

## EARNED MEDIA

### Why Earned Media is So Important

Earned media coverage can be one of the most powerful tools in your integrated marketing communications program. Unlike advertising, earned media often carries more weight and credibility in the minds of consumers because it is delivered and received through the recognized filter of a credible third-party organization or person such as a newspaper reporter or columnist, TV or radio anchor, or reporter.

While many state highway safety offices clearly are doing the hard work and heavy lifting to maximize earned media coverage in support of mobilizations, crackdowns and other year-round initiatives, other states appear to still be struggling with adding this important component to their communications programs. The earned media session at this forum is designed to help illuminate both the challenges and the solutions to help you gain additional earned media coverage.

### Earned Media is Not Free Media

It requires significant work to generate and sustain steady coverage and to build on the momentum of past successes. Adopting a year-round, proactive and aggressive approach to earned media allows you to dramatically expand and enhance the profile of your key messages.

The keys to good media relations are building strong, trusting relationships with the media; learning to pitch them in ways that, in their minds, add value for their readers, viewers or listeners; generating a steady series of significant press releases, announcements and special events to give them something to cover; and, perhaps most importantly, putting in the time and effort to follow-up until you get the coverage you need.

### Some Key Steps to Successful Earned Media Coverage

#### **Build Relationships with the Media**

Good media contacts and relationships are often the key to good media coverage. Get to know key journalists and make sure they know you. Then use these relationships to help you secure steady coverage for your organization. Recognize that a good relationship should be mutually beneficial. Always try to be helpful to journalists, return all calls promptly, learn and respect their deadlines, and always be honest and forthright with them when you want to be helpful to them, particularly in those times when you must explain why you cannot.

#### **Perfect Your Pitch: Add Value to Gain Coverage**

News editors and reporters first and foremost are interested in covering stories they believe are interesting and add value for their readers/viewers/listeners. Put yourself in the minds of their audiences; determine why your news is important to their audiences; and pitch your stories to the news editors and reporters with that in mind. This simple approach should help you gain better press coverage.

---

## EARNED MEDIA

### Create Opportunities for News Coverage

It seems obvious that if you do not offer reporters something of importance to cover, then you will not gain any coverage, yet many organizations do not build a sustained and steady program of coverage opportunities to advance their cause. Building a sustained series of news releases, news conferences, announcements, events, etc., that feature fresh and interesting news angles is key to generating good earned media coverage.

### Follow-Up, Follow-Up, Follow-Up

Journalists are busy people with many stories to sort through. Do not expect them to pay much attention to your news releases, news conferences, or op-eds you give them for placement, unless you are willing to take the time to aggressively work the telephones to follow up. Moving your story from the bottom of their stack to the top is a vital step to generating good press coverage. And often the only way to do that is to work the phones to get the attention you want and need.

### Key Questions to Consider

As you build your earned media program, here are some key questions to consider:

1. During enforcement crackdowns and mobilizations, do your earned media efforts match up with where you are focusing your paid advertising and enforcement activities?
2. During other times of the year, are you using social norming messages to bridge your enforcement periods and create a good year-round mix of earned media activity and exposure for your programs?
3. Are you putting as much planning time and emphasis into earned media as you are paid advertising and enforcement – and if not, why?
4. Are you working your LEL networks and other partnerships and allegiances to get others working on delivering your earned media messages?
5. How much time are you spending on the phone following up on news releases and advisories, which are key to generating coverage and building relationships?
6. Are you collecting and evaluating your news clips after each earned media effort to refine and modify your efforts?

### Getting Started: A Quick Earned Media Checklist

Before beginning any earned media effort, see if you can answer the following questions to assist in the development of a simple press promotion plan:

---

## EARNED MEDIA

### Message Development

1. What are our behavioral/communications objectives in this assignment?
2. Whom are the primary audiences we are trying to reach and persuade?
3. What do we want them to do?
4. What is the key benefit they will get from doing this?
5. What are three major points, statistics, core messages that may make this benefit more believable/valuable to them or might help stir them to action?
6. What must we say? Any legal, institutional or corporate requirements in delivering this message?
7. Have we answered the five Ws—Who, What, When, Where and Why—in our materials?

