

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### MEDIA PUBLICITY

#### Telling the Papers

The principal way of gaining widespread publicity for an exhibition is through the press and the media. Whatever the size or the scope of the exhibition, it is sure to interest the local newspaper. A very early approach should therefore be made to the paper (or, of course, papers if there are more than one). The opening shot should be a letter, short and specific, telling the editor that on such and such dates there will be an exhibition of certain sorts of books in this or that place, and giving the names of any celebrities who have agreed to open it or visit it. This should be followed by a phone call offering further information and eliciting questions.

It is important to be definite about one's objectives in talking to the press. What do you hope to achieve? What is your target audience? These are the types of questions they will ask. In addition, it is always helpful to be able to provide a newspaper with a human interest story. Anything or any person with strong local influence or background is suitable. Papers like exclusive stories, so if there are several connected with the exhibition or those involved with it, they should be parcelled out among the press with exclusivity in each case.

If, for example, the exhibition contains books dealing with the Second World War, then if someone connected with the book exhibition is a war hero or a concentration camp survivor, (or the son or daughter of one) there is a story straightaway. Or if a similar exhibition was held five

years earlier and someone was sufficiently spurred on by it to read for a degree in the subject, then that, too, is a story. Newspapers are always interested in people, so thought should be given to every aspect of those involved in the exhibition which might be turned into a newspaper paragraph.

### Lead Times

Newspapers usually work pretty quickly. Magazines need longer "lead" times: they may go to press as much as six weeks in advance if they are monthly, or almost double that time if they are quarterly. Quite early in the planning stages of an exhibition, care needs to be taken to establish closing dates for copy for any journals that might be interested. Feature stories may need still longer lead times. Keep to any deadlines you are given, always remembering that one column of publicity at the beginning of an exhibition is worth hundreds at the end.

Occasionally a newspaper will do a whole feature about an exhibition. This is almost always tied to advertising, so it's a matter of convincing the paper that enough people will buy advertising space round the feature or supplement to make it worthwhile for them. They may also want assistance with the editorial matter in this case, though given the basic facts they will more often prepare the copy themselves.

It is worth remembering that editorial mention of an exhibition is almost always more telling than direct advertising. All of us tend to invest editorial copy with an authority (and indeed accuracy!) which we withhold from paid advertising, so it should be a high priority to make sure that mention is made of the exhibition, preferably on more than one occasion, before it opens.

## Snapping the Start

Since local papers like publishing photographs of local happenings, an opening reception or party will almost always find them willing to send along a photographer to record the occasion. Press photographers usually have tight schedules, so they don't want to be kept waiting until "rest of the committee turns up" or "the chairman's aunt arrives". The session should be scheduled to take place at a given moment after the reception starts. (Half an hour after is usually ideal: most people who are coming have arrived; those leaving early have not yet started to go). These timings should be given to the press so that the photographer can arrange to arrive a few minutes before the session is due to start and to leave 15 or 20 minutes later. Such precision will give papers the confidence to send a photographer along.

## Radio and TV

Radio and television are more demanding than newspapers because their "space", or air time, is more valuable. They need the same prior warning, though news and news features programmes are compiled at quite short notice; and they will nearly always respond to the opportunity of interviewing a well-known person. They may want to do this at the studio or at the show. Care must be taken to ensure that the exhibition itself is mentioned! There are plenty of cases where a famous author or writer-politician has been interviewed because of a book exhibition but at some stage in the interviewing or editing all mention of the exhibition has been dropped. The prime aim of the broadcasting station is to secure an interesting interview: the prime aim of the exhibition organisers is to secure mention of the exhibition. The radio and TV station will not forget its aim: on their part the exhibition organisers must ensure that the broadcast also features the exhibition.

## Press Releases

In countries where there is effectively one local paper and one local radio station, direct contact of the sort outlined above is usually easy. Where, however, there are a number of papers and stations, then the first essential in announcing an exhibition is to issue a press release. This should be mailed to every possible outlet that might mention or feature the exhibition, including church magazines, work magazines, and club or society magazines as well as commercial ones. Boldly headed "Press Release", it should contain the basic facts of the exhibition - dates, times, place, transport, opening hours - followed by a brief description of what is being displayed, and ending with material that could be useful for quotes to anyone writing about it. Ideally, if funds allow, there should be a preliminary press release well before the exhibition, possibly soon after the committee has drawn up the initial plans. Then, a few weeks before the actual show, another press release should be distributed including the names of the opener, guest of honour and visiting celebrities, and giving other details.

## Posting the News

Besides sending posters to schools, colleges and the like, you should consider sending them a press release. With any luck it will be put up on a notice board and further whet the appetite of those who read it. The difficulty with sending such promotion pieces to any large institution is addressing it to the right person. The head teacher or principal may do nothing more than glance at it and put it in the wastepaper basket; equally the registrar or secretary is likely to regard such announcements as not being directly germane to his or her work. Where literature is the real subject of the exhibition, the head of the English department (or equivalent for other tongues) is the most likely to want to spread the news. Similarly, for other subjects - such as engineering, sociology, medicine, and the law - the head of department is the person most likely to take real action.

Best of all is to send the press release not only to the head of department but also to a teacher or student in that department who is known to have an interest in the exhibition or in those involved with it!

### Beat the Drum Locally

Local societies (we mentioned club and society magazines above) can usually be relied on to spring to attention when something affecting their interest is concerned. So an exhibition of railway books will almost always get the local railway society alerting its members; stamps will do the same with the philatelic society. More general groups, like Women's Institutes, Round Table, Lions and Rotary, require a more careful approach. So when you get in touch with them, list the reasons why their members might be pleased to have their attention drawn to the exhibition.

In short, publicity means letting as many people as possible know that the exhibition is taking place, at the same time giving them enough information to fire their interest and enthusiasm. It is virtually impossible to take too much trouble in doing this, but care should be taken not to waste publicity material - press releases included. It's useless informing papers or radio stations hundreds of miles away. It may sound nice to say that the exhibition got a mention so far off, but in practical terms the idea is to attract visitors, and people are unlikely to travel for long distances unless the exhibition is of the size and importance of the Frankfurt, Nice, Montreal or Delhi Book Fairs.