

Unit Introduction



A well-seasoned public affairs officer used to tell new public affairs officers that the news media are a lot like rain from a military perspective in that they are simply part of the environment. You can't change them, you can't control them (although we try) you can only plan for them and try to think ahead of them in much the same way that an infantryman or pilot plans for weather.

In reality, the job of a public affairs officer is very much like that of a meteorologist, except that the subject of our study is not the weather, but news media. So, in regard to media training, the intent of this course is to make you a qualified "media-ologist" so you can help your commander and your organization operate in today's media-intensive environment.

Unit Introduction

This unit of instruction is designed to build upon and reinforce other media relations units in Functional Area I -- The Nature of News, Guidelines for Release and to some extent, Crisis Communication.

This unit will cover the basics of the news media as a business and address some of the practices and techniques of media relations.

To be a successful public affairs officer you must have a basic understanding of how the news business functions. With this basic understanding, you will be able to more effectively communicate your organization's goals and missions through the media to the American public.

Objectives

1. Define the characteristics of various media (e.g. radio, television, print, Internet).
2. Explain the public affairs implications of the 24-hour news cycle.
3. Identify basic elements of a media relations program.
4. Identify methods for maintaining media relationships
5. Given a scenario, determine the most effective medium for release of information.
6. Given a scenario, determine the appropriate course of action to address media errors in fact.

Unit Overview

- Guidelines for good media relations
- Characteristics of media
- Your media relations program
- Guidelines for working with the media
- The news cycles
- Mediums available for dissemination of news and information
- Purpose of selected media
- Correcting media errors
- Evaluation

Why Engage the Media?

Why should the military even bother to work with members of the media? After all, most reporters know so little about the military and they make careless mistakes covering military stories. Why not just bar the door and refuse to talk with them?

In fact, these sentiments reflect a common attitude among many members of the military. While the attitude is far less pervasive than in the immediate aftermath of the Vietnam War, some members still don't trust the media to accurately report on the military.

That's where you come in. As a PAO, your job is to show that there are a number of good reasons to work with the media, whether to showcase your organization or to explain an accident or other "bad-news" story. Working with the media not only benefits your organization, it benefits the nation, as well.

The Public's Right to Know

The public has a right to know what we do for a couple of reasons. First, as you learned in Guidelines for Release, Americans have a right to know because they pay the bills. American taxpayers pay our salaries, buy our ships, tanks and aircraft, and enable us to operate around the world.

Second, an informed public is the key to democracy. We rely on the news media to tell the American public what its military does, whether in wartime or peacetime.

In short, working effectively with the media enables you to gain and maintain public support. Most people base their opinion of the military upon what is reported by the news media. They will like or dislike us, trust or distrust us by what the media report on us. By working with media, we help inform Americans about their Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. It's useful to keep these concepts in mind because you may need to remind some senior officers and staff of them on occasion.

Benefits of Engaging the Media

There are several other reasons why it's to our benefit to work with the media:

Good for unit morale: Media coverage shows service men and women -- whether stationed stateside or forward deployed -- that Americans care about them. World War II war correspondent Ernie Pyle once said that the average soldier will willingly go through his share of hell, provided "he is getting some credit for it, and that the home folks know about it."

Helps recruiting: We always need more recruits. Public affairs efforts extend the reach of recruiting advertisements to many more potential recruits.

Influences decision makers: Media coverage about the military lets Congress know we're doing our jobs. In fact, media coverage helps maintain the force strengths, budgets and weapons systems. Of course negative media coverage can have the opposite effect.

Media Realities

Being able to work effectively with reporters and editors requires that you understand certain basic realities of the news business.

Competitive: The media are a highly competitive industry covering a spectrum of technologies, interests and backgrounds. They are neither a one-dimensional group nor do they represent a single viewpoint.

Narrow "news holes": The news hole is the amount of time or space devoted to news or editorials. If it's a busy news day, your story might be given short shrift. Conversely, a slow news day may be seen as an opportunity for you to get better coverage of your story.

Computer Networked: Journalists have instant access to mountains of information through the Internet. Computers instantly access written news stories and even video footage. If you or your boss have ever said or done anything that has attracted media coverage, it can instantly be retrieved.

Media Realities

Market-driven: Shareholders, owners and publishers drive the news executives and editors-in-chief to build ratings and market share. The resulting pressure is reflected in the assignments, resources and coverage of popular issues. News has evolved from "what you need to know" to "what you want to know." New York Times reporter Scotty Reston once said, "The media may not be able to tell you what to think. But they certainly can tell you what to think about."

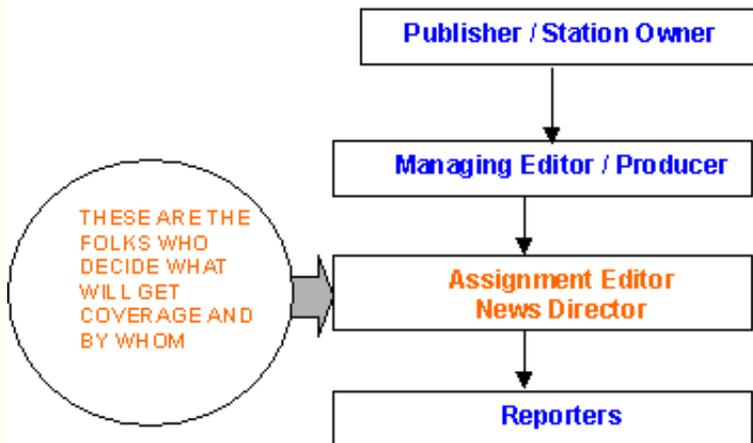
Influential: The media's power emanates from its ability to 'set the agenda' for policy makers, politicians and other elite members of society. Those who know how to access the media and communicate effectively, share in that power.

Cost cutting: Large media conglomerates are increasingly in control of television, radio and print outlets, thereby exerting pressure on the bottom line. Journalists are being asked to do more with less. This means reduced resources and increased expectations for more stories with a faster turn-around rate. Journalists are under mounting pressure to 'get the story,' provide 'instant analysis' and meet ever-tighter deadlines.

Media Chain of Command

Regardless of the medium (print, radio or broadcast) there are some common characteristics of the news media. The various news organizations share common organizational structures and news-gathering processes. You need to understand their "chain of command" and know how they operate in order to work with them effectively.

