Public Relations Toolkit

Resources For Enhancing Your Company’s Image

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NACS®
ReFreshing our image

Through its “reFresh” initiative, NACS is addressing ongoing concerns about industry image by providing retailers with the tools to both evolve their in-store offer and to elevate their image. The reFresh initiative is currently focused on three distinct elements:

+ Creating tools for retailers to use to address NIMBY (not in my backyard) issues by educating stakeholders about the contributions convenience stores make to their communities;

+ Forming partnerships/relationships with credible nutrition- and community-focused groups to accelerate the evolution of in-store offers; and

+ Sharing credible facts/data to demonstrate the evolution of the industry and to correct an outdated reputation.

This report and other industry toolkits and resources can be found at convenience.org/refresh.
Public Relations Toolkit: What It Is And Why You Need It

The NACS Public Relations Toolkit gives you the resources you need to launch your own publicity efforts in your community — from how to write a press release and crafting talking points to how to pitch an interview and inspire great media coverage.

It used to be that news cycles were daily — news was communicated every night on the national news or every morning in the newspaper delivered to your doorstep. Sometimes, news stories even went through weekly news cycles, with news magazines like *Time* or *Newsweek* among the most widely read publications in the country.

Today, everything has changed. News cycles are now measured in hours — or even minutes. Cable news channels run around the clock. The Internet constantly pumps out new “news” to generate “hits” and satisfy advertisers. Meanwhile, ratings have sharply dropped off for the nightly newscasts, newspaper circulations have plummeted and news magazine subscriptions have fallen so sharply that some now only exist in an online format.

The changing landscape presents new challenges on how to own your brand and message. But let’s set aside the challenges for now — those are addressed in crisis management handbooks. Let’s instead focus on how today’s landscape presents enormous opportunities for you to get out your message, and even potentially limit the negative media attention if such a crisis were to occur.

The bottom line is that there are more news sources that there even have been before. Not just with traditional media, which is as voracious as ever for content, but with citizen reporters. Today, everyone is reporting something on some level, especially on social media. This one fact demonstrates how much is being communicated: Roughly 10% of all of the photographs ever taken were taken in the past year. And a high percentage of these pictures were posted on social media, often with commentary and often shared by others. Expect that trend to accelerate.

That means every day — every hour or minute — is a new opportunity to generate publicity for your company. If your company doesn’t already have a public relations program in place, you’re missing out on an opportunity to generate customer recognition for your stores, build employee satisfaction and enhance your industry’s image. It’s about more than press coverage. It’s about projecting the message that you want to convey about your business. Stories will be written about your business — whether online or in print. Do you want to help frame them in a positive light?

One more thing worth mentioning. Most news outlets have pared back their research departments. Because of budget cuts, they don’t have the resources to do the same level of research that they used to do. If you can help a reporter by providing credible, accurate information — or by suggesting places to find it — you’ve made a friend. That doesn’t guarantee that you will only garner positive news stories, but it sure increases the likelihood of getting your positive message heard.

By implementing some basic public relations strategies and gaining some additional exposure for your efforts, you will be able to more successfully attract consumers to your store, increase sales of your marketed items and improve the reputation of your store and your brand.
Communications Overview

Enhancing your image does require an investment of your time, but think of it as another element of building your brand. Brand repetition, around positive messages, drives sales.

Building a media outreach program can pay off for your company in a number of important ways:

1. Build Consumer Recognition
   A favorable mention for your business in the news can provide more value than buying an advertisement. This can increase consumer awareness of your company’s name and retail locations.

2. Improve Employee Satisfaction
   Show your employees that you value their contributions to your team and let prospective job seekers know that your company is an excellent place to work. Tell the media about promotions, your participation in local charity events and educational accomplishments. And perhaps even allow employees to share their pride in your business.

3. Help Generate Positive Coverage for Your Industry
   Your media-relations efforts can help the entire convenience store industry by generating positive coverage of its people, its accomplishments and its contributions to our economy.

Getting Started

The media is a conduit to the people who shop in your stores. It is also a way to reach your local decision-makers: city and county office holders, state lawmakers, zoning commissioners, etc. — as well as organizations with whom you do business, such as banks, suppliers and public utilities.

