

COMMUNICATIONS FUNDAMENTALS

FENTON NEWS AND TIPS

1. HOW TO SECURE NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS
2. HOW TO PLACE STORIES ON TV
3. HOW TO MAKE REPORTS NEWSWORTHY
4. USEFUL WEBSITES FOR RESEARCH AND MEDIA RELATIONS

**To view online: <http://www.fenton.com/list/casestudies4.htm>

1. HOW TO SECURE NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS

Who reads those editorials in the back of a newspaper? Policy makers and their aides do, which is why securing favorable editorials on your issue is essential, particularly for campaigns targeting legislation. Good editorials also help establish an organization as an authority.

Fenton recently helped secure a series of favorable editorials for the Energy Future Coalition (EFC) and its energy policy platform in the Washington Post, New York Times, Los Angeles Times and USA Today. Here's how:

A. Do your research: Review the paper's stance and coverage on your issue first. The editorial board will appreciate your familiarity, knowledge and ability to discuss angles that haven't been covered yet.

B. Target the right paper and writer: Most editorial boards have one head editor and a handful of writers, each focusing on issues like the environment, health and foreign policy. For EFC, we worked with the appropriate editorial writers at the top 25 newspapers to find local angles.

C. Get to know the gatekeeper: The editorial board and some individual writers have assistants. Introduce yourself to them and get as much information as you can about the best way to approach them.

D. Send a formal pitch: This 1-2 page letter should clearly state the editorial position you want the board to take and communicate: -Timeliness and urgency: For EFC, we used the summer black-out and legislative movement on Bush's energy plan as opportunities to promote EFC's ideas for a "smart grid" and improving fuel economy. -Credible spokespersons: We offered meetings with EFC coalition members who were former congressmen and White House advisors. If your spokespeople are less well-known, establish their background and what makes them experts.

E. Provide persuasive documentation to bolster your arguments: We encouraged editorial boards to review an EFC-authored report detailing their recommendations and the solid analysis behind them.

F. Be persistent: Follow up with phone calls, suggest meeting dates and send background information by mail with a personal note. IT TOOK MORE THAN TWO MONTHS TO SECURE SOME OF THE EDITORIALS WE LANDED.

2. HOW TO PLACE STORIES ON TV

The New York Times is great for reaching the nation's elite, but when you need to reach the masses, the best way is through your local newscasts. Local TV is the number one news source for most Americans, so getting coverage means tailoring your news for that medium and making it easy to cover.

This is just what we did when we helped KIDS AND CARS launch a campaign urging Detroit automakers to install safety features to prevent power windows from killing and injuring children each year.

Our tactics included:

- A. Providing local angles through a report documenting deaths and injuries by city and state over the past 40 years.
- B. Providing video footage for local broadcasts to run in the background with their voice-over. It featured power windows slicing vegetables and fruits, and a child inadvertently caught by a closing window.
- C. Distributing the footage through a satellite uplink service so stations across the country could download it for their broadcasts.
- D. Directing local stations to get additional footage of the Washington, D.C. news conference from national news services and their network affiliates (CNN, Cox, NBC, Fox, etc.).
- E. Providing national polling data to show how much their viewers care about this issue.

These tactics helped us secure more than 600 TV news segments in 48 hours. The media saturation increased interest from other media, and multiple stories came out or are planned in the future.

3. HOW TO MAKE REPORTS NEWSWORTHY

"A New Study Released Today Shows That..."

How many times have you heard that sentence as a lead-in to a news story? Research reports are a newsroom's bread and butter because of the facts and new information they deliver.

Research is a powerful tactic for advocates seeking to make headlines and drive home their points. But don't assume that the facts will speak for themselves; planning and a smart communications strategy are essential.

Four Fenton tips for packaging and releasing reports:

- A. Set yourself apart: Reporters need to know right off the bat what makes your report unique and worth covering. Create interest in why your report demands attention by completing sentences such as "This is the first study of its kind to..." or "This report is the most comprehensive look at..."
- B. Prepare an executive summary: Make the reporter's job easier with a short summary of key findings right up front, along with recommendations or analysis. This may be all some time-strapped reporters review.
- C. Localize, localize, localize: Having a local angle can make or break a story. You'll significantly raise your chances of making headlines if your report includes state-, county- or city-level data. Even better, use your data to make rankings, such as the "top 10 most polluted cities in America."
- D. Image is everything: Break up text by illustrating your data with bar graphs or pie charts. Also consider "side bar..." of real-life stories that give life to dry statistics. For example, a report on the health care crisis for America's poor could feature a case study about a single working mother raising three children who becomes homeless because of the hospital bills from treating her breast cancer. People are motivated by emotions, not facts.

4. USEFUL WEBSITES FOR RESEARCH AND MEDIA RELATIONS

Save time and strengthen your own communications and research with these free Internet resources:

<http://abcas2.accessabc.com/ecirc/index.html> Searchable site with up-to-date circulation figures for newspapers, magazines and trade publications in the US and Canada.

<http://nationalpriorities.org/database> Offers data on socio-economic needs and federal expenditures, allowing activists to create customized tables, graphs and charts by region.

<http://www.pollingreport.com> An independent, nonpartisan resource on trends in American public opinion.

<http://www.opensecrets.org> or <http://www.campaignfinance.org> Helpful for researching political contributions.

<http://www.lyinginponds.com/allcombinedpi.html> This tracking of partisanship by major syndicated columnists can help your pitching, especially when you don't know their slant or frequent political targets.

<http://www.diverseopinions.com> Diverse Opinions seeks to cultivate and promote people-of-color perspectives and provocative commentary on politics, society, arts and commerce. They hope to develop regular contributors for syndication into mainstream publications.

<http://www.rocketnews.com/search/index.html> Rocketinfo scours 5,000 web sites for current news and information. It retrieves news articles and stories (such as AP, CNN and the Washington Post) for up to five days.

<http://www.poynter.org> Reveals the scoop in the journalist world and lists different events/conferences.