

Working with the Media

Media coverage is a powerful tool to build awareness for your tennis initiative. Whether print, online, broadcast or social media, you need to use the media to reach the largest audience possible to promote your goals and objectives. Media outreach can play an effective role in showcasing tennis as a lifetime sport for everyone and, more importantly, how tennis will be a positive force in your local area.

BEFORE YOU CONTACT THE MEDIA

Meet with your committee and allies to formulate the specific and focused initiative and story that you will present. You may want to review *The Case for Tennis and Developing Your Advocacy Project* to prepare you for contacts with and submissions to the media. The key is to go in with a story, not an idea.

For best results

- Designate a media coordinator who will develop and implement a media strategy, and who will act as the bridge between the media and your organization. The media coordinator should approve any material that goes out to ensure a consistent message, including social media.
- Create a contact list of reporters, editors, bloggers and broadcasters, especially those who cover sports, health/fitness and community affairs, or those who have a connection to tennis (i.e. if they play in a local league). Include email and phone numbers, and if possible, the area each covers. Find out the preferred method of contact for each individual. Consider following key media members on social media.
- Be ready with details about the name of your initiative, names of your allies and funding sources, details on your action plan, the project's cost and current fundraising efforts, the initiative's local economic impact, and the "who, what, where, when and why" of your initiative. The "why" may be the most important—the story here must be a strong message about the physical, social and mental health benefits of this lifetime sport.



- Make note of your key messaging points, such as: tennis facilities can serve as a safe haven for kids after school; tennis can offer opportunities for youth; tennis provides a better quality of life for all and helps to improve schools and communities; tennis contributes to community and economic revitalization.

TIP: While good coverage can help your organization, you should be prepared if the coverage is not what you expected. Have a rebuttal messaging plan in place.

TIP: Consider creating an app specific to your initiative. An app can alert your donors and friends about upcoming events, fundraisers, or fundraising progress.

THE STORY PITCH

Communicate why the story, issue or event is important and relevant today. Include human interest stories. Reporters are interested in hearing about how tennis has made an impact on a particular person's life, and how they are looking to give back to the community. You can also give statistics on how tennis can change the community economically.

Connect with the media whenever you have news to share, such as: when announcing your tennis campaign or project; when a new supporter comes on board with your initiative; to report on fundraising progress; when you have achieved your goal or significant steps toward the goal; when there is a public ceremony about your project (i.e., the completion of a tennis court facility or new lighting in the public park).

Email is usually the preferred method of contact for members of the media, but whether by email or phone, be clear at the start of the conversation why you are contacting them. Be conscious of a reporter's time and whether they are on deadline. Be prepared to answer questions from the reporter. If you do not have the answer, tell them you will get back to them. Always call or email when you say you will, and send a thank-you.

If you haven't already sent press materials, releases and fact sheets, have them ready to be emailed directly after the conversation. Always keep a log of your calls.

TIP: Make sure you and your media coordinator's complete contact information (email, phone numbers, address if necessary) is on all press releases and material—and also in your email signature. Make it easy for the media to get in touch with you.

TIP: It generally is best to reach out to newspaper reporters and editors in the morning, as stories are generally written from mid-to-late afternoon. Sundays are often slow news days.



IN-PERSON INTERVIEWS

To prepare for an interview, write down two or three message points you want to communicate. Keep things simple, communicating your action-plan story points. You may want to consider taking a partner or colleague with you to the interview, who can help remind you of topics or details.

During the interview, make sure to:

- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer.
- Use the other person's name in the conversation.
- Be patient and answer what you may think are obvious or awkward questions—a reporter may not know a lot about tennis.
- Talk slowly and clearly so you will not be misquoted. Few reporters can write as fast as you speak.
- Nothing is “off the record.” Never say anything to or around a reporter that you don't want to see in print, online, on the radio or on television.

After the interview:

- Thank the reporter.
- Leave your printed materials and information with the interviewer.
- Write a note or email thanking the reporter for their time and interest in your story.

ONLINE

If your story is printed in a newspaper, or appears on the radio or television, it will most likely be posted online on the publication's website, too, but make sure to double-check with the reporter or editor that that is the case.

Online-only publications and blogs that focus on community affairs, public policy or physical fitness are good places to pitch your story. You can generally find email addresses for online reporters and bloggers on their websites or from their bylines.

If you have presented at a public meeting, or to a non-profit group, your story may also appear on their website. Find out from the organization if you can provide the information that will be posted, or have an opportunity to review the material before it is published.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is an effective and low-cost way to publicize your organization, cause, event, or project. It is also a useful tool to drive traffic to your other digital platforms, such as your website, blog, membership-management system, and social media.

Today, social media is essential for gaining attention and credibility among a broad audience. If organizations and causes do not have a presence on social media, they may go undiscovered, especially among younger demographics.

It is quick, easy, and free to set up social media accounts for your organization or project. The first step is gaining an understanding of the different platforms (also known as channels), the audiences they attract, and the type of content that works best for your needs.

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Here is a quick overview of the major social media platforms:

- **Facebook** is the social channel with the most critical mass. Over 79% of internet users log in to Facebook, with an average of 1.15 billion daily users worldwide. It is by far the most popular social channel.

There are Facebook Pages & Facebook Groups. A “page” is like a newspaper or magazine in that it pushes out news; think of it as a one-way presentation. A “group” is like a book club in that it encourages conversation and dialogue with and between followers.

The Facebook algorithm rewards content that is engaging. This means the more dialogue your content produces, the more people your posts will reach, therefore making your campaign more effective. You can purchase ads to boost your range or target a specific audience. In Facebook posts, you can insert a live link to longer form content that is hosted on your website or in another location. Facebook also allows you to set up events and invite your followers to attend.
- **X (formerly known as Twitter)** has 336 million monthly users that research shows tend to be younger and more highly educated than Facebook users. X users also tend to be early adopters of emerging technology, thought leaders, and media types.

