



myplace
support team

Social Networking

Introduction

Good publicity for your project is important for two main reasons – it helps to create a more positive image of young people in your wider local community and it promotes a buzz around the range of activities and facilities available at the centre, encouraging more young people to get involved. This briefing will give you some starting points on getting your message out there.

How to promote your project using the news media and social networking

Communications don't have to cost a lot to be effective. What matters most is working out a clear strategy in the first place. You need to think about your messages and the audiences you want them to reach. When you know this you can concentrate on finding interesting and eye-catching ways of getting them out there. There are two distinct strands here. One is going through a news media channel (your local newspaper or radio station, for example) so that their readers and listeners will hear your story. The second involves going more directly to your service users and relying on them to cascade your information through the variety of social networks that they belong to.

Before you try to place something in your local news media though ask yourself why you want this story in the news? Who do you want to hear it and why would it interest them? What would you hope their reaction to it would be? Having decided to go ahead it's important to make what you do stand out – it has to pass the 'so what?' test. What's newsworthy, different, interesting or even unique about what you're saying? This is what will make the journalist (and later their readers and listeners) sit up and pay attention. The good thing is young people are naturally newsworthy, sadly often in a negative way, but try to turn this to your advantage.

Getting in touch with the local media is easy – as straightforward as dropping something through the door, picking up a phone or sending an email. A good way is to prepare a press release. Ensure that yours will stand out from the many others they'll receive. There's lots of advice available on the best way to write and present press releases, so give this some thought too, or seek advice from your local council or partner organisations' press offices.

One important thing to consider is timing. Do a bit of research to find out when the local news media deadlines are and allow for these. If inviting people to attend an event or an opening give plenty of notice. Find out too if there's someone on the staff of the newspaper or radio station charged with covering young people's or educational issues – they'll be a good person to make contact with and keep in touch with too.

Celebrities can be a big help in getting noticed so if you can build a relationship with someone well known, you'll find it will help. Many **myplace** projects have found celebrities to be very interested, particularly if they were a young person in your area.

The press and media can be an effective and highly influential tool in promoting your project. They can reach a large audience in a short time, so it is important you provide them with clear, accurate and timely information.

But another way of getting your news out into the world is by using social media channels. Social media refers to the tools people use to publish, converse and share content online. There are a huge number of sites, with the most popular being Facebook, Bebo, Twitter, Flickr, MySpace and YouTube. These are simply places where users can create a profile of themselves or their organisation and socialise with their network of friends and contacts, using a range of tools, such as writing on each other's walls, adding friends, posting videos, writing notes/blogs, adding images, creating groups and organising events.

Joining a social networking website or using existing sites you are connected to, such as Twitter or Facebook, is a good way to share information and publicise your project. They have a huge following - over 60 per cent of 13 to 17-year-olds have profiles on social networking sites (SNS) and many are spending upwards of two hours a night on online social networking activities. MySpace has over 80 million monthly users worldwide. Facebook has some 500 million users around the world and the average number of 'friends' in a Facebook network is 120 - messages sent out there could spread quickly. Social networking sites can engage and empower young people through their powerful communication and organising tools. They can be dynamic spaces to get educated, debate ideas and join communities

Social networking websites can help you to:

- › find effective methods of involving your local community in your project design;
- › share best practice, information and ideas with other projects;
- › get support on issues relevant to managing their projects;
- › help you deliver, manage and staff projects;
- › promote your project to a wider audience and generate publicity;
- › connect with young people; and
- › promote events and activities at your project.

For most social networking sites no specialist IT knowledge is required to use and create a space for your project, but within your **myplace** centre there will be plenty of knowledge and experience, so tap into it. You could also look to this to help you develop and run a project website too. If you do, make sure you keep this up to date, informative and accurate, or people will stop visiting it.

New media should be key to any promotional work you are doing. Almost all young people go online and have a mobile phone. A text message about your project will have higher impact than a leaflet or a poster, and young people tend not to be avid readers of their local newspaper.

