



effective



public  
relations

a guide for Rotary clubs

PRR

The practice of public relations varies throughout the world. Regardless of cultural differences from one country to another, all Rotary clubs have audiences with whom they should communicate, including the media, local government officials, the business community, civic leaders, and other organizations, as well as qualified prospective members and people directly affected by Rotary service projects. Developing a message for these audiences and finding an appropriate way to deliver it is public relations in action.

## Components of Public Relations

To understand what public relations entails, it helps to break it down into its separate components:

- Understanding news
- PR writing
- Media relations
- External relations
- Nontraditional media

This guide will help you develop and use traditional and nontraditional PR materials and methods, work with the media, develop cooperative relationships with non-Rotary organizations, and evaluate and measure the success of your club's PR efforts.

# What Is News?

News has been described as extraordinary things happening to ordinary people and ordinary things happening to extraordinary people. The following elements are considered by many to make up “news”:

- **Immediacy.** Timing, or immediacy, is important to getting your story in the media. Using words like *today*, *yesterday*, *early this morning*, and *tomorrow* are all examples of using immediacy. Reporting something that has just happened or is about to happen is critical for a story to become news.
- **Proximity.** If the story you are pitching happened outside your community, city, state, or country, would you be interested in reading about it? By asking this simple question, you can tell if your story is newsworthy. Newspapers and other media sources largely focus on hometown and regional stories. The more localized a story is, the greater the chance it will be used.
- **Prominence.** Does your story feature public figures or officials, people of renown, or those who pique curiosity? In general, such people of influence can make the news. To qualify, your club’s visitor or speaker must be able to gain the readers’ attention either by reputation or by the topic being discussed.
- **Singularity.** In many places in the world, the unusual and the unexpected often make news. For example, if your club has accomplished a challenging or unusual project in your community or another part of the world, or if one of your members has performed an incredible service, be sure to use this angle to create a news piece.
- **Conflict.** Unfortunately, conflict is one element that makes headlines world-wide. Be proactive and share what your club is doing to build goodwill and

peace in the world. An op-ed piece in response to a recent story on conflict would be a good start.

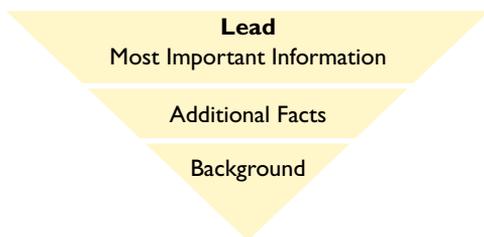
- **Emotional appeal.** Often called human interest stories, news pieces that elicit the reader’s sympathy or other emotional responses make great feature-type stories. Does your club have a compelling story that will capture the interest of the general public as well as Rotary club members?
- **Consequence.** For a story to show consequence, it must be important to a vast number of readers. Does your club’s story affect other people’s lives? Try to focus on the efforts and reactions of one or two people to humanize the story as much as possible. Share your club’s efforts on polio eradication, clean water, environmental stewardship, or other critical issues to demonstrate that if Rotary weren’t active in this area, there would be negative consequences.

Experience shows clubs have been most successful in promoting the following types of Rotary stories:

- Outstanding volunteers
- Interactions between people in developed and developing countries
- Local Rotary or Rotary Foundation projects
- Rotary International studies and exchange program participants (Youth Exchange students, Rotary World Peace Fellows, Ambassadorial Scholars, or Group Study Exchange team members)
- Human interest stories about people who benefited from Rotary service
- PolioPlus activities, particularly in polio-endemic areas

# PR Writing

The ability to write easily, logically, and succinctly is vital in public relations. The object of most PR writing is to grab the reader's attention. Most press releases and other written communications for the media use an inverted-pyramid style, with the most important and relevant information at the top, followed by gradually less important information.



## Writing a Press Release

The headline and the first sentence are the two most important parts of a press release. Make sure they are compelling enough to draw the editor or reporter in. Use active verbs in headlines, making them brief and to the point.

- Develop a well-thought-out “news hook,” a persuasive reason for the news media to pursue a story. The news hook provides direction to the rest of the release.
- Always define Rotary as “a global network of community volunteers” in the release.
- Determine who will be the contact person for media inquiries, and place that person’s name, e-mail address, and phone number in the upper-left corner. A reporter or editor will more likely follow up when your contact information is easily available. If your club or district Web site is current, also include the Web address.

## Lead paragraph

Include the five Ws in your first paragraph, ideally in the first sentence:

- **Who?** The main focus of your story — a person or group of people that is the essential element of the story
- **What?** The event or project with which your club is involved
- **Where?** The location of the event, including a street address
- **When?** The time, day, and date of an event or the time period involved for a person or project
- **Why?** The reason this event, person, or project is significant to the general public

## Additional paragraphs

In subsequent paragraphs, describe details about the event or project or how the person achieved something extraordinary.