### Tactical Development

1. What media do we want to target with our message?
2. Do we have contact names, fax numbers and e-mail addresses to reach them?
3. Are there partnerships and alliances we can add/include to help attract more media interest?
4. What approaches should we use to deliver our message? (e.g., News Release, Media Advisory, Guest OpEd, Letters to the Editor, News Conference, Special Event or Announcement, TV/Radio Interviews, Editorial Boards, Radio Talk Shows, Feature Stories/Testimonials, Web Blogs, etc.)
5. What is our schedule, timeline, deadlines for using these approaches to deliver our messages?
6. What is our plan to follow-up with these media targets to ensure/encourage coverage and placement?
7. What is our plan to collect and report on coverage of our message?

## Using All the Tools in Your Toolbox to Generate Earned Media

Favorable media coverage can greatly enhance your effectiveness in delivering key messages to target audiences. This section quickly summarizes a variety of earned media tactics you can use to help publicly communicate your statewide plan.

### News Releases, Advisories and Announcements

A key to generating good press coverage is to give the media something to cover. The easiest way to do this is regularly issue news releases, advisories and announcements about any significant development likely to interest the media's readers/viewers/listeners in your area. Examples might include major mobilizations and crackdowns, with special emphasis around key holidays and special events; new national or state statistical or survey information; official proclamations; new programs, approaches, or marketing techniques being used to reach target audiences, etc.

A release is simply your story written up in a journalistic form. On receiving your release, news editors will glance at the headline or the lead (the opening paragraph) of the release to get the gist of your story. If it fails

---

## EARNED MEDIA

to attract their attention or interest, then the release will get discarded. The most effective releases typically seek to convey only one central message or point with enough appropriate information to support that message.

To generate an attention-getting release that will stand out from the hundreds of others editors see daily, make sure your story is timely, unique, interesting, informational, unexpected or even a little controversial. Make sure it speaks to the interests of the editor's readers/listeners/viewers. And make sure it always covers the journalist's five Ws—Who, What, When, Where, Why—and whenever possible, the “How” as well. Be sure to cover all of the facts, but keep your releases simple and succinct.

Unlike more fully developed news releases, media advisories are sent out in advance of events, announcements and press conferences to provide just enough information about the five Ws to invite and facilitate press attendance and coverage at the event. Advisories and releases always should carry a contact name and phone number as a reporter's point of contact for questions and follow up.

### News Conferences

Consider a news conference to announce important events, results or achievements. The press conference has an air of importance and credibility because it uses a news format to present important information. But be sure to arrange a press conference only when your news is of significant importance, likely to generate sufficient media interest, or is visually interesting resulting in better television coverage.

The goal of a press conference is to bring all of the key players together to publicize your announcement, to share dramatic visuals, and to deal with any questions for follow-up at the same time. But organizing such an event can be very time-consuming, so if issuing a news release can do the job just as well, then opt for the news release.

### News Interviews, Editorial Boards, TV and Radio Talk Shows

Inviting members of the media in for one-on-one interviews, going to a newspaper for an editorial board (a group interview with perhaps a number of editors and reporters), or scheduling a local TV or radio talk show interview can be very effective ways of explaining and promoting more complex announcements, trends or stories.

Reporters or interviewers generally ask questions to get the interviewees to respond in an interesting, illuminating, lively or even entertaining way. Consider in advance how to respond to all of the basic or difficult questions you expect to encounter and practice your answers. Identify your core messages and concentrate on getting those points across. Think through the real “news angle” of your message by putting yourself in the minds of the media outlet's readers, viewers or listeners. Even if the questioner tends to stray, try to reinterpret any difficult or “off-the-wall” questions to get your point across.

