
UNIT - 13 : MEDIA RELATIONS IN PR

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13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to -

- explain how to organize a press conference
- trace the differences between Press Meet and Meet the Press
- discuss press briefing
- explain how to organize and manage a press tour
- explain the rules and regulations for writing a press release
- illustrate the concept of back grounder and rejoinder

13.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit we have discussed one of the important parts of PR, i.e. the PR tools and analyzed house journal, book, periodical, poster, folder etc. as publications, oral communication and also bulletin boards, open house, video magazines etc. In this unit we are going to consider some important methods of PR, which are used for developing media relations by the organization.

A press conference is a media event in which an organization, interested to publicize an issue or to make news, invites journalists of different media to disseminate the information and ask questions on the issue. There are two main reasons for organizing a press conference. One is that a newsmaker who gets many questions from reporters can answer them all at once rather than answering so many phone calls. Another is that someone can try to attract news coverage for something that was not of interest to journalists before. Also it is a cost effective tool for disseminating information.

Effective media relation is one of the prime tasks in PR practices. It is basically, those activities that involve working directly with persons responsible for the editorial (news and features), public service and sponsored programming products of mass media. Media relation is the linkage between the media personalities and the organization in getting a favorable, timely, and widespread media coverage. We shall trace the various methods to build a good media relation in this unit.

13.3 ORGANIZING PRESS CONFERENCES

Organizing a press conference has become an accepted means of issuing information to the press. A press conference should not be called merely to handout a development or information, which could be, covered equally well by a press release. The main justification for organizing a press conference is that the subject on the issue is an important one, which requires some clarifications or important information and the management of an organization can share ideas and answer or explain a plenty of questions from the journalists present.

A press conference is never held as a routine affair. It should be held to announce major policy decisions and important message of a organization.



LET US KNOW

A press conference is a voluntary presentation of information to the media. In a press conference, a PR practitioner decides on the information and how it should be presented and who will present it. It is an opportunity to get the story on TV, radio or in the news papers. To hold a press conference a PR practitioner contacts the media, chooses the time and place, makes a presentation and responds to reporters' questions.

The invitees to the government press conference are normally all accredited correspondents including foreign correspondents, accredited cameramen and representatives from Radio and TV, etc. In case of a private organization all correspondents who normally cover the organization are invited to the press conference. Official invitees to the press conference are generally minimum in number. The information officer or public relations officer first briefs the speaker in advance about the correspondents and the nature of questions likely to be asked as well as the subject matter so that the executive can start and discuss subject wise. Before the press conference begins, they should also give a proper but brief introduction of the speaker and the subject. Invitations to the press conference are sent well in advance indicating the date, day, time, subject and venue of the conference. The name of the person holding the press conference and his designation are usually mentioned there.

13.3.1 How to organize a Press Conference

It is better to organize a press conference in the forenoon or early afternoon in order to catch the next day editions of newspapers.

In case of important press conference it is necessary to tape-record the proceedings. Discussion on individual and personal cases should be avoided. Generally not more than four to six questions are to be allowed on any one aspect of the subject.

It is necessary to prepare a comprehensive press media note on the subject of the press conference and to distribute it a little before the press conference is scheduled to start. This will help in many ways, particularly in the time of rechecking facts and statistics.

Tea, snacks or light refreshment can be served just after the formal conference is over. The press conference arrangements should be properly organized. Transport can be provided both ways, if the press conference is held at a distance or out of the prime place of the city or town. Equal treatment should be given to all newspapers and audio visual media representatives.

Actually, a press conference provides an opportunity to the organization to communicate directly with representatives of the press. On rare occasions, Public Relations directors arrange press conferences. Its purpose is to obtain publicity in connection with some vitally important news, such as the introduction of a new product, settlement of a labor dispute, change in management, plant expansion, corporate reorganization, and accidents or disaster. A press conference should not be called unless the importance of the news clearly indicates doing so, and then it should be so timed that the news will secure the widest coverage. The president and representatives of management should be present to make the announcement and answer the reporters' questions.

