

Making The Most of Your Media Exposure

By Larry Shenosky

Spreading the word about model rocketry isn't as hard as it might seem. It takes effort, some creativity, and knowing to whom you should direct your message. This article offers you some inside tips for getting coverage for your club. We'll focus on media attention before and during your next major launch.

You really have two goals at work:

1. Draw a crowd (and get some new members).
2. Expose the media (and thus the public) to model rocketry.

PRE-EVENT PUBLICITY

Recruiting new members for your local rocket group is easier when word of your next meet is spread by the mass media. Radio, print and television can be powerful supplements to the most direct way of reaching hobby enthusiasts: putting up posters in schools and hobby shops. The posters will spread your message to people who already are hobbyists... much like direct mail advertising is used in business.

The advantage of media coverage lies in its ability to reach a mass audience. Start to harness the media's power by examining you club's commitment to publicity. Do you have a public relations or media committee to handle the job of getting the word out? Good P.R. takes time, tenacity . . . and usually lots of typing! A committee of three means there is one person each to contact the print, radio and television outlets in your area.

Before you can contact the press, you need a list of the local newspapers. Be thorough and include major daily papers as well as their weekly suburban supplements. Be sure to check the phone book or library to make sure that you know about all the smaller community newspapers. Don't forget to look for monthly magazines in your club's geographic area. Supermarket shopper's tabloids and TV viewing guides often list community events to fill excess space between ads.

Once you're confident you have listed the available print contacts, start on the broadcasters. Local radio stations usually have one person who handles Public Service Announcements (PSA's). Radio's value to your club is that it reaches the age group you're looking for. Call the radio outlets in your area and ask to talk to the person who handles such announcements. Find out how much notice is needed and keep a note of the lead time.

Television is harder. Today, fewer TV stations maintain a public service department that produces PSA's for the local audience. If your local stations don't have a PSA contact, ask what department handles broadcasting notices of community events.

You might find local news departments with a noon or 5 pm newscast that has a feature called For Kid's Sake. Those stations have purchased syndicated rights to a community service campaign targeted toward children and their parents. Many such TV stations do a weekly feature called the For Kid's Sake Calendar where the goal is to list community events

suitable for family participation. Your rocketry club activities are just what they're looking for!

While you are calling the television station, learn the names of three key people: the Assignment Manager, the Weekend Assignment Editor, and the Executive Producer. Later, you'll see why these three people are the primary gatekeepers who can make or break your television publicity efforts. Compile a list of these three people for every local TV station that does news. The list will need to be updated every three months or so for all your media contacts.

Now that you have a master list of local media, you have some event planning to do! If you have an upcoming contest, you need to double - check your manpower on the flying field. The last thing you want to do is to be surrounded by 100 spectators and 3 TV station crews while you and your range crew fumble around looking for spare igniters.

Check the date of your launch against any type of community calendar you can find. Are you competing with a major local event such as a County Fair? Your chances for publicity are greatest when there is no significant event that might otherwise attract the attention of the local media.

Once you're satisfied that everything is ready . . . assemble a press release. Some tricks of the trade are:

- Make the releases short...no more than one page.
- Boldface the date and nature of the activity.
- Print or copy the release on something other than white paper. ALWAYS provide a contact person who is reachable during regular business hours as well as nights and weekends.

Releases should be mailed or delivered to each of the media outlets in enough time for the station to process the information. Send two releases to stations from which you want both pre-event publicity and day-of coverage. Your releases must be addressed to a specific person...usually the assignment manager for television news departments or the features editor for newspapers.

Releases that look promising are filed according to date...others are simply pitched.

Your goal is to get noticed. That's where the boldfacing and colored paper come in, since your releases is competing for attention with a few hundred others.

Once your releases are out, you'll have the urge to call about whether they were received. Don't! Newsrooms get zillions of such calls daily, and they end up damaging your chances. If you've done a good release, you'll see and hear notices of your event in newspapers and on radio.

A day or two before your launch, an assignment manager or features editor will leaf through

their press releases file and come up with a few stories to parcel out to the new reporters and photographers. If your release is doing its job, you'll get a call from a newspaper or TV news manager to set up the story. That's why it's important to have a phone contact during and after business hours.

Even if you get one phone call, you can employ some tactics the PR firms use. Call the newspaper feature reporter or the TV station Executive Producer. Tell them you don't want them to be embarrassed by missing your event because one of their competitors has called to set up the story. Be sincere about it and you'll stir their news gathering paranoia!

Another favorite PR trick is to deliver something to the newsroom that will generate talk about your event . . . like a ready-to-fly rocket! Make an appointment and tell a feature reporter or weekend assignment editor that if their news people bring the rocket to the launch, you'll fly it for them.

By the day of the event, your advance work is over. The media will either come to cover your launch or they won't. If they do arrive, have a PR committee member introduce him or herself and offer to answer any questions. For TV, offer to provide rocketeers who are glib and can "talk in 20-second sound bites". You'll end up launching a few demonstration rockets, so make sure you have something big and slow so the photographer can follow. Above all, let the reporter and photographer do their work without being pestered. You're the expert at rocketry. . . they're the pros at getting you to tell and show them what it's all about.

After you get coverage, a nice thank-you note to the responsible parties is in order. Don't forget the people back at the station or newspaper who helped you publicize the event. You might do well to note when you have a future event coming up so they can mark it on their calendar.

The media love rocketry because it's visual and unusual. Capture those elements in your contact with the media and you'll see just how easy it is to get coverage. Good Luck!

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Optimize Your Section's Free Online Promotion

From C.D. Tavares, NAR Webmaster

If you're responsible for an NAR Section, make the NAR web site work it's hardest for your club. It's effective, and it's free!

Thousands of modelers access the online Section Directory at <http://www.nar.org/NARseclist.shtml> every month. Some of them are looking for a club in YOUR area. Why make it harder than it has to be for them to contact you? Charter forms that we receive are sometimes lacking contact information as basic as a phone number!

Prospective members on the web will take advantage of the convenience of e-mail to write you immediately about your club. If your listed Section contact has an e-mail address, then provide it to us for your listing! If not, do you have another club officer on whom you can rely to handle "first contact" with prospects? Then include his name and e-mail address and we'll run them in your listing in addition to your official contact.

Does your club have a web page? Provide that, too! An effective web page can tell prospective members so much about your club that they won't even bother to phone or e-mail you - they'll just mail in an application and a dues check!

The NAR site also provides an "expanded" information listing in which a Section can provide details about its activities, its meeting schedule, its launches, and its HPR capabilities. Only a fraction of Sections are currently taking advantage of it. Is yours?

If any of the above items are missing from your Section's listing, here's how to get them online:

Take a look at the online directory to familiarize yourself with the type and scope of the information other clubs have submitted.

Have your official Section contact or other authorized club officer e-mail the information to: webmaster@nar.org for prompt inclusion.

When you fill out your Section renewal form each year, remember to supply the same information if it isn't already. Also, keep it up to date. The web master works from these forms every January to update the online directory.

Remember a minor effort spent on making your club accessible to the online modeler means more members, bigger launches, and a healthier treasury for your Section!

C.D. Tavares, NAR Webmaster

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