

Tips to planning press conferences

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Good media events rely on certain basic events management principles and these quick tips will ensure a smoother press conference.

Invitations

- Get invitations out in advance. Giving the press a day or two notice is not only insensitive (implying they have nothing else to do) but will probably result in juniors being sent instead of the people you need
- Mention who is addressing the event and other noteworthy people attending (Minister, CEO, foreign investors etc) - everyone mentioned needs his/her correct title and full name - not initials
- Describe the event accurately - it is a press statement (no questions); it is a press briefing with Q&A; it is a launch, with Q&A afterwards etc. Summarise in one paragraph what the event is to achieve.
- Give accurate dates and times when the event will start and finish – deadlines are important to daily media
- Give accurate address and directions, send GPS coordinates or a map if complicated
- Tell the news media why your event is important to their readers and viewers – not just 'Please come to my event.' They get hundreds of these every week – make yours stand out as the one they want to attend because of the news it offers

Press kits

Send a brief fact sheet electronically before the event, so that they can prepare questions or send the right person. Indicate what will be in the press kit on the day. This way they know if they need to bring a photographer, sound person etc.

On the day, provide a press kit on a CD or memory stick that contains:

- Copy of the main speeches – if these cannot be had in advance, indicate how you will send them and by when
- Photographs of the main speakers/project/product – get these in advance to avoid the endless flashing camera effect on the day
- Background and objectives of the project/news
- How many people are involved in the project and who they are
- Recent achievements and other projects of the organisation
- Names of key people in the organisation
- One A4 page of facts developed especially for the day

Build good relationships

- See if there are opportunities to build their audience, through prizes and giveaways, either before or after the conference
- Be creative – get them interested in the story first
- If you receive media coverage, thank the journalist in writing after the event

(This is an extract from Gwen Watkins' 'PR & Communications' training manual, which encapsulates her 30 years of experience as a journalist and PR practitioner)

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