

## Chapter 3.3

# Media relations and operations

### Benefits of this chapter

Branding is more than just determining what your National aquatics Federation should represent – it's also about communicating what your federation represents to the public. As such, good media relations and operations are critical components of successful branding strategy.

In this chapter, your federation can learn how to create stable, transparent relationships with media and journalists. Cultivating these relationships can make it much easier for your federation to leverage those relationships and promote its brand and the sport in general.

This chapter can also help your federation create sustainable strategies for consistent, influential communication with the media. By making consistent communication with the media a key element of your branding strategy, you can exercise some control over the information that is reported about your federation and the sport in general. Controlling the message is an important element in organisational growth and development in any industry – and sport is no exception.

## Introduction

Developing effective media relations requires your federation to determine what you want to communicate, to whom and how. This chapter will lead you through key considerations relating to all three questions.

It is important to point out that each National Federation will have different resources and staff available to develop media strategies. Small federations may not yet have a formal communications staff, whereas established federations may have sophisticated media strategies already in place.

The key to this chapter is considering the information that is applicable to and feasible for your federation. If your federation already has effective ways of communicating major events to the media, then you may not need assistance in that area. However, if your federation is in the early stages of development, the basics of media relations outlined in this chapter could be a critical first step in promoting your brand and growing your federation.

## Determining what you want to communicate

The first step in effective media relations is knowing what information you want to communicate. Establishing that will help you determine how and to whom you will communicate that information. As a general rule, err on the side of providing “too much” information. Doing so will keep the media content and prevent them from thinking you are trying to hide details. By supplying the media with information, you give them something to report instead of them looking for something to report.

The information you want to communicate will vary from federation to federation, but the following points represent information that you may want to consider providing the media to build relationships with them and control the information that the media reports about your federation and your sport:

### Event information

This includes details about upcoming events that your federation is in charge of putting on. This could be national championships, age group championships or circuit events. Information provided should not only be from the competition itself. Rather, the media may also like to have information about the bidding process for the event, what the criteria were to decide who would host it and any other relevant information leading up to the event itself. This helps generate more interest in the event and develops your reputation as a federation that is busy and active.

In terms of the events themselves, it is important to provide media with full schedule, results and statistics from the complete event. By being the first source to provide this information, your federation becomes the trusted source of reliable information and the information you provide is perceived as the “official” record. In addition, it can be a significant advantage to archive these details so media can access them to compare them to future events.

### National team activities

The media and fans will also be interested in events happening outside your country e.g. World Championships or World Cup circuit events). By providing the media with details about what the national team is doing, where they are competing, who their coaches are and how they are performing internationally) your federation can generate more excitement around aquatics sports in your country and ensure that your sport is covered year-round, not just during your country's national championships season.

### Club information

While national media may not be particularly interested in events and activities at the club level, regional and local media may be. By providing information on club activities e.g. club meets, new clubs, club athletes who have joined the national team, etc., the media is more likely to perceive your federation as a serious and active organisation. Additionally, athletes, fans and sponsors are more likely to see your federation as an exciting organisation with lots of activities going on.

### Athlete information

Making information about individual athletes available can be useful to the media and helpful to your elite athletes. If your federation has the resources available, it can be helpful to produce a database with biographical details and career highlights for your elite athletes. This way, media can access that information easily and fans can follow their favourite athletes, which will develop greater affinity for your federation.

### Rules and regulations

It may not be particularly sexy, but providing information about the rules and regulations of your sport can achieve a couple of goals. First, it strengthens your authority by supporting the idea that your federation is the governing body of aquatics sports in your country. Second, by informing the media about the rules of the sport, anti-doping policies, referee training and other regulatory components of aquatics sports, you can strengthen your reputation as a transparent organisation. By being transparent, the media is more likely to be patient and understanding if and when serious rules infractions occur or potential scandals develop. This allows you to maintain as much control as possible of the type of information reported during crisis situations, thereby protecting your federation from potential public relations disasters.

### Special projects information

Because many national sports federations are subsidised by the government or may even be part of the sports ministry, there is a good chance that activities are taking place outside of direct competition. These activities may include community outreach efforts, charitable campaigns or other programmes that bring the athletes into contact with the public. Making information about these activities available to the media can strengthen your federation's reputation as an organisation that is active in the community and doing positive things on behalf of sport and society. This generates goodwill with the media and the public, which can only make your sport more popular.

### Sponsorship and partnership information

Whenever you establish a new partnership or sponsorship with your federation, it is critical to announce that to the media, including details of why the partnership was created and how it will benefit the sport and the company. Keeping the

media up-to-date about your sponsorship arrangements and the positive impact they are having on the sport are not only signs of respect, but is often required as part of the sponsorship agreement.

## Determining to whom you want to communicate

In addition to knowing what information you want to communicate, it is important to know to whom you want or need to communicate that information. This begins by understanding the media environment within your country. In some countries, there may be hundreds of media outlets – publications, websites, television stations, radio stations, etc. – reporting regularly on sports and aquatics sports in particular. In other countries, media outlets may be limited to only a handful of journalists and media outlets.

To understand the media environment in which your federation is operating, the best step in collecting and organising contact details for all media outlets in your country and the individual journalists covering sports, especially aquatics sports. Developing this type of comprehensive database can be a time-consuming process, but it really is the basis for developing effective media relations between your federation and the media.

