

“The newspapers are full of what we would like to happen to us and what we hope will never happen to us.”

- John Fowles (1926–) English novelist, complex, cerebral writer, wrote *The French Lieutenant's Woman*

The following piece was written with gym owners in mind as an effort to help them contact local media and effectively promote their programs. With the upcoming World Championships and the potential exposure our gyms and gymnasts will receive, some of these guidelines may help in preparing for interviews via print and electronic media. Share some of this information with your athletes so they can feel more comfortable being interviewed and represent your program in the best light possible...

Dealing with the Media – Press Releases

There are two situations that will bring a news reporter to your gym – a special interest opportunity or a tragedy. Dealing with the media in either situation can be difficult to handle appropriately. You certainly won't have the same questions asked of you in these two scenarios but in each case you should be well prepared and make the best of it. How you present yourself to the media can be a tremendous boost to your business or absolutely destroy it. This month I would like to offer some thoughts on “welcome news” and trying to get your organization some positive notice by the media.

If you have ever submitted a “press release” to your local newspaper and been disappointed when you got no response, rest assured you are not alone. A lot of gym owners think that every Level 5 State champion or Regional team qualifier in their gym should receive feature coverage. Your newspaper or TV news editor may not agree. A few things to keep in mind can help you promote your program:

- ✓ **Timing** - Consider what is happening in your community and how it relates to the news business. If there is a lot going on, the competition for space may limit your chances of getting published. Your press release may get lost in the shuffle of a busy news week.
- ✓ **Trends** - Is there a hot new fad that is getting a lot of attention lately? Are you riding that wave and deserve a little recognition for your contribution to the cool lifestyle?
- ✓ **Tie-Ins** - National Gymnastics Day provides a great chance to get some exposure. State, National, Regional or World Championships may provide you opportunities to tie into these major events. Is there a community event that you can be a part of that would put you in front of the public eye? Public service events like Cancer Cartwheel-A-Thons and volunteer service activities are always good for added exposure.
- ✓ **Tags** - People that make your business special – your employees or your customers can give you a chance to tag into their notoriety. Do you have a staff member that has another interesting side to their life? Can you tag onto an announcement about your gym hosting a KAT or Safety Certification Workshop and expand to include additional details about your program? Are there any celebrities (local, regional, national) in your program that would allow you to use them as endorsement figures?

Don't be afraid to engage in a little self-promotion. If you don't believe enough in your business to tell other people how great you are, nobody else will.

When writing and submitting a press release, a few tips may get you moved up the priority list. Make sure your announcements are:

- ✓ **Correct** - Double check to make sure that your information is 100% accurate.
- ✓ **Brief** – Sometime shorter is better, as many newspapers receive hundreds of announcements, letters and releases a day, so you will have more chance to get published. Focus on one major topic. Also make your main point as early on in the release as possible, as editors will tend to cut a story if they are running short of space.
- ✓ **Clear** – Your press release must make sense. Remember that while you may know a great deal about Gymnastics, not all editors or newspaper readers will.
- ✓ **Personal** - You are more likely to be published if the release contains personal knowledge, interest or experience. Provide photographs if possible.
- ✓ **Complete** – Make the reporter/editor’s job as easy as possible. Provide them with written (typed, double spaced) copy and digital copy (on disk or via e-mail) as well. Always include your contact details; name, address, phone numbers, fax number, e-mail address. Make yourself available to be interviewed.

If the opportunity presents itself to engage in positive publicity, take it for all it’s worth. Be prepared with ready answers to probable questions and a couple of choice sound bytes that will look good in the paper or sound good when quoted.

Next Month – *“Dealing with the Media - In a Crises”*

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