

P Media

This media guide was adapted from materials originally written by Kim Freeman, a longtime curler and public relations executive in New York. If you have any questions on how to secure media interest for curling in your community, feel free contact her at: kimmariereeman@aol.com

The Role of the Media

Being aware of the context in which the media works will help you in your publicity efforts for your club. To be effective, you will need to understand who controls the flow of information at a newspaper, television or radio station and how he/she functions.

The Media Today

We live in an information-driven society where satellites, computers and new technology have made news gathering and dissemination almost instantaneous. The public is constantly bombarded with information as the efficiency and method of information distribution grows. Cable television, the proliferation of specialty magazines and media specialization, makes communications a competitive environment. Despite the fact that new technology and media specialization are making our backyard bigger, we still have an insatiable desire to know what is happening in our own backyards.

Journalists

Journalists, like the public they serve, are bombarded with information. They, therefore, become the media gatekeepers: they choose what to write about and ultimately what we will see and hear. To get their attention, telling them “who, what, when, where, why and how” is **no longer enough**. They view these questions in relation to others: Is it unique? Is it bigger? Is it better? Unless the answer is yes, a story won’t pass their desks. Because they must compete for the public’s attention, their job is not merely to inform, but to interpret the news and make it entertaining.

Understanding what makes news and knowing who cares!

It certainly can be a frustrating experience trying to sell your story to media outlets but understanding what makes news can go a long way in breaking down the media barrier.

What makes news?

It has been said that news is what people are talking about. A nice simplification, but you need to know more. If you want a reporter to be interested in your story, you need to meet one of the following criteria:

...Timeliness:

Nothing beats breaking news. Such news stories often command front page attention at newspapers and lead air time at radio and TV stations. Breaking news is immediate news about something that just happened and that matters to a defined audience. This has to be news that people will talk about.

...Proximity:

Most media are first and foremost interested in stories with a local angle. National papers have a mandate to cover the country and thus are more likely to be interested in stories from all over Canada.

...Conflict:

Like it or not, conflict, whether it involves people, companies or government makes news. And don't be fooled by those who say they don't read negative stories - they do and news editors know it.

...Eminence and Prominence

Some people are newsworthy simply because of their fame or their position of power. *Thousands of Canadians curl every day and no one cares. But if Guy Hemmings comes to your club to play an exhibition game, then the press will write about it.*

...Consequence and Impact

What may be a simple sports story to you may be of tremendous consequence to your neighbour. The more people affected, the bigger the story.

...Human Interest

People are interested in people. It's a fact and a strong element of news. Those who read, listen and watch the news like to learn about others. Though a curling story at first glance may not seem to be about people, playing up personal elements in your story will make it more interesting to viewers and readers.

Other factors affecting what becomes "news"

...News Holes

Why is it that the minor hockey league tournament scores made the news last week but your club's bonspiel results didn't? Often, space limitations (a busier news day and more stories) will result in your event being dropped from the paper.

...Focus of the medium

The monthly curling magazine has a different editorial mandate than the sports section of the daily paper or the local TV station. Understanding what mandate each medium has is key to working effectively with the media.

...Competition among media

No one wants to cover old news. An editor or reporter is far less likely to write about your event if the competition had the same story a week earlier. On the other hand they may be very likely to run your news story if you approach them with an "exclusive" and give them the chance to cover the story before anyone else gets it.

What is News?

Broadly defined, news is something that shapes or changes the lives of individuals, a group or many groups of people. People make news, unusual events make news. For example, "Dog Bites Man" is not news. "Man Bites Dog" is.

Curling as News

Curling is news because many people see it as an off-beat and interesting sport. It is most likely to be newsworthy if it is positioned properly: either as a social event or a competitive event.

Keep this in mind the next time you try to publicize a curling event. The media will sometimes “make fun” of curling because they don’t understand the difference between a fun bonspiel and a competitive tournament. Make it clear how you view it by first calling upon the “right” editor, and secondly by telling them the “side” of curling you want covered.

Working with the Media

The following information about working with the media is supplied from the perspective of the media and is designed to assist your club in getting the most coverage in your local media.