Public relations should be integrated into your marketing program and amplify and support your overall company messages. In many cases, successful public relations programs carry more credibility than marketing programs, because your message is delivered by a third party, not you directly. That’s why public relations efforts to get news articles are called “earned media,” while advertisements are known as “paid media.”

Your goal in launching your own public relations program is to manage your image in the community. If you don’t have the resources for an effective public relations program, consider working with the local high school, community college or university. They all have journalism students who crave real-world experience and will often work for credits and/or pizza. Think about contacting the school to see what kinds of programs you can develop. The age group is also the most familiar with new techniques to communicate, or how to integrate social media. And these students may become your biggest advocates and tell their friends, giving you more great publicity.

You also may want to contract with a public relations professional or agency. These professionals know how to write press releases, message and place stories. What they don’t know is your business. So even if you contract out the public relations work, you will still need to be engaged in developing your public relations plan, both in terms of educating the public relations agency about your company and in properly addressing many of the elements that follow. And you will work with the agency to identify and prepare your spokesperson.
Basic Elements to Consider

Your goal in public relations is to define your image in the community. It is not “spin” or damage control — it is proactively telling others your story about how you are working to improve your community, much like you would in your existing messaging. Here are some basic elements that will help you successfully promote your efforts:

+ **Determine Your Spokesperson**
Appoint someone who will perform the basic public relations duties (maintaining press contacts, producing press releases, handling media calls, etc.) as well as serve as company spokesperson when the media calls for comments and interviews. This person should know the operations of the company, be comfortable speaking in public and be accessible to the media. Most of all, the spokesperson needs to be able to quickly think on his/her feet, and be unflappable.

+ **Develop Fact Sheets**
Fact sheets about your business can be used to develop your overall messaging strategy and can be shared with reporters. Good facts sheets are not overly cluttered — they contain two or three messages per topic. Messages that actively state what you are doing are much more effective than passive announcements. And whenever possible, try to support each message with facts, using either overall trends or specific data.

+ **Develop a Media List**
Gather e-mails and phone numbers for your area’s big daily newspaper and your local newspaper(s), local network-affiliated TV stations, and local news radio stations. Also, don’t forget non-traditional media — social media, etc.

+ **Keep Good Records**
Set up files to save the media materials you develop, as well as newspaper clippings that your efforts generate. This will help you tailor your messages going forward for maximum effect.

We will go over each of these elements later in this toolkit. Before that, let’s look at the most basic public relations tool that incorporates all of the above: the press release.
Press Releases

Writing and distributing a press release is an effective way to get your message out to your local media — or on social media. The message is largely the same, whatever the medium.

A well-written release helps explain your story.
Remember that reporters see far too many “news” releases that are nothing more than advertisements. Give your local media news they can use and you will not only generate publicity for your company today, you’ll also become a trusted source that reporters will turn to again and again. Here are a few things to consider before you write your press release:

+ Determine Your Message / Objective
What do you want people to know about your news? There are basic press releases about new hires, promotions, etc., that don’t require much beyond specifics. But for those that are more in-depth (like a new design concept or product offer), you will want to develop messages, which you want customers to remember. Support these messages with “proof points”: facts supporting the overriding statement. It allows you to provide the “why” to potential customers and give them context if they aren’t familiar with your business. (Carry these themes throughout your press materials, as well as your online presence.)

+ Determine Your Audience
Who do you want to reach and through which media outlets? Trade publications are the best way to tell industry-specific stories. General media outlets (newspapers, radio, television) are best for reaching customers directly. Develop a media list or update any lists you may already have. You may want to call the publications directly to ensure you have the most recent information and the appropriate contact names.

+ Differentiate Yourself
Yes, you have a basic story to tell, but how can you put a twist on it? Try to think about a unique news angle — why would reporters be interested in your story?

+ Know Reporters’ Schedules and Communicate Early
Most monthly and weekly publications have a longer editorial planning cycle than daily papers and broadcast programs. For monthly trade publications, the lead-time is often a month or more. Newspapers have daily deadlines, but have feature stories that may be a week or more in development.

+ Remember the Local Angle
Make sure there is a local angle for the media. A reporter in one town probably isn’t interested in a story that affects another area — unless you tie the story to a local angle.