Media Chain of Command



Each of the various types of news organizations have a common structure, though the titles may vary.

Senior Media Officials

The Publisher/Station Owner is the senior person in the local chain of command. This person's position is similar to that of the commanding general. In fact, he or she and the commanding general are probably about the same age, probably share many friends in the local community, are both opinion leaders and are considered VIPs in the local community. Although you should know who these people are, you will probably not deal with them frequently.

Managing Editor/Producer is the person responsible for the content and packaging of the newspaper or broadcast. This person is probably equal to the senior PAO at the installation level. The managing editor or producer is instrumental in determining the relationship between your command and the news organization, even though you will not necessarily deal with them very frequently.

Editors and Reporters

As we move further down the chain, we start to get to the people you will deal with on a daily basis.

Editors: On the print side, there may be several layers of editors, depending upon the size of the news organization. The most common are the metro, business and entertainment editors, each of whom has his or her own assignment editor. There are also copy editors, but you will probably not see or talk to them much.

On the broadcast side, you have the news director and the assignment editor. Together these people decide what stories will be covered and who will cover them. Obviously, they are very important people to know if you're trying to get news coverage. You need to have a good working relationship with these people.

Reporters: At the bottom of the chain are reporters. These are the individuals who will speak to you directly. They will gather the facts, take the pictures and determine, in large part, the details of the actual story. Their levels of experience and professionalism vary considerably. It is your job to help them get it right by providing them with timely and accurate information.

Maintaining a Proactive Media Relations Program

An assignment editor is only as valuable as his or her Rolodex. What that means is, an assignment editor with no contacts is of no use (in top 25 markets). The same could be said of PAOs. If you don't know the assignment editor/planning editor at all of the TV stations in your market, or the managing editor and editor in charge of military stories at all the newspapers in your area, if you don't know how to get yourself on the radio...you're setting yourself up for problems later on. By having a good working relationship with all (or most) of the media outlets in your area, it can help you get your message out, buy time on a developing story or possibly even give you a "heads up" about negative stories. But....how do you do this?

Maintaining a Proactive Media Relations Program (Cont)

- When you arrive at duty station check the clip files and file tapes to see what's been done in the past.
- Check with others in the office to see if they have made contacts with local media and expand on that.
- Make a list of all media outlets and the person you need to speak with to pitch a story.
- Visit the media outlets and meet the people you are actually talking to and ask them what you can do for them, e.g. faster response time to queries, more information on the military in general. While there, also ask what they look for in a story to cover.
- Every once in a while call just to chat. A good time is after the noon program. Be the person who offers good ideas and new angles for stories.
- Read newspapers (all kinds) and watch local and national news. Look for ways to localize stories to your installation and pitch that to the media. For example: You notice there's some good combat camera b-roll from Iraq on DIVIDS of a Marine patrol in a hostile area. You have the urban assault course at your base. Invite media outlets to come out to the course, show them around. Let them talk to a couple of soldiers, like one who trains and one in training. You have just given me a story I might be looking for, or maybe it's something we will come back to later, or maybe media doesn't want it at all, but you have made the pitch and that helps the relationship grow.

Reflective Question: Think of some examples of national stories and some local angles you might pursue, based on your duty station.

Interim Review

- Q. Why have a good media relations program?
- Q. What is a news hole and why should you care?
- Q. Who is the head honcho of a newspaper?
- Q. Who are you most likely to deal with on a day-to-day basis?
- Q. Who will you see face-to-face?
- Q. How many types of reporters did we talk about?

Interim Review

Q. Why have a good media relations program?

A. Right to know, morale, recruiting, influence

Q. What is a news hole and why should you care?

A. Space available for stories, if it's a slow news day you may get more coverage

Q. Who is the head honcho of a newspaper?

A. The publisher

Q. Who are you most likely to deal with on a day-to-day basis?

A. News director/assignment editors

Q. Who will you see face-to-face?

A. Reporters/photographers

Q. How many types of reporters did we talk about?

A. Six (Sensationalist/ideological/well informed/follow the pack/columnists-commentators/community)

Guidelines for Working with the Media

Your reading assignment in "*On Deadline*" lists ten personal attributes that will help you be a more effective public affairs officer when working with the media. They are:

1. "Be cooperative. Recognize that news people face constraints and expectations that most of us never dream of and if you can say "yes" to a request for information or an interview, you are making their job much less of a hassle."
2. "Be accessible. Don't even think about restricting your availability to the media to regular business hours. Give out your home, cellular phone and pager numbers freely, and encourage reporters and editors to use them. If your organization is a 24-hour-a-day operation and someone else can handle routine inquiries after hours, it may be perfectly acceptable as a matter of policy to direct those routine media calls to that person. But, if the reporter calls you first, don't ask him or her to jump through hoops by saying, "Why don't you call so-and-so"; give the answer yourself and suggest that the next time the reporter call the person on duty."
3. "Be direct. When you can't help a reporter, say so, and explain why. Don't be defensive, don't sound pained and overburdened and above all, don't display arrogance. You should be genuinely sorry that you can't help a reporter, because it is a missed opportunity for both of you."

The Ten Guidelines for Working with the Media (continued)

4. "Be fair. Don't give opportunities for in-demand interviews only to certain media outlets and not to others. If your commander is suddenly thrust into the spotlight, for example, and agrees to just one block of time for an interview, don't offer that time only to the news organization screaming the loudest."

5. "Be a resource. If you can't arrange an interview or answer a question for a reporter, whenever possible suggest someone else who can. It is always better to end a conversation with a reporter by giving him or her another direction to pursue instead of a dead end."

6. "Be an authority. Learn all you can about your organization such as its history, goals, mission etc. And learn everything you can about how newsrooms – both print and broadcast – operate. Your goal should be to inform news people of important trends as well as converse knowledgeably with them about their business.

7. "Be an educator. You need to educate two very different constituencies – your co-workers and media representatives – about each other. Hold workshops, informal meetings and media training seminars if appropriate to defuse distrust and misunderstanding."

8. "Be an advocate. It's sometimes tricky to walk that tightrope between two sets of clients – those within your organization and those in the media. Although one of your primary responsibilities is to present your organization favorably to the media, it is just as important to reinforce the value of the media to your organization."

