

PUBLIC RELATION TOOLS FOR PROMOTING THE WORK OF THE COURTS

The public image of courts matter

In today's world, more than ever, "perception is reality"- the way people perceive your institution, that's the way you are indeed. You might do the best job, but if the people do not trust you, it all falls apart. Image is the mental picture that people have of an organization. Building positive public image is key for organization's success. It is even more important when you spend taxpayers' money. These are institutions of public character and the community has a right to know how work is performed. Courts must be concerned about their image and invest in developing a positive reputation for their work, thus building public trust and confidence.

Being proactive

It is clear that the public as well as the media are interested in what courts are doing. Why shouldn't the courts be the ones that inform the public about court issues and concerns? Court silence in the face of media inquiries, only serve to permit the critics of the judiciary to define, often inaccurately, the position of judges and the judicial branch. Proactiveness is the "formula" for implementation of the principles of openness, transparency and accountability in the courts. Public information officers in the courts should step up and keep the public informed on the court's work, as well as the challenges they face providing timely and fair justice.

What is the purpose of public relations?

There is the story about a British admiral who, in the early years of the twentieth century walked into a gunnery class. Turning to a nervous young midshipman he asked him what the purpose of gunnery was. „To fire the gun, sir!' was the reply. The admiral's face purpled, and no doubt the midshipman's paled, and he bellowed: „Boy, the purpose of gunnery is to hit the target!' Similarly the purpose of public relations is not to issue press releases or handle inquiries from journalists, or even to generate a massive pile of press cuttings. The true purpose of press

relations is to enhance the reputation of an organization and to influence and inform the target audiences.

Well planned and successfully implemented public relations can:

- ✓ Improve the image of the court
- ✓ Improve its media profile
- ✓ Change the attitudes of the target audiences
- ✓ Influence government policies
- ✓ Improve the relations with other stakeholders

Many of these objectives can be assisted by favorable media coverage. The presence of the courts in the media and positive stories about their work directly affect their image. Therefore, developing a relationship of professional cooperation with the media should be one of the key aspects of courts' communications strategy.

Knowing “how to”

This brochure is intended to become tool-kit for the courts, primarily for the president judges, public information officers, court administrators, but also for all other judges and court employees, because positive public image is important for all and is to be created by all. This brochure will provide an overview of the key public relation tools and a mechanism that courts might use to build a good public image.

The publication will cover three most used and effective PR tools: press release, interview and press conference. It will also provide details on how to work with the media. Finally, it will list a few other public relation tools that you might find useful in your work, such as: briefings, media tours, organizing special events, publications, websites and internal communication.

This brochure offers useful, practical tips and hints for shaping your public relation activities. However, successful work with the public takes more than just knowing how to do things right. The ever-changing communications environment requires a lot of energy, commitment and courage to test new approaches. I wish you enjoy this brochure, pick up what you deem appropriate for your court, test it, and add your personal flavor to it. It must work!

COMMUNICATING WITH THE MEDIA

Although there are different ways to reach the public (some of which will be discussed in this publication) still, media are the largest and the fastest communication channel in modern societies. You might deliver your messages from person to person, from group to group, but by using the media you could reach thousands of people at once. Media have a huge influence in creating public perception about all areas of society life, and the judiciary is not an exception. Therefore, courts should involve media as a way to inform the citizens about their work. Contacts with journalist are part of the everyday activity of the public relations.

The ideal relationship between the courts and the media should be based on trust, which develops over time. Journalists differ, and the public information officers must assess who is to be trusted and how to approach each of them. Efficiency and sensitivity are essential. Courts and media do not always share the same interests. Journalists search for attractive stories, while courts want to be viewed in a good light. Often institutions make the mistake of believing that they can talk to the media only when it suits them, and not when they are asked to do so by the media. Although it involves bad news, you have to be available and respond to the media inquiry in a professional manner. Most of the work with journalists will be done over the telephone and e-mail, but at times it will also require face to face contact. Also, sometimes you will be the link between the journalist and the president judge or other judge who will give an interview or statement. In your communication with journalists:

- Provide the information requested as quickly as possible; journalists have strict deadlines, old information won't make the news
- If you don't have the information, try to get it and call back the journalist
- If you cannot provide information, inform the journalist promptly, so that he/she could look for other sources
- Sometimes journalists will need help with legal terminology and concepts. Provide your support
- If the journalist asks you to check the facts in the article, do it, without commenting on the style

PRESS RELEASE

A press release is a simple tool used to convey to the media, new and important information. It is an official written statement that is sent to the media to be publicized. A Press release is neither an announcement nor letter. It is an article, written in third person that seeks to demonstrate to an editor or reporter the newsworthiness of a particular person, event, service or product.