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Tip: Test your news story idea on a friend who is not in the industry to see if it’s really “newsworthy.”
How to Write a Press Release

Unfortunately, most of the press releases that the news media receives are along the lines of this: “Company X has released a new product. This product is a great new product. People should rush out and buy this product.”

What the media wants to see is something more like this: “Shiner hair, whiter teeth and superhuman strength are just some of the benefits consumers can get from using this new product from Company X.”

See the difference? Reporters want to know if the company is offering something that will immediately benefit their readers or viewers in a way that’s new or different. That’s what makes it news. (The “superhuman strength” claim is certainly a stretch. Only use claims that are credible and believable. But if your product/service in fact delivers verified superhuman strength, contact the NACS Communications team first: We want the exclusive!)

The first paragraph of your release should be brief and to the point, telling the reader who, what, when, where and why. It should inform the reader and make them want to read more. It should be the one sentence that best explains what you are announcing. Avoid slang, jargon, acronyms, clichés or language that seems too much like a sales pitch. Reporters are looking for “just the facts,” so they are a different audience than your potential customers.

Find fun ways to put things in context. To define the importance of convenience stores, NACS tells reporters that convenience stores are responsible for 3 percent of the country’s gross domestic product (or one of every 34 dollars spent in the country), an impressive number. (Convenience store sales were $550 billion in 2016; the gross domestic product was $18.57 trillion.) Another great number is that convenience stores serve 160 million customers a day. That is half of the U.S. population of 320 million and considerably more than the approximately 111 million who watched the Super Bowl in 2017.

Should I include a Quote

Yes! Quoting a top company official gives the reader a frame of reference about why your news is important. It is also an excellent way to state an opinion about your news — to put your “spin” on the story. Try to avoid going overboard, though, because that could make the news seem less than believable. The more interesting the quote, especially how it ties back to customers, the more likely it is to be included in a story.

What’s a Boilerplate

A boilerplate is the short description of your business that you want to communicate in every press release. It is the last paragraph of the release. (They can be updated regularly to reflect the growth in the number of stores or other metrics, but the basic format should remain consistent throughout the course of a year — or longer. This is the NACS boilerplate in October 2017:

NACS advances the role of convenience stores as positive economic, social and philanthropic contributors to the communities they serve. The U.S. convenience store industry, with more than 154,000 stores nationwide selling fuel, food and merchandise, serves 160 million customers daily — half of the U.S. population — and has sales that are 10.8% of total U.S. retail and foodservice sales. NACS has 2,100 retailer and 1,750 supplier members from more than 50 countries.

Tip: some writers find it easier to write the body of the story first, then come back and write the lead sentence and headline. By then you have your thoughts better organized.
Anything to Avoid?

You know your business better than anyone, but that in-depth knowledge also can be a negative. Try to avoid explaining it in too much detail; reporters prefer things explained as simply as possible. Try to avoid touting the features; focus on the benefits instead. Don’t Capitalize Words To Make Them Stand Out. And don’t upper case words — like PRODUCT NAMES — to make them stand out. Most people consider that the equivalent of shouting and find it annoying. And keep exclamation points to a minimum — never use them in anything but a quote, and only sparingly there, too.

What About Pictures?

As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. See if you can have high-quality pictures or graphics available for your story. For a new store opening, have a picture of the store available, along with a picture of the store manager or any unique products or offerings at the location. Consider having photos of your key executives on hand, especially if they are quoted in a press release. You don’t need to send these photos with the release — if they are large files, they may cause the e-mail to be rejected by the recipient. You could have a line on your press release that states that “Note to editors: photos of (PERSON/STORE/OFFERING) are available upon request.” Or, consider allowing reporters to download images directly from your website.

How Do You Format a Press Release?

Provide a name, e-mail and daytime telephone number (and perhaps a cell phone number as well) for a contact person, so reporters can follow up.

If the release is for use as soon as the media receives it, put “For Immediate Release” at the top of the page. In some cases, you may not want advance information to be used until an event is held. This is known as an “embargo.” In that case, specify “For Release on (date and time).”