Communication

Communication from the club to print media (as well as radio and TV) is very important. The better job that is done at the curling club end regarding events, results and provincial competitions, the better the publicity that curling will receive over other club sports such as bowling, skating, tennis, swimming, etc.

Publicity Person

Because of the importance of this communication, it is highly recommended that the club appoint a media/publicity person whose sole responsibility is to work with the local media. One person that the media can contact and deal with will ensure that curling will receive more prominence. You may want to consider a member that has an interest in writing.

Advance Notice

Supply media with a schedule of club events and bonspiels at the beginning of the season. (This may not work in larger centres; therefore you may have to remain in contact year round.) Call a few weeks before the event to ask about coverage, to arrange a photographer and to discuss how to get results in, both in terms of timing and format.

What to Supply and Style

Not just bonspiels but even club events can be reported, if handled properly. The less work required by the sports desk in checking names or scores, the easier it is to use. This is particularly true for a weekly paper. Here is an example of the wrong and right approach:

Wrong: Skip Ann Smith’s rink won the Wilson Trophy over Mrs. White’s rink from the Ottawa area. **Missing** – proper names, the score, no game details and club identification. This would require follow-up phone calls

Right: Ann Smith’s host club rink, scoring two on the final end, defeated Jill White’s Ottawa Rideau rink 7-6 in the Wilson Trophy final at the Royal Kingston Curling Club. **Off to press** – everything needed is right there – full names of skips, their clubs, some game description and the score. Names of rink members could be added.

Space and Time

Don’t assume that the person receiving the information knows the game or can fill in the missing information. It is up to the club to provide the information. Space is limited but good information; tightly packaged (see OFF TO PRESS) will make the paper. The more information supplied the better. It may not all get in but it can’t be reported if it wasn’t received to begin with.

When providing information, **always** leave a contact name and phone number.

Deadlines

In the media business we get this a lot – the bonspiel or playdown ends on Saturday afternoon and we spend Sunday night looking for results. The response is often that they were going to send that in tomorrow. Media, especially after doing a pre-event story, is anxious to get results quickly. Sunday night information makes Monday's paper. A word of caution though, if you supply good information on time and it doesn't make the issue you expect it to, this may be a result of a space problem, so be patient as it will make a subsequent issue. We can guarantee, however, that if it doesn't get in on time, it won't make the next day issue. We do ask that the person sending in the information not try and play the part of editor too.

Provincial Competitions

If your club is hosting an association playdown at any level, ensure that you have someone handling the phone so that when media call in for an update they get what they need. It is a constant problem for the media to phone host clubs for results when too often the response is (1) surprise that the media is calling or (2) lack of interest such as "Do you need that now?" an/or "I don't know what the score is." This attitude won't help get publicity for the competition or the host club. If the event is high profile and in or near a major centre, consider using a dedicated line or cell phone as the "media line". It is annoying to hear busy signals all day.

Clubs can generate coverage by supplying the name of the event, number of rinks, names of competing skips and draw times to the media in advance. If the draw times are provided, the editor then has the option of sending a photographer/camera operator over for the big games.

Web Site

Web sites are a great place for the media (and the public) to get results and entry information. Make sure you update it regularly.

Choosing the Right Media

Understanding how the media works, what makes news and how to make the news can be valuable knowledge for any business. Favourable media exposure means recognition in the community and a higher profile among potential customers. So here are some inside tips on the do's and don'ts when it comes to gaining media attention for your business.

...Print

What makes the print media unique is its ability to provide in-depth commentary by way of longer news articles and the fact that newspapers and magazines have long shelf lives (compared to radio and TV).

...Radio

Radio has the advantage of being able to produce and air a broadcast report minutes after news breaks. Also, morning drive-in shows and evening rush hour programming often have large followings and loyal listeners.

...Television

Television's strength is its ability to blend pictures with storytelling to create a compelling and visual broadcast that can leave an impression for a very long time (i.e. Sandra Schmirler at the Nagano Olympics). *When it comes to curling coverage, television has its advantages because of the great visuals from a curling rink. Many local television stations also air*

community special interests story and curling fills that bill quiet nicely because of the broad slice of the Canadian population who curl.

