

How the Media Works

Federation of Irish Sports

Sport HQ, CityPark

November 27th, 2006

Presented by: Louise Parkes & Colm McClelland, www.newsagencyonline.com

IOA attendees: Martin Flynn & Marcus Geoghegan

The IOA Chairman and Webmaster attended an FIS seminar entitled “How the Media Works”. It was presented by two experienced journalists with a background in Equestrianism. Louise Parks is the equestrian correspondent for the Irish Independent and Colm McClelland is the Press Officer for The Equestrian Federation of Ireland.

The symposium was organised to give small sports, such as orienteering, an insight into the workings of the Irish media. It described the forces under which journalists operate and showed how we could maximise the exposure of our sport. Due to the presenters’ background, most examples were Equestrian based but many could easily be applied to other sports. The main differences between them and us are:

- They have about 10 times as many participants
- They have a full time Press Officer
- They have had the advantage of a huge controversy to drum up interest.

Many topics were discussed and the following is an effort to enumerate them.

What Drives the Media

Just as with any other person/organisation, when dealing with the media, it is important to know what they need from you. Once you know what information they need and when they need it, it is possible to provide it to them. Once you become a regular and reliable source of information, you are much more likely to have copy accepted. Some of the points that emerged are:

- All information **must** be up-to-date and accurate. There is no point sending results of a Sunday event to a daily newspaper on Monday. In fact, I would say that you should always upload results to o.ie on the day of the event too.
- It is very helpful to build up a relationship with a journalist within the paper. They are much more likely to publish material if they have an interest in the sport or know the source. You are also better off if you have a contact to send material, rather than just sending it to the sports desk.
- While the big 5 (GAA, Soccer, Rugby, Racing, Golf) take up 80% of the sports pages, newspaper editors still want as many sports as possible in their sports section as each sport covered may drag in a few extra readers.
- Trade and weekly publications are always eager for copy.
- There is massive potential to get coverage in local radio and provincial newspapers; they will *always* cover a local competitor who has done well. Always rewrite your story for each local media outlet to give the local angle. National media trawl the local media for stories.
- The media like attractive and controversial personalities. Use celebrities who are involved in your sport or who are friends with somebody involved in your sport.
- Sunday PM sports radio needs “dead-air” fillers, even during big events. We’ve all heard them – “So-and-so has just gone into the lead at such-and-such race”. There is no reason why orienteering results cannot be used. It’s not important that they are final results – provisional results are good too.

Press Releases

Before the symposium, I had pictured Press Releases as propaganda that you used to get across your side of a story. However, anything that you send to the media is a Press Release. They can be used to send Results, Announcements, Propaganda or even stories about some aspect of the sport or person involved in the sport.

In any case, there are several points to consider before sending a press release.

- If the sports journalist has no interest in your story then he will assume the public also has no interest. He will ignore any copy that is out of date or too long.
- The big five (GAA, Soccer, Rugby, Racing, Golf) get stories. Other sports get news briefs, so make it short and snappy.
- It is your job to tell them how big your sport is – you can't expect them to know what orienteering is, or how many take part.
- The example of the Equestrian press release was used to illustrate the standard format:
 - One line for the basic facts.
 - One line for background info.
 - One line to indicate that there is more to come (i.e., there is a story here).
 - Prove that your details are correct by giving the full results as well (1st, 2nd, 3rd + Irish positions).
 - Indicate if for “immediate publication” or “embargo until xyz date/time”. Journalists will respect this.
 - The example is available on request
- Know the birthdays and hometowns (and other biographic details) of all your Elite athletes. These are useful for tying together a release.
- For international events, name the winner, if it was not the Irish guy.
- If at all possible, **email** the Press Release **in plain text** (faxes and PDFs cannot be copied & pasted). Never attach anything – the email will be dropped.
- Always send pictures to the picture desk – not directly to the sports desk or journalist.
- Make sure the top of the email says who it is from.
- Don't waste time thinking of a headline, they will write their own. This is what sub-editors do.
- When you send in copy, follow-up with a phone call to make sure that the right person got it. If you have a photo, ask do they want it, send it to the photo-desk and then check that they got it.
- Accuracy; correct any mistakes with a follow-on email AND a phone call. Establish a reputation for accuracy.
- Concise copy; not long-winded; see example.
- Give a contact mobile number & email address.
- Speedy copy; the sooner your copy is in the more likely it is to be published and the more space you get.
- Find out if there is a journalist already assigned to your sport. Develop a single contact person in each organisation. Don't send copy to the sports editor, you will only annoy the sports journalist who is responsible for your sport.
- Always be contactable, even in the middle of the night, especially via mobile phone.

Why was my submission ignored?