The primary information you want to collect and record includes:

- Name of media outlet
- Name and job title of person covering sports, especially aquatics sports
- Address
- Phone numbers (office and mobile)
- Email addresses

In addition to collecting this information, the database should be consistently updated to keep contact details current. One way of doing this is to send out an email or form once or twice a year asking individuals in your database to confirm and update their contact details. As such, it is critical that someone within your federation is the point of contact in charge of updating contact details regularly. And every time you receive a business card or contact information, those details should be entered into the database in a timely manner.

## Determining how you want to communicate

Once you know what and to whom you want to communicate, your federation can determine the best method for making contact with the media. There is no “one size fits all” approach to how you communicate with the media – certain methods are more appropriate and effective than others but this is depending on the situation and information at hand. The following list of contact strategies provides an overview of various options available to you and tips for using them to their greatest advantage:

## Media release/press release

A media release is most appropriate when communicating significant factual information or decisions coming from your federation e.g. decisions by the Board of Directors, rulings on disputes, anti-doping issues. Media releases are typically short (10-20 lines) and are intended to generate interest among the media so they will cover the story or the sport in greater detail. As such, be sure to include in the media release contact information for a point of contact within your federation. That way, journalists will know how to contact your federation to seek more information and cover the story more thoroughly. The following tips may be useful to your federation when drafting media releases:

### The five W's

The media release should be brief and provide basic details on the following five Ws:

- Who is/was involved?
- What is happening/happened?
- When did/will the event or action take place?
- Where did/will the event or action take place?
- Why did/will the event or action take place?

### Core elements

Although brief, media releases should inspire the media to seek more information to cover the story in greater detail. To inspire that kind of reaction, be sure to include at least one of the following core elements of an effective media release. Examples are provided in the parenthesis:

- Relevance (a decision about swimsuits that will affect the sport of swimming)
- Seriousness (the injury of a platform diver during competition)
- Drama (a swimmer from your federation breaking a world record)
- Curiosity (a fan who travelled thousands of miles to cheer on the national Synchronised Swim team)
- Proximity (news from local, regional or national aquatics clubs)
- Public importance (announcement that a city will host a major aquatics sports event in the coming year)
- Controversy (the dispute of a penalty called during a major Water Polo match)
- Progress (the opening of a new aquatics centre in an underprivileged community)
- Love (charitable efforts by members of the national Swimming team)
- Emotion (an award to an administrator, athlete or coach who has dedicated years of service to aquatics sports)

### Basic do's and don'ts

The following list includes some simple do's and don'ts that separate effective media releases from those that end up in the trash bin:

- Write simply and use clear, active sentences
- Avoid obscure sports jargon – not every journalist is an aquatics sports expert
- Fewer sentences per paragraph are easier to read
- Stay objective and avoid biased commentary

- Use names, quotes and statistics to enrich your text
- Don't mention the name of your federation more than once in the text
- Get releases out as quickly as possible after events happen or decisions are made

### Mechanics

Use these simple techniques when drafting media releases:

- Use standard paper for media releases – letterhead should only be used for the first page
- If the release continues on another page, write “continue” at the bottom of the preceding page
- Indicate the end of a media release by writing “END”
- Each page should end with a complete paragraph
- Indicate the release date, time and place (e.g. Tuesday, June 15, 2010, 12:00 GMT, LAUSANNE, Switzerland)
- Give every media release a running number per year to facilitate record keeping and reference making (e.g. the tenth media release issued in 2010 should be listed at 10/2010)
- Include contact information (name, phone and email address) for a point of contact within your federation
- Follow up with key media to make sure they received the release and offer further assistance/information as necessary

Please refer to Annex C for examples of press releases from FINA

### **Press conference**

To communicate news that is more complex in nature or on which your federation would like to provide immediate answers to questions, a press conference may be appropriate. Depending on how established your federation is, you may or may not have processes in place to coordinate press conferences. The following points may be helpful as you develop your relations with the media and establish more formal communication strategies:

#### **Media kit**

A media kit is a folder or packet of key information for the press.

Media kits are often distributed at press conferences and in the lead up to a major event. These kits often contain the following information:

- Covering media release summarising the objective of the press conference
- Text of any prepared speeches
- Fact sheet – biographical data of all featured persons at an event (athletes, coaches, etc.)
- Photographs – action shots or head shots of featured athletes, coaches, etc.
- Artwork – event and federation logos with precise colour indication supported by digital files (CDs, memory stick)
- Schedule of events with times and locations clearly listed
- Gifts/souvenirs – pins, stickers, pens, or posters.
- Business card with contact information for your federation to facilitate follow up inquiries from the media

### Press conference mechanics

Press conferences can be hectic and chaotic, especially for major announcements involving high-profile athletes or controversial issues. The following tips can help you organise the event and limit any unnecessary chaos or confusion:

- If time permits, send out invitations to the press two weeks before the event listing precise date, time, location, subject and participants
- Follow up with a phone call to invitees 2-3 days before the conference
- Ideal dates for press conferences are 1 day before you want news covered in the press and same day during “light” news days for television.
- Conference facility should have a head table for participants, a backdrop with federation brand logo, seats for audience, a table for registration and distribution of media kits as well as ample room for camera operators and photographers
- Members of the press should be required to sign in to receive any necessary accreditations – this is a great opportunity to collect contact information and update your media contact database
- Equipment should include microphones for the head table and any necessary audio and visual equipment
- For international audiences, consider providing simultaneous translation services if resources allow
- Brief all conference participants beforehand, including order of speeches, critical questions that may arise and projected timeline of the event
- Open the conference with some brief introductory remarks and allow participants to speak before the media asks any questions
- If appropriate, allow exclusive interviews once the conference has concluded