Keep your release concise. State opinions in quotes from club leaders, project beneficiaries, or person being featured or honored. Decide what information is necessary and then focus on one or two main points. Limit the release to one page.

If you’re sending a release to a television station, think of its visual needs. Suggest good video footage opportunities, such as unusual events, colorful scenes, smiling children, or celebrity appearances.

## Pitching Yourself as “The Expert”

Journalists are always looking for experts on a variety of topics for feature stories. Send a letter to a specific reporter with an idea for a story and offer your help in developing it. Describe why you or someone in your club qualifies as an expert on a particular issue, such as literacy, water, eliminating global poverty, environmental stewardship, or

conflict resolution. Include the names of people available for interviews, project information, and related story angles. Tailor the letter to the reporter and the medium as much as possible. Consider these tips:

- Summarize your pitch in one page.
- Explain why readers would be interested.
- Detail the scope and significance of your project.
- Provide a few interesting details.
- Offer alternate approaches to the story when possible.
- Describe possible photo opportunities.

### A picture is worth 1,000 words

Photos increase interest in your story and give your release an extra edge. They should be an essential part of every PR plan. Consider these tips to help ensure a great photo:

- Plan ahead. Determine the message you want to convey, and find a way to capture it in a photo.
- Use a professional photographer or high-quality digital camera.
- Take action shots. Images featuring hands-on activity create more interest than posed shots of people shaking hands and standing and facing the camera. A creative, active shot could be the deciding factor for an editor on whether to run a story.
- Keep deadlines in mind. Send timely photos to the media well in advance of publishing deadlines. Make sure to include a caption with the correct spelling of names and a sentence explaining the event. Use the who, what, where, when, and why format to write captions.
- Download current photos of RI officers at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org).

## Letter to the Editor

The editorial page is one of the most-read sections of the newspaper, and your letter can reach many people. Keep these tips in mind when sending a letter to the editor:

- Make one or two points and state them clearly, ideally in the first sentence.
- Make your letter timely. If you aren't addressing a specific article, editorial, or letter that ran recently, tie your comment to a recent event.
- Familiarize yourself with the coverage and editorial position of the paper. Refute or support specific statements and address relevant facts that had been ignored, but avoid attacking the media in general or the newspaper in particular.
- Check the letter specifications of the newspaper. Length and format requirements vary from paper to paper (about two short paragraphs are ideal). Remember to include your full name, title (if applicable), mailing address, e-mail address, and daytime phone number.

## Op-Ed

An op-ed (positioned opposite the editorial page) is an opinion piece written by an individual who is not on the newspaper's staff. Before writing an op-ed for your paper, learn what topics are of interest to your community. An op-ed should:

- State a point of view
- Provoke thought
- Stimulate discussion

Review the op-ed pieces in your paper before submitting your own. Like a letter to the editor, an op-ed should be brief and clearly stated.

## Fact Sheet

A fact sheet provides details about Rotary programs to ensure journalists have accurate background information. You can download Rotary fact sheets from the Public Relations section at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org).

## Media Kit

On occasion, reporters require more information than appears in a press release, particularly at events.

A media kit is a pocket folder, preferably with a Rotary identifier, that holds general information about Rotary and your club as well as materials tailored to the event.

Your media kit should include:

- A fact sheet or brochure about your club
- A fact sheet or news release about the project or event
- A fact sheet about the Rotary program involved

## PR Writing Case Study

### ***Rotary Responds to News of U.S. Polio Cases***

In 2005, U.S. health officials were surprised to discover that five children in an Amish community in Minnesota were infected by the poliovirus. Polio hadn't been seen in the United States for 26 years. In response to a *Washington Post* article covering the outbreak, RI posted a sample letter to the editor in its *Rotary PR Tips* newsletter, emphasizing that no child is safe from polio until the disease is eradicated worldwide. It stated:

Rotary members worldwide are committed to immunizing every child and have made eradicating polio their top priority since 1985. Rotary and its partners at the World Health Organization, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and UNICEF have immunized more than two billion children in 122 countries.

RI's Public Relations Division also developed an opinion piece and sent it to district governors and club presidents, encouraging them to submit it to their local newspaper. Through these actions, many letters and opinion pieces were published, and Rotarian voices were heard all over the world.

## Media Relations

Just as manufacturers market their products, Rotary members must “sell” stories to the media. Understanding the media will help you market Rotary's message successfully.

### Identifying Media Targets

Before sending stories to a journalist, get to know your audience. Read your local newspaper and watch television programs to identify particular columns or segments where a Rotary story could be placed. Consider inviting a local journalist to speak to your club about how to work with the media. This will give you an opportunity to get to know the journalist and better understand the news process.

Identify your target media. These might include regional or suburban newspapers, local radio stations, media that cover one specific topic — for instance, education or health — and local television and cable stations.