Various factors regarding the Press conference :



*A **press kit** is some background material: fact sheets, news release, text of the statement, and visual materials, such as photographs. It can help reporters to create and produce their stories. It also contain a notebook and a pen for the reporter to jot down important points. All these materials are usually neatly arranged in folders.*

1. Timing : Ideal timing is forenoon from 11 am to 11.30 am. Or afternoon from 2 pm to 3.30 pm.
2. Initiative : The date of the Press conference should be fixed 7 to10 days before (except emergency).
3. Invitation : Media relation is very important. That's why invitation letters should be sent to all the nearby media, followed by phone calls.
4. Arrangement : Room arrangements, seating arrangements, sound system checking etc will be the main concern of the PR job.
5. Introduction : In the news conference PRO introduces the chairman & other guests seating on the dais.
6. Press Kit : Distribution of press release, the brief speeches of the concerned guests & speakers, relevant facts & figures regarding the matter of press conference, relevant photographs, a notebook and a pen (if possible) in a very impressive envelop or folder.
7. Situation handling : PRO sometimes may have to faces counter questions from the press.
8. Refreshment : Arrangement of gifts, and light refreshment like tea, coffee, & snacks to be served timely. Some press conference are also followed by lunch.
9. Follow up : The day after the Press conference the PRO should thanks the media over phone for carrying the news & also thode who didn't carry the news for attending the press conference.

13.3.2 Difference between Press Meet and Meet the Press

Already we have discussed press conference, which is also popularly known as press meet. It is basically a meeting to which journalists are invited to hear about a new product or for getting new information about an organization.

On the other hand, some time because of the paucity of time, the media houses including the profit press and electronic media may invite a person of repute in any field for an interact. Here, unlike the organizing style of a press meet, an individual or any body representing an organization is invited by the media to a press club or at any other suitable venue. In a Meet the Press, the guest invited by the media addresses the journalists of different print and electronic media and after concluding his formal address, the journalists can interact with him, but unlike a Press Meet the addressee is not bound to answer each and every question of the journalists.

13.3.3 Press Briefings

The intention of a Press Briefing is to enhance and reinforce the conventional written publicity material. It is an opportunity to highlight certain events and also to clarify the complicated issues to the press representatives through questions and answers. Sometimes better results are achieved in a face-to-face discussion with the correspondents rather than giving information to them through written publicity material. To get the best results out of oral briefings, it is necessary that these should be organized in a methodical manner. Every care has to be taken as to when and how to give the press briefing. The oral briefings are of mainly two types.

Querries from Press Representatives

A press correspondent can put a querry on any aspect of the working of government department or of organization. Such

queries are treated as confidential and the replies are to be given only to the press representative concerned on an exclusive basis. The confidence of the correspondent should be respected. The query should be noted down and the officially relevant correct answers should be noted. The press correspondent should be replied without much delay and with as many details as possible.

The answering of queries from the press representatives helps in checking the correspondents who rely on unofficial and unreliable sources or on gossip. Also, in the garb of query the Public Relations personnel can plant a story on exclusive basis in a paper. However, stories of general public interest should not be given to the correspondent.

Special Press Briefings

Press Briefings are arranged for specially accredited correspondents taking interest in a particular subject field. The purpose is to explain the background of a happening, not necessarily for the purpose of its being used as a news story. In these briefings all accredited correspondents are not invited. These briefings are in the nature of special briefings on a particular subject.

Besides the ministers and secretaries, these briefings are also organized for senior officials for giving detailed information and elucidation on complicated matters. The officials should not remain too much silent and guarded in replying inconvenient questions as that will defeat the very purpose of such briefings. Separate Press Briefings are sometimes conducted for foreign correspondents on important aspects of national development.

13.3.4 Press Tours

Like organizing a press conference, press tour, which is also known as media tour, is an important and fruitful method of Public Relations

to establish and improve media relations. Some new products or new services can be successfully publicized with a press tour. On a press tour a Public Relations Officer or a representative of the PR department of an organization travels with the journalists to introduce a new product or service.

