no comment". If you just don't have the answer to a question, say, "I don't know", and let the media know that you will seek the answer.

The following checklist might help you to evaluate if you are prepared for a crisis:

Have you evaluated what types of crises could occur and which kind will have the most severe impact?

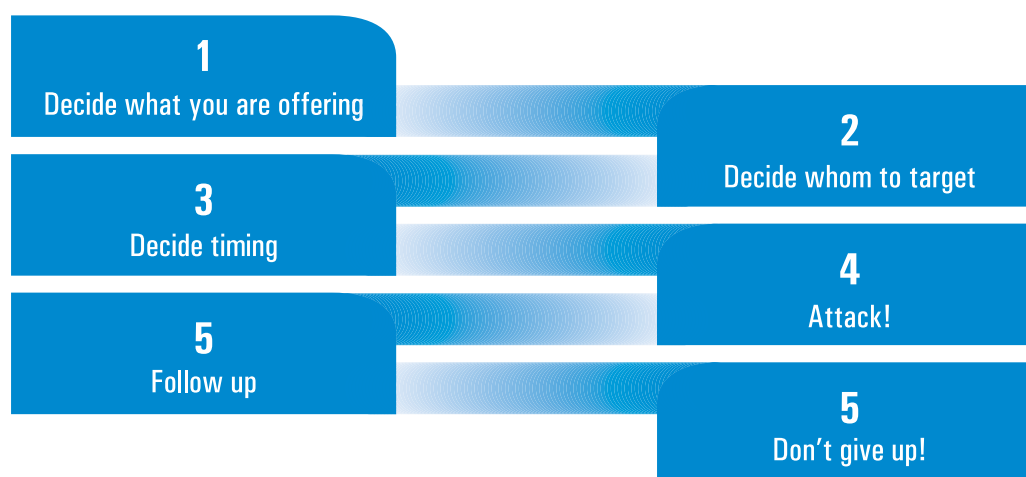
Have you discussed a "desired result" philosophy and whether a legal, economic or image result is top priority?

- Do you have a crisis management team?
- Do you have guidelines for internal information and official statements?
- Do you have a designated spokesperson and are you sure to speak with one voice?
- Has the spokesperson media training?
- Do you have a crisis management plan in place?
- Have you got press materials prepared and in the can?

11. Keep in Mind

As said at the beginning of this document, Media Relations are a very important part of your daily routine. Even if you are the best executive and administrator of basketball, you will not be able to get the message across, if you do not have a good strategy to inform the public about your activities. Your investment will pay off. Basketball is clearly the most popular indoor team sport, and it is certainly a global sport. There is no reason to hide behind other sports or their organizations.

We should approach the media always with confidence and vision. And in order to achieve our goals, we need to be constant, transparent and persuasive. Just like salespersons! So whenever you feel discouraged, just take a look at the graph below.



Good luck!