Approaching the media

Know your media

As mentioned before, print, TV, and radio each have different requirements when it comes to deciding what makes news. Understanding what is "newsworthy" for each media outlet is key to pitching your news story. In simple words, TV needs pictures, radio needs voices and print needs quotes. Organizing a press conference with a celebrity in attendance is good for TV. Have a number of different story angles when calling various media and choose your targets knowledgeably.

Get to the point

Not only are you busy but so are reporters - so get to the point! Reporters face daily deadlines and between faxes, e-mails and telephone calls, they receive hundreds of story suggestions each week. Reporters have good news judgment and can often decide within a few minutes whether or not they are interested in your "pitch". More than five minutes is too long. (NOTE: When leaving a phone message, leave your name, number, company name and a BRIEF description of the story idea).

Don't confuse advertising with editorial

Nothing upsets reporters more than the suggestion that buying an advertisement warrants a news story. Though on occasion the protocol is sometimes breached, the rule of thumb is that advertising is separate from editorial (news) content, like church and state. It is **NOT** a good idea to have someone from your advertising department phone an editor. Appoint someone who understands the editorial side of the media. If you have a good newsworthy story it should be able to stand on its own.

Call early but DON'T call often

If you are sending out a press release, it is important to follow-up with a media call as soon as possible. Be specific when calling. Ask if the reporter received your release and whether or not you could have two minutes of his or her time to explain the contents of the release. Don't forget to tailor your pitch to the specific media. If the reporter says NO, more often than not it means NO. Thank them for their time and move on. If the reporter is interested, he or she will let you know. Then half the battle is won. If you are the media contact, be available for the media. There is no use putting your name on a press release if you are not willing or available to talk to reporters.

Be prepared to run around

If a reporter likes your story idea, then you are halfway to getting coverage. But you still have work to do. Reporters will often ask for background information and contact names - make sure you have them on hand. Media outlets with daily deadlines need information quickly, whether or not you have it available can decide whether the story runs or not.

The Role of Publicity

Publicity can play an important role in recruiting new members and in raising awareness about curling in your community throughout the season.

What is Publicity?

Publicity is not advertising. Publicity supplies free of charge, information about people, events and ideas to the media for public consumption. Publicity is the editorial side of journalism, and so, the credible side. Advertising, on the other hand, is the commercial side of journalism.

Limitations of Publicity

There are never any guarantees that a story will appear in a newspaper, and if it does, it should read exactly as you would like it. This is just the opposite of advertising, where you control exactly when and where an ad may appear and what it says.

Publicity is non-repeatable. If the morning newspaper runs a story on “local club to host national championship”, the evening newspaper may be reluctant to do so. The trick is to think up different story ideas for different outlets. For instance, if the morning paper reports that your club is hosting a tournament, the evening paper might do a feature story on the local team that has won it five times.

Guidelines and checklist for creating a news release

News releases remain the most common tool for organizations to make a public statement through the media and community. Newsrooms receive hundreds of story ideas each week. Here's a simple check list to make sure your news release will stand out in the crowd:

- Find a "**news hook**". Ask yourself “is this news?” Your news release will get better pick up if you develop a strong new hook, create a human interest element, or relate the news release to an industry trend or national or international event.
- Create a great **headline**, one that hits the heart of the story. If the headline doesn't grab the news editor or reporter it is less likely that he or she will go on to read the body of the news release. Remember that in a busy newsroom you are competing for the editor's or reporter's attention. An effective headline always includes the organization's name, gives a sense of immediacy by using the present tense, use active verbs and plain conversational words to clearly communicate the nature of the story.
- Answer the **eight W's**. The initial five (who, what, why, when, where) should be captured in an interesting opening statement of 25 words or less. The remaining three W's should be answered in the second paragraph. They are: Who wins, Who loses and Who cares. A good reporter will be asking themselves these questions so it's in your best interest to answer these questions for them.
- Don't spin a bad news story. Always **tell the real story, even if it's bad news**. The media will be less likely to trust your organization in the future if a news release tries to hide the bad news at the end of the news release. Be proactive and explain why the bad news is happening and what the organization is doing about it.
- Contact information. You must **provide sound contact information** if you want the media to react to your news release. That includes: contact name(s) - meaning someone who can respond directly and immediately to the media or who can immediately arrange a media interview; daytime and after hours telephone number; e-mail address; and, the organization's web site. Make sure the contact person is available and ready to respond.
- Once you've sent the news release, **follow up with a call**. Call the sports desk or beat reporter. A thorough follow up will let the media know the story is important and will help you build stronger relationships.