Guidelines for Working with the Media

9. "Be a strategist. This is where "proactive" media relations comes in. Don't make the mistake of thinking that if you're not out there pumping up the organization's agenda every time you have contact with the media person you're not doing your job. Be selective in what you promote about your organization."

10. "Be a team player. This rule is really the internal version of Rule Number One. You'll find that becoming a team player is a great way to let your organization know how successful you are practicing the preceding nine rules. Seek out information from key people throughout your organization so that you can stay informed about critical developments. Keep others in your department who don't work in media relations apprised of your activities. What does all this lead to? Building relationships and credibility – both inside and outside your organization."

Six Categories of Journalists

There are almost as many "types" of journalist as there are news outlets. However, we are going to explain six categories as outlined in *Encountering the Media*. You can add to this mix editors, researchers, producers and editorial writers. Remember, if you know the reporter's background, approach and attitudes you are well on the way to being better prepared to work effectively with them.

1. Sensationalist: This type of journalist usually works for a tabloid-type newspaper, radio or television program. Their focus is on embarrassing personal or emotional issues. They rely heavily on unnamed sources and allegations and hype their stories to build an audience.



Ideological Journalists

2. Ideological: This type of journalist is driven by a personal, political or social agenda. They shape their stories to fit their personal agenda and tend to make the issue black and white.

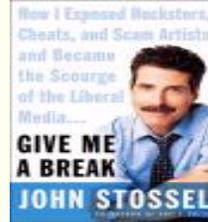


The Well-informed Journalist

3. Well-informed: This type of reporter relies heavily on knowledgeable sources developed over a long period time and are typically committed to getting the real story. They take pride in their knowledge and are generally well-respected by their colleagues.



Tim Russert NBC



John Stossel ABC

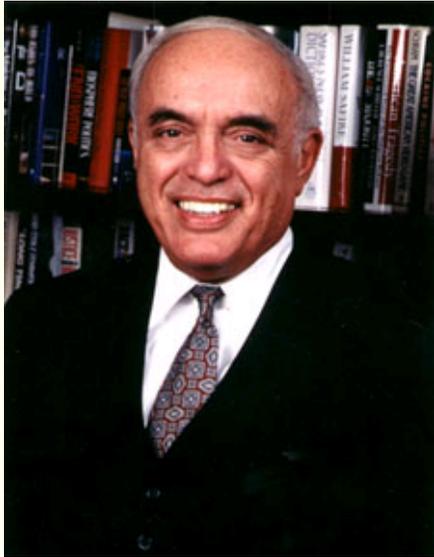
Follow-the-Pack Journalists

4. "Follow-the-Pack": Typically this type of journalist allows others to define the story of the day because they don't want to be seen as having missed the story. Their skill lies on doing a quick and easy story.

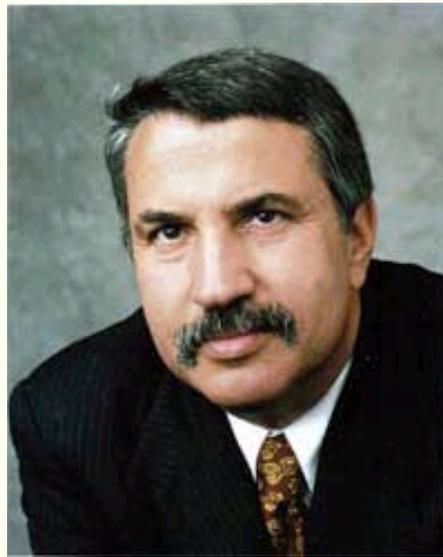


Columnist or Commentator

5. Columnist or Commentator: The important distinction to remember here is that columnists or commentators are paid for their opinions while the journalist is paid to provide a balanced and fair account of the story. As a result, columnists and commentators are frequently controversial. They typically aim for the "story behind the story." They feed on access and like to portray "grass roots" viewpoints.



Robert Novak - CNN Cross Fire



Thomas Friedman - New York Times

The Community Journalists

6. "Community" Journalist: Typically this type of journalist works for small town papers and small TV or radio outlets. They are concerned about "community" – sometimes at the expense of the "story." They are usually less demanding and less critical in their reporting.



Traditional News Cycle Elements

The traditional news cycle begins with a story idea or tip, often called a lead. As a PAO, you should generate suggested leads and story ideas and pass them along to reporters and editors.

If you have built up good working relationships with specific reporters, it's often more effective to give leads directly to them. They can then discuss the story with their editors and get approval to cover it. Otherwise, direct your story to the assignment editor who will decide if it warrants coverage and will assign it to a reporter.

The reporter who draws the assignment will have to do more research before writing the story. If you did not generate the story, this may be the first time you hear about it. You should ask about the story, the other sources and the reporter's deadline. Then you need to provide information a

Traditional News Cycle



The Traditional News Cycle

When the editor/news director is satisfied with the story, it must go through a process before it can be published or aired. For the print media, the process includes such things as type size, layout, page placement, etc. For broadcasts, such decisions could include where the story is placed in the order of stories to be aired, will the news anchor go live to a reporter in the field for a live report, etc.?

The traditional news cycle is almost complete with only one more element remaining. That is to present it. For the print media this takes the form of a newspaper, magazine, Web site, etc. For the electronic media, it takes the form of a radio or television broadcast.

Traditional News Cycle



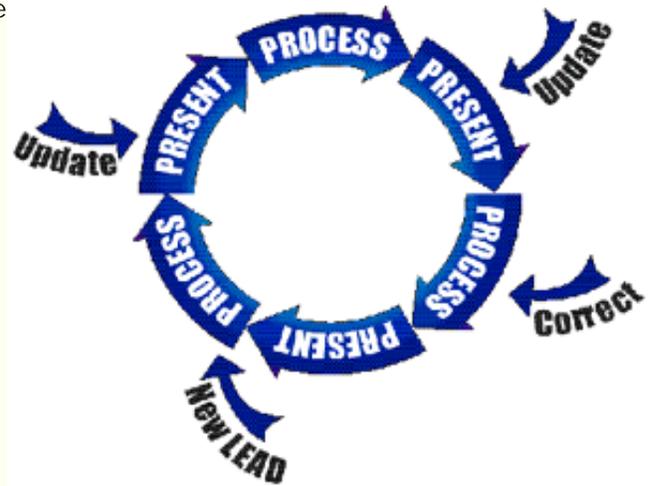
The traditional news cycle is now complete and the process begins all over again the next day.