Give it a concise headline. This is particularly important for e-mails. Today, spam filters will often reject an e-mail if the subject line has too many characters, sometimes as few as 60. Also, avoid any words that could trigger someone’s spam filter. There are a number of websites that list these words; here is one: http://emailmarketing.comm100.com/email-marketing-ebook/spam-words.aspx.

Tip: virtually all press releases today are issued via e-mail (as opposed to mail or fax). make it easy for reporters to publish your information so either e-mail the press release as a word document or (better) as a copy and paste. don’t send it as a pdf, which makes it less likely that the release will be copied and printed verbatim, unless there is some compelling reason to do so. and post your releases on your website.

What’s the Right Length?

Shorter is always better. Remember, reporters are often looking to fill holes in a newspaper or news report. The shorter and more concise something is, the less editing is required to make the press release suitable for the news source. And it gives an editor more options on where to place a story in the layout, as opposed to larger stories that may not fit anywhere. Also, graphics may help editors — a smaller story can fit a larger hole if there are pictures or charts that complement the copy.

Above all, keep it brief. End the news release before the reader loses interest. Reporters can always contact you if they want more details. The bulk of well-written press releases are 400 to 800 words. Your release should never be more than two pages, and they should only be that long when you have something very important or complicated to say. News agencies also are following the shorter is better rule. One well-regarded national news agency now requires reporters to write stories that are 400 words or fewer.
**How Often Should I Send Press Releases?**

The short answer is you should send out news releases when you want to communicate news. Don’t focus on sending out a certain number of releases over a period of time (one a week, month, etc.). If you send out releases that aren’t really news, reporters will eventually tune out all of your releases, including those that do have news. Make sure that you are only communicating to them when it’s worthwhile.

**Who Should Receive My Press Release?**

Provide a name, e-mail and daytime telephone number (and perhaps a cell phone number as well) for a contact person, so reporters can follow up.

If the release is for use as soon as the media receives it, put “For Immediate Release” at the top of the page. In some cases, you may not want advance information to be used until an event is held. This is known as an “embargo.” In that case, specify “For Release on (date and time).”

+ **trade publications:** What trade publications cover your business? This may be the best audience if you are just beginning a media outreach program. Trade reporters (like those at NACS Magazine) understand your business. They are always looking for announcements about new personnel, new stores, new designs and concepts, etc. They also are vested in our industry and generally want you to look good. They may even allow you to see your quotes or other details before they are finalized. And here’s a bonus: As your business is seen in the trade press on a more regular basis, others notice. It might help you in finding new connections with vendors or give you more prestige when you talk to them.

+ **local media:** Think about the obvious ones: the local newspaper, the news radio station and any other appropriate outlets. And try to give them each the most targeted news. If you have a number of local newspapers, spend a few days and review who writes articles in line with your messages. Is there a local business editor? Food editor? Compile a list of their contact information that can be used to build your database. Are their local TV or radio stations? If the local TV news station doesn’t cover stories about new store hires, don’t send them releases on this subject. Instead, see who might be covering specific issues and use the web to help you identify their contact information. But think about them for trends, especially visual stories. Remember, reporters treat e-mails the same way you do. If they get too many “worthless” press release from you, they stop reading them — and will miss the good ones.

**Tip: Run your release past a few people before you send it out. If they have questions after reading it, rework your release to answer these questions. If there are unnecessary details, then get rid of them.**

**Tip: if you haven’t sent out a press release in a while, examine why. is your team not identifying opportunities to communicate news? are you taking certain things for granted? there may be anniversaries or current events that can make a good press release, such as the start of summer drive season, thanksgiving and other holiday driving periods, and employee work anniversaries. and then there are the fun “national days” like hot dog day (july 23). you only have to go three days into the year before there is an industry relevant day: national drinking straw day on january 3. a fairly comprehensive listing of these types of celebrations is at: http://nationaldaycalendar.com/calendar-at-a-glance/
For broader, national stories, you might also want to consider sending the release out on one of the newswire services (PR Newswire, BusinessWire, etc.), which send your releases to hundreds or thousands of media contacts (for a fee, of course).