There are many reasons why your material may not have been used. Just because it was not used this week does not (necessarily) mean that you are wasting your time submitting material. Do not get discouraged but do review what you are sending and when.

- *No Space or Time*; the sports editor is given a number of pages for his section which is based on the available advertising revenue for that day. The size of the sports section is nothing to do with the amount of news stories.
- *Too Late*; deadlines are not the same each day. Do not assume it is always 6PM; some days it might be 4PM. Ring and they will tell you today's deadline. Again, results are probably useless the day after the event.
- *Unreliable*; if you have previously sent in bad copy, you will be ignored for evermore.

Website

Orienteering.ie gives a lot of information for seasoned orienteers but for the media and, indeed, non-orienteers in general, it is sadly lacking.

- Website should be full of statistics and information. No fancy graphics on website, wastes time.
- The need for a website archive of past achievements of each competitor was stressed repeatedly during the seminar. Past achievements must be easy to find.
- Statistics should include past national champions, results from World Cups and World Champs for the past number of years. Junior competitions and Home Internationals are also important.
- Your archive must be simple, clear and current.
- Your sports' archive is a measure of your sports' success.
- Need biographical information on our elite athletes.
- Need information on orienteering in Ireland, history, International Orienteering ...
- Need a supply of good photographs that can be used by the media.

Baby Steps

- Make your sport credible. Magazine features are an ideal starting point.
- Use local radio and provincial newspapers. Eventually the national media will pick up on local stories.
- Example of the Irish Junior golf website was given as a very good site.

Athletes

- Athletes have a responsibility to promote themselves to the media and within their own sport.
- Journalists *love* quotes.
- School sports supplements in newspapers are good, but your copy should be about school vs. school competitions.

Photos

A professional Sports Photographer gave a brief talk on photographs. The information related to what to do with photographs, rather than how to take them.

- The definition of news is “something that people have never heard before”. The definition of a good picture is “something that people have never seen before”.
- Don't bother sending in low resolution images; must be at least 6 million pixels; high-resolution, **sharp**.
- Don't crop or manipulate your image, that is their job.
- Always send photos to the picture desk, not the journalist.
- Put the caption into the jpeg using Photoshop (or whatever software you use) and also paste it into the email
- If a photo is good, sometimes it will be printed quite large with a “thick” caption, where the story is told in a caption of 2 or 3 lines.
- In general, photos of prize-givings are dull. However, a local paper may like a photo of a local person receiving a prize.
- The photo does not need to show the sport, think laterally. Example given of a shot of legs dangling over the side of a sailing boat. Don't just record what happens.
- Never send in bad, blurred or uninteresting photos; you will get a bad reputation and be ignored forever.
- You need the subjects' permission if it will be used for publicity; you do not need it if it's for a journalistic report on an event.
- Have a media library on your website; make things easy for the journalist.

Press Receptions

When making a major announcement or launching a project/event, it can be worthwhile going to the expense of a Press Reception. If you have a sponsor for your event, it will almost certainly be mandatory.

- Choose a location near the journalists, not inaccessible.
- Morning, 10:30AM; not PM or evening
- 8 days advance notice, 4 days invite, lots of follow-up phone calls
- Use any personalities in your sport (or well known friends) and make sure the press know they will be there
- Get a professional photographer
- Try to make it stand out from the crowd. Some sort of theme, a quirky angle, suggestive or intriguing title.
- No need for alcohol; coffee, tea, pastries etc. are OK.
- Cost is a few thousand euro, but can be well worth it.
- It is vital to follow up on the Press Reception to make the most of it.

Conclusions

Trying to apply the information to Orienteering, I have come up with the following conclusions:

- At the moment, our national profile is provided purely by the website. Any media exposure is through the efforts of individual clubs contacting local newspapers. Several clubs have been very good at this and have reaped the rewards. However, on a national basis we have zero profile. This is not the fault of the members of the IOA committee. As usual, it is the fault of everybody who is **not** a member of the IOA committee. There is no IOA PRO as nobody volunteered for the job.
- We need to decide what we want to achieve by increasing our public profile. Do we want to increase numbers, increase grants, increase sponsorship, improve land access ...? Or, do we even want/need to increase it.
- As things stand, we probably feel that the press is irrelevant to us. However, if a tragedy, positive drug test, exceptional international result or other unforeseen event were to occur, we would have no choice but to engage with them. It has been shown that with good media management, any event (good or bad) can have a good effect on a sport. Likewise, with bad media management, such an event can be catastrophic.
- We need to update the website with the required information: Biographies, photographs, profiles, history, results ... it must be made more non-orienteer friendly.
- We need a much better connection between our International teams and the overall sport. For other sports, their international team is one of the main sources of newsworthy material and of interest amongst the ordinary rank-and-file members. However, our teams seem to leave and return with the rest of us being only vaguely aware of it. To the casual observer, there is no international aspect to orienteering.
- We need to have results available promptly. At the very least, if an event takes place on a Sunday afternoon, the results **must** be on o.ie on Sunday evening! We need a system where results can be sent to the press on Sunday afternoons.
- While it is probably best for clubs to deal with their local press, we need a more central approach to the national media. We are much more likely to have results published if they are delivered every week by 1 or 2 people than if they are sent 2 weeks out of every 3 by 1 of 100 different organisers.
- We need a Press Officer who will, at least, facilitate the production of material and its speedy delivery to the press. Maybe we should pay for this!?
- Our elite athletes and good juniors should be encouraged to increase their profiles, both within orienteering and outside.