A different type of press tour is the book tour, where an author travels to various parts of the country to promote a newly released book. This tour may include personal appearances in connection with special events, such as public appearances, speaking engagements or autograph signing opportunities etc.

In press tours much of the exercise is similar to organizing a press conference. More elaborate arrangements are required which may involve transporting the press party for a long distance. The occasion could be a landmark achieved in the commissioning of a project or a crisis situation like an accident. Both occasions need careful planning and organization. While inviting a reporter to join the press tour, it is always advisable to write to the editors or bureau chiefs of different newspapers. In normal circumstances, sufficient notice must be given, because the concerned reporter may have to be spared for a number of days from his usual work and may have to be away from his workplace.

A Public Relations person, should consider to the following points before organizing a press tour:

- He/she should prepare the list of the journalists
- He/she should arrange suitable travel facilities
- He/she should arrange comfortable accommodation at the site
- He/she should brief the journalists at the site describing all the necessary information related to the subject.
- He/she should brief the background information
- He/she should take care of good hospitality for the media persons
- He/she should arrange an entertainment programme at the site, if possible

It is necessary that a responsible representative of the organization should accompany the journalists of different media. After coming back to the station, the representative of the organization should formally offer thanks to the journalists and he should keep a regular contact with them to establish good media relations. Here we can site an example of a press tour. Whenever our Prime Minister or The President visits a foreign country to discuss an important issue or to deal with new policies, then the govt. arranges a press tour and invites the journalists to accompany the country representative to cover the story.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 1. What do you mean by a Press Conference?

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Q. 2. What is a press kit?

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ACTIVITY 13.1

1. If you are a member of a club, or any other society of your locality, try to organize a press conference to publicize the activities of your club.

13.4 RELEASES AND WRITTEN MATERIAL TO MEDIA

13.4.1 Press Release

A press release is a written statement of an organisation distributed to the media. It is a fundamental tool of Public Relations. Press releases are usually sent via newswire service (such as PR Newswire or Business Wire) to media outlets, where journalists may pick them up and use them as they see fit.

The text of a release is usually written as a news story with an eye-catching headline and text written in standard journalistic style with inverted pyramid structure. This style of news writing makes it easier for reporters to quickly grasp the message.

Some journalists believe that to copy from a press release may be unethical -- they believe it is a lapse of good judgment. Ethical reporters prefer to try soliciting an individual quote from the speaker before filing their story. Public Relations professionals believe that press releases and other collateral material aid a journalist's job.

Since press releases reflect the organization's preferred interpretation or positive packaging of a story, journalists are often skeptical about their contents. The level of skepticism depends on what the story is and who's telling it. Newsrooms receive so many press releases that, unless it is a story that the media are already paying attention to, a press release alone often isn't enough to catch a journalist's attention.

With the advent of modern media and new technology, press releases are to be found in the form of video news releases and audio news releases.

The workhorse of Public Relations, the press release, was invented in the late 1800s. Written in the form of a conventional news story, a release presents the point of view of the organization

that disseminates it. Newspaper editors and reporters often use facts, quotes and other information from releases to amplify their stories or support their accuracy and credibility. Press leases were first used by the big railroads, although they rapidly became the norm in all corporations and large organizations, both for profit and nonprofit. Early in the 20th century, Ohio Bell Telephone discovered that if it handed out "canned" news in this form, newspaper reporters would stop going to telephone rate hearings to get the information in person, thereby minimizing uncomfortable inquiries about the rates and related matters. More often, releases were used, and continue to be used, to attract the media to attend press briefings or to request follow-up interviews. Initially it was considered a form of advertising because of their self-serving content. Releases quickly became accepted for what they are today - a free source of news and information that can be used by media. The traditional format (one or two pages of double-spaced text with standardized spelling and punctuation) was developed to satisfy the needs of editors for space in which to edit the text, and typesetters who required certain kinds of editorial markings in order to follow the flow of individual pages while typesetting the text. With more and more releases distributed via e-mail and more and more print media moving to digital printing, the format of press releases has become far less important for recipients. Many public relations practitioners also disseminate their releases far beyond the media to key audiences such as employees and investors who are as interested as the media in what the organizations they support are doing.