The press release should make the journalist interested in your story and then make him/her want to publish it in the media. This has various benefits – positive exposure for your court and its work, the journalist will have a good story, and lastly, the citizens will be informed.

HOW TO WRITE A PRESS RELEASE?

Only one of ten press releases is published in the media. You don't want to see your press release in the trash bin of the journalist, with your time wasted and your frustration with the media increased. Therefore, you should do your best to make a well-prepared and professional press release. Use a journalist style. Imagine a short newspaper article - that's how your press release should look. It will help you attract a journalist's attention and increases the chances that your text will be originally portrayed in the actual article of the journalist.

Best rule to follow: Keep it short and simple!

THE STRUCTURE:

The press release has a form of inverted pyramid - what is the most important goes first.

-TITLE - it has to attract the reader and also provide a summary of the article. Be creative! Do not send press releases without titles.

-DATE - when you send the press release

The LEAD is the first paragraph that is supposed to capture the attention of the audience and set the tone for the rest of the article. The LEAD includes:

- WHO
- WHEN
- WHAT
- WHERE
- WHY

-Next comes the BODY, which includes explanations on the lead, quotes, statistics, history or other relevant details.

-Including QUOTES is very important. People are interested in real-life stories, your quote will give a human touch to your press release. Be sure that you include the full name and title of the person who contributed a quote.

At the end, you include SUPPORTING INFORMATION, such as: information on your court, whom to contact for more details, etc.

-PHOTOS-If you have, include 1-2 good-quality action photos or mention the photo opportunities.

THINGS TO BEAR ON MIND WHILE WRITING THE PRESS RELEASE

- ✓ Determine the focus or the angle of your story-this should be ONE thing
- ✓ The first ten words have to be effective
- ✓ Use facts
- ✓ Be sure to remain objective, without influences
- ✓ Use common, understandable language, avoid legal, technical or “strange“ language
- ✓ Check the grammar
- ✓ Be concise
- ✓ Use short sentences
- ✓ One page is enough
- ✓ Choose the right timing – when the topic is hot, not weeks after
- ✓ Don't make it look like advertising-no one will publish it!

THREE MAIN REASONS FOR FAILURE

- It is not newsworthy-it is not of significant importance, it doesn't make people interested
- Badly written, the story is hidden inside, not obvious, too much technical material (laws, regulations, terminology)
- Sent to the wrong media/journalists (or to everybody-not targeted)

INTERVIEW

On many occasions, president judges and judges will be invited for an interview to present the work of the court, discuss burning issues and/or express an opinion. Interview is a journalist genre, used to present a position, opinion, and point of view of a person, group of citizens or institution. Interviews are excellent opportunities for you to send your message and provide first hand information. On the other hand, journalists need to talk to confidential and prompt sources of information --people who are leaders in their area of work and who are able to communicate easily, with language accessible to everyone, related to the specific issues and topics.

Good interviews require good communications skills, but above all, what it takes for a good interview is systematic and thorough preparation. It is said: "To fail to prepare is to prepare for failure". Therefore:

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- ✓ Find out more about the media, journalist and show: you should know where you are going and what to expect
- ✓ Decide what do you want to achieve with the interview
- ✓ Plan your three major points (**only three**, in any case the audience won't remember more than three points) that is your skeleton plan; your answers during the interview should center around these three points
- ✓ Plan relevant messages. Use the „So what?’ test and go through what you intend to say and check it. It might be really important to you...but, what about the audience? If it is not relevant and interesting, then what's the purpose of saying it?