---

## EARNED MEDIA

### Op-Eds, Letters to the Editor and Blogs

Another very effective way to generate press interest about key initiatives and announcements is to submit a guest editorial, commentary or letter to the editor to newspapers or blogs for publication. NOTE: these typically need to be directed to the newspaper's opinion page editor and not the standard news reporters you may usually deal with. Strong op-ed pieces or "Letters to the Editor" need to be informal, persuasive, and entertaining, yet succinct and to the point.

### Feature Stories and Testimonials

Life-and-death highway safety stories touch real lives through heroism and tragedy. The news media love to share these kinds of human-interest stories with their audiences.

Tastefully and sensitively working with law enforcement and emergency response officials who are working on the "front lines," as well as with the family members of crash victims, or highlighting lessons learned by crash survivors, all represent powerful human interest perspectives important to the news media. Do not overlook the opportunity to humanize your news story, announcement, or press conference with these examples as you develop your earned media plans.

### Generating Media Coverage

There is not much magic about attracting media coverage. As long as you have something newsworthy to cover, building coverage simply requires time, work and diligence to reach out to and follow up on the telephone with the targeted reporters.

Make enough calls in advance of your event or announcement to identify and build the right press list and contact information for those reporters most interested or appropriate for your story or issue. Find out how they prefer to receive information from you—via e-mail, fax or regular mail. Learn and respect their deadlines. And once you send them your information, follow up to make sure you know they received it, to see if they have questions, and to ask for their coverage.

## Resources

You can find, tailor and localize for your own use working examples and actual samples of many of the above tools and tactics online at [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov), [www.trafficsafetymarketing.org](http://www.trafficsafetymarketing.org), and [www.stopimpaireddriving.org](http://www.stopimpaireddriving.org).

For some earned media basics, also see:

- *Free Publicity*, by Jeff Crilley
- *Media Training 101*, by Sally Stewart
- *Media Relations Handbook for Agencies, Associations and Nonprofits*, by Brad Fitch

## EARNED MEDIA

### A Sample Event Timeline

"Click It or Ticket"

NHTSA National Launch Event on May 19, 2011

Draft Event Planning Timeline

#### WEEK OF MARCH 31 - (7 Weeks Out from Event)

- Research and scout potential launch venue in Arlington County, Va; Montgomery County, Md; and the District of Columbia.
- Discuss and identify desired event materials (backdrop banner, podium sign, press kit folders and inserts, DVD, etc.) and identify potential vendors.
- Identify potential production vendors and assemble estimates for BBR & SMT packages.
- Finalize and post "Click It or Ticket" earned media and collateral materials for national, state and local partners.

#### WEEK OF APRIL 7 - (6 Weeks Out from Event)

- Finalize launch venue and notify partner agencies
- Present estimate for BBR & SMT packages
- Assemble estimate for launch event equipment and support (audio, TV screens, staging needs, risers, mult-box, tent, etc.)
- Assemble estimates for all desired event materials
- Coordination call with GHSA, IACP and regional law enforcement liaison

#### WEEK OF APRIL 14 - (5 Weeks Out from Event)

- Coordinate with NHTSA regional office and venue on all event logistics, desired multi-jurisdictional representation and law enforcement equipment needs (DUI vans, checkpoint signage, vehicles/motorcycles, etc.)
  - Meet with NHTSA media relations team and identify target media for event turn-out and determine who is on point for pitching/follow-up
  - Finalize vendor for BBR & SMT packages and schedule late April BBR tapings
  - Identify BBR spokespeople and core messages and coordinate schedules for taping
  - Present estimates for launch event support and equipment
  - Present estimate for desired launch materials
  - Order all launch materials (stickers for press kit folders, event banner and podium card, customized press kit inserts, etc)
  - Coordination call with GHSA, IACP and regional law enforcement liaison
-