## Developing a Media List

After identifying media targets, put together a contact list for each story that includes the names, phone numbers, fax numbers, and e-mail addresses of journalists, editors, or news directors who might take a special interest in Rotary. Larger newspapers or broadcast stations may have departments or reporters specializing in certain topics such as business, features, medical news, event calendars, or education. A business writer may be interested in a club's career day for students, while an education writer may wish to interview an exchange student or an Ambassadorial Scholar.

## Contacting the Media

You can take your story to the media several ways. Whatever approach you choose, be persuasive, persistent, and friendly — but not aggressive. The most effective methods depend on the journalist's preferences. Here are some suggested approaches:

- **E-mail.** Most reporters use e-mail and appreciate the time it saves identifying worthwhile stories. Like a headline, your subject line should be well thought out; it can make the difference between your e-mail being read or deleted.
- **Phone.** Many editors prefer a brief (less than two minutes) phone description of a story, along with the reasons it would interest readers or viewers. They will then tell you if they are interested and if they need additional materials.
- **Fax.** Faxes are an inexpensive and fast way to send information requested by a reporter or editor or to deliver time-sensitive materials. Most reporters discourage unsolicited faxes. A news advisory concisely ticks off the who, what, when, where, and why — often with times and places underscored to catch a busy editor's eye.

- **Mail.** Use the mail for sending one-page letters outlining your ideas or background materials for stories without an immediate deadline.
- **Personalized letter.** Sent alone or with a press release, a letter can point out a specific angle or suggest story ideas or good interview subjects and show you've taken the time to consider what might interest that particular reporter.
- **Press kit.** A press kit can be effective if you have several related stories to tell or a number of related events to promote, such as a month-long series of speakers. In addition to a fact sheet and release, it may contain photos (with captions attached), a calendar of events, and brief biographies of the Rotary club members involved.

Some news should be targeted to specific media, including:

- **Calendar items.** Magazines, newspapers, and radio and TV stations have calendar editors, who list upcoming events. To inform the media about your club meeting or event, send the calendar editor one paragraph detailing the program, place, and time.
- **PSAs.** Public service announcements are nonpaid "commercials" that RI has developed for clubs to send to their local media outlets, including TV and radio stations. Both DVD and Beta SP tapes are available. Contact the station's public service director to see if the station would be interested in receiving Rotary PSAs. Send all requests to [pr@rotary.org](mailto:pr@rotary.org).

## Conducting Interviews with the Media

Journalists are always looking for good human-interest stories. Equally valuable is a knowledgeable messenger. Develop

informed, articulate spokespersons who are easily accessible and well-versed about Rotary's programs. Good candidates include international, district, and club officers and people who have benefited from Rotary programs, such as Ambassadorial Scholars, Group Study Exchange team members, Youth Exchange students, Rotary World Peace Fellows, and Rotary Volunteers. When a non-Rotarian expert or celebrity is participating in a Rotary event, make sure they are adequately informed to convey the right message about Rotary.

Consider the following points, to ensure that when a journalist calls for an interview, you present your story in the best light:

- Provide the reporter with background materials, including a short biography of the person to be interviewed, beforehand.
- Know your main points and rehearse them before the interview.
- Remember your audience. Make comments that will interest the people who read the article or see or hear the broadcast.
- Be articulate and concise. Present the facts in a simple, direct manner.
- Avoid Rotary jargon (for example, *PDG*, *GSE*, *makeups*).
- Ask the reporter to clarify his or her question, if necessary.
- Understand that everything said to a reporter is on the record, regardless of a reporter's assurances to the contrary.
- If a reporter asks a negative question, answer honestly and try to steer the conversation to positive ground.
- It's OK to ask when the story will run, but avoid asking the reporter to show you the story before it appears.
- Make sure the reporter has a phone number where he or she can contact you for additional information.

## Quick tips

- Familiarize yourself with the publication or TV news program that you would like to publish or air your story.
- Keep media lists current. Personalize your materials as much as possible.
- Contact the media only with newsworthy story ideas.
- Call reporters during times other than deadline. Mornings are usually best.
- Know your story and anticipate questions.
- Send background materials immediately following contact.
- Be available. Make sure you are available to take journalists' calls if they need more information or want to check a fact for accuracy.
- Always work within a reporter's deadlines.
- Let your club members know when you send out information to the press.
- Take no for an answer. You have a great story and compelling photos — but still no interest. What can you do? Accept the reporter's decision. Arguing with reporters only alienates them and will hurt your chances of placing future stories.

## Managing Crisis

Despite your best efforts, problems may develop that are sensitive in nature. Be forthcoming if a reporter calls, but avoid initiating contact with the media about unflattering stories.

When a situation arises that you think will need immediate attention, contact Rotary International before you speak with the media (phone: +1-847-866-3237; e-mail: [pr@rotary.org](mailto:pr@rotary.org)).

Keep in mind these general rules for crisis communications:

- Provide a straightforward response.
- Don't speculate.
- Shift to a more neutral or, if possible, positive message.

When information gets out quickly, rumors are stopped and nerves are calmed. The goal is to terminate the crisis, limit the damage, and restore credibility.