The 24-Hour News Cycle

As little as five years ago, you could give the media all the available information and then take some time to gather new, updated information before the next production cycle. But the growth of electronic media and faster communication technology have greatly changed all that, along with other aspects of media relations.

Today CNN, MSNBC and Fox News along with many online Web news sites can run you straight into the ground with the continuous need for the latest information. Not only that, but the standards of journalism appear to have slipped along with the news media's need for speed. Today, some are more concerned with getting it first than they are with getting it right, thinking they will correct the story in the next update.

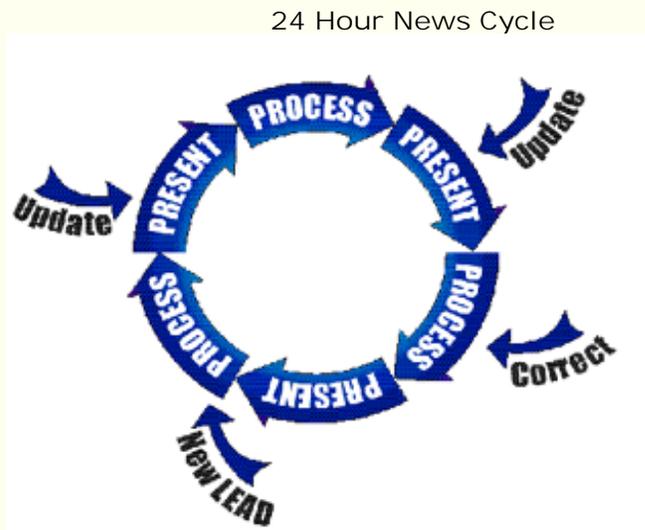
24-Hour News Cycle



The 24-Hour News Cycle

The traditional news cycle has been compressed so that news outlets hurriedly go from the initial lead to on-the-air presentation in a matter of minutes.

Think back to the television coverage of Hurricane Katrina when news anchors saw real-time video at the same time as their viewers, with no time for research, analysis or reflection. Those elements will hopefully be added in a follow-up or update.



As a PAO, you have to deal with both the 24-hour continuous news cycle and also the more mainstream traditional news cycle. The result is that trying to meet the needs of the news media has become much more challenging. It's a very fast-paced business and you need to understand how it works.

The 24-hour new cycle only has two elements in common with the Traditional News Cycle - process and present. While they are similar to what has

Picking the Best Medium

When you have gathered the facts, written and coordinated your news story, it's now time to release it to the media. Now you must decide to which medium you should release it to meet your objective. Having a basic knowledge of how the following media work should help you in making that decision.

Wire Services

Wire Services are IMMEDIATE and often the first to report breaking news. That's why the summary lead is so critical. It contains only the essential facts of a story. For example, on July 19, 2005 television stations broke into regular programming at 7:45 p.m. saying that wire services are reporting that President Bush's Supreme Court nominee will be John G. Roberts, Jr. The major wire services include:

- Associated Press, United Press International and Reuters
- Knight-Ridder and New York Times
- PR News Wire
- Sygma and Black Star Photo

These media service all other news outlets. While UPI was one of the great wire services of its day, producing such well-known journalists as Walter Cronkite, Eric Sevareid and Helen Thomas, AP and Reuters are generally considered the largest wire services in the world, distributing news, video and photo images to thousands of clients around the world.

Wire services are a cooperative effort of its members, which means your story in a local newspaper could go national if the paper is a member of that service, as are 90 percent of U.S. newspapers. Within the U.S. approximately 6,000 news outlets subscribe to the AP. U.S. Wire service subscribers can pick and choose what types of news stories they wish to receive -- all stories or selected categories (metro, state, regional, national, business, sports).

There are also specialty news services such as PR News Wire which distributes news to news media for business and other subscribers.

While AP and Reuters have photo wires, Sygma and Black Star deal exclusively in photographs.

Newspapers

Newspapers are the "informing" medium. They probe events and provide more in-depth coverage. Newspapers have a shelf life; so what you say in print will last for a long time. Most newspapers are built with 25 percent national news and 75 percent local concerns. When working with newspapers, the best way to get coverage is to sell the local angle.

Newspaper reporters, particularly the ones who have been working at a newspaper for some time, will look to build a more personal relationship with the PAO. Military beat reporters view the PAO as an important part of their job. The PAO should also build that relationship because the long-time military reporter may know more about what has happened at the base than the PAO.

Working with reporters from national newspapers -- *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal* -- may differ from working with local reporters. For example, they will likely not be as familiar with your installation or its operations. They may expect more information and may demand more cooperation from you and senior officials simply by virtue of the potential impact of what they write. Let's face it, a front-page story in *The New York Times* has far more impact than a story in your local newspaper.

Television

Television is considered the "involving" medium, stirring the emotions of the audience. People tend to be attracted to the action. It also has the largest audience. People like to get their news from television because it's easy.

While television is considered by many to be more superficial than print media, it's still the most trusted of the news media because of its perceived credibility. The public tends to take television news at face value because they can see it happening.

Even local television outlets have now adopted new technologies that make them more immediate than ever. Most moderate-sized broadcast outlets have access to microwave links that allow them to go "live" from virtually any location. News concerning the military can take place off base and may be broadcast to the public before anyone on the installation even knows what is going on.

Television can bring with it unique problems.

Shallow Coverage: Television is limited by time. Neither you nor your commander will likely be on television for 30 minutes. If something happens that is of greater news significance, an interview you conducted may not even be aired. That's why it's important to know exactly what key points to cover and say them succinctly.

Visual Bias: Only motion and those factors that make "good TV" will make it on the air. If your story lacks action, you are less likely to have your story aired.

The Television Effect: Sometimes the presence of a television crew is in itself news; the people who are present make it so. Have you ever seen bystanders start to gawk when a camera is around? Or have you ever seen a normally lucid person take on the appearance of a deer caught in the headlights when the lights come on and the cameras roll? Television is not a natural part of the environment. There is nothing normal about having blinding lights shining in your eyes, the big black eye of the camera staring you in the face, having a microphone shoved under your nose and then being asked a question.