## EARNED MEDIA

### WEEK OF APRIL 21 - (4 Weeks Out from Event)

- Coordinate with event partners (GHSA, IACP, NHTSA regional office and their PR firms) on media turn-out relationships and plans
- Determine all press kit components (e.g., launch news release, "Click It or Ticket" fact sheet, info on each of the launch event partners, DVD of new television spot and B-roll footage or checkpoints, arrest, booking footage, etc.)
- Frame out core messages for each event spokesperson and submit to team
- Coordination call with GHSA, IACP and regional law enforcement liaison

## EARNED MEDIA

### WEEK OF APRIL 28 - (3 Weeks Out from Event)

- Draft all press kit components
- Produce DVDs with new TV spot and B-roll footage
- Finalize launch event talking points with event participants
- Tape interviews for BBR package
- Coordination call with GHSA, IACP and regional law enforcement liaison
- Support GHSA/IACP as needed with regional events

### WEEK OF MAY 5 - (2 Weeks Out from Event)

- Finalize and print all press kit components
- Finalize and help coordinate all briefing books for event speakers
- Advise and begin media turn-out calls
- Finish taping and finalize BBR B-roll and interviews
- Coordination call with GHSA, IACP and regional law enforcement liaison
- Support GHSA/IACP as needed with regional events

### WEEK OF MAY 12 - (1 Week Out from Event)

- Assemble press kits
  - Re-advise and continue media turn-out calls
  - Final arrangements and coordination of event logistics
  - Advance media placement of story if desired for day of launch coverage
  - Vendor begins pitch for national SMT
  - Coordination call with GHSA, IACP and regional law enforcement liaison
  - Support GHSA/IACP as needed with regional event
-

## EARNED MEDIA

### WEEK OF MAY 19

- Assemble state-by-state numbers and prepare second national press story
- Finalize details and pitch for SMT
- Coordination call with GHSA, IACP and regional law enforcement liaison
- Support GHSA/IACP as needed with regional events
- Prepare BBR re-feed for distribution on May 22

### LAUNCH EVENT – MAY 19

- Load in, set up and test a/v equipment
- Final staging and event details
- Launch event coordination and media support
- Tape event for BBR package
- Assemble, finalize and distribute BBR package
- Distribute news release and make follow-up calls for non-attending press coverage

### WEEK OF MAY 26

- Announce state-by-state numbers and distribute national press story or conduct SMT on state-by-state numbers
- Track and report BBR coverage and news clips
- Coordination call with GHSA, IACP and regional law enforcement liaison
- Support GHSA/IACP as needed with regional events



**EARNED MEDIA**

**2011 [EVENT TITLE]**

Date:

Time:

Location:

| <b>LEAD</b>        | <b>Pre-Event Tasks Deadline</b>                         |  |
|--------------------|---|--|
|                    | <b>MEDIA PITCHING</b>                                   |  |
| Person Responsible | • Media list(s)   |  |
| Person Responsible | • Local media pitching                                  |  |
| Person Responsible | • National media pitching                               |  |
|                    | • Media pitching to begin                               |  |
|                    | • Production house assistance (pitching/feeder cameras) |  |
|                    | • Embargo date/time for materials                       |  |
|                    |   |  |
|                    | <b>PRESS MATERIALS</b>                                  |  |
| To be drafted by:  | • Media pitch points                                    |  |
| To be drafted by:  | • Media advisory  |  |
| To be drafted by:  | • Press release   |  |
| To be approved by: | • Advisory and release approval                         |  |
|                    | • Press kit content                                     |  |
|                    | • Press kit assembly                                    |  |
|                    |   |  |
|                    | <b>BBR PRODUCTION</b>                                   |  |
|                    | • B-roll to be compiled from which sources              |  |
|                    | • Principal interviews to be taped for BBR include:     |  |
|                    | • Ads/Creative materials to be included in BBR          |  |
|                    | • Background information for slates to be provided by   |  |
|                    |   |  |
|                    | <b>CREATIVE MATERIALS</b>                               |  |
|                    | • Banner(s)   |  |
|                    | • Podium card   |  |
|                    | • Charts/press kit stickers/lapel pins/etc.             |  |
|                    |   |  |