Consider the following factors to help lessen or alleviate potential negative publicity:

- **Surprise.** A public relations crisis is usually unexpected. You may learn of the situation only when a reporter calls for comment. Don't feel pressured to give a quote immediately. Instead, find out what the reporter wants, assure him or her that you will respond, and then get off the phone. Seek advice before making a statement or answering a critical question. Contact Rotary International if needed, but don't hide from the media.
- **Insufficient information.** Rumors may fly. Avoid reacting or commenting on something that hasn't been substantiated. Also avoid saying "no comment," which could be used to insinuate guilt. Instead, say that you will check out the matter more fully and get back to the journalist.
- **Escalating events.** The crisis broadens. Additional media pick up the story or the situation becomes more complicated. Remain calm and keep the long-term picture in mind. As much as possible, tell the full story and tell it promptly.  
Too long of a delay could put your club in a negative light.
- **Increased scrutiny.** The public feed on rumors. "Helpful" politicians, local leaders, and others may make observations that complicate the situation. Channel

all Rotary comments through one spokesperson and ask club members to refrain from speaking about the incident and to refer journalists to the designated club spokesperson.

- **Siege mentality.** When an organization feels attacked, it tends to immediately shut down to defend itself. Resist the natural impulse to protect yourself. Seek legal and public relations counsel when necessary, but remain as open to the media and the public as possible. Rotary is not a secret organization and should not be portrayed as such.
- **Panic.** Nerves start to wear thin when the possibility of negative publicity arises. Remain calm, seek counsel, tell the truth, and position the club as an open organization. This will help to stem further eruptions and most effectively communicate Rotary's message.

When a difficult situation has been resolved, contact the press and let them know immediately.

## Media Relations Case Study

### **Local Story Makes National News**

An article in the *San Diego Tribune* about Fary Moini, a member of the Rotary Club of La Jolla Golden Triangle, California, USA, caught the eye of a producer from *NBC Nightly News*. After reading it, he contacted the club to discuss doing a story about her. Honoring Moini as a "hometown hero," the article praised her extraordinary work to aid Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Afghanistan and highlighted her Rotary experience and its impact on others in the world. In the story, she said, "I belong to a great organization, Rotary International, and with their encouragement, with their support, I was able to do these small things with love."

After gathering background information, the *NBC Nightly News* produced a human interest piece featuring Moini's efforts as part of the show's "Making a Difference" series. The 2:40-minute broadcast was seen by millions of viewers. It focused on how Moini worked with her Rotary club to raise US\$250,000 to construct a school equipped with a science lab, library, and computer room for 2,000 children in war-ravaged Jalalabad, Afghanistan. The NBC team followed her to Afghanistan and shot footage of the opening of the mixed-gender school. Moini was interviewed during the piece and was able to share Rotary with the world, all of which provided great coverage for Rotary and allowed viewers to see how Rotarians are active in both their communities and around the world. And, it all began with local news coverage.

## External Relations

Working with other organizations, known as external relations, is an important component of public relations today. Rotary clubs and districts are encouraged to collaborate on projects with other groups locally, nationally, and internationally.

Rotary International has a long history of working with other organizations. The first Rotary service project — the building of public washrooms near Chicago's city hall — was completed through the cooperation of civic agencies and key local business leaders. Today, Rotary is a spearheading partner in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, an alliance that serves as a model for private-public sector collaboration. Working with other organizations can help increase public awareness of your club's activities, multiply the impact of a project, and expand your access to technical and financial resources.

Recognizing the importance of developing and maintaining partnerships, Rotary International established the Rotary representative network. More than 20 representatives to the United Nations, its agencies, and other major international organizations participate in international meetings and events on behalf of Rotary. These representatives, appointed each year by the RI president, are listed in the *Official Directory*. Draw on their expertise if your club is considering working with another organization with which RI has official relations.

### Tips for Collaborative Relationships

- Develop clear guidelines of what is expected from each party.
- Ask the cooperating organization to feature information on your joint project on its Web site. Make sure the site also includes information about your club or district and a link to your Web site.
- Host local events such as sports competition, parades, or musical activities to raise funds for your mutual cause and highlight the cooperation between your club and the other organization.
- Issue joint press releases to keep the media informed of your activities.

Find out more about working with other organizations at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org).

## External Relations Case Study

### ***Rotary Clubs Partner with Center for Global Safe Water***

More than one billion people throughout the developing world live without safe water, and over two billion lack adequate sanitation. Every year, more than 2.2 million deaths occur because of contaminated water, mostly children under age five. In response to the ongoing need to provide safe water in developing countries, the UN Millennium Development Goal for water and sanitation was devel-

oped, created to reduce the proportion by half of the world's population without access to safe water by 2015.