News Releases and Media Alerts

Two basic items can help you get publicity for your club: the news release and the media alert. The news release is used to convey all the information you can about a curling event, and so, can be used as the basis of a story. The media alert is used as an “invitation” to media to cover a curling event.

The News Release

The news release is simply a statement of fact issued to the media as news. It is written in an interesting, informative and professional style in the hope that a reporter might use portions of it “as is”. The length of a news release varies according to the amount of details and importance of the story. For a curling event, try to keep them no more than 2 pages in length, double-spaced.

The structure of a news release is that of an “inverted pyramid”. The most important information (who, what, when, where, how and why) is in the first paragraph, and lesser information and detail are in subsequent paragraphs.

Example: ST.PAUL, April 8 – The first members of the 1988 U.S. Winter Olympic team will be chosen this weekend in St. Paul, Minnesota. 32 men’s teams and 16 women’s teams will compete for the honor of representing the United States in the sport of curling at the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary. The Olympic curling trials, which will be held at the St. Paul Curling Club, will begin Wednesday, April 9 and conclude Sunday, April 12.

WHO? The first U.S. Winter Olympic team members. **WHAT?** Olympic curling trials. **WHEN?** April 9-12. **WHERE?** St. Paul Curling Club. **WHY?** To choose team members. **And what’s the news?** The curlers were the first Olympic team members among any winter sport in the U.S.

The body of the news release then provides additional details about the event in descending order of importance. The closing paragraph reinforces the first.

The Media Alert

The media alert is a one-page summary of key points for a news event. It serves as an “invitation” for media to come to your club and cover your curling event. It is much like an “outline” of the first paragraph of a news release and includes the following:

- **Who** – names of people
- **What** – curling
- **When** – date and time
- **Where** - curling club address
- **Why** – significance of the event relating to the club or the sport of curling in general

With a media alert, be sure to include at the bottom of the page detailed directions to the club along with any technical information the reporter might need to know (fluorescent lights? ice that is slippery? no flash bulbs allowed? curlers available for interviews?)

Developing a target media list

Even before the start of the curling season, begin to develop a short list of key reporter you’d like to have come to your club to see and write about curling. To figure out just “who”, follow this outline:

- Daily newspapers
 - Sports editor, sports reporters
 - Feature editor, feature reporters
- Weekly newspapers
 - Feature editor
- Radio Stations
 - News editor
- Television Stations
 - News editor
 - Sports reporter

Call each of the newspapers, radio and television stations and get the proper names, titles, addresses and phone numbers for the people listed above. Then, type these up on a master media list on which you can take notes when you call to ask them to cover curling or run your news release. It might be also helpful to print out the names and addresses on mailing labels to make the mailing of the news release and/or media alert easy.

Publicity planning timetable

Four weeks before the “Start” of the season

Call the sports editor of your local paper along with one or two of the TV sports reporters and try to schedule an appointment to see them – or at least, send them an introductory letter and information package.

The reason for meeting is to provide them with a complete calendar of curling events of your club and to discuss which ones would be most “newsworthy” from their perspective. Generally speaking, your club’s open house, club championship, curler profile, and invitation tournaments will probably be the most important. They are also probably spread out over the five month season such that you won’t be overwhelming the reporter with too many curling events.