- ✓ Plan short and simple messages, which are repeated during the interview in different ways; that's how messages reach the audience
- ✓ Your messages should have impact. Compared between: "Our court implemented computer system which completely automated the case management" AND "Now, from your home you could check the status of your court case", the latter clearly shows to the audience what are the benefits
- ✓ Arrange the facts, anecdotes or the examples which will support your three points: your appearance should be interesting and appealing. Remember that people love stories
- ✓ Try to assume potentially difficult questions and prepare for appropriate answers
- ✓ Rehearse. Rehearse. Rehearse.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- ✓ Break the ice with the interviewer. Use some casual talk about the weather, traffic issues, mutual friends, etc. You have your agenda and the interviewer has his or hers, it is good when you both achieve most of your agendas. So, start by showing an interest in the interviewer. Mention something that you liked from their work, start a conversation about their job, the subject of the interview and what they want to ask you in the interview.
- ✓ Try to deal with the nervousness. First of all, it is natural to face nervousness. The time to worry is when you are not nervous! Spend a few minutes on your own, concentrate and breathe deeply. Don't think about the cameras and the journalists, imagine that you are talking to a stranger on the street and you are explaining the work that you are doing for him/her to understand. Let your communication be natural.
- ✓ Think positive. The interviewer has the advantage of asking the question, but you have an even bigger advantage of answering it. Treat each question not as a threat, but as an opportunity to convey your messages to the audience. You decide what to say and how to say it; you are the expert in the topic, and after all, that is the reason why you are being interviewed.

TIPS FOR A GOOD INTERVIEW

- ✓ Use numbers as little as possible, if you have to, than use effective numbers, connected to something familiar

- ✓ Do not use professional terms. Use the language of the ordinary citizens, since you are addressing them. Using too technical or weird language won't make you look smarter
- ✓ Tell the truth and nothing but the truth
- ✓ If you do not know the answer - admit that and offer to provide the answer later
- ✓ Do not speculate and do not give hypothetical answers
- ✓ Do not say „I have no comment’ - explain why it is not possible to answer the question
- ✓ Nothing is „off the record’ with journalists. Even if you are not „on the air’, say only things that you would like to see broadcasted
- ✓ Be energetic and full of enthusiasm
- ✓ Look at yourself from the point of view of the public that will read/watch/listen to you
- ✓ Be convincing and make the audience believe in what you are saying
- ✓ Always be positive, even when the journalist is negative
- ✓ Use “bridges” – a rhetorical tool that will help you answer a difficult question or direct the discussion to arrive at the essence of your point/message
- ✓ Example for “bridges“:
 - Allow me to add...
 - That can be the case...
 - It seems that the most important question is...
 - The point is...
 - What should be remembered is...
- ✓ Take the journalist inside your story - make him listen to your key points, through the phrases such as:
 - There are three matters which your readers need to know
 - There are several aspects that we should underline in this issue. First... etc.
- ✓ Do not fill in the silence. Just answer the question and that is it. The journalist is responsible for the interview. Do not say things that you will regret later.

SPECIFICS OF DIFFERENT INTERVIEWS

TV

During a TV interview, the audience will focus not only on what you say, but also on HOW you say things, including your voice and your body language. Therefore:

- ✓ Talk fluently and relaxed

- ✓ Provide short answers, without many details
- ✓ Look at the journalist, NOT the camera
- ✓ Do not react while the question is being asked
- ✓ Do not gesticulate too much
- ✓ Do not knock on the table with the pen
- ✓ Do not recline in the chair
- ✓ Be spontaneous, but do not overdo it
- ✓ Without many smiles, without being too strict
- ✓ Pay attention to your physical appearance: wear things that are, above all, comfortable for you; more conservative style will work better. Avoid stripes, shiny fabrics and flashing jewelry. Use simple make up.

