

How to annoy reporters

By Jessica Woolman.

Seventy per cent of content in newspapers is proactively generated. It comes from journalists and editors who received a good tip from someone with an interesting story. So how can the library get in the newspaper, and hopefully, do it without annoying reporters?

[Stephen Barrington](#), Manager of Communications and Marketing at Vancouver Public Library, gave a captivating presentation at the BC Library Conference on how to work with reporters – from the point of view of what **not** to do.

For instance, blame the paper for never including anything about the library, send them something the day before publication, or expect them to adjust to your timeline and schedule. Perfect examples of what you would **not** want to do.

Stephen offered light-hearted quips but was chock-full of advice and tips. One of his best tips was about making a good first impression that won't undermine your credibility. Don't expect a newspaper editor to care about your news item when you have ignored the deadline, sent them something irrelevant to their audience, or not given them any contact information in the first place.

The key points of his presentation highlighted CAPS: being concise, active, positive and short. This is often called speaking in "sound bytes," or 10 to 15 second bits.

Pay attention to word limits, publication deadlines and costs. Stephen outlined a badly written press release that was too long, and cost \$1 per word to send via the Canada News Wire. An example of where CAPS could have spared some money in the long run.

Above all else, give them what they want: news that is distinctive, unique, or unusual in some way. Anything that is the "first" of something, or the "newest" something could be newsworthy.

Once you have their attention, don't leave them hanging. Be prepared for all forms of media – print, television or radio. This means having images, sound, or video on the ready. Be able to speak in key phrases and give a "hook" for your message. Basically, you should be able to answer "Why should I care?" in one sentence.

With all of this in mind, it is clear to see how easily we can annoy reporters. According to Stephen, practice definitely helps; you learn the more you do it. So try being proactive and putting your message out there. But start at the top, and ask yourself what your message is, first.

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