Managing Media Relations

Public Health Communications Webinar Series

July 18, 2019
Webinar Objectives

• Introduce basic principles of interacting with and pitching local media

• Understand different types of media communications tactics, (e.g., press releases, backgrounders, media advisories and press briefings)

• Learn best practices for educating media partners on health topics/data to avoid inaccuracy
Agenda

• **Media Relations Principles & Tactics**
  - Richard Sheehe, Senior Strategist, Merritt Group

• **Case Study: Ottawa County Department of Public Health (Michigan)**
  - Kristina Wieghmink, Public Information Officer

• **Q&A**
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NACCHO
2019 Public Health Communications Webinar Series: Managing Media Relations

Richard Sheehe
Senior Strategist, Merritt Group
Senior Research Fellow, George Mason University Dept. of Communications

July 18, 2019
Learning Objectives

Understand conceptual keys to effective media interactions

Navigate the media, messaging and interview techniques

Leverage media relations tools and templates: You don’t have to start from scratch!

An Integrated, Strategic Communications Approach

Informed by evidence-based leading practices and a cross-disciplinary perspective derived from Richard’s background in journalism, PR, marketing, education & research.
Primer Exercise: Importance of “Storytelling”

An individual has been described by a neighbor as follows:

“Steve is very shy and withdrawn, invariably helpful but with little interest in people or the world of reality. A meek and tidy soul, he has a need for order and structure and a passion for detail.”

Q: Is Steve more likely to be a librarian or a farmer?
An individual has been described by a neighbor as follows:

“Steve is very shy and withdrawn, invariably helpful but with little interest in people or the world of reality. A meek and tidy soul, he has a need for order and structure and a passion for detail.”

A: Steve is at least 18x more likely to be a farmer.

THE UPSHOT: Our communication style must leverage narrative & storytelling...
   ...including tech, engineering, science, etc!
WHAT REPORTERS WANT

To break news

Facts and figures, supported by interesting quotes

Responsiveness

Drama -- rapid success or failure — outsized personalities, controversy, spicy quotes

You to know of their publication or network

Straight talk, honesty, and access

Personal approach

References (customers and analysts)
WHAT YOU WANT

Leverage the media as a resource to reach many stakeholders

Avoid confusing the interests of the media with the interests of your organization and stakeholders

Maintain polite locus of control during the media interaction

Remember that a media interaction is, above all, a business interaction. **Never confuse a friendly interaction with friendship!**

Tailor interaction to situational factors (ie: crisis vs. ribbon cutting)

Maintain “Message Discipline” and stay on topic...

…..while still maintaining people skills, staying human and approachable
SUPPORT YOUR STORY WITH SOLID MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT

KNOW YOUR STORY:

• Develop key messages and have sound bytes ready to optimize quotability

• Balance facts and figures with anecdotes and illustrations
  • This reaches the broadest variety of stakeholders

• Use 3rd party endorsements

DEFINE YOUR OBJECTIVE AND THE MEDIA’S OBJECTIVE:

• What are you being interviewed for?

• What is the potential loss/gain? Any controversy?

• Will stakeholders, consumers, partners, and customers understand your message?

SUPPORT YOUR STRATEGY WITH SOLID GRASP OF SITUATION & GOALS
THE COMMUNICATIONS "ECOSYSTEM"

- Content-controlled mindset with people skills intact (no robotics). Issues mapping. Talking points. Polite locus of control and "bridging" skills during interviews.

- Approachability & easy demeanor without tell-all disposition. Empathy, ability to listen and "think on your feet" in real-time exchanges. Clarity & simplicity. Ego in check as confidence & humility remain balanced.

- Crisis vs. ribbon cutting; Expected vs. unexpected. Known vs. unknown; Mapping stakeholder & influencer concerns.

- Underlying traits & tendencies that affect trust & comprehension, including linguistics, evolutionary factors, social psychology.

- Psychobiology

- Situational Factors

- Interpersonal Skills

- Message Discipline
More on the Communications Ecosystem

Ecosystem Approach Urged For Communicators

By Richard Sheehy and Gary L. Keps

Managing public communications across a range of situations and stakeholders involves a lot like building a puzzle from many different pieces, but fragmented, pieces of insight. Especially during a crisis, it can be challenging to share relevant information with multiple audiences and maintain a consistent and trusted organizational identity, amidst diverse, and sometimes conflicting, priorities and principles.

Imagery, for instance, you’re hearing calls that a very wide population for a disease that, in all scientific knowledge, is extremely rare, spreads beyond a small group of individuals. From a communications standpoint, how do we balance public fears and political demands for “abundance of caution” against risk, scientific and organizational concerns about maximization of resources? Emotions, medicine, politics, competing stakeholder interests and basic human nature are all at work here — and your communication strategy needs to take every perspective into account.