**National Media:**

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**When Should I Send Out Press Releases?**

Try to send them early to give reporters the most opportunity to use them. For daily newspapers/newsletters, try to send them in the morning, sometime before lunch. Don’t wait till the end of the day: The news lineup usually has already been allocated by mid-afternoon. For weekly newspapers, know their publication schedules. The community weeklies are often delivered on Thursday evenings. Look at sending them your news on Fridays or Mondays while they are still looking at how to allocate space.

**Tip: Think About Targeting Community Newspapers, Those That Are Weekly and Free.**

There is a reason that acclaimed investor Warren Buffett purchased several media groups representing community newspapers: they are widely read and influential in community “buzz.” And even better, they want hyper local news and are content hungry. These newspapers are the most likely to publish your press release verbatim, including the boilerplate.

Here are some suggestions to make it all work:

+ Consider tailoring your pitch with a short reference to what they do. Such as noting that you enjoyed their last story about...

+ Don’t ask editors when they will run a story — but you can ask them to call you if they need more information.

+ Compile multiple distribution lists for your e-mails whether by topic (food, business, community) or type of media outlet (magazine, newspaper, TV) so that you can most effectively target the right reporters.

+ If you send out releases to a listing of reporters, send them as a BCC. No one wants to see that they are one of many getting a release.

+ If you use a newswire service, send the release to go out at an unusual time. Most groups set releases to go out on the hour or half hour and yours could get lost in the noise. If you want to send a release early in the morning, don’t set it to be distributed at 8:00 or 8:30 am, but at a time like 8:04 or 8:22 am — something more uncommon.

**Above All: Proofread the Release Very Carefully.**

Spelling mistakes, bad grammar and typos are likely to be noticed by reporters. Like it or not, the quality of your business can be judged by the quality of your communications. If there are typos, can customers be sure that your store operations are as good as you say that they are?
Fact Sheets

Fact sheets are designed to share topline messages with the media in an easily digestible form. The messages are amplified by “proof points” that support your overarching message.

You should consider developing fact sheets on major initiatives (community giving, healthy options, store redesigns, etc.) as well as about specific categories (foodservice, beverages, etc.) or other topics.

Fact sheets are also important to have on hand to give reporters background and context about your business. Develop them as you develop your initial press strategy and then think about how you can develop specific fact sheets for various broad programs or initiatives.

Fact sheets aren’t things that are just shared upon request. Make them a part of your broad messaging. Consider posting them online. Try to see how some elements from them can be incorporated on social media. Use this as a simple summary of your business to help positively define your business in a number of ways.

A sample fact sheet that NACS developed about the convenience store industry is on the following page. Each positive statement is followed by supporting facts.

(You’ll notice that the messages that were used in other media pitches for the NACS Show and the NACS In Store events use similar or even identical wording. It is international and helps reinforce a message that you ultimately want to take hold in people’s minds.)
The U.S. Convenience store industry

The U.S. convenience store industry has 154,000-plus stores that account for nearly $550 billion in sales. Here are some facts about the convenience store industry:

Convenience stores are everywhere. There are 154,535 convenience stores in the United States— one per every 2,100 people. Other competing channels have far fewer stores, according to Nielsen TDLinx, such as drug stores (43,636 stores), supermarkets (51,191 stores) and dollar stores (28,832 stores). Overall, convenience stores account for 33.9% of all retail outlets in the United States.

Convenience stores are America’s fueling station: Convenience stores sell the majority of gasoline purchased in the country — approximately 80 percent of all fuel sold in the United States. A total of 123,807 convenience stores sell motor fuels. Overall, 80.1 percent of all convenience stores sell motor fuels.

Consumers are embracing convenience stores like never before. An average store selling fuel has around 1,100 customers per day, or more than 400,000 per year. Cumulatively, the U.S. convenience store industry alone serves 160 million customers per day.

Convenience stores have robust sales. In 2015, U.S. convenience stores had $550 billion in sales — more than the sales of the country’s restaurants (projected at $709 billion in 2015) or supermarkets ($649 billion) and far greater than drug stores ($238 billion, not including prescriptions). Overall, convenience store sales in 2016 were 3% of the $17.95 trillion U.S. gross domestic product. The U.S. convenience store industry had sales that would rank it the 37th largest country by gross domestic product, between Vietnam ($552 billion) and Iraq ($544 billion), according to the CIA World Factbook.

