



PR KIT

Chapter 1 Guidelines for A.D.S. Members: Working With the Media

NOTE TO MEMBERS: This chapter of the A.D.S. PR Kit and its accompanying samples are posted at the association Web site, www.diesel.org. Future chapters will be provided at the Web site for downloading and keeping for your files.

GUIDELINES FOR ADS MEMBERS: WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Every business or organization strives to project a positive image to its customers, the industry and to the community in general. You project your image to your customers in your everyday business dealings with them. But how do you develop a positive image within the community?

You can do it by taking advantage of opportunities that exist with the general media in your community — newspapers, local or regional business publications, radio and television stations.

WHY?

Why should a fuel injection shop be concerned about projecting a positive image within its community? For a number of reasons, not all of them related to business. No company exists in a vacuum and everyone lives somewhere. It's human nature to want your neighbors to like and appreciate what you do.

More important, things you do can affect the quality of life in your community, both symbolically and in reality. For many people, the image of anything to do with diesel focuses on large clouds of black smoke and pollution. Anything that can be done to change that image is worth doing. Is there anything from The Diesel Technology Forum that can add emphasis here? Maybe the black cloud is symbolic but we should be proud of the changing reality.

Finally, it's good business. The person who just happens to pick up the paper and read about your shop today might wind up being your best customer next week. We all assume everyone knows us. However, assumptions often have little basis in reality.

WHAT DOES NEWSWORTHY MEAN?

An old saying in journalism is that “dog bites man” isn’t news but, “man bites dog” is news. News by its nature focuses on recent or unusual events, which unfortunately are usually bad (or maybe that’s fortunate: when things like plane crashes and bombings aren’t news, we’re in trouble!).

But journalists are also always on the lookout for interesting stories not specifically tied to a particular event. Keep in mind that newspapers can’t run white space and radio stations can’t air static. Local news organizations are always looking for something to fill the holes.

Some subjects that a newspaper might consider newsworthy could include:

- Personnel information, including new employees, promotions or an astounding years-of-service achievement. This is the kind of information most likely to be used on a consistent, routine basis. (Note: retirements are generally considered newsworthy only in cases of top management or extremely long service.)
- New technology developments in diesel engine service (particularly as they relate to emissions).
- New developments in fuels, lubes and other technology, and how they relate to emissions.
- Things the average person can do for his car/truck to keep it operating cleanly and efficiently.
- Work you’re doing with a local municipality or government on community vehicles.
- Things your shop is doing to reduce pollution, emissions and other industrial wastes from its operations.
- Company milestones, such as a 50th anniversary, large renovation project, or company expansion.

HOW TO APPROACH THE MEDIA

Though the average newspaper, local business journal, local magazine or TV and radio station is routinely inundated with phone calls and press releases providing information and pitching stories, putting something down on paper is still the best way to get their attention. You might get some interest from a phone call, but unless it's something the reporter is going to rush right out and do now, there's always the risk he/she will forget. Or, as often happens, they get pulled out of their normal routine by a fire or some other happening.

Be aware of what the media uses from other businesses around town: they will likely use the same type of things from you.

Watch the other coverage they provide. If they run an article or two on some national subject (emissions, pollution or anything to do with engines), see if there's a way you can help them "localize" the story. Send them a letter or press release mentioning that you saw the story on such and such, and explain how you're involved with that subject and tell them you'd be happy to talk to them about it at their convenience.

Give the letter time to get there, and then follow up by phone. Address the letter to the reporter(s) you have observed covering these issues if possible, or address it to the assignment editor.

Some things to have ready in case they're interested:

- A brief biography of your company. Include a general written description of your operation, location(s), important people within the company, products, who your customers are and company history
- A general photograph of your operation (not the outside: something that shows people doing what they do). If you have a company brochure, some of the original prints used to produce the brochure would be appropriate.
- Camera-ready logos of your shop/company and the A.D.S. logo.
- Contact information: names, positions, phone numbers and e-mail addresses.

THE COMMANDMENTS OF DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

1. **Be neat.** Remember, in considering publicity, *everything* you do reflects on your organization. Misspellings, poor quality pictures or hard to read news releases all send an image of a poorly run company.
2. **Be precise.** Whatever media you select (radio, TV, newspaper) send your information to a **specific individual**. Don't hesitate to call and ask who it should be sent to – they get calls like this all the time and are happy to tell you the correct person. The smaller the media operation, the more chance you have of getting your release to run. That means often you have a better chance in a weekly newspaper than a daily; a better chance in newspaper than radio; and a better chance in radio than TV.
3. **Be patient.** Don't expect everything you send them to run. Local weekly newspapers and business papers will likely use almost anything you send them, but not always. It may come in the middle of a heavy news week or it may get misdirected. Don't get discouraged and stop sending them information if the first news release you send in doesn't run. There are many reasons why something might not have been used, but that doesn't mean they're not interested. If you keep the information flow going, they're more likely to notice you and use the material.
4. **Be sensitive.** *Do not ever* mention advertising as a reason the media should run your news releases. This perhaps should be the First Commandment because it's probably the one violated most often. This is a great way to not get your information to run. In newspapers especially, the newsroom and ad personnel tend to mix as well as oil and water. Telling a reporter or editor something ought to run because you advertise with them – which invariably sends them the message that you might stop advertising if they don't run your information – is begging them to relocate it into the circular file.

Remember, it's their decision on whether or not to use something in their publication or airwaves. They don't tell you how to rebuild pumps; don't try to tell them how to do their jobs.

5. **Be complete.** Whatever you do send the media, keep it short and sweet, but complete. Remember the average editor gets piles of these types of things every day.
6. **Be realistic.** Never demand to see the article prior to publication. While some trade publications have established review policies for technical information, as far as the general media are concerned, such pre-publication reviews by sources are often forbidden. Typically, there is not enough time for a review process, but beyond that, many journalists are likely to be offended by the request, because inherent in it is the

suggestion that you don't trust them not to screw it up. If it's something technical, explain it as simply and completely as you can and encourage them to call and follow up if other questions arise. Then, trust to their professionalism.

To make sure you're communicating well from the beginning, it's a good idea to have the best qualified person write the news release. If you feel uncomfortable doing it, ask around within your organization. There are frustrated writers everywhere. Use of company letterhead is okay. The format is newspaper style (even for radio and TV) and what you write should be written to that form. Briefly, newspaper style is "pyramid" writing: the most important items first and least important items at the end. The news release samples posted at the A.D.S. Web site with this chapter are examples to follow.

The best advice is to remember that this is not advertising copy.

7. **Be thorough.** How does a company brochure add to thoroughness of the news release? What about sharing technical bulletins? If you have a company brochure, send that along with the news release. Pictures are okay, black and white is fine – don't waste your money on color. But, if you do send a picture, make absolutely sure it is good quality or don't send one. Other than personnel announcements, if they are interested, they'll take their own pictures.
8. **Be appreciative.** If the media does use your press release, a call or note thanking them does wonders for their morale (99 percent of the people who call them do so to complain) and your standing rises with them. You may also establish yourself as a source: the next time they have a question about anything to do with engines, they'll probably call you.
9. **Be consistent.** If they do call again, don't ignore them. Remember, by initially sending your press release, you invited them to look at what you do. You asked them to do something for you and if they did it, it would be the height of rudeness to ignore them after they ran your information. It's a slight that would almost guarantee that they would never use information from you again (and you never want to cross people who buy their ink by the barrel). So, if they call you about a diesel fuel quality article or emissions or underground fuel storage, ***work with them.*** Instead of an intrusion, treat it as an opportunity to establish yourself as an expert in your field.

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