The usual way of issuing information to the press is by writing a press release. A press release is an official, authorized statement about the policies and activities of an organization. As the company or the government has to stand by it, the press release must be factual, and correct and must project the policy clearly and without ambiguity. It should leave no scope for misreporting. This is then sent by post or by hand to various newspapers and periodicals as

well as to radio and television news offices. It is also communicated to the news agencies, who have direct tele-printer contact with the main newspaper offices in the country. The news agencies edit the release and do not send it out in its entirety. So it is always worthwhile sending out the full release as widely as possible. The PRO should give adequate information on all points of public interest. If he examines the material critically from the viewpoint of a press reporter and the public, he will immediately discover certain areas where further light or clarification is necessary.

The press release should be written in journalistic style. It should follow the principles of news reporting. The introduction or the 'lead' should be in a summary format. It should answer the five W's and one H as in a news story. The second and the subsequent paragraphs should elucidate and elaborate the points. It should provide facts or information of interest to the readers and should attempt to cover all the aspects of a specific subject.

The release should not generally be lengthy. It should be concise and to the point. The release is a piece of clear writing without any ambiguity, without any effort towards colour or ornamentation. As far as possible each story should be complete in itself. Public memory is short and people are not likely to remember what had been said on the subject a couple of months ago, or even the previous fortnight. Moreover, repetitive publicity is the essence of selling an idea.

It should have a consistent format. Generally, the name of the agency from where the release emanates is given on the top. The date and place are indicated on the top right side. The release should have a title or subtitle also, if necessary. In the case of releases from non-official organizations, it is desirable also to mention the designation of the person issuing the release and his telephone number.



LET US KNOW

Scott Lorenz, the President of Westwind Communications, an America based public relations and marketing firm gives a few reasons for use of press release –1. Announce a new service. 2. Announce a new product.3. Tie in with a national holiday, a birthday or anniversary. 4. Report a new study of your own and your analysis or forecast. 5. Tie in with a controversy by commenting on it. 6. Co-op an event with the media. 7. Utilize a national survey or study to your benefit. 8. Announce your exhibit at a trade show or convention. 9. Commission a survey and report the results.10. Write a white paper and announce its availability at your web site. 11. Create and promote a special event. 12. Use a current news event to frame your release.13. Host a seminar and announce the information discussed.14. Announce an upcoming speaking engagement.15. Schedule a speaking engagement at the local library... for free. 16. Make reprints of speeches available at your website.17. Create a contest and offer a prize that's newsworthy.18. Pricing and policy changes. 19. Patents and trademarks. 20. Litigation won. 21. Announce the results of a new study. 22. The number of hours your employees donate volunteering in your community.23. Involvement in various community events and activities.24. Innovative use for your products. 25. First person stories about people using your product or services. 26. New clients you've obtained.27. New testimonials. 28. Celebrities that use your product or service.29. Financial projections and forecasts. 30. Announce a public appearance. 31. Appointments by government officials to offices.32. Retirement of well respected and revered employees.33. Recognition of long-time employees with 25 years of service or more.34. Internal promotion of key staff members.35. Send a letter to the editor and CC the media and your audience, “in case they miss it.” 36. New members of important committees. 37. Results of an election. 38. The passage of an important resolution. 39. Anniversary of the founding date of the

organization or company.40. Charitable donations by your organization. 41. ISO 9001 certification of your company.42. New awards won.43. Association membership.44. Publicly release a letter from a soldier or someone with poignant thoughts.45. Report on a public project and offer insight to the problem. 46. Protest an activity or issue.47. The sponsorship of a community event.48. How to apply for internships in your company. 49. How to apply for scholarships offered by your company.50. Open house where people can tour your plant, office etc. 51. Create an award to honor individuals in the community. 52. The appearance in front of a public entity, i.e., testimony before the US Senate.53. Host a public debate. 54. Announce a fact finding trip and then report your findings.55. Host a celebrity event and tie in your company.