Connecting the Dots

Communicators hoping to untangle situations like this will benefit from fewer silos and more coordination among the many practice areas involved. Media advisors, community relations staff, subject-matter experts, crisis managers, finance, legal and regulatory colleagues can all play important roles in guiding strategy. But it’s the communicator’s job to synthesize these diverse and sometimes competing interests into a public narrative that is unified, consistent and trustworthy.

With the strategy to connect the dots, we believe the most successful strategies involve blending wisdom from multiple disciplines through a common lens focused squarely on the communications mission. In this article, we’ll be advocating a way of communicating in ways that are meaningful and understandable to your audience. We’ll cover the importance of a cross-functional approach, the role of crisis management, and how to build a credible narrative that resonates with your audience.

Three Strategic Priorities

The accompanying graphics are one way to illustrate this kind of “Communications Ecosystem” mindset, as we’ve come to call it. Whatever your specific strategy might look like, we suggest it involve several key characteristics:

1. Your strategy should be multi-disciplinary — Depending on the specific situation, the communicator may be dealing with science, politics, health, media, infrastructure or other areas. In these cases, the communication plan may require coordinated efforts from multiple stakeholders to achieve the desired outcomes.

2. Your strategy should be evidence-based — Your approach should be informed by evidence from credible sources. This includes data analysis, research, and expert opinions.

3. Your strategy should be measurable — It’s important to track the effectiveness of your communications strategy to ensure it’s meeting its goals.

NPHIC News Article: (archived at https://bit.ly/32t9eKG)
FRAME OF MIND

Make sure to convey:

- Openness and “Empathy”
- Common interests
  - “Zoom out” to find shared goals
  - “Zoom back in” to establish POV from a starting point of consensus
- Emotional balance
  - Keep any of your own strong emotions in check
  - Avoid urge to match any negative rhetoric/tone of the questioner
- Sense of teamwork (“We” instead of “I”)

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INTERVIEWS & REAL-TIME MEDIA RELATIONS: CONSTRUCT ALL YOUR ANSWERS FROM 4 KEY "BUILDING BLOCKS"

PROACTIVE POINTS

REACTIVE POINTS

BRIDGES (or bridging)

CONTEXT POINTS
CONSTRUCT ALL YOUR ANSWERS FROM 4 KEY “BUILDING BLOCKS”

PROACTIVE POINTS
Positive points you want to make and introduce wherever possible, including key messages and preferred sound bytes

REACTIVE POINTS
Uncomfortable or low-priority issues you should be ready to address if asked. Answers should be brief, with bridge to proactive or context points

BRIDGES (or bridging)
Brief phrases to smoothly pivot away from uncomfortable or off-topic questions back to preferred territory.

- “One of the key things to keep in mind is…”
- “It’s important to remember that…”

CONTEXT POINTS
Broad and quotable points on context and/or process around an issue. Easy destination for bridging...and always counts as useful info

Modular or “recombinant” like DNA
KEY TAKEAWAYS

• The media is not your end stakeholder, only a conduit to them.

• Your media interactions require advance strategy and preparation wherever possible.

• Your strategy and tactics should be informed by evidence-based best practices and a grasp of the broader “Communications Ecosystem”

• Your real-time media interactions should rely on communications building blocks and message discipline.

• Tools, templates and processes can enhance consistency, efficiency and impact of your media relations efforts...YOU DON’T HAVE TO START FROM SCRATCH!
Lots of media relations tools and templates exist, including those freely-available by and for government communicators (e.g., CDC – CERC).

More info at https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/
YOU DON’T HAVE TO START FROM SCRATCH!

Another example: USDA’s NEW GIS-BASED MEDIA SYSTEM

More info:
YouTube Video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPqYgg2g0ll

Dirk Fillpot
USDA Office of Communications
Managing Media Relations

Contaminated Drinking Water at a Rural School

Kristina Wieghmink, Public Information Officer
kwieghmink@miOttawa.org | miOttawa.org/miHealth
Situation Overview

Coordinated Response

Lessons Learned

Kirk Park Beach, Ottawa County, Michigan
Principles

1. Be First.
2. Be Right.
3. Be Credible.
4. Express Empathy.
5. Promote Action.
6. Show Respect.
Statewide Testing Initiative

PFAS sites in Michigan
Response Agencies

MPART
MICHIGAN PFAS ACTION RESPONSE TEAM

EGLE
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, GREAT LAKES, AND ENERGY

MDHHS
Michigan Department of Health & Human Services

STATE OF MICHIGAN GOVERNOR

Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development

DNR
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

ROBINSON TOWNSHIP

Grand Haven Area Public Schools

miOttawa Department of Public Health

OTTAWA COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Ottawa Area ISD

miOttawa Where You Belong
Coordinated Response Priorities

Address Public Concern

Provide Consistent Messages

Communication Methods

- News Releases
- Press Conferences
- Text Alerts
- Social Media
- Facebook Live
- Websites
- Town Hall Meeting
- Posters
- Interviews
- Administrator’s Digest
- Newsletters/bulletins
PFAS found at Grand Haven's Robinson Elementary

Hi this is Catherine Shaffer from Michigan Radio. We just spoke and you said you'd call me back.

