

Working With The Local Media

1. What is your message? Why is your story important to the community?

Think of three positive things you want to say about the Peanut Hotline and your business. These are called "talking points." Write them down and edit them to make sure they're concise and clear. Practice saying them aloud several times. After you're comfortable with the talking points, think of interesting facts or funny examples to illustrate them. For example:

"We get 8 to 10 people a week bringing us "peanuts" to reuse. Just last week a man stopped by the day after his wedding with his car *full* of packaging peanuts."

Think of talking points as building blocks of your story, the basic themes. Talking points are direct, simple, positive statements of the major points that you want to communicate. Return to your talking points over and over again. Everything you say should relate directly to these simple sentences.

Limit yourself to three talking points. More talking points will confuse your audience and muddy your message. If you attempt to build more themes, your message will get lost.

Ideas to consider as you develop your talking points:

- You are helping the community recycle by providing a drop-off center for plastic loosefill.
- You are keeping loosefill packaging out of landfills.
- Many people think polystyrene packaging "peanuts" can't be reused or recycled – they can and you are doing it.
- How many people come in each week to return "peanuts"?
- How much loosefill have you collected/reused?
- How do people find the nearest location (800-828-2214 and www.loosefillpackaging.com)?
- Are there other collection sites in your town/county?

2. Preparing your story for the media

The news media can be divided into two broad categories: Print (includes newspapers and magazines) and Broadcast (includes radio, television and cable). Each requires different approaches.

Newspapers rely heavily on facts, issues and background. Newspapers usually give the most comprehensive coverage of a particular issue and are more able to cover important details of a story.

Newspapers often use photos. Think of a photo that reflects your business's participation in the Peanut Hotline. Newspaper coverage varies depending on the section of the newspaper covering the story.

- Lifestyle stories take a human interest approach to issues. For example, your newspaper's lifestyle section might be interested in how employees, customers or consumers are pitching in to support community recycling efforts.
- News stories focus on facts and events. Your 100th customer returning loosefill or statistics on how much you've collected make good news stories.
- Business stories would address the impact of your recycling activities on the local economy.

Television relies on visual images, pictures and scenes. You must have an interesting picture to interest TV. Where you are standing when you give a television interview will set the mood for the story. For pre-taped pieces, reporters cut and edit your responses down to 10 to 15 seconds. In live interviews, reporters will not edit your statements and may run 2 to 3 minutes of tape. Like newspapers, television news segments deal with basic facts about an issue or event.

Radio relies entirely on sound. The tone and emotion in your voice combined with background noise will tell the story. Reporters usually cut and edit your responses to approximately 10 to 15 seconds. How you say something is more important than what you say. Be pleasant and positive – and make your voice sound enthusiastic.

3. Contacting the media

You will be more effective if you address your story to the proper person at the newspaper and television and radio stations.

Newspapers:

- Call the paper and ask for the reporter who covers environmental and/or business issues. Identify yourself and say you want to talk about your packaging "peanut" reuse program. Ask if the reporter has time to talk to you now or should you call back. If the reporter wants you to call back, ask when is the best time.
- You should always have a "story angle" – a compelling reason why the story is important to the newspaper's readers along with your point of view on the issues the story raises. Invite the reporter to visit your business.

Television:

Contacting your local TV station is easy. Just call the station and speak with the news director. You will want to ask:

- Who at the station covers environmental, waste management and business issues?
- How does the station want to be approached with a story idea?

Emphasize the visual aspects of the story. Let the assignment editor know what action he will see, for example that you can be "buried in a mound of returned packaging peanuts."

4. Writing a news release

This is the "who, what, when, where and why." Keep it short: not more than one page. Neatness counts! Do not send out any release with typos or misspellings.

A news release is a statement with all the details: what is it you are doing, where it is, why you are doing it, when you do it. Include in the release a direct question, usually a couple of sentences in answer to the question: Why? For example: "Now it's convenient for people to recycle their used packing 'peanuts' when they go to the shopping center."

The release can be mailed or hand-delivered to the media in your area. Send it to everyone. Telephone a few days later to see if the release has arrived. Be prepared to describe the contents of the release in brief clear terms in 30-40

seconds. Offer to answer any additional questions and encourage the reporter to cover the story.

Type the release on your store's letterhead stationary or on plain paper. Always have a contact name with phone number at the top. Double-space the sentences. (A press release from the Plastic Loose Fill Council is attached as a template to customize for your use.)

A news release always includes the release date and where to go for more information in the upper left hand corner. A release can be marked for immediate release or released at a future date of your choice.

The text of a news release is organized with the most important and basic information first so that it's easy for the editor to cut it by starting with elimination of paragraphs at the bottom. Accordingly, the first sentence or two should answer the key questions: who, what, when, where, why and, if possible, how.

Make all statements factual. Never editorialize in a news release.

You should use short, two-sentence paragraphs.

To indicate that you have reached the end of the press release, type -30- or three ### (number signs) under the last paragraph in the center of the next line.

5. Some interview tips

- Be well prepared. Practice your talking points with a friend or in front of a mirror.
- Look pleasant. You are sharing information about a program that helps the public recycle...you're the "good guy."
- Be yourself. The more natural you are, the better impression you'll make.
- Speak clearly.
- Round off numbers because they're easier for everyone to remember.
- Look the reporter (even if camera is there too) in the eye.
- Wear comfortable, medium colored clothes (blue, green, brown).
- Respond to questions with short, clear answers. Don't ramble on.
- If a question does not relate to your points, answer it briefly and steer the conversation back to your points ... even if the two are barely related. Example: "I don't know how this affects the total volume of loosefill manufactured, but the important thing is that our business is helping our citizens make a positive contribution toward waste reduction through reuse, recovery and recycling."
- If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Then promise to get them the answer as soon as possible – and do it!
- Smile!