*Martin Flynn & Marcus Geoghegan
December 2006*



Media Workshop - Federation of Irish Sports Monday 27th November

6 THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT PRODUCING A PRESS RELEASE

1. Keep it concise, including as many important details as possible.
2. Do it quickly - if it is an event report, write it immediately after the competition/event is over - the earlier you get it in the more likely it is to be used
3. Be accurate - check out all the facts, confirm all results before starting to write
4. Establish a contact within media organisations - someone you can call to check they have received your copy
5. DO NOT send any information to newspapers in an attachment - most likely the email will be deleted without even being looked at - send it in plain text in an email
6. NO PICTURES WITH TEXT - send pictures separately to Picture Desk. And tell someone you're doing it.

6 THINGS TO INCLUDE WHEN WRITING YOUR REPORT

1. Start with the name of your organisation
2. State whether it is for immediate publication or embargoed
3. Include date sent
4. Include headline and full description of competition/event
5. Include fully detailed results
6. Include contact details for someone who can verify/expand on the information supplied.

6 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT STAGING A PRESS LAUNCH

1. Location is vital - for the national media (tv, print and radio), proximity to Dublin city centre is a must if reporters/photographers/cameramen are expected to attend and the more unusual the venue the better
2. Hold it as early as possible during the day - the earlier your press release and pictures make it to the relevant news/picture desks the better the chance they will be used
3. Keep your invitation list under control and remember the photographer needs LOTS OF GOOD LOOKING PEOPLE - hiring a model is always a good idea as well
4. If you can hire the photographer who is "flavour of the month" with the newspaper editors then do so
5. Don't go crazy about supplying food and drink if your budget is restricted - it's entirely unnecessary
6. Check that your press release and pictures arrived with the relevant news/picture editors

AND FINALLY,

Don't be disheartened if your initial efforts are not well-rewarded. It takes time and effort to establish contacts in the media, even at local level. Be consistent and determined - your organisation's profile can always be improved upon - and if you need professional assistance, we are here to help.....

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From: EFI PRESS <press@horsesport.ie>
Subject: **SHOW JUMPING - KURTEN RUNNER-UP IN FRENCH YOUNG HORSE CLASS**
Date: 4 November 2006 11:32:29 AM GMT
To: EFI PRESS <press@horsesport.ie>



EQUESTRIAN FEDERATION OF IRELAND
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SHOW JUMPING - KURTEN RUNNER-UP IN FRENCH YOUNG HORSE CLASS

BASIC INFO FULL STORE
IRELAND'S Jessica Kurten scored her highest position of the weekend so far when she steered <Castle Forbes Cadeau Z> into second place in today's (Saturday) Young Horse competition at the five star show in Lyon, France.

BACKGROUND
The German-based rider, who celebrates her 37th birthday later this month, has been maintaining a low profile on the results sheets at Lyon, but jumped a very fast clear round this morning on the seven year-old bay mare to finish just under three seconds behind Swiss winner Steve Guerdat in a field of 46 starters.

THERE IS MORE TO COME
Lyon's Grand Prix takes place on Sunday, but there are still several valuable classes to be competed for later today.

SHOW JUMPING RESULTS: CSI5* LYON FRANCE 3-5 NOVEMBER 2006

Prix VIACOM
International Jumping Competition - Young Horses
6 Years old (1m30) and 7 years old (1m35)
Table A against the clock - No Jump off - FEI 238.2.1
Saturday, 4 November 2006

- 1) EL TOMBO Z; Steve GUERDAT (SUI) Faults 0.00 Time 66.76
- 2) CASTLE FORBES CADEAU Z; Jessica KURTEN (IRL) Faults 0.00 Time 69.23
- 3) LUIGI D'AMAURY; Yannick MARTIN (FRA) Faults 0.00 Time 71.41

} This proves that you are correct

46 starters

ends

THIS INFORMATION WILL ALSO BE AVAILABLE ON EFI WEBSITE www.horsesport.ie/results1.html

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This page gives a story and a result