

PLANNING A PR CAMPAIGN

HOW TO GET BETTER
PRESS COVERAGE



PR & MARKETING

For our purposes, PR is any coverage that is

- Unpaid;
- Is stated in the third person (for example, a journalist interviewing an artist - the interview is written through the journalist's voice);
- With PR, typically you do not have control over the final message. That is, an interview pitched in one way might come out differently if the journalist/editor feels that there is a better angle.

PR is differentiated from marketing, which therefore is

- Paid;
- Is stated in the first person (for example, in an advert: Arts Council Malta wishes to inform that...);
- With marketing, you have final control over the message. Typical examples are adverts, printing of a programme, billboards etc.

In this toolkit, we will be focusing on a typical PR campaign for an artistic event or festival.

HOW PR WORKS

PR works through story value – that is, a news agency feels that it will be getting value-added by running a particular story. With PR, the promotion is indirect and filters through the piece. But the story is being read /watched for its content, not for its promotional value.

Therefore your story pitch or angle is key to determining whether or not your story will get media coverage.

PLANNING A PR CAMPAIGN: A BASIC GUIDE

A typical campaign starts out with features and interviews on newspapers and magazines as the longer-term, more analytical medium. Eventually, while these are still running, it moves on to include TV and radio. Finally, as the event approaches, the campaign focuses on news, both on TV and in print. It usually starts out looking to create a general hype – and then zooms in on particular aspects of the event that might require a boost.

With a PR campaign, your aim is to tell stories. The lives of artists, event themes, behind-the-scenes aspects: all are potential stories so that audiences can understand the artistic processes behind the event/s.

PREPARATORY WORK

Before you contact any journalists/editors, make sure you have:

- A programme or a clear idea of the events you'll be promoting with dates and venues;
- A good supply of excellent images; these can be collected from the participating artists themselves. If you do not have them, it is worth commissioning a professional photographer to take them as they will come in handy throughout the campaign;
- Bios and performance info – familiarise yourself with these so you can extract themes, interview pitches, story angles;
- Identify story angles – identify key stories and key players and tailor them to the media's various requirements.

Keep in mind that the media works by exclusivity: once a story is featured in one medium, it is unlikely to get featured in another. Moreover, journalists and editors tend to get annoyed if a story they have accepted to run, appears in another medium before their own story is published.

STEP 1: MAGAZINES

- Magazines plan their stories a couple of months ahead: so start early;
- Angle the theme to the particular mag: women for *Pink*, lifestyle for the *Sunday Circle* etc;
- Aim for at least one magazine cover;
- Magazines usually have very good visual appeal and longish interviews, so factor that in your thinking.

STEP 2: NEWSPAPERS

- Newspapers typically plan their stories anything from a month to a week ahead: so you will need to contact them early in your campaign;
- Newspapers can run interviews, features or themed stories;
- The key is to get the culture editors excited: plan running campaigns with exclusive stories for each;
- Bear in mind that some newspapers will carry out interviews themselves while others will require ready-made material, so be ready to supply both.

STEP 3: RADIO & TELEVISION

- These can run features, news features or interviews on cultural programmes or programmes with a cultural slot. Later in the campaign, your event can also be featured in the news bulletins;
- While print editors love to be contacted early, with television, the opposite tends to work better. Newsrooms work on a day-by-day basis and their mantra is news value. Anything that is still weeks ahead is not (yet) news;
- Features and interviews on breakfast shows, *MaltArti* etc can be filmed a little ahead;
- News features typically happen in the last week although you will need to contact the editor a week or two before.

ACROSS ALL MEDIA

PRESS RELEASES

- If you are looking at reaching all the media simultaneously, press releases can be useful tools. However you have no guarantee that they will be carried, they can be edited down and they are easily ignored;
- Press releases tend to work well at the beginning of the campaign and during a press launch;
- They need to be issued in English and Maltese for broad coverage. Try not to exceed 400 words in total;
- Press releases should be issued with logos and images and possibly footage;
- Use formats that are easy to edit such as word; never send out pdfs. It is always best to include ticketing info, contact details, websites etc;
- Bear in mind that most Sunday newspapers close their pages mid-week, so press releases are best issued early in the week.

PRESS LAUNCHES

- Press launches are more dramatic ways to get coverage across all media;
- Their main advantage is providing the opportunity for footage and/or photos, thereby reaching TV news stations;
- However you need to make sure that you have a magnet to attract the media's attention: this could be anything from a minister or an unusual event. In other words, you need to make sure that the media has something to film;
- With press launches, you need to issue a press call at least a day ahead of the event. Make sure that your press call gives clear info on place, date and time and why the media should take the time to attend. Include anything from the presence of a minister to refreshments;
- Call the media to remind them directly before the event. Offer to send info and images if they cannot make it;
- Upload any images on facebook during the launch;
- Issue a concise press release in English and Maltese with images and footage directly after the event;
- Press launches are usually best organized when there is a significant milestone or newspoint as well as around a week before the event, preferably linked to rehearsals, for TV coverage;
- As with press releases, bear in mind that most Sunday newspapers close their pages mid-week, so press launches are best organized early in the week. Try to avoid organising them late in the evenings as most journalists work day shifts, limiting your coverage possibility from the outset.

OTHER TOOLS ONLINE

Facebook and other social media: use these to personalise your event and for behind-the-scenes info. Try to include an image with every post. Get your artists to do your PR for you; ask them to promote their specific events and tag you. Instagram is also great to include a behind-the-scenes diary which can then be transformed into an online blog.

Generic websites: websites such as www.artscouncilmalta.org, www.visitmalta.com etc will often feature your event for free either on their site or on social media; in the case of www.artscouncilmalta.org, we will feature your project on our social media if it is supported through one of the Council's funding programmes.

Mailshots: consider sending these to your target audience.

CLOSER TO THE EVENT

- Setting up of the event, rehearsals and general preparations are great opportunities to obtain media coverage on TV and the newspapers' news (as opposed to features) pages;
- Make sure to ask newspapers whether they would like press comps, particularly if they will be sending reviewers. Ensure they have excellent seats and are treated well; during the event, try to greet them and see to any individual requests;
- Coordinate any photographer passes for your event. Brief them on any rules such as flashes etc.

DURING THE EVENT

- You should try to plan at least one media appearance at the opening of the event;
- Make sure your event is documented: this is key not only to any coverage during the event but also to promote future editions. Hire a professional photographer and preferably a videographer. Upload images on social media and send them out to the media together with short footage snippets;
- If your project was funded or supported by Arts Council Malta, remember to send the images to Arts Council Malta so we can use them in our own promotional material.

AFTER THE EVENT

- Follow up reviewers; send them images and footage for their stories. Do not attempt to influence them;
- Consider sending out a survey or gathering feedback through facebook.

LOGOS

- If your project/event/festival was supported/ funded by Arts Council Malta, make sure to include our logo on all marketing and promotional material. If the project was supported through a specific funding programme, make sure to include both the logo of the funding programme as well as that of Arts Council Malta. Email our creative brokers on fundinfo@artscouncilmalta.org if in doubt.

LASTLY

- Enjoy relating your stories to your audiences and visitors and sharing the poetry, thrills and colour that come with organizing a high-calibre artistic event.

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