Convenience stores sell time: Convenience stores offer speed of service to time-starved consumers who want to get in and out of the store quickly. These shoppers recognize this channel of trade for its convenient locations, extended hours of operation, one-stop shopping, grab-and-go foodservice, variety of merchandise and fast transactions. A NACS speed metrics study found that it takes customers, on average, 3 minutes and 33 seconds from the time they leave their cars until the time they get back in their cars with a purchase. No other channel comes close.
There is a world of difference between pushing out press releases with your message and in conducting interviews with reporters. However, by developing the messaging building blocks, you have most of the tools that you need to succeed. All that you need to add is how you say them — and know how to say it.

It is important to note that the vast majority of interviews will take place via telephone, not on site at a store or in a TV studio. Over the past 15 years, NACS has conducted more than 5,000 media interviews but only 100 or so have been in a TV studio.

There are three steps to preparing for a successful interview:

1. **Develop Messages**
   These are the soundbites that amplify something positive about your business. They are also known as “talking points.”

2. **Develop Proof Points**
   The facts and stories that back up your messages. Sometime the most effective proof points are stories — personal or business-related stories that convey your central message.

3. **Learn Bridging Techniques**
   This is the central skill that spokespeople all learn. It is how to guide a conversation back to what you want to talk about. Bridging techniques allow you to move away from the way a question has been raised to the way that you want to answer something. It can move you away from the yes/no questions, etc. Sample bridging phrases are, “I think the real issues here is...,” “It’s important to note that...,” etc.

The next step is to practice — either aloud or in your head — how you might respond to questions posed. One approach is to use time that is otherwise underused — driving to work, exercising — and play through various scenarios that you might encounter. Is your reasoning and explanation sound? Can you poke holes in it? If you were the reporter, how might you call “BS” and push back on your messages? It’s always better that you or someone on your team is questioning your message, because reporters are trained to ask thoughtful questions that may test your message’s validity.

Above all, embrace this opportunity. There will be times where you will wish you had done better, or the wrong quotes were used. Sometimes you could have controlled the situation better, and sometimes the story will be one that probably was going to be a poor one even before you were involved in it. But, the key is to learn from any missed opportunities and improve your communications. Stories will continue to be written that are either about your business or things important to you. Your business will benefit if your voice is part of the discussion.

**Tip:** To avoid being “misquoted,” be sure that you have sufficiently explained the issue. Remember that reporters may be basing most of their understanding of an issue on what you tell them. If you can spend time to explain the basics, reporters will be more able to accurately summarize the story and tell everything in context.
There are three steps to preparing for a successful interview:

**Before the Interview:**

+ **Be prepared.** Know your facts and the message that you want to convey. If you don’t know the answer to a reporter’s question, it’s okay to say that you don’t know — but will get them the correct answer in a timely manner.

+ **Memorize your key message points.** Ask yourself: What do you want the reporter to take away from the interview and communicate to readers/viewers? Develop concise messages that get your points across.

+ **Understand deadlines.** You may not be able to dedicate full attention to a reporter’s request for several hours, but be prompt in your initial response. Even sending an e-mail saying that you are temporarily unavailable but will get back to them makes it much easier to help meet deadlines and ultimately become a trusted source for future stories involving your business.

+ **Know what you are doing before you do it.** Ask questions about the topic of the news article or TV interview. Will they be talking to others? When will it air? It’s good to know what you are getting into before you agree to it.

+ **Have a plan.** If you watched the end of the 2014 World Series, you might have seen something that was either hilarious or painful, depending upon your perspective. A sales executive for a car company presented the MVP trophy and totally lost what he was trying to say, because it was half presentation and half sales pitch. The two basic mistakes in the presentation could have been avoided. One, have a spokesperson speak, not a salesman. Two, have a tight narrative with defined messages. (Google the phrase “Chevy Guy” to see a video clip.)

**During the Interview:**

+ **Use facts to tell your story.** If you cite figures, be prepared to back them up.

+ **Be in control.** Answer the question the way you want. (Many polished spokespeople jokingly say that it doesn’t matter what question is asked, because you should answer the question that you wanted asked — whether or not it was.) If you get off track, guide the conversation back to your message.