The Rotary Safe Water Project, a two-year initiative in Kenya, started in April 2005. The Rotary Club of Atlanta, Georgia, USA, and Rotary clubs in Kenya partnered with Emory University's Center for Global Safe Water (CGSW), and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) creating the Safe Water and AIDS Project in western Kenya's Nyanza Province. This Kenyan-based nongovernmental organization mobilizes rural community-based HIV/AIDS groups to become vendors of the Safe Water System, enabling them to earn an income, provide access to safe water, and support AIDS orphans and widows.

Additionally, the Rotary club project has drilled more than 100 boreholes in two dry districts of eastern Kenya and acts as the local agent in managing the implementation of the well-drilling operation. A CGSW staff member in Kenya oversees the project and submits reports on its progress. CDC provides logistical help for the project, and the Center for Global Safe Water and the CDC perform joint research on the project's health impact.

Through this nonprofit project, the cooperating organizations have made household water treatment and storage units available via commercial distributors and local artisans. In addition, local HIV/AIDS help groups have educated community members about health and home-based approaches to making water safe.

## Beyond Traditional Media

Rotary clubs can improve their public image in ways other than news coverage. Rotary International provides pre-produced PSAs for billboard and Internet advertisements and encourages all clubs to localize these materials for use in their communities.

### Cable and Public-Access Television

In many areas of the Rotary world, public access or cable television provides community-based programming. Consult a cable company in your area to learn how your club might broadcast its service activities or

weekly meetings or highlight special events and speakers. Some Rotary clubs have even taken advantage of cable television by producing and airing entire programs devoted to Rotary.

### Public Service Announcements

Television and radio stations sometimes broadcast short announcements and messages



at no charge to community organizations such as Rotary. In addition, print media often have unsold advertising slots they offer as “remnant space” for free or at reduced rates to nonprofits. Notices of fundraisers, projects that benefit the community, scholarship availability, or public events sponsored by Rotary are suitable subjects for PSAs.

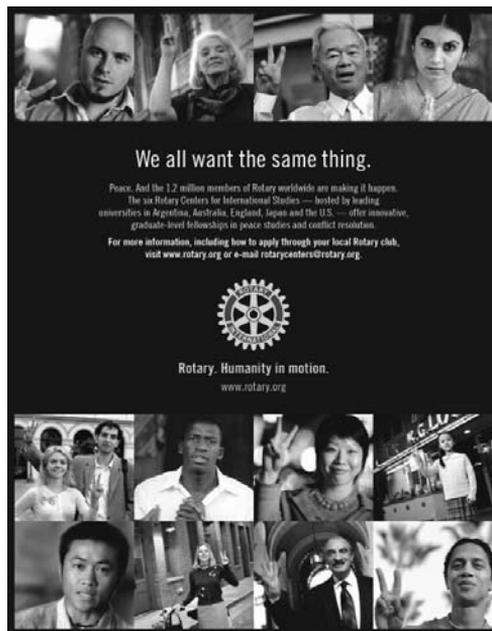
Print PSAs are available for download at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org) and can be used for newspaper or magazine placements. They can also be used for posters, air or rail terminal displays, community directories, program booklets, and banners. In addition, Rotary has PSAs and commercials that Rotarians can offer to their local radio and television stations.

## Building an Effective Web Site

Clubs and districts are encouraged to create Web sites as an important way to communicate the Rotary message to the world. An effective Web site is designed with specific audiences in mind by developing different sections which focus on different users. Remember to keep your content clear and concise while avoiding Rotary jargon (e.g., DGE, PP, etc.). Updating your content regularly is important as well as making it interactive. Uploading images, audio, and video adds to the overall feel of the site. Rotary International encourages club and district Web sites to link to resources and articles at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org). RI’s official Web site also features an RSS news feed that clubs and districts can incorporate into their sites’ content for frequently updated Rotary news headlines.

## Billboards, Posters, and Signage

Build Rotary awareness by creating billboards, posters, or signage to show what Rotary is and what Rotary does. Use resources available through the RI Web site to create Rotary signage. The graphics may also be useful for publications, stationery, or other print materials.



## Newspaper Supplements

Spotlight the good work of Rotary at home and abroad by arranging for a local newspaper supplement. Ask club members to support the supplement by purchasing advertising space for their businesses. Then, work with the newspaper’s editor to develop stories that focus on Rotary’s service locally and globally. Include information on such international programs as Rotary Scholars, GSE teams, humanitarian grants projects, and PolioPlus. A sample newspaper supplement is available for download at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org).

## Special Events

Some radio and television stations regularly broadcast programs devoted to stories about worthwhile community service organizations and their activities. Most of these programs are interviews, but some TV stations may film or videotape a visually interesting project or activity to air during a broadcast.

Many radio and TV stations also cooperate with Rotary clubs on special fundraising efforts, sometimes turning the microphones

over to Rotary members. Occasionally, clubs have participated in the fundraising efforts of other community groups.