X content is a very short form. Posts that include photos or videos tend to have higher engagement. Live links to content hosted elsewhere, such as a blog or website or article, can be inserted into X posts, making it a great platform to drive traffic to longer content hosted on your website or articles written about your organization or project.

“Hashtags” are key words or phrases preceded by a hash symbol (#) used to index information on X posts, making them more easily discoverable. Identifying key words and phrases for your organization and affiliated activities is important and can help create more reach and engagement for your posts. Hashtags originated on X but have now been adopted for use on every social platform.

Tagging people and organizations in your posts is a great way to target people and groups with your messages and increase engagement. If a person or group is tagged in a post, they will be more likely to open it and share it with their followers.
- **Instagram** currently has 650 million daily users and attracts a younger demographic. It is focused on short-form visual content, including both still images and videos.
- Live links cannot be inserted into Instagram posts. You can, however, point followers to the link in your Instagram bio to drive them to your website or content. Hashtags are critical to Instagram posts and help followers search for and find content that is relevant to their interests.
- **YouTube** has more than 1.3 billion users and 30 million visitors a day and is the second-largest search engine behind Google. YouTube is great for video content, both in long form and short form.
- If your organization generates a lot of video content, you can create a personalized YouTube channel to host it. Links can also be generated for content on YouTube, allowing you to insert the link into emails, websites, and Facebook and Twitter posts.
- **LinkedIn** is a professional networking site with 367 million registered users that is primarily business-oriented. Users tend to be highly educated with higher household incomes, and seek to network and share information on specific topics with other professionals. You can host articles on your LinkedIn profile as well as join groups where you can post news about your organization, cause, or project.

- **Blogs and Vlogs:** A “blog” is a discussion or informational website, often written in an informal, conversational, diary-type style. A “vlog” is a blog in video form. Regularly posting to a blog or vlog will inform your key audience about your organization’s or project’s latest developments.

Creating a blog is easy. Two things are required: a blog host, which is a company that stores and delivers all of the blog content files, and blogging software, such as WordPress, Blogger, or Medium. Blog posts can be from a single author or from multiple authors.

Vlog entries often combine embedded video (or a link to video) with supporting text or images. Increasingly popular in recent years is live video broadcasting on social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram.

- **Survey Monkey** is not a social media channel but is a great tool for aggregating feedback and insights from constituents, which is helpful when building a case or demonstrating support. Survey Monkey is free, simple to use and can be integrated into both email and social media, increasing the odds of getting larger sample sizes.
- For more information on Social Media Platforms, check out the blog post at Sprout Social <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/new-social-media-demographics/>.

HINTS & TIPS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA SUCCESS

- Choose a short, recognizable, consistent name for all your social channels. Less is more. Shorter is almost always better for account names, posts, videos, and hashtags.
- Ensure there is someone in your organization or on your board of directors with social media expertise. The social media landscape is in constant flux, so it is important to keep an eye on the latest trends in order to optimize your impact.
- Utilize your board members’ contacts and circles of influence. Most or all board members will have personal accounts through which they can invite contacts and share content.
- Create a “content calendar” for your social media. A content calendar is a way to plan and organize upcoming content to avoid scrambling to post something at the last minute. List dates and times of key events, campaigns and activities. Add newsletters, photographs, and other information that is useful and interesting to your followers. A content calendar makes it easier to collaborate with others, helps allocate resources effectively, and assists in determining content quality.
- Follow a 3-to-1 ratio—make three posts that provide helpful information or useful content for every one post that is an “ask,” such as a contribution or attendance at an event.
- Make your content mobile-friendly! Most people access email and social media on their cell phones.
- Make posts and information visually interesting and exciting, with a clear call to action. Engaging content will get shared more often and will reach more people.
- Keep information succinct. More images and fewer words works best on social media. You can link to your website or blog for longer content.
- Include your social channels on your website and business collateral, such as brochures, letterhead, business cards, and email signatures.
- Consider investing in social media. Most of the social channels have an advertising program for which a fee is charged based on usage. If you have an event or a fundraising campaign you’d like to boost, it may be worth allocating some funds toward advertising or promoting posts.
- Use hashtags and tagging posts to increase engagement and expand reach for your social media efforts. Remember to keep your words and phrases short, simple and consistent.

SOCIAL MEDIA: JUMP IN NOW!

Social media is constantly evolving. Don't be intimidated or hesitant to participate because you don't feel like an expert. You will gain important insights about your constituents as you build a relationship with them through your social initiatives. Jump in with a growth mindset and be amazed at the results.

PRESS RELEASES

In most cases, you and/or your media coordinator will be sending out press releases to the media. Journalists receive many press releases daily, so try to make your headline (and email subject line) as attention-grabbing as possible.

Here are some tips for writing a successful press release:

- The first paragraph communicates the most important information and the main idea—the who, what, where, when and why.
- The following paragraphs should discuss the details.
- Include quotes in the press release from people directly involved in the event or project, clearly identifying the speaker with properly spelled names and titles. Only include those who have given approval to be quoted, and include their title and affiliation.
- Include your (and your media coordinator's) complete contact information on all press releases.

POST-COVERAGE TIPS

Always write a thank-you note to journalists or reporters who believe and understand your story and covered it.

If inaccurate information happens to be included once a story has been placed, do not overreact. Contact the media person you were working with, calmly acknowledge the mistake and ask for a correction. If the publication made the mistake, look at it as a chance to get additional coverage.