But take care and plan anything you do with young people. If you try to use social media in the wrong way you can be seen to be trying to take over young people's private lives. There are safeguarding issues to consider too, as well as your own personal space. So, for example, many youth workers don't use their personal Facebook pages when communicating about their work.

“The media is great as it gives people an opportunity to see all the good, positive activities that are going on in their local area.”

“If you’ve got something to say or promote what you are doing, tell everybody. Keep it local so it has more impact.”

Action planning

Young People

Share ideas for publicity with young members of your group and encourage their input. Agree what the key messages will be. Before you send a press release, ask someone to check it for spelling mistakes and factual accuracy. Especially check that relevant times, dates and locations are included.

Making a Difference

Your centre can offer lots of strong photo opportunities for the news media. For example, using the climbing wall to create a dramatic backdrop. Be creative in taking advantage of these to make your stories stand out.

Vision and Values

Make sure you consider safeguarding issues when using new media and social networks. If you’re uploading photos or videos onto your website or Facebook pages make sure the images are suitable and everyone included is happy for them to be there. Once they are there they can be there forever.

Practicality

Before you invite journalists to visit your centre, ask members of your group if they want to be there and get involved by having their photograph taken or being interviewed. It is important that anyone who is going to be photographed has signed a photography consent form. A sample form is available at www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/granholders.

Tools, ideas, exercises

Explore with young people the social networking sites they use and concentrate on targeting these to promote your activities. Identify and train a motivated group of young people to become spokespeople for your **myplace** centre, so they can promote positive stories to the news media and other young people, and undertake radio and television interviews. Encourage them to set up, update and oversee a website for the centre. This could include loading centre-made videos to YouTube to promote specific activities, for example. Make sure those who appear in any moving or still pictures are happy to be included.

Links and Further Guidance

Through Community Newswire charities and not for profit organisations can get free advice on developing press releases. These stories can then be submitted free of charge to the Press Association's subscribers, which includes every national paper, all regional daily papers, the vast majority of broadcasters and most regional weekly papers. This is an initiative from the Media Trust. Some 90 per cent of press releases submitted to Community Newswire are used. Find out more at www.mediatrust.org/newswire

Youth Work Online is a space where you can share your questions about the impact of digital technologies on work with young people; and about the policy or practice of digital youth work. Find out more at network.youthworkonline.org.uk

Plings helps people discover trusted information about places to go and things to do for young people. This information can be accessed through different websites, social networking and mobile tools and local authority portals. It aims to be a national resource providing live information about positive activities organised by local authorities, voluntary and private sector organisations for young people in their communities. Find out more at www.plings.co.uk

The Media Trust works with media organisations and charities and voluntary organisations to enhance their communications and enable communities to find their voice and make it heard. Find out more at www.mediatrust.org

Sounds Positive: a guide to working with the media for Young People is a four year project in the south west funded by a Big Lottery grant, to train and support young people to work with the media and promote the issues that matter to them.

Email: soundspositive@learning-southwest.org.uk

Youth work online is a community for youth workers and other youth professionals exploring digital dimensions of their work. Find out more at network.youthworkonline.org.uk

The DIY Guide to Powerful Publicity Most people who have to write publicity material in the voluntary sector have received no formal training in how to go about it. This book fills the gap for untrained copywriters who are expected to craft powerful publicity material. DSC, October 2006. ISBN 1 903991 73 0

The DIY Guide to Public Relations For Charities, Voluntary Organisations and Community Groups, Moi Ali; DSC, 2nd edition 1999. 92 pages, ISBN 1 900360 53 5. This best-selling guide is for voluntary groups who want to be more effective at promoting their organisation and services. It offers advice and tips for all charities, especially small groups with limited resources, and covers:

- › media relations and events;
- › publications;
- › campaigning and advertising; and
- › customer care.