Magazines

Magazines: Magazines are the long-range, in-depth medium. Because they are published on a weekly or monthly basis, they go into more depth on any given issue or story. For that reason, they are very influential and also serve as agenda-setters for other news media. For example, if there was a story about a military topic in a weekly news magazine, you could expect reporters to try to get a local story on the same issue from your base.

When speaking about magazines, we tend to think about Time and Newsweek. But think about the magazine rack at your exchange or bookstore. There are thousands of local, regional and specialty magazines, each with a specific audience.

If magazine reporters want to do a story about something on your installation, you can count on them being with you for a while. They want to get "inside" a story. Make sure what they are asking is worth the effort and that your service will get a worthwhile return for your efforts.

Magazines attract many freelance writers. Freelancers can also be a resource. Just take precautions to ensure your work with freelancers is worthwhile. General DoD policy is to require the freelancer to provide a publisher's letter of intent to publish before you grant access. Otherwise, making extensive arrangements could be a waste of your time. The same is true with book authors.

Magazines

Trade publications can also be classified in the magazine category. Military trade publications include Jane's Defense Weekly, Aviation and Space Technology, etc. Additionally, monthly publications produced by organizations such as Association of the United States Army, the Navy League and the Air Force Association are considered trade magazines.

These publications are directed toward one of our internal audiences but are considered external publications. They often expect more access than other external media, and if they don't have their requests answered, may complain loudly and in high places.

Radio

Radio is known as the alerting medium. It's usually the first to broadcast breaking new stories.

It's sometimes only a matter of a few minutes that radio can air a story because it is typically not as structured and "program-driven" as television. Often, you can plug into radio stations by using "actualities" or "beepers." You can facilitate getting the news out by taping a statement from your subject matter expert or commander and playing it for the station over the phone. Find out what equipment you need to make it broadcast-quality for your stations or let the radio stations tape your statement and use your actuality to add color to their reports.

Radio

Radio is segmented by demographics more so than any other medium. Think about the number of radio stations as compared to other mediums. Each has a very specific format -- news, rock, rap, jazz -- which has a specific audience. Use the right format to reach your target audience for a specific message.

Radio stations may have local programming; however, in smaller markets, much of the programming is from a larger network.

Many PAOs overlook radio because there are so many stations. We advise against that. Talk radio can be very influential, but is seldom monitored or used by PAOs. We encourage you to consider using radio to deliver news and information, especially to specific groups or audiences. For example you might publicize your open house on a rock station to attract younger listeners.

The Internet

One medium you can't overlook is the Internet. According to a recent survey on media use of the Internet, "Journalists now use the Internet as frequently and as comfortably as they use the telephone." Not coincidentally, both the number of Web sites among traditional print media and the amount of original content on those sites are exploding. Growth in the use of the Internet as a common journalistic tool for research and for distribution has happened over a remarkably short time span. You need to be aware of the power of the Internet and use it to your advantage. Here's some statistics:

- 93 percent of journalists are connected
- More than 40 percent of journalists produce Web content
- Internet is now the second most important resource (personal contacts are first)
- 42 percent of journalists use the Web to find new sources
- 45 percent of those journalists report using the Web more than once a day

However:

- 51 percent of media outlets still prefer paper-source information
- 49 percent of media outlets still prefer slide or camera-ready art
- 29 percent of media outlets prefer online submission

The Internet

The exploding use of the Internet by journalists has forever transformed the practice of public relations. E-mail and computer on-line information services and networks have great potential for use as a means for receiving and sending information and news, and for interfacing with the traditional news media. There are currently more than 4,500 news links across six continents. One of the first things you should do in your assignment as a public affairs professional is to explore the computer resources available to you. Then take steps to capitalize on the public affairs potential using computer technology.

News Release

Public affairs personnel have many tools available to communicate with the public through the media. Each of these tools functions best when used for specific situations or issues. For example, not every announcement warrants a news conference. In many cases, a news release will serve the purpose. News conferences should be reserved for major events of such importance that they will draw extensive media coverage or interest.

News release: The news release is useful for providing complete information about breaking news or updating news stories with more detailed information. It is designed to generate media interest in a newsworthy event or announcement. Use it sparingly and only when you have something truly newsworthy to announce. Your news release must be researched, written, staffed and released quickly to be of value.

Op-Ed and Letter to the Editor

Op-Ed Piece: The term Op-Ed -- Op(posite) Ed(itorial page) -- refers to the location where opinions and observations by regular or guest columnists should appear, usually on the page "opposite the editorial page." An Op-Ed article is an opportunity to offer your opinion on a given subject or take a stand on a current issue.

There are a few things to consider before writing an Op-Ed. First, read previous and current Op-Eds to get the feel for how they are done. You should also check to see if the newspaper publishes any guidelines for writing an Op-Ed. Usually Op-Eds have a word limit (typically 750 words) and the subject must be a current issue. Don't use it as a means to attack an individual or organization, or to question a reporter's technique. If you decide an Op-Ed is appropriate, you should clearly state the issue, offer appropriate background information and then suggest any actions that may be necessary to correct the situation.

An Op-Ed can be an effective way to communicate your position on a given subject, but you need to stay in your lane and address only those subject areas you are qualified to discuss. For example, your commander could certainly address the installation's economic impact on the community, but it would be inappropriate to discuss international diplomacy.

Letter to the Editor: The purpose of a letter to the editor is to correct a serious inaccuracy. If you need to send a letter to the editor, follow the rules (most newspapers publish their rules on the same page on which such letters appear). If the issue is of significant concern to your organization, it should be signed by a senior official, such as the organization commander, to give it the credibility and weight it deserves. A letter to the editor should not be used to point out minor errors, insignificant misquotes or what you perceive to be biased reporting.

Media Seminar, Backgrounder

Media Seminar: These seminars are typically held to communicate highly technical and complex material to the media. In most cases the reporters who attend such briefings are usually specialty writers in such fields as science, medicine, technology, finance, etc. If you plan to conduct a media seminar, make sure you have the best subject matter expert(s) available to address the material thoroughly and with credibility.

Backgrounder: This is an issue-oriented paper written and designed to provide detailed understanding of a complex policy or issue. It is typically one- or two-page paper that provide context, background, chronology and explanation to support a media event.

