

# Publicity...Another Opportunity to Attract Attention to Your Business

Publicity, or public relations, is a powerful marketing tool for most large corporations and organizations; however, it can also benefit you, the small business owner of a martial arts school, if you learn a few simple publicity methods. The best part is that it takes very little time and costs nothing.

Let's concentrate on the two publicity methods that will help you the most:

1. Prepare and distribute a press release.
2. Become a recognized industry "expert" and a source of information and interviews for local media.

Publicity is any program or campaign with prepared information about a company, organization, product or event that is distributed to the media—newspapers, magazines, radio and television—to obtain "news" coverage. In other words, gaining exposure to the public without the cost of advertising to them.

Publicity can take many forms:

- Written information: press release, press kit, fact sheet, newsletter.
- Visual materials: photographs, TV news video, video news release.
- Events: awards dinner, celebrity appearance, community sponsorship.
- Membership in industry associations: be recognized as an industry experts by the media.

The list doesn't end there, but since this is your first step in learning how to benefit from publicity, let's move to the first method you can use easily and successfully.

## Prepare and Distribute a Press Release

You don't have to be a journalist to write a press release, but you do need to understand some basics. Let's start with some more definitions.

A press release is a "news" story about your company or organization written in a specific form, which is then distributed to the media—reporters, editors and producers—for possible publication in their newspapers, magazines or radio and TV programming.

A news release is a type of press release and usually contains time-sensitive information, for example:

- Announcing the opening of your next school.
- John Doe, celebrity, is appearing Friday.
- Announcing the date and time of a community seminar on neighborhood safety.
- High-profile Black Belt promotions.

A feature release is another type of press release, but one less time-sensitive than a news release, for example:

- A feature release about a company's support of charitable organizations could be distributed to the media and published almost any time of the year, i.e., National Martial Arts Day Kick-A-Thon.
- However, a feature release about feeding needy families at Christmas will only interest an editor.

## Press Release Writing Tips

1. Complete the required information: name of your school, your name, etc. and distribute it during the first quarter of 2011 to your list of local media contacts.
2. Study the sample included in this month's member materials to learn more about the form and structure of a press release.
3. Follow this sample to create press releases about your school.

Please refer to the sample often as you read the press release writing tips below. Together, they will help you to learn how easy it is to prepare a press release about your school.

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**Tip #1:** Present your press release on your school's letterhead and limit it to one page, or two at the most.

**Tip #2:** Do your best to write only statements of objective facts. Editors are less likely to consider a release with subjective statements as newsworthy.

**Tip #3:** Avoid using "insider" words and terms that only others in the martial arts industry would understand. When you must use them, explain your terms clearly.

**Tip #4:** Write your press release in the "inverted paragraph" form. The first paragraph contains all the primary facts and each succeeding paragraph has less important information about the story. Editors are able to fit the story to the space available by simply excluding or including a paragraph.

**Tip #5:** Type the words "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" at the top left of the page. News releases are for immediate release or for release on a specific date. "For Immediate Release" is always in bold, all capital letters.

**Tip #6:** Triple-space and write your headline in bold, all capital letters. Headline should contain the primary news angle in the fewest number of words.

**Tip #7:** Start the first paragraph with the source location of the news and the date.

**Tip #8:** To make sure the first paragraph of your release contains all of the primary and important facts, it should answer six questions.

- Who is the primary person or group in the story?
- What is specifically "new"?
- When did the news or event occur?
- Where did the news or event occur?
- Why did the news or event occur?
- How did the news or event occur?

**Tip #9:** Write the complete name of a company or organization the first time it appears in your press release. Place the abbreviated form in parentheses immediately following the complete name. Use the abbreviated form in the remainder of the release. For example: "National Association of Professional Martial Artists (NAPMA)" the first time and "NAPMA" thereafter.

**Tip #10:** Use quotes! They are a good device for emphasizing specific points and introducing a spokesperson representing your company. Make positive statements. Never use disparaging remarks about anyone or anything. Remember, quotation marks always begin the sentence, and don't end until AFTER the punctuation.

**Tip #11:** Include references to Websites, phone numbers or email addresses as sources of additional information.

**Tip #12:** Your press release should include a call-to-action near the end, asking readers, for example, to call or write; attend an event; or visit a Website.

**Tip #13:** Designate the end of your press release with three centered number symbols (# # #).

**Tip #14:** Include your name and contact information so editors and producers can ask for additional information.

## Media Contact Tips

Once you've prepared your press release, you're ready to distribute it to the local media. Follow these handy steps for contacting your local media and providing them with your press release. Learning how to develop relationships with local media representatives is much more important than writing a press release. Once you have the opportunity to talk with the local reporters, editors and producers, you'll learn exactly what kind of information they need. They will always be happy to help you prepare the information, if they recognize the value of the information to them.

**Tip #1:** Create a list of the major media in your town, city and local community. You'll want a complete mailing address and phone number. Leave space to add the names, direct phone numbers and email addresses of the media's representatives. You can easily create this list from the Yellow Pages by looking under the "Newspapers," "Magazines," "Radio Stations," and "TV Stations" sections. Most of us are very familiar with the local media since we access them many times everyday, so many of the names that serve your city or town will come to mind quickly.

- For newspapers, include the major daily paper for your municipality and the local weekly paper for the

community or neighborhood where your school is located.

- For magazines, include any general interest and business publications for your city or town.
- For radio stations, include those that appeal to the audiences that are more likely to become students at your school, e.g., youth, parents, single adults, etc.
- For TV stations, include the three or four major stations that you receive in your city or town, which have local news broadcasts throughout the day. Include any 24-hour TV news station in your area.