Provide him or her with background information

The editor/reporter will need the following (in writing) before the season starts:

- A good description of how curling is played
- The names of two or three appropriate individuals in your club they can call for information
- A brief history of your club, along with the history of the tournaments you wish to have covered.

Try to schedule a demonstration of the game for the editors/reporters benefit within the first two weeks of the season. This will help later on when the reporter is pressed for time and needs to accurately describe how the game is played. Promise the editor/reporter that you will notify him or her one week and two days in advance of upcoming tournaments so that he or she can schedule a reporter and/or camera crew to cover the event.

Two Weeks Before Each Curling Event

Write a news release about the event. Send it to:

- weekly newspapers **two weeks** ahead;
- daily newspapers **one week** ahead;
- television and radio stations **four days** ahead.

After sending the news release, call the most important people on your list and see if they will write a story, or assign their own reporter to cover the event. Provide whatever additional background information, photos or interviews they need to complete the story.

Three Days Ahead

Write your media alert and send it to the TV and radio assignment editors. Call them one day ahead to see if they will send reporters to cover the tournament.

Day of the Event

Keep two or three of the same background packets you gave out before the season handy in case reporters show up unexpectedly and don't have any information. Assign a club member to escort the reporter down on the ice and to answer any questions he/she has.

Day after the Event

Watch your newspapers and clip articles. **Also clip articles about curling wherever you see them.** Select the better ones for future use as enclosures in your media background kit or with the opening letters you send to the media. If you liked a particular article, don't be afraid to call and tell the reporter.

Finally

Have fun! Publicity can help your club recruit new members or just gain recognition in the community. And remember that reporters are people too – they may enjoy what they see and hear about curling enough to join your club... and then you'll have a "fairy godmother" to help you with your publicity efforts in the years to come.

The McIntyre Curling Club in Timmins, Ontario invited radio personalities from the local station to join their mixed league. They waived the entry fee and, without asking, received an incredible amount of ad-lib time. This promoted their business and was an effective recruiting tool.

When the media contact you

The 7 golden rules - remember these, if nothing else....

1. **Know what the interview is about.** Don't go into an interview cold. Find out why a reporter is calling, give yourself time to prepare, and then call back.
2. **Have a message.** Once you know the subject of the interview, prepare three to five key points you want to make.
3. **An interview is not a conversation.** The media are your conduit to the public. Speak to the public, not the reporter. Be friendly, but remember that interviews are how reporters conduct business.
4. **There's no such thing as off the record.** An "off the record" comment may not be attributed to you, but that doesn't mean it won't appear in the paper or be used to confirm information.
5. **Keep it simple.** Nothing ruins an interview faster than long, complex explanations. If you want your message conveyed, be sure to say it simply.
6. **Be brief.** Practice answering questions in 20 seconds or less. Chances are, the reporter will use the first decent 20-second comment and skip much of the rest.
7. **Tell the truth.** Don't lie and don't guess.

Sample Media Releases

Pre-Season Letter to Editor on your letterhead!

August 15, 2002

Mr. John Doe
Sports Editor
Local Newspaper
123 Main Street
Anywhere, Any Province A1B 2C3

Dear Mr. Doe:

Each winter, the Anywhere Curling Club holds a number of tournaments, and at the same time, we wonder how we might get our area newspapers to cover them. We decided to ask.

We know it is early to do so, but we are hoping that by getting you the dates for each of the tournaments (“bonspiels”) ahead of time, we will be included in your planning schedule.

Specifically, we would like the Anywhere Press to do a feature story on “curling in Anywhere at the beginning of the season for our open house (early October), and later on, provide regular coverage for the individual tournaments/bonspiels.

Enclosed is a tentative schedule for the season, along with some background on the sport itself. I will give you a call in a few weeks to see if this is a possibility.

Many thanks for your help.

Sincerely,

[Your name]
[Your phone #]

Enclosures

Open House Press Release on letterhead

For release: [date]

Contact: [your name]
[your phone #]

CURLING SEASON OPENS!

Anywhere Curling Club to hold Open House

The 2002-2003 curling season will begin the weekend of [dates] with an open house hosted by Anywhere Curling Club for area residents.