## Club Brochures

In addition to using informational materials available through the *RI Catalog*, such as the *This Is Rotary* (001-EN) brochure and *What's Rotary?* (419-EN) wallet card, develop a professional-quality, printed brochure to highlight your club's service projects and programs. Profile Rotary Scholars, GSE participants, or other beneficiaries of Rotary service, and provide information and statistics about the club. Include your club's history and service accomplishments and photos showing Rotary members in action. Distribute the brochures to local journalists, prospective members, program speakers, and guests at club meetings or events.

## Presentations and Speeches

Rotary members may be called upon as “experts” in their communities. When asked to speak — whether before an audience of students, other community organizations, or professionals — be sure to mention Rotary. Explain that Rotary is a global network of community volunteers, and share examples of Rotary's work locally and around the world. Consider these tips for public speaking:

- Remember your audience, and make certain the topic is meaningful to them.
- Get to the point.
- Use the power of threes: Make your speeches captivating, compelling, and a complete package.
- Tell a story.
- End with your opening: Repeat the main point you want to make.

All RI materials can be ordered through the *RI Catalog* or at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org).

## Beyond Traditional Media Case Study

### ***French Rotarians Raise Rotary Awareness***

For their second National Rotary Awareness Day, Rotary club members in France organized a movie theater event called Hope in Mind. They sponsored a special premiere of Laurent Tirard's movie *Molière ou Le Comédien Malgré Lui* in nearly 300 theaters throughout the country. The objectives of this multidistrict event were to raise €1 million for six research projects selected by the Fédération pour la Recherche sur le Cerveau (Federation for Brain Research), an organization that studies degenerative brain diseases, and to promote Rotary to the general public.

All district governors were invited to participate and mobilize their clubs into action. Rotarians raised awareness of the event through the Rotary regional magazine *Le Rotarien* and coordinated the campaign nationally by creating promotional materials with a consistent message and distributing them to all the French districts and by managing toll-free number lines. The movie night began with a six-minute documentary about Rotary and a presentation on degenerative brain diseases, which affect about 10 percent of the population directly or indirectly. The event raised about €600,000 for brain disease research through the sale of nearly 60,000 tickets in 250 movie theaters nationwide. The fact that the Rotarians chose to focus on and support an issue that affects so many people greatly contributed to the event's success.

# New Trends in Media

Citizen-generated media (CGM) gives users the ability to produce content on a variety of topics, easily uploading it to the Internet. CGM provides an interactive medium for users to share information by posting ideas and opinions to sites including: discussion forums, blogs (short for Web logs), and message boards.

Throughout the world, the Internet has become one of the most popular mediums people use to gather information. Some users are beginning to trust others like themselves more than traditional news sources.

CGM also affects marketing and advertising trends because this content is easy to locate with the aid of search engines. When using a search engine to look up a person or an organization, many users find information posted by another user. CGM is changing how information is shared and how opinions are formed.

## Blog

Blogs started in the early 1990s simply as a version of the online journal. Today, blogs are defined in many different ways, often with confusing media buzz. From a technology standpoint, they are simply template-based Web sites that allow an author to quickly make regular updates. They also regularly allow for user interaction through comments and subscription services via RSS (Real Simple Syndication).

There are more than 50 million blogs on the Internet. They have become extremely popular because they offer an easy, user-friendly approach to uploading content often including text, images, and sometimes video.

What has separated blogs from regular Web sites and traditional media is the type of content they publish. The most successful blogs focus on a single subject and cover it with passion, depth, and sometimes wit. The most successful writers have a strong voice and are able to build trust through their expertise, honesty, and ability to create a good conversation with their readership.

Another phenomenon of blogging and blogs is the regularity with which they comment on, respond to, and link to other blogs and bloggers. The universe of bloggers — the “blogosphere” — can be looked at as a giant conversation. Blogs can also incorporate other forms of media, including audio (podcasts), video (vlogs), and images (photoblogs).

Blogs offer an easy, inexpensive way to publicize your club's projects and events. And because many journalists search blogs for stories, they also offer an opportunity to reach the media with your Rotary stories. So, the next time a local journalist is looking for a human interest story, what will they find on your club's blog?

## Podcast

Podcasts (the term *podcast* combines *iPod* and *broadcast*) consist of digital audio files distributed over the Internet, usually through a subscription-based service. Some smart programmers figured out a way to mix RSS with the audio posts to allow for automatic downloading to the popular media players. Now, people often refer to podcasts as any media file available via download from the Internet.

Like blogs, the most successful podcasts are often short and focused. Ideally, listeners should feel attached to the voice of the podcaster, viewing him or her as an insider or a “real person.” That sense of honesty is what gives nontraditional media its power.

Podcasts are commonly referred to as “push technology” because of its subscription capability. Podcasts are different from other digital media because they can be downloaded automatically through subscription. It is information that a provider chooses to receive instead of searching or “pulling” it from the Internet.

In the past, producing a professional-quality show was cost-prohibitive. But with contemporary technology, the cost of entry has come down considerably. The only limiting factors are time to learn the technology and coming up with a great idea.