**Tip #2:** Now that you created your “media distribution” list, you need to do some research to determine who should receive your press release. News from a martial arts school could interest a number of editors and producers:

- Martial arts has an athletic, competitive element, so list the names of sports editors.
- Martial arts has a health element: target health editors and lifestyle editors.
- Martial arts has a youth activity and family element: target neighborhood editors, lifestyle editors and family life editors.
- Martial arts has a self-defense element: target women’s editors, lifestyle editors, legal editors.

These are just four examples of press release topics and seven different editors/producers who could be recipients of your releases.

There are a number of ways to obtain the names of editors and producers.

- Most publications list many of their editors names and contact information.
- Many publications and radio and TV stations have Web sites, which often list complete rosters of their news staffs.
- The most direct method is to call their main phone numbers and ask for the names and direct numbers of the various editors and producers who could be interested in your press release.

**Tip #3:** Once you’ve completed your media distribution list, call or contact each editor who

you think should receive your press release. Ask them exactly how they would like to receive a press release: by regular mail, e-mail or fax. Most editors and producers have a preference. Following their distribution rules will distinguish you as someone who is media-savvy and more likely to receive a positive response to your press release.

**Tip #4:** Now that you know how each editor/producer wants to receive your press release, you can distribute it to them. Keep a record of each distribution, including the date distributed, to whom and which release.

**Tip #5:** Avoid follow-up calls to editors and producers just to know that they received your press release. They probably did. Media reporters and editors are busy people. They don’t have the time to respond to every follow-up phone call. In fact, they often limit the time period when they are available for calls to a few hours a day, and never during the deadline crunch. Knowing the right time to call them is an advantage to developing a beneficial relationship.

Remember, you are asking to receive FREE exposure from media outlets that generate income by charging for space and time. They will never use every release you send them. They may not use your first few releases just because they don’t know you. That is why it is important to develop relationships with media representatives, and that takes some time, patience and perseverance.

## **Become a Recognized Industry “Expert”**

One of the best ways you can develop a relationship with the media is to promote yourself as a martial arts industry expert. The media have huge amounts of space and time to fill with information, news and entertainment for a “hungry” public. Editors and producers need resources on which they can rely to provide detailed information about a subject, industry or organization and experts or spokespersons that are available for interviews.

The process is very similar to the preparation and distribution of a press release.

### **Industry Expert Tips:**

**Tip #1:** Prepare a brief, one-page biography/fact sheet with information about you and your school.

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Remember, you want to highlight those facts that promote you as an expert.

- Use your school letterhead if you have it.
- Start the sheet with the title, <Your School Name> Fact Sheet, centered.
- Double space and center your school's complete name, address, phone number and email and Website addresses on separate lines.
- Double space and type your name and your title.
- Double space again and center the date below your name.
- Double-space and begin the fact sheet with the first heading and its description.
- Use the following headings and write a brief paragraph for each. Better yet, list your facts as bullet points under each heading. You'll make it easier for busy editors and producers to scan and understand.

### **Fact Sheet Headings:**

- **School history:** date opened, by whom; number of students served.
- **Programs and services:** describe classes for various age groups and any advanced or special classes.
- **Community:** name the local suburban community or neighborhood where you are located; list any community organizations or projects with which the school is involved.
- **Affiliations:** For example, "A member in good standing of the National Association of Professional Martial Artists (NAPMA), the world's largest professional martial arts association, comprised of school owners and instructors committed to the highest professional standards of health, safety and fitness for the mind, body and spirit." Include other affiliations, such as Chamber of Commerce, Better Business Bureau, etc.
- **<Your Name and Title>:** briefly describe your professional background, e.g., number of years in martial arts; number of years as a school owner; number of years as an instructor; and other markets or significant schools where you worked.

- **Education:** briefly list any business or other significant degrees; describe your martial arts training.
- **Professional distinctions:** list awards or special recognitions you've received, relating to business, martial arts or community involvement. Include the titles of articles or books you've written and speeches or interviews you may have given.
- **Contact information:** List your direct phone number. State the best times to reach you.

**Tip #2:** Write a very brief cover letter, stating that you are available as a resource about the martial arts industry. You would be pleased to assist them with any background information they need, give them a tour of your school and participate in interviews. The accompanying fact sheet provides information about your school and your professional career. The last paragraph of the letter is a call-to-action, for example: "Please call me at your convenience whenever I can assist you with any stories about the martial arts industry. I can be reached at <repeat your direct phone number and your best times to be reached>."

**Tip #3:** Distribute your fact sheet to the same mailing list as your press release. Remember to send it according to their preferences.

**Tip #4:** Wait a few weeks after you've distributed your fact sheet and then contact the editors and producers. Be ready to cover all the following points in a brief conversation because they won't give you very much time.

- Assume they have received your fact sheet; don't ask them if they did.
- Tell them your name and the name of your school.
- Remind them that you sent them a fact sheet for the purpose of becoming a reliable resource on the martial arts industry.
- Tell them you will send them an occasional press release.
- Close the conversation by stating that you are available to assist them. Please call the direct phone number on the fact sheet.

**Tip #5:** Distribute an updated fact sheet every six months as a reminder of your availability.

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Remember, you won't likely be recognized as an industry expert immediately. It may take a few months before you're asked to provide a quote or be interviewed.

Spend some time learning and using these two basic publicity methods, and you'll discover many new opportunities to attract attention to your school at little or no cost.