We often confused some important government or other organizations release with the general press releases. The highest authority of an organization, especially a government, usually sends the following categories of news releases--

1. Press Communiqués
2. Press notes
3. Handouts
4. Unofficial stories or unofficial handouts.

1. Press Communiqués

Press communiqués are issued when some important government decisions or announcements are made, such as cabinet appointments, conclusion of the foreign dignitaries' visits, etc. The press communiqué has formal character. It carries the name of the ministry or department, place and date at the bottom left hand corner of the release. Generally, the press is expected to reproduce the press communiqué without any substantial change. No heading or sub-heading is given on press communiqués.

2. Press notes

Press notes are less formal in character. They are issued on important matters. They also carry the name of the ministry/department and the place at the bottom left hand corners. Headings or sub-headings are given in press notes.

3. Handouts

Handouts are issued on a variety of subjects and on day-to-day activities of the ministry/department, VIP speeches, questions and answers in Parliaments etc. The handout is a less formal type of release and not issued under the government's formal authority. It bears the name of the PIB or other releasing agency on the top without any mention of the ministry/department to which the release pertains. The place and date are indicated on top at the right hand side. One of the most important common categories of handouts relate to the speeches of ministers or other high officials. The handout is released only when the speech is connected with governmental activity. No official handout is issued if the minister has spoken in his personal capacity as a member of a political organization. The speech when released to the press in the form of handout is summarized and properly edited. Formal, introductory and concluding remarks are omitted and redundant and repetitive materials are taken out. A proper title and sub-title are given. The full text of the speech is not released unless the subject is of very great importance.

4. Unofficial stories or unofficial handouts.

Unofficial handouts are issued on the subject where the government would not like to assume official responsibility in the matter but feels that there may be positive advantages in making information public unofficially. These handouts are supplements to oral briefings. The unofficial handouts do not have the imprint of the PIB or of other releasing agencies. The date and place are indicated at bottom left hand corner.

Timing of releases is very important. All releases should so far as possible reach the desk by 6 to 7 p. m. The PRO should finalize the release at least one hour in advance of the official delivery time.

Writing a Press Release:

Press releases are broadly categorized into the following types -

- a) general news releases
- b) event releases
- c) product press releases
- d) social media press releases

The writing style of the press releases is common. This helps journalists to separate press releases from other PR communication methods, such as pitch letters or **media advisories**. Some of these common structural elements include:

Headline - used to grab the attention of journalists and briefly summarize the news.

Dateline - contains the release date and usually the originating city of the press release.

Introduction - first paragraph in a press release, that generally gives basic answers to the questions of who, what, when, where and why.

Body - further explanation, statistics, background, or other details relevant to the news.

Media Contact Information - name, phone number, email address, mailing address, or other contact information for the PR or other media relations contact person. The following is an example of a press release issued by the Rashtrapati Bhavan.



Press Release

HEADLINE →

PRESIDENT CALLS UPON IAS PROBATIONERS TO ADMINISTER WITH A HUMANE TOUCH

DATE LINE →

09-05-2008 : Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi

INTRODUCTION

The President, Smt. Pratibha Devi Singh Patil, while addressing the IAS probationers of the 2007 batch who called on her at Rashtrapati Bhavan today, said that they should administer with a humane touch and implement schemes in their true spirit. The President said that as the heads of their districts in the early phase of their career, they should not only make use of the law and the power at their disposal but also deal with the people with a humane touch.

BODY

Describing the officers as 'blessed ones', as they had had the benefit of good education and now being selected for this elite service, the President said they should use their education and training for the betterment of the people and to be their friend, philosopher and guide. Referring to India's rapid development with an average GDP growth rate of 9 percent, Smt. Patil emphasized on the requirement of an inclusive growth and emphasis on the importance of education in a "knowledge economy". The President also speaking about the social evils in society such as child marriage, female foeticide and dowry, urged the young officers to play an active role in implementation of laws and schemes so that such evils would slowly disappear. Smt. Patil also strongly encouraged the officers to play a pro-active role in helping in the empowerment of the first generation of women stepping into Panchayati Raj Institutions.