## Electronic Press Release

Although traditional print faxes are still accepted in newsrooms, an electronic press release provides several advantages to both the sender and the journalist. New technology allows writers to attach pictures and video to their press releases and send it all by e-mail. The journalist will then have the story and pictures readily available and can save critical time in contacting you and waiting to get these items. Attach good video footage or pictures that show Rotarians in action.

## Video Uploading

Through the power of the Internet, uploading video has become very easy. More than 50 video uploading/sharing sites allow you to put your Rotary efforts on the Web. Each

site offers different options, from simple video upload to editing, all completely free of charge. Consider uploading video to your club Web site or blog or attaching video or pictures to your electronic press release.

## New Trends in Media Case Study

### *How a Blog Aided a Nation*

The Rotary Club of Colombo Regency in Sri Lanka invited a speaker to their club’s meeting to teach members how to create a blog, not realizing how valuable this new technology would prove to be. Just one day after the world’s deadliest tsunami destroyed parts of their country, the club members set up their first blog. It allowed people from all over the world to provide immediate assistance by donating money and providing food and medicine, and daily updates kept contributors informed about the club’s relief efforts.

Club members e-mailed friends and family members to alert them to the blog and the account they had set up for donations. The club also made an arrangement with Lankafood.com — which did not benefit from the agreement — to take orders for food and medicine and send them directly to the Rotary Club of Colombo. Club members then purchased items from the local wholesale market and distributed them. Within a week, the club had raised nearly US\$50,000 and an additional \$35,000 had been pledged. “Our club has been successful because we have been able to reach out the international community through this site,” said club secretary Chamila Wickramasinghe.

## Using print PSAs, graphics, and other materials

In addition to billboards, Rotary graphics can be used as public service announcements in a variety of media, including newspapers and magazines. Using a mixture of media multiplies the overall effect of images while broadening the audience they reach. The following placement ideas are provided as a starting point. You may discover additional uses.

- **Magazines/newspapers**  
Contact the advertising section and inquire about “remnant” space. Would the publication consider donating space to your club or district and run a print PSA for free or at a reduced cost?
- **Program booklets**  
Is your Rotary club or any of its members involved in a community theater? Does your club support a local sports team? Include the PSAs in the program booklets.
- **Community directories**  
Use the PSA in the telephone directory, chamber of commerce directory, or a community ad book. Would the directory consider donating the space?

- **District newsletters/directories**  
Similar to program booklets, use the PSAs in Rotary publications. Include a caption explaining that the PSAs are available for club members to place in local media.
- **Public displays/posters/banners**  
Create posters to be used in displays, on community bulletin boards, or in public buildings.
- **Air/rail terminals**  
Public locations such as these often coordinate with a local agency to handle their signage. Contact the terminal, inquire about who handles advertising, and follow up with the agency. Would the agency consider donating the space?
- **Notecards**  
Create notecards featuring the images, and use them as club thank-you or holiday cards.
- **Web sites**  
Add graphics to your Web site.

You can download print PSAs that provide images highlighting Rotary’s work at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org).



# Evaluating/Measuring Success

In public relations, it's important to evaluate what has and hasn't worked. Watch for Rotary-related news clippings in the papers you have contacted. Cut them out and compile them as a way to document your success and use the experience as a learning tool for future PR work. Always remember to send thank-you notes to those who helped along the way.

## RI Public Relations Award

As an incentive for clubs and districts to tell their Rotary story, Rotary International created an award to recognize clubs that have generated increased awareness and understanding of Rotary through outstanding media coverage or public relations efforts. Competition and selection of winning entries take place at the district level. Entries must be submitted to RI by a district governor. Find more information in the Public Relations section at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org).



## Evaluating/Measuring Success Case Study

### *RI District Implements PR Survey*

In 2006, a public relations committee chair in Chile initiated a districtwide survey to test the members' knowledge of public relations. The questions focused on Web site use, awareness of Rotary publications, and individual club PR efforts, including media exposure. The results revealed that many Rotarians found the RI Web site hard to navigate and had difficulty locating relevant information and Rotary publications on the site. The survey also showed that many members had little to no contact with local media and little interest in learning how new trends in technology were relevant to their clubs. Many of the clubs said that public relations efforts didn't inspire them, that they considered the Rotary regional magazines out of date and irrelevant to their own club's projects, and that they weren't interested in creating a Web site to promote their club.

As a result of the data, the district asked the Public Image Resource Group zone coordinator to present informational sessions on working with the media and how clubs can participate in public relations. After these sessions, a number of clubs developed newsletters that featured their projects and their contact information for the local media. Awareness of Rotary in the local community has increased, and clubs now take a more active role in public relations.

# Public Relations Resources from Rotary International

Your Rotary club's public relations chair will find a wealth of resources from Rotary International for developing any type of public relations campaign.