Background Briefing: A background briefing is for selected reporters, usually held in conjunction with a major announcement or event. They are usually conducted on a not-for-attribution basis immediately prior to the media event. The reporter, however, can use the information to guide him or her on the story. Be careful that whatever you say does not contradict what your command says publicly on the issue.

Media Briefing: A media briefing is designed primarily to provide the media "fill in" information between news conferences or other events. This is normally done by the spokesperson, not the major news-maker. The opportunity for questions is usually limited; tell the media in advance so expectations will not be unduly raised.

News Conference

News Conference: A news conference is typically used to provide important news and information to the media in a single presentation. Before calling a news conference, make sure the issue is worthy of a news conference. If you are introducing a major piece of war fighting equipment, a news conference is probably an appropriate way to get the information to the media. However, calling a news conference for a mid-level change of command will probably be met with little to no media attention.

Why conduct a news conference?

- To talk about a newsworthy event
- To focus media attention
- To save time, cutting down on numerous individual media interviews
- To get the story out to multiple media outlets simultaneously
- To avoid accusations of favoritism to a certain reporter
- To explain a complex matter

News Conference Preparation

Preparing for a news conference

- Make sure it is a newsworthy announcement
- Arrange room appropriately for television and radio equipment
- Make sure telephones and electrical outlets are nearby
- Don't provide lavish food or liquor. Coffee, tea, soft drinks, water and snack food may be appropriate refreshments
- Send out a media advisory 24-48 hours in advance giving notice of the broad subject of the news conference. Be sure to include the date, time and location for the event, as well as any special instructions for attendees
- Provide contact name and numbers for confirmation of attendance
- Prepare a media kit containing fact sheets and other background materials
- Contact assignment editors; confirm the media attendance in advance and follow up with telephone reminders the day before the news conference. If remote newspaper, radio or television stations can't send a reporter, offer to set up a telephone or video conference with the journalists
- Provide broadcast-quality video to television reporters, showing footage illustrating the issue or announcement
- Record the news conference to have an accurate record of the event
- Prepare an opening statement (no more than five minutes) with built-in sound bites or quotes
- Assign a PAO (or other spokesperson) to make introductions, direct reporters' questions and conclude the conference

Editorial Boards

Editorial Board Meeting: This is a meeting between a newsmaker and the editorial board of the newspaper, used to provide in-depth background on-the-record. The newspaper will often write a news article or editorial about the meeting. The intent in conducting an editorial board is to explain fully the context surrounding an issue in the news. Senior military leaders often use editorial boards to communicate their position on timely or sensitive, high-interest topics. Common editorial board topics include: transformation, sexual harassment, base closings, investigations, etc.)

The editorial board may include:

- The editor-in-chief
- The editorial page editor
- An editorial board member (writer)
- A reporter who covers relevant issues for the newspaper and
- The editor of the relevant section of the newspaper

Prepare for editorial meetings. Anticipate the issues and questions that may be raised. Have some bulleted notes and facts, but don't read from them. Prepare an informal five-minute introduction, then open the meeting for discussion. The PAO should record the meeting for future reference.

Public Affairs Products

We've examined several avenues you can use to deliver information to the media and the public. Now let's examine some of the specific products you can use to make your communication efforts more effective. The products can range in complexity from simple fact sheets to satellite media tours.

Fact Sheets: Printed information on specific issues or weapon systems to help reporters understand the basic facts and background.

Media Advisories: Commonly used to announce an opportunity for media to cover an event or story. Its purpose is to generate media interest in your event by briefly explaining its significance. You also need to provide a point of contact and any other information the media might find helpful in covering your story. Media advisories should be sent out at least 24-48 hour prior to the event. This will normally provide assignment editors sufficient time to assign a reporter to cover the event.

Photo releases: Used when you have a quality photo with time-sensitive news value that doesn't necessarily require an accompanying story.

B-roll footage: Background or stock video footage. Such footage must be high quality, in the proper format and delivered on time to be of value. It may be helpful to check with the news director on submission requirements. The B-roll, in television terms, is stock footage, crowd shots and aerial shots used to cover the reporter's narration and to help the viewer understand "the big picture." Most major news outlets have a policy against using B-roll from outside their own organization unless the footage is unavailable.

Press kits: A folder containing a collection of news releases, fact sheets, photos or video footage designed to help reporters tell a more thorough story. Most often, press kits are issued in advance of an event or program to expand coverage or publicity, or are provided to reporters at news conferences and other events.

Feature stories: Profiles of interesting individuals, units or operations. Typically the material in a "feature" is less time-sensitive than in news stories, so it can be used anytime by media outlets. Well-written and interesting features are usually welcomed by media in smaller markets where news outlets do not have the resources to cover many topics.

Public Affairs Products (Continued)

Video News Releases (VNRs): Video of an event or operation, usually produced by internal information assets and delivered to media outlets for their use. In general, if a story is newsworthy, broadcast media will cover it themselves. Sometimes, however, they do not have the resources and will run your video to cover the event. Your VNR must be high quality and delivered on time to be useful.

Public Service Announcements (PSAs): Video or audio productions provided to broadcast outlets for use as filler for which no charge is made. PSAs are most often used by recruiting services. PSAs can be used to promote any community service program or event, and are usually 10, 30 or 60 seconds in length.

Biographies: Brief summaries of the experience and credentials of key personnel within your command. It is often helpful to include the person's photo in the biography.

Questions and Answers (or FAQs – Frequently Asked Questions): A paper containing answers to frequently asked questions. This technique helps reporters understand the basic issues and avoids wasting time at the media event. Q&A documents should not be confused with public affairs guidance (PAG), which is for internal use only.

Public Affairs Tools (Continued)

Conference Call: A telephone linkup involving key personnel within your command and journalists at various locations. Essentially, the same as the editorial board except by phone. Conference calls can also be conducted using Internet, Satellite and Video Teleconferencing (VTC) technologies as well as.

Media Availability Session: Arranging to have a newsmaker available for interviews in the vicinity of the event such as before or after a speech, ribbon-cutting ceremony, etc. Make sure your subject matter expert is aware of the media availability and is able to respond to questions.