**EARNED MEDIA**

|             |   |  |
|-------------|---|--|
|             | <b>LAW ENFORCEMENT PARTICIPATION</b>  |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law enforcement point of contact</li> </ul>                                |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law enforcement participation coordinated by whom?</li> </ul>              |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-ranking police official to be acknowledged (if applicable)</li> </ul> |  |
|             |   |  |
|             | <b>PRINCIPALS</b>   |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaker 1, Title, Organization</li> </ul>                                  |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaker 2, Title, Organization</li> </ul>                                  |  |
|             |   |  |
|             | <b>TALKING POINTS</b>   |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaker 1 talking points to be drafted by WHOM?</li> </ul>                 |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaker 2 talking points to be drafted by WHOM?</li> </ul>                 |  |
|             |   |  |
|             | <b>EVENT SITE LOGISTICS</b>   |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehensive site brief</li> </ul>  |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Property owner permission (in writing)</li> </ul>                          |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weather contingency (if outdoor venue)</li> </ul>                          |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stage</li> </ul>   |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lighting</li> </ul>  |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sound/Malt Box</li> </ul>  |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Podium</li> </ul>  |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pipe and Drape</li> </ul>  |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media Table/Chairs</li> </ul>  |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Green Room</li> </ul>  |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generator</li> </ul>   |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easel(s)</li> </ul>  |  |
|             |   |  |
|             | <b>MISC. DOCUMENTS</b>  |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cell phone contact list</li> </ul>   |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Event schedule (agenda)</li> </ul>   |  |
|             |   |  |
| <b>LEAD</b> | <b>Day of Event Tasks</b>   |  |
|             | <b>STAGING LOGISTICS</b>  |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On-site POC</li> </ul>   |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staging load-in time</li> </ul>  |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show ready by</li> </ul>   |  |
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staging team on-site to break down at</li> </ul>                           |  |

**EARNED MEDIA**

|             |   |  |
|-------------|---|--|
|             | <b>PRESS CALLS</b>  |  |
|             | • Local media follow-up   |  |
|             | • National media follow-up  |  |
|             |   |  |
|             | <b>MEDIA MATERIALS</b>  |  |
|             | • Press sign-in sheet   |  |
|             | • Press kit transportation to event site                                |  |
|             | • BBR beta tapes on site for distribution                               |  |
|             |   |  |
|             | <b>MEDIA COORDINATION</b>   |  |
|             | • Media table staffing  |  |
|             | • Individual to coordinate any post-event one-on-one interview requests |  |
|             |   |  |
|             | <b>LAW ENFORCEMENT COORDINATION</b>                                     |  |
|             | • Individual to coordinate motor vehicle presence                       |  |
|             | • Individual to coordinate officer participation on stage               |  |
|             |   |  |
|             | <b>PRINCIPAL ARRIVAL/PARTICIPATION</b>                                  |  |
|             | • Principal arrival times   |  |
|             | • Principal staffers/assistants contact info                            |  |
|             |   |  |
| <b>LEAD</b> | <b>Post-Event Tasks</b>   |  |
|             | <b>BBR</b>  |  |
|             | • BBR approval needed by:   |  |
|             | • BBR to be approved by:  |  |
|             |   |  |
|             | <b>MATERIAL STORAGE</b>   |  |
|             | • Banner/podium card ownership  |  |
|             |   |  |
|             | <b>THANK YOU LETTERS</b>  |  |
|             | • List of recipients to be compiled by                                  |  |
|             | • Thank you to be drafted by  |  |
|             | • Letters to be mailed by   |  |