+ **Maintain focus.** While there is the temptation to check e-mails or something else while you are on the phone, don’t do it. Focus on your interview. One tip is to stand up during your conversation. It helps you maintain focus and adds energy. Sometimes the words you say aren’t enough — having more energy helps the reporter understand your passion about a topic.

+ **Avoid giving blunt answers to open-ended or hypothetical questions.** Don’t be drawn into making generalizations. Simply restate the reporter’s question in the context of your business and your message. (“Well, I can’t speak for everyone, but at our stores...”)

+ **If you don’t want it repeated, don’t say it.** While you may be able to talk to a reporter “on background” (where you can provide details without attribution), it is something that you need to only do after careful consideration. There are scores of seasoned media professionals who have lost jobs by unsuccessfully navigating this process. Carefully think about what you want to say. It may be that you decide that your best approach is to only say things that you are 100% comfortable seeing repeated.
**Beware the “hot” mic.** If you have a microphone on you, there is a chance that you will be recorded or have your words picked up, even if you aren’t on air. Remember that hilarious scene in the movie “Naked Gun” where someone’s wearing a mic while using the restroom? There is a reason that high-profile political speakers only use a lectern mic — they can easily walk away from it with a much better likelihood that their private conversations and thoughts remain just that: private.

**“Anything else?”** Sometimes, reporters will ask at the end of an interview whether there was anything else that you wanted to add. Take this as the opportunity to restate your most important message. Yes, you may have already stated it, but restating it clearly demonstrates to reporters that it is important. And, you may find that you say it better the second time around. It may be the quote that ultimately gets published.

**Tip:** avoid leading with lists that are difficult to remember. There are countless examples of media interviews or debates gone bad when someone says that there are three things to do and can only name two. Make it more general and avoid those traps.
Meet & Greets

Making personal contact with the people in your community who report the news can prove invaluable.

A great way to establish local contacts is through a “meet and greet” event. Invite newspaper, TV and radio reporters and editors to one of your company’s retail locations.

Reporters will learn about your business and how it benefits the community, and they will also start to seek out news about your company. Ultimately, you can become a good news source for reporters seeking to “localize” a national news story.

What Makes for a Great Meet and Greet?

+ A new store opening: Invite the media as part of your soft launch.

+ A new product or service: Are you introducing a new foodservice program? A new type of fuel? Or a new redesign? Those are all potentially worthy of a meet and greet.

+ A community event: Are you either launching or completing a charity drive or community event?

There are many other variations on a meet and greet at your store. You could invite reporters to talk to your spokesperson if there is a high lottery jackpot drawing in the news, if gas prices hit a certain level, etc. Think about a variety of possibilities.

The Basics of a Meet and Greet

Media meet and greets provide reporters with a behind the scenes tour of your store. It’s highly likely that they’ve never really thought about all the different things that go on in a convenience store. Have one of your employees demonstrate some of the things they do to serve customers and keep the store running.

Look at things like:

+ How you stock products and get delivery.

+ How you manage operations, especially credit card processing.

+ How you bake onsite or prepare food.

+ What’s involved in responsible ID checks, etc.

All of these looks behind the scenes can be a valuable education to reporters. They don’t have to be long — 30 minutes or so might be a perfect length.

Planning and Logistics

In advance: Send out a media advisory several days in advance of your event. It is similar to a press release in that it clearly spells out the who, what, where, when and why. Morning events are better — they are further away from end-of-day deadlines and the crunch of filing stories on a regular basis.

As part of the advisory, encourage reporters to pre-register so that you know what to anticipate. Remember, even one good reporter at an event can make it a success. Place follow-up calls to determine the amount of interest your announcements are generating and to develop a list of reporters planning on attending your special event, or to set up interview appointments.

NACS has developed a number of media advisories and two are included at the end of this section: one to highlight the NACS InStore Congressional visits and another to encourage reporters to attend the 2014 NACS Show. You will see similarities in the messaging even though they are very different events. That is intentional to be consistent with branding.
On-site: Prepare your spokesperson and also make sure that you have enough materials for every attendee, whether press kits or samples. Many reporters are unable to accept gifts, so keep that in mind. However, there still may be value in offering company