RADIO

The techniques for radio interviews are basically similar to those for television, but the key difference is the visual appearance, which is replaced with the tone of your voice. Therefore:

- ✓ Pay attention to your voice and the manner of expression; it is all that you have to convey your message successfully
- ✓ Use the voice to picture enthusiasm
- ✓ Try to imagine the audience and to address it directly
- ✓ Make a two second pause before each answer
- ✓ Use of anecdotes and analogies is crucial to capture listeners' attention. The television audience receives pictures all the time, while the radio audience needs to paint their mental pictures.
- ✓ Studios are generally smaller than TV studios, the microphone is in front of you, and it can't be ignored. The interviewer might do something else while you answer the question, so don't be distracted.

LIVE

Life interviews can enhance your performance. It guarantees that nothing will be cut, lost or misinterpreted by the journalist and/or editor. You just need to stay focused and give your best.

RECORDED

Treat it as a live interview and give your best at the first attempt. If you make a mistake, you can ask them to stop and start over again.

PANEL

This is usually done in TV shows, with more than one person being interviewed, sometimes including a live audience. The time slot is divided between many people, so your messages should be as clear and short as possible, providing for a maximum effect. At this type of interview you have „competition’, so you should try to give your best and to be as interesting and as colorful as possible.

DOWN-THE-LINE

Down-the-Line is an interview conducted by a journalist on location A (usually studio) with an interviewee on location B (sometimes even in another town). In such a case, you should listen to the journalist in the headphones, look and talk in the camera, to someone you don’t see, which might be strange. However, imagine that you do it every day on the telephone. Practice makes it go easier.

ON SITE

The TV or radio team comes to your court for an interview. Normally, people perform better on their own territory. People also perform better when standing and outdoors than indoors. Propose the journalist and crew your preference of where to do the shot; for example, in front of a banner, flag, or any other professional background. You don’t want to have your coffee machine behind you while giving an interview.

DOORSTEP

Often, media teams can appear from nowhere and try to make an instant interview. Don’t run away, but also do not agree to the interview without adequate preparation. Tell them that you want to talk, but not right now. Invite them to the court, discuss the idea and do some preparation before the interview. If you are open and reachable to the media, such situations will rarely occur.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Relations with the media should be developed and nurtured on a daily bases. Therefore, after the interview:

- ✓ Send a thank you letter or note to the journalist
- ✓ Add the media and the journalist to your list

- ✓ Document your appearance

PRESS CONFERENCE

A press conference is to be organized only when you have something really big, important, exclusive and new to inform about. If you think you have such a topic, test your idea by asking yourself whether maybe a simple press release or interview will serve the purpose. If your answer is „no, we need something bigger’, then most probably you should start planning a press conference. A press conference is organized for the press. Journalists will be there expecting to ask their questions on the topic, and sometimes even beyond it. Organizing a press conference will save your time. Instead of talking to tens of journalists separately, at the press conference everybody will get the information. However, good press conferences require careful and thorough preparations. You should have a team to work out all the content and logistical details.

TIPS FOR PREPARING A PRESS CONFERENCE

- ✓ Carefully select the speakers: they have to be relevant to the topic and each of them has to have a say
- ✓ Involve 3-4 speakers: one to facilitate the press conference and the others to address the journalists and answer questions
- ✓ Divide roles and responsibilities: everybody should know what he/she is in charge of
- ✓ Be sure that everybody’s address is brief, concise and interesting and that speakers do not repeat each other
- ✓ Determine the date and time for the press conference: you should bear in mind that journalist should come, cover the press conference and return to the media office to edit the material and prepare the news. Therefore, plan press conferences in the period from 11 am until 1 pm. Be careful that your timing does not overlap with other important events, which might decrease the attendance and coverage. Finish in maximum of 45 minutes.
- ✓ Prepare a list of journalists that you would like to see at the press conference. Send the invitation at least two days before the press conference.

- ✓ Prepare a press release for the press conference (using the tips highlighted in the section for press conference). Send it with the invitation and distribute it as part of the press package at the event.
- ✓ Prepare a press package for journalists: include the agenda for press conference, speakers with their full names and titles, press release, and any other materials relevant for the topic (such as reports, statistics, publications, etc.)
- ✓ Determine the location for the press conference. It has to be convenient and easy to reach for the journalists and their equipment. In your case, a bigger meeting room in the court may serve the purpose. Plan the stage, the background, be attentive to the branding
- ✓ If possible, rehearse 24 hours before the press conference. Check whether speakers are clear and brief enough and invite colleagues to challenge them with questions that journalists might ask. It will improve your self-confidence and will give you an idea how you might be perceived.