Media Interview: Usually an on-the-record conversation which could include one of the following formats:

- Print interview – by telephone or in person
- Radio interview – by telephone, in person, or in a studio (possibly with a host and other guests)
- Television interview – on location or in a studio

Public Affairs Tools (Continued)

Satellite Media Tour (SMT): An SMT can be conducted from a studio location to multiple local TV stations (or networks) worldwide. The tour consists of a series of one-on-one television interviews with the news anchors and program hosts in each market, thus allowing the newsmaker to tailor the message for each location.

Appearance on Talk Shows: Newsmakers have the potential to reach a large and varied audience. Talk show appearances should involve topics with broad appeal.

Handling Exclusives

What is an "exclusive"? An exclusive is a reporter's request for information that no other reporter has asked for. It can involve a major or minor story. Most services allow reporters to work on exclusives, but you are obligated to provide the same information to other reporters if asked. The reporter should be made aware of this policy to avoid misunderstandings.

By their very nature, interviews are exclusive in term of quotes and statements, but not in content if another reporter requests it.

There is a distinction between minor and major stories. For minor stories you can protect the reporter's exclusive until a similar request comes in from another reporter. However, exclusives are never honored for major stories. The services must release information on major stories to all media equally. The public's right to significant news transcends the right of a single reporter who first asked for the information.

The Rule of First Inquiry

The Rule of First Inquiry is intended to assist PAOs in implementing the basic policy of equal treatment of media. It normally applies to a minor news story of limited interest. It also pertains to a major story at its earliest stages, at a time when it may appear to have limited potential for intense coverage or widespread public interest.

When only one news media representative has requested information of obviously limited news interest, that information may be provided as "an exclusive."

The fact that such information has been provided to a reporter is not to be divulged or volunteered to other reporters. If, prior to answering the reporter making the first inquiry, substantially similar inquiries are received from other reporters, the first reporter will be so informed. None of the inquirers will be told the identity of the reporter or news media that have made similar inquiries.

Media Ground Rules

Before entering into any sort of media interview, it is important to establish the ground rules under which the interview will take place. Some of the most common ground rules are:

On the record: Everything you say can be quoted and you can be named as usual or otherwise negotiated in advance. For example, "According to Major Smith, the investigation is still under way." DOD policy is that the military is always on-the-record and exceptions are risky.

Off the record: The reporter agrees to take information from a protected source without writing a story or using the information in any way. This, however, does not prevent the reporter from getting the same information from another source. As a general rule, if you have to provide it off the record, you probably should not be talking about it. If you don't want it out, don't say it.

Reporters don't always agree on what "off the record" means. Some reporters say it means they won't use the information; others say it's "deep background." Some find it useful in getting information that they track down through another source.

On Background or not-for-attribution: Background information is provided to give a reporter a better understanding of some issue, incident or event that you are not able to speak about openly. It helps to establish a context for better understanding. It might be a new program or policy or it may be that you are trying to correct misinformation without speaking poorly of the original source. Background information is usually attributed in vague terms such as "according to a Navy spokesman," "government sources indicated," or "a senior official said."

Deep background or "for guidance": A protected source who can't be identified or directly quoted, but from whom the information can be used by the journalist: "It is well known that within the DOD that this situation ..." In other words, you are pointing the reporter in a certain direction without revealing the source of the information.

Media Support Responsibilities



One of the unique responsibilities you have as a military PAO is taking care of the media during deployments. These deployments might be for an operational exercise, a contingency operation or an actual wartime operation.

You recently covered much of this material in the unit of instruction on Public Affairs and Logistics (unit 1-26).



The following is a review of your primary media support responsibilities:

- Accreditation
- Registration
- Travel
- Food, shelter, clothing
- Media escort
- Media pools

Media Accreditation

Accreditation is the process of verifying and validating that a person represents a legitimate commercial news organization. This means that accrediting governments or military organizations will physically verify the affiliation.

Accreditation requires reporters to show identification and affiliation before they have access to your operations. It will be required when extraordinarily careful media access and control is necessary. Accreditation usually isn't required during peacetime, but it could be required for special circumstances such as during a major exercise, deployment or contingency operation.

Accreditation can be difficult to perform in the midst of an ongoing operation, especially when deployed far away from the United States.

It is generally accepted that, when overseas, the decision to accredit news media is made by the host nation's government in coordination with the combined or unified commander. The U.S. military will attempt to avoid media accreditation unless absolutely necessary.

Media Registration

Registration is an accounting tool that lets PAOs know what media are represented in the theater, where they're located and their movements around the area. It is a much less stringent procedure than accreditation.

This information is helpful in planning and conducting media logistical support and transportation. Registration also identifies which news media have asked for military assistance and have agreed to the command's media ground rules.

Commands should establish emergency plans to implement accreditation/registration procedures in a contingency. The actual process may be accomplished at the public affairs office or at the media operations center.

Media Travel

Having media travel with your unit can dramatically expand their understanding of your service's mission, equipment and people. However, media travel requires advanced planning and coordination on your part. Consult DOD 4515.13-R, "Transportation and Traffic Management," which authorizes media travel aboard DOD-owned aircraft.

Commanders can provide credentialed media transportation on military vehicles, ships and aircraft whenever feasible. [Note it is DOD policy that four-star authorization is required for media embarkation or travel on military aircraft] In many cases, the news media will be dependent on the military for transportation support within the theater of operations, especially in remote locations. Taking reporters along on unit deployments, on ship and on aircraft training or orientation flights can improve coverage of your service's mission and the people who make it happen. Here are the governing principles:

- Travel must not conflict with available commercial carriers. If commercial transportation is available to the location, reporters should ordinarily use that service.
- When travel is part of the story, media representatives' travel is allowed on government transportation. For example: a story on pilot training is incomplete without the reporter going with the pilot into the skies. The only way a reporter is truly going to understand the mission and capability of the C-17 is to ride in one. The reporter who wants to cover the life of a sailor on shipboard deployment has to be on board the ship to cover that angle accurately and thoroughly.
- When travel is a part of your long-range public affairs plan, government travel is allowed. Ensure your commander, operations officer, logistics chief and other key players are aware in advance that the media will be transported. If media travel requirements are outlined and agreed to in the public affairs portion of the exercise plan, media travel will be much easier to arrange.
- If reporters need to be evacuated or protected in an emergency, the government may transport them without prior arrangements.