The season opener will be held at the club at [club address].

The open house will include a reception, informal instruction on how the game is played, videotapes of recent world curling championships and a mini curling match for all attendees.

This season marks the [# of years] the year of curling in [city/town] for the curling club. The club traces its roots to [insert two or three sentences on history of club].

Curling, a game which has been described as “shuffle board on ice”, involves two, four-man teams who alternate sliding rocks down a 146’ sheet of ice. The team that places the most rocks nearest the centre of the circular target at the end of 8 or 10 ends (innings) wins. The game is an ancient Scottish sport (over 500 years old) and was recently featured in the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, Utah.

For further information about curling and the open house, contact: [name of open house chairman], [name of curling club], [club/home phone number].

The public is cordially invited.

-30-

Playdown Release

For release: immediate

Contact: [your name]
[your phone #]

ANYWHERE CURLING CLUB TO HOST MEN'S
PROVINCIAL CURLING CHAMPIONSHIP
Winner to Represent PEI in Canadian Curling Championship

[City, date]— [Number of rinks] teams from [list cities] will compete this weekend in a playoff to determine PEI's berth in the 2003 Nokia Brier.

[Name] Curling Club will host the event, which will begin at [time] and continue through the weekend. The playoff will take place at the curling club, located at [address]. The final round is scheduled for [day, time] and the public is invited to attend.

The winning team from this weekend's championship will compete in [location for national championship], [date of championship], for the Canadian national curling title. Victors there will go on to compete in the world championships, [dates] in [location for world championships].

Included among the teams competing this weekend are: [name of skip, home club, nationals experience; name of skip, home club, nationals experience, etc].

Curling, a game which has been described as "shuffle board on ice", involves two, four-man teams who alternate sliding rocks down a 146' sheet of ice. The team that places the most rocks nearest the centre of the circular target at the end of 10 ends (innings) wins. The game is an ancient Scottish sport (over 500 years old) and was recently featured in the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, Utah where both the Canadian men's and women's teams won Gold!!

For further information about curling and the open house, contact: [name of championship coordinator], [name of curling club], [club/home phone number].

The event is open to the public

-30-

Follow-up letter to feature writer

(used in September, 1989 with the New York Times for St. Andrews, Ardsley and the New York Caledonian Curling Clubs)

September 9, 1989

Ms. Lisa Foderaro
The New York Times
170 Hamilton Avenue
White Plains, NY 10601

Dear Lisa:

Thank you for taking my call yesterday – I know things can get crazy around a deadline.

The story idea I have is on curling. The sport has been played in the area for about 85 years, ever since the St. Andrews and New York Caledonian Curling Clubs moved to Westchester from New York City's Central and Van Cortlandt parks around 1904. We all now curl at the Ardsley Curling Club on Mountain Road in Ardsley.

The game itself is over 500 years old. It began in Scotland and was transplanted to North America by British and Scottish troops in Canada shortly before the Revolutionary War. There are about 15,000 curlers in the U.S. and probably 1.5 million in Canada. We in Westchester total 300.

It's an interesting sport and has been described a lot of ways, from "marbles in a meat locker" (thank you, Bill Geist) to "Chess on the ice" (more to our liking). All agree it's a game you need to know a little more about to really understand, appreciate, and enjoy.

I guess that's where the New York Times can help.

The curling season officially starts on October 21 with an open house for the public. We will begin "making ice" the first week of October (it's a bit complicated – for instance this year we're going to "de-ionize" our water to get a better quality playing surface). It would be great if an article could be run sometime prior to the open house to help get the season off to a good start.

I've enclosed a couple of background articles to give you an idea of how it's been reported in the past (the most recent from The Times was two years ago when one of the Olympic curling team members was in the area).

I'll give you a call later next week to see if you'd like to go ahead with the story. At that time we can discuss additional background, interviews, demonstration of the game, etc.

Talk to you then (and thanks for your interest!).

Sincerely,

Your Name
(212) 555-1212 x. 444 (days)
(212) 555-1234 (evenings)