13.4.2 Backgrounder

The backgrounder is defined in the dictionaries as a summary of pertinent information and facts about the subject or about the organization at hand, which is provided to the media especially when dealing with a complex issue. The term is also described as a press conference or interview in which a government official explains to the reporters about the background of an action or policy.

Basically, a backgrounder provides the background information about the organization and its achievements, success stories, various activities etc. with a brief history. It is necessary to distribute it at a press conference along with the press release to inform the journalists about the activities of the organization. It also helps a journalist to prepare a comprehensive report on the organization.

13.4.3 Rejoinders / Clarification

PR persons may sometimes be forced to be the front men in some public disputes. The very simple reason is that by issuing rejoinders or clarification, reports or denials, the Public Relations person unwittingly gives Public Relations mileage.

Actually, sometimes some newspapers may publish some news, which may be against an organization. This news may harm in the image building process of the organization or it may reduce the public's confidence in the reputation of the organization. In that case the PR department of the organization should think about it and should issue clarification to the concerned newspaper/s. This is popularly known as a rejoinder. The rejoinder is the opportunity for the PR department to address constructively and positively the comments and criticisms made by an individual or an assessor. A

rejoinder can effectively counter the criticism/s raised in the reports, which can show the way to the concerned individual or the assessor and it can also help build a favourable image of the organisation again before the readers of the newspapers.



CHECK YOUR PROGRES

Q. 3. What do you mean by a press release?

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Q. 4. How and why press communiqués are issued?

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Q. 5. What is the main difference between Press Notes and Handouts?

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ACTIVITY

Write a Press release with a backgrounder for the organization with which you are associated any organization of your choice.

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13.5 LET US SUM UP

A press conference is a media event in which an organization, which is interested to publicize an issue or to make news, invites journalists to disseminate the information and ask questions to clarify doubts etc. on the issue. In press tours or facility visits much of the exercise is similar to organizing a press conference. Open house is an important tool to build rapport with the community/neighborhood where the plant is located.

A press release is a written statement distributed to the media. It is an important tool of Public Relations. Press communiqués, press notes, handouts, backgrounder, and rejoinders are some other important tools of Public Relations.



13.6 FURTHER READINGS

1. Black, Sam (1970), Practical Public Relations, New Delhi : Universal Book Stall.
2. Banik, G. C. (2002), PR & Media Relations New Delhi : Jaico.
3. Moore H. F. and Kalupa F. B. (1985), Public Relations New Delhi : Surjeet Publication.



13.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q. No 1 : A press conference is a media event in which an organization, interested to publicize an issue or to make news, invites journalists to disseminate the information.

Ans to Q. No 2 : A press kit is an assortment of some background materials like fact sheets, news release, text of the statement, and visual materials, photographs etc. It can help reporters to create and produce their stories.

Ans to Q. No 3 : Open house is an important tool to build rapport with the community/neighborhood where the organization is located. It is also a widely employed way of building pride and morale among the employees as well as the other publics.

Ans to Q. No 4 : A press release is a written statement distributed to the media. It is a fundamental tool of Public Relations.

Ans to Q. No 5 : Press communiqués are issued when some important government decisions or announcements are made such as cabinet appointments, conclusion of the foreign dignitaries visits, etc.

Ans to Q. No 6 : Press notes are less formal in character. They are issued on important matters. But the handout is a more or less formal type of release and not issued under the government's formal authority.



13.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions:

Q. 1. Why backgrounder is important in PR?

Q. 2. What do you mean by rejoinders?

B. Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words):

Q. 1. Discuss the role of PR at the time of an accident in an organization?

Q. 2. What are the things to be kept in mind when you are writing a Press Release?

Q. 3. Write a brief note on the importance of Press Conference. How will you organize a press conference?

C. Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words):

Q. 1. What are the differences between press conference and press meet?

Q. 2. Write a press release on an event of your choice. What is the writing style of a press release?