- **RI International Offices**  
The Secretariat encompasses RI headquarters in Evanston, Illinois, USA, and international offices in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, India, Japan, Korea, and Switzerland. These offices provide a range of communication tools — newsletters, brochures, audiovisual programs, guidance, and instructional materials — to help clubs and districts succeed. See the *Official Directory* for contact information.
- **Public Relations at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org)**  
The Public Relations section of the RI Web site provides materials that will help your club or district promote the story of Rotary. Use the site as a guide when questions occur during PR planning. You can view Rotary PSAs and download materials, including print PSAs, news releases, and other helpful PR tools. Also visit <http://shop.rotary.org> to order PR publications.
- **Rotary PR Tips**  
The *Rotary PR Tips* newsletter from RI's Public Relations Division includes general PR writing tips, new trends in media, and examples of outstanding grassroots public relations efforts completed by Rotarians. It's distributed by e-mail twice monthly. E-mail [pr@rotary.org](mailto:pr@rotary.org) to subscribe, or view the latest edition at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org).



# Rotary PR Planning Calendar

Effective public relations campaigns don't happen by chance; they require time, effort, and planning. Rotary public relations chairs should develop a strategy at or before the beginning of each Rotary year and make a timetable. Although it's impossible to anticipate every public relations opportunity, scheduled events can be planned well in advance. By developing a comprehensive plan early on, you can prevent difficulties later and avoid last-minute preparations.

An effective way to create a plan is to prepare a large blank calendar for the coming year. Use the calendar at the end of this guide as a starting point. Confer with the district governor and other committee chairs about when they'll be conducting newsworthy activities, and mark them on the calendar. Then review the following checklists and decide in which month your district would like to schedule a particular activity. Place those activities into the planner accordingly. The planner includes annual RI events and internationally recognized days to help your public relations outreach.

## Planning Tips

- Set dates for club or district public relations planning meetings and follow-up meetings.
- Order promotional materials from the *RI Catalog*.
- Begin encouraging clubs to submit local public relations success stories for the RI Public Relations Award.

## Overview of Newsworthy Local Events

- Beginning of new district governor's term.
- Announcement of Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Scholars or Rotary World Peace Fellows.
- Arrival or departure of a Rotary Foundation Group Study Exchange team.
- Arrival or departure of Youth Exchange students.
- District conference.
- Chartering of a new Rotary club.
- Chartering of a new Interact or Rotaract club.
- Presidential visit or conference in your area.
- Local or international district-sponsored project.
- Local club anniversaries or newsworthy programs.
- PolioPlus projects or Rotarians who are experts in their fields working on special Rotary projects (such as a local Rotary Volunteer working on a medical mission).
- Celebrity or prominent local figure involved in a Rotary event.
- Club activities surrounding RI months or international observances such as Earth Day or International Volunteer Day.

## July

- Annual changeover of Rotary leadership, 1 July
- UN World Population Day, 11 July

## August

- Membership and Extension Month
- UN International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, 9 August
- UN International Youth Day, 12 August

## September

- New Generations Month
- UN International Literacy Day, 8 September
- UN International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer, 16 September

## October

- Vocational Service Month
- UN International Day of Older Persons, 1 October
- UN World Habitat Day (first Monday of October)
- World Sight Day, 11 October
- UN World Food Day, 16 October
- UN International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, 17 October
- World Polio Day, 24 October
- United Nations Day, 24 October

## November

- Rotary Foundation Month
- World Interact Week (week of 5 November)
- Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Scholarship applications available/promote scholarship opportunities
- World Diabetes Day, 14 November
- UN Universal Children's Day, 20 November (date may vary by country)

## December

- Family Month
- Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Scholarship awardees notified of their study institutions
- UN World AIDS Day, 1 December
- UN International Day of Disabled Persons, 3 December
- International Volunteer Day, 5 December
- UN International Migrants Day, 18 December

## January

- Rotary Awareness Month
- World Leprosy Day, 31 January

## February

- World Understanding Month
- International Assembly (sometimes held in January)
- World Cancer Day, 4 February
- Rotary's anniversary/World Understanding and Peace Day, 23 February

## March

- Literacy Month
- District conferences held March-June
- Most Group Study Exchange teams depart and arrive, March-June
- International Women's Day, 8 March
- World Rotaract Week (week of 13 March)
- RI Public Relations Award entries due from clubs to district governors, mid-March
- RI Best Cooperative Projects Award entries due from clubs to district governors, 15 March
- UN World Day for Water, 22 March

## April

- Magazine Month
- UN International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, 4 April
- UN World Health Day, 7 April
- RI Best Cooperative Projects Award entries must be received at RI headquarters, 15 April
- Earth Day, 22 April
- Africa Malaria Day, 25 April

## May

- RI Public Relations Award entries due from district governors to RI, mid-May
- UN International Day of Families, 15 May

## June

- Rotary Fellowships Month
- Prepare for new Rotary year
- RI Convention (sometimes held in May)
- World Environment Day, 5 June

## Rotary's Mission

The mission of Rotary International, a worldwide association of Rotary clubs, is to provide service to others, promote high ethical standards, and advance world understanding, goodwill, and peace through its fellowship of business, professional, and community leaders.



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