Food, Shelter and Clothing

Depending on where you are or where you're going, the media must be made aware that they must prepare for the appropriate climate and conditions. If they are embedded with your unit, it's generally accepted that meals, lodging and transportation will be provided.

Most of your daily interaction with the news media at your home station will not require you to house and feed them, but there will be times when your planning must include billeting support for the media. Unit deployments and exercises, contingency operations, naval operations at sea and war are examples of times when you will most likely have to provide some type of billeting support. The following general guidelines apply:

- Billeting for media is normally provided on a reimbursable basis when there is a daily charge for those services. This does not apply when media are embedded with military units at forward locations and on ships at sea.
- Media representatives are normally billeted as O-4 or GS-12 equivalents. Of course, if your home away from home is a tent in the middle of a muddy field in Bosnia, then the media get what your people get.
- Typically, the media will take care of their own messing and billeting needs unless you are hosting them for a media event at your installation or location.
- If you are hosting media at your installation, you would normally provide whatever special equipment is needed, such as flight suits for orientation flights, hearing protection, etc.

Media Escorts

The role of the media escort may be a topic of debate between the military PAO and the media representative. While the military PAO may see his escort duties as being helpful, the reporter may view him as an obstacle. Your job is to act as a liaison, but not interfere with the reporting process. Your mission is to assist the flow of information about an issue, event or operation and to help the media understand the situation so their coverage is accurate.

Escort responsibilities:

- Anticipate and provide a professional service to meet the media's needs
- Serve as liaison between the media and the forces in the field
- Be a guide for reporters covering a story away from the media center
- Enforce safety, ensure that reporters do not stray into restricted or hazardous areas
- Enforce ground rules

Media Escorts (Continued)

Media escorts will often not be full-time public affairs officers, so they may not be fully aware of their responsibilities. Members of the media center (or any other office assigning escorts) must be knowledgeable and trained in the following areas:

- Overall mission: Why is this event going on? Why is the reporter here?
What is the command's position on issues the reporter might ask about?
- Potential areas of interest of reporter: What will the reporters want to see? To whom will they want to talk?
- Physical restrictions: What areas are off limits to the media because of security or safety?
- Physical limitations: What is the health of the reporter? Does he/she have the proper stamina, clothing and equipment to go into certain areas?
- Ground rules: Escorts must know the ground rules thoroughly, including what to do if the ground rules are violated.

Media Pools

Media pooling may sometimes be the only feasible means of early access to a military operation or to remote locations. This situation is often driven by a lack of commercial transportation or where military transportation is extremely limited. Pooling is usually used when media interest exceeds space limitations. When 16 reporters show up and you have only four seats on the airplane, you may have to use a media pool. How do you do this?

First, be sure there really isn't enough room. Transportation may have priorities different from yours. You should coordinate in advance to ensure the news media are given a high priority on movement during an operation.

If a media pool is truly necessary, explain the situation to the reporters and let them decide who will go. The group usually has a senior reporter who will arbitrate in arguments and make determinations. Don't get involved in the "who-will-go" decision; let the media decide.

Check your service and command policies to see whether pooled media must sign releases promising to share their photos and stories. At any editorial boards or media briefings you host, consider discussing pools. Be aware that international media often have different ideas about pooling products. The Department of Defense National Media Pool will be discussed in greater detail in a later unit.

Evaluating Media Programs

No communication campaign, program or event is complete without evaluation. Evaluation is a measurement of your success or failure. This analysis should have nothing to do with how well your PA team manages the program; the goal is to learn how well the team communicated with its various audiences. Clearly, PAOs need to be accountable for what they do. Measurable results are paramount.

You cannot perform an effective evaluation after the fact or on the spur of the moment. Any effective evaluation of your media relations program must include the following:

- Output
- Outcomes
- Outgrowths

If you're only measuring one of the three, you're missing the boat. Evaluations run from the very basic to more advanced or sophisticated measurements.

Evaluating Media Programs (Continued)

Output: Level 1: How did you do at getting your messages out and having your messages actually appear in the media? This is the lowest level of evaluation. These are typically measured in column inches or minutes broadcast, but are not a very meaningful method of evaluation.

Example: Was your press conference well attended? How many media picked up and used your press materials? Were targeted audiences exposed to the key messages you were trying to get out?

Outgrowths: Level 2: -- How did you do in getting your audience to remember, understand, or pay attention?

Outgrowth measures describe and evaluate whether target audience groups actually received the messages that were directed at them, whether or not they paid attention to the messages, whether or not they understood the messages and whether or not they retained the messages in any shape or form.

Outcomes: Level 3: -- How did you do at getting your target audience to change their behavior, their attitudes or opinions?

These measures describe and evaluate whether or not the messages and themes led target audience groups to change their opinions, their attitudes or their behavior patterns as a result of being exposed to the information.

- Message use: Techniques include content analysis. How many publications or broadcast outlets used your message? Why or why not? Were your releases in the wrong format? Was the mail service too slow? Was the release considered newsworthy or of interest for the audience?
- Message perception. What message did the public receive? Is it the same message we intended to send? What do they think we said? Before and after research/focus groups.
- Message impact. What impact did our message have on the public? Did our release reach the intended audience with the same meaning you intended it to have?

Final Review

- Q.** What are some of the tools we can use to get our messages out to the media?
- Q.** In most cases what do we do when we see the media has gotten it wrong?
- Q.** What are we measuring when we look for a change in the audience's behavior or their attitudes?
- Q.** What is the informing medium?
- Q.** Why have a good media relations program?

Final Review

Q. What are some of the tools we can use to get our messages out to the media?

A. Fact sheets, news releases, media advisories, etc.

Q. In most cases what do we do when we see the media has gotten it wrong?

A. In most cases we do nothing

Q. What are we measuring when we look for a change in the audience's behavior or their attitudes?

A. Outcomes

Q. What is the informing medium?

A. Newspapers

Q. Why have a good media relations program?

A. Right to know, morale, recruiting, influence

Unit Summary

Establishing and maintaining news media relations is a critical part of the successful public affairs equation. As a PAO, you are the conduit of consistent, credible and timely information between the military and the public – through your relationship with the news media. Your relations with the media must be sound to ensure the American public is aware of and understands your service's mission, programs and activities.