The number is 734 763 9052

Thanks!

Thank you- I'll be in touch soon

Yesterday - 6:28 PM

Thank you for the interview. To reiterate, state and local health and environment officials are working closely with the Robinson Elementary school and county leaders to monitor the situation. Currently, there is not a known source, but will keep the public updated as details emerge.

Mon 6:28 PM • SMS
Hello Robinson residents. I'm a reporter with the Grand Haven Tribune hoping to talk to some residents who have had their water recently tested for PFAS. Please message me or reply here if you would be willing to share your experience with us. Thanks very much.

Grand Haven Area Public Schools

Today we were notified by the Michigan DEQ that Robinson Elementary School's water supply tested positive for the presence of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in an amount greater than the EPA's Lifetime Health...

13 On Your Side

Page - 261K like this - Grand Rapids, Michigan - TV Channel

WATCH LIVE: PFAS test results of Robinson Elementary School revealed

WOOD TV8

Page - 260K like this - TV Channel

UPDATE: Follow-up tests at Robinson Elementary near Grand Haven have confirmed the school's water contains elevated levels of PFAS. Report:

dtv.com/1564910990

Irlzarry

1 like this - Journalist

...found elevated levels of PFAS in Elementary's drinking water.
PFAS Response

The Ottawa County Department of Public Health (OCDPH) continues to work with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE, formerly MDEQ), Grand Haven Area Public Schools, and Township on a public health action plan. A plan was developed in response to the statewide testing initiative for PFAS in the water supply well for Robinson Elementary School in Grand Haven. The National Science Foundation's (NSF) Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study for the purpose of assessing health effects of PFAS in drinking water. Patients were recruited for the study and will be administered a survey assessing dietary habits and PFAS exposure. This study will be completed in 2023.

The results of the study will help determine the overall health effects of PFAS exposure and will be used to inform future actions.

Robinson Elementary School

At Robinson Township there are multiple schools, including:
- Grand Haven High School
- Grand Haven Middle School
- Grand Haven Elementary School
- Robinson Elementary School
- Grand Haven Public Schools

Details of the investigation results are provided below in the timeline, with different colors based on sample results.

On October 29, Robinson Township was informed that the Ottawa County Department of Public Health and Grand Haven Public Schools were notified of elevated levels of PFAS at Grand Haven's Robinson Elementary School. School leaders immediately restricted access to drinking water in the building; bottled water is being provided to the school. Other than Robinson Elementary, all other schools in the Grand Haven Public School District are served by North Ottawa Water, which is not affected by PFAS.

Robinson Elementary PFAS Water Issue

On Monday, October 29th, 2018, Grand Haven Public Schools were notified by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) that Robinson Elementary School's water was positive for the presence of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). In an effort to protect the health of our students and staff, we immediately provided bottled water to the school and are taking every precaution to ensure the safety of our students and staff.

5-9-2019
Update on PFAS in Robinson Elementary Water

Our GHAPS Families,

Thank you so much for your patience and support as we continue to work through this issue. Our students' safety is our utmost concern, and we have provided bottled water for drinking. We are actively working on system design for a new well in the near future. This new well is expected to be complete in the next few weeks.

Our team has been working hard to address this issue and ensure the safety of our students and staff. If you have any concerns or questions, please contact us at (517) 982-2222 or fas@ghaps.org.

Sincerely,

Grand Haven Area Public Schools
Public Relations
Emergency responses don’t have to be chaotic.

- Develop relationships with media before an emergency.
- Coordinate consistent communications with all stakeholders.
- Respect each other’s expertise and role in the response.
- Look at the situation through the eyes of those affected.

Don’t ever think it can’t happen to you!
Helpful Tools

- Analyze headlines - headlines.sharethrough.com
- Hootsuite – social media management platform
- Prdaily.com – communication tips
- PolishMyWriting.com
- Hemingwayapp.com
- GovDelivery
- Qualtrics
- Adobe Creative Cloud
- Free photo and vector sites

Contact me if you want any links.
THANK YOU

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Q & A
Thank You