DURING THE PRESS CONFERENCE

- ✓ Arrive at the venue at least one hour before the press conference starts
- ✓ You need to take care of many logistical details: the arrangement of the room, welcoming table (with materials and sign-in sheets), lightening, stage, sound system (if needed), planning a place for cameras, sound recorders, electric supply, refreshment (water and coffee is enough), banners and other branding, name plates for the speakers, etc.
- ✓ Do not invite many colleagues. It looks unprofessional when the hosts outnumber the journalists.
- ✓ Make sure you start and end on time
- ✓ The facilitator should open the press conference, introduce the speakers, inform about the rules of the press conference (protocol) and provide a brief overview, not longer than five minutes
- ✓ Speakers should be brief, focused and simple
- ✓ Try to answer all questions
- ✓ Keep eye contact with the facilitator, to coordinate who will answer the question
- ✓ Make sure that all speakers are included in answering the questions. Otherwise, it will become a „one man show’ and everybody else will be perceived like a „decoration’

- ✓ Do not say “I have no comment”. If you do not have the answer, commit to provide it later and keep the promise
- ✓ Focus on the subject, but don't ignore other questions related to it
- ✓ Arrange individual interviews with the speakers, if that is requested by journalists
- ✓ Have the press conference recorded and photographed by members of your team

AFTER THE PRESS CONFERENCE

- ✓ Send press packages to journalists who did not come to the press conference
- ✓ Monitor and document the articles resulting from your press conference
- ✓ Update your media lists

OTHER USEFUL PUBLIC RELATION TOOLS

BRIEFINGS

Briefing is an informal event with a group of selected journalists, where you discuss topics that you want to share with the media. It is similar to a press conference, but without formality, without cameras and microphones. Briefings could be organized regularly, for example once a month, as a way to share information about the work of the court, current developments, issues, challenges, etc., that journalists would use for their future stories. Briefings are relatively easy to organize and cost effective. Be careful-although it is an informal event, you should say only what you want to see published in the media. At the briefing, offer published materials relevant to the topic you discuss. Be prepared to follow-up with journalists, if they became interested in some of the issues you've discussed, they will proceed with creating a story and might call you for additional information.

MEDIA TOUR

When you want to promote a very important project of the court, or a new process or technology that you introduce, which is a novelty for the citizens and will impact their access to justice, you

might want to organize a media tour. Media tours bring journalists from different media to visit your court (or other venue) and provide them the opportunity to see how that novelty functions in practice, which will be presented in the stories they will develop.

WEBSITES

Court websites could be an effective tool to promote the work of the courts. Make sure you keep your website updated and that you use all the features it offers. Publishing information on the website will save your time and resources, while people and journalist could get the information without the need to come to the court or call you. Remember that an inactive and empty website creates a very unfavorable image of your court.

PUBLICATIONS

Printing different newsletters, brochures, leaflets, posters, etc., which target certain aspects of the courts' work are effective tools for informing citizens, especially on a local community level. All publications should be focused, brief and clear. They should have a standard branding, used continuously for all publications, which will make your court more recognizable.

ORGANIZING SPECIAL EVENTS

For certain occasions, courts could consider organizing so called special events, organized at a community level, which will bring the work of the court closer to the citizens, but will also attract media interests and attention. Such events could be organized for: celebration of the National Day of the Judiciary (March 31st) or other important days for the court, annual review of the work of the court, open days, new court facilities, new system of work, or any other occasion that seems appropriate for organizing a special event. Remember that you have to work with a team, which will plan all the details for the event and media coverage.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Good communication begins with effective internal communication. Courts should share all key information with their employees. Court staff should be informed about all news, procedures, plans, projects of the court, etc. This could be done through newsletters (electronic and/or

printed) and other publications, internal computer network (intranet), court web site, etc. Such approach would not only increase employees' satisfaction at the workplace, but will also make them knowledgeable to provide the right answers to their clients.

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