

AT AN ARTS BUSINESS SEMINAR HOSTED BY THE AUSTRALIA Business Arts Foundation in Sydney earlier this year, Katrina Strickland, Arts Editor of the *Australian Financial Review*, gave an insight into the world of a pressured journalist working on tight deadlines with an unending stream of calls, emails and faxes coming in from people hoping to get their arts story in to the paper. Leaving us with no wonder that she doesn't always answer the phone, these were some of her words of advice for prospective arts publicists:

- Develop news sense [see box for some tips].
- Be aware of the audience/readership of the paper.
- Approach your story the same way you tell a story to a friend in the pub: put the most newsworthy information up the front.
- Names work. (You don't normally read about Board appointments in the paper but when Sarah Murdoch was appointed to the Board of the Australian Ballet it was news.)

- Be honest. Journalists have a pathological hatred of people who lie.
- Arts people talk about honesty but when it comes to actual attendance figures or sponsorship income, few give the bald truth. Those who are honest and upfront tend to rate better with journalists.
- Journos triple check what you tell them. If you lie to them they might find out and you will come off a lot worse in the press.
- Speaking off the record does work with reputable journalists but be clear about the difference between 'off the record' (the information may be used but not attributed to you) and 'not for publication'.
- Most journalists want to find their own stories. Engage them in discussion and debate.
- One of the keys to success is to develop a two-way relationship with a journalist rather than simply sending them press releases. ■

Wasting time on media relations? Take some advice from a journalist

- Remember that newspapers like the *Financial Review* and *The Australian* have national coverage and need stories of national significance. Some stories may be more appropriate to a state or regional publication.
- The whiff of any backstage drama, ordeals and sagas is always interesting, of course. So are first things or last things ... and anniversaries.
- Think of topicality beyond the arts; try to tie this into the background. The recent play about David Hicks did this well.
- Quality pays off. If you do something well, eventually the media will pick up on it.
- Pick your media – think about who will your story most appeal to. The scattergun approach really does not work.
- If it's a one city production, you might not have much luck with a national paper. Perhaps your local paper would be better.
- If it doesn't have good visuals, it's maybe not for television.
- Consider columns for small items with a humour twist, such as Strewth in *The Australian* or Rear Window in *The Financial Review*.
- Pick your timing. You're more likely to get a run when there's not much on, for example, Sunday for Monday. Journalists always need news on a Sunday and 'softer' stories are more likely to get in then.

What's newsworthiness?

The following characteristics are commonly associated with a "news" story. The more you have connected with your arts event, the more likely you are to get coverage:

- Novelty
- Rarity
- Innovation
- Shock
- Conflict
- New data
- Simplicity
- Kids
- Animals
- Social issues
- Celebrities | prominent public figures
- Humour
- Outdoor | unusual location
- Action
- Bright props & images
- Links to news of the day
- Local impact
- Symbol of a social trend
- Holidays, anniversaries

More arts marketing and media relations resources in our Websites & Publications section on page 30.

List of characteristics of a newsworthy event from the Australia Council for the Arts' *ReSAUCEful Medial Relations workbook (2002)* by Judith James p.56

March

10 March

 The **BERMAGUI** Seaside Fair features an arts and craft exhibition, a street parade, over 100 market stalls and the famous Bermagui Idols Music Competition.
Web www.bermaguiseasidefair.com

10 – 11 March

 St Saviour's Patchworkers & Goulburn Embroiderers present a quilt show with trading stall and raffle as part of **GOULBURN's** Heritage and Roses Festival. Contact Fay Tel 02 4823 5005
Web www.goulburnsoldiers.com.au

10 March – 17 March

 **GOULBURN** Regional Conservatorium's Big Band in Concert Part of the local program of Cathedral Week activities. Web www.igoulburn.com

10 – 18 March

 Garroorigang Heritage Home Guided Tours take visitors through the historic Hume family homestead, built in 1857, to view its superb colonial and Victorian collections. **GOULBURN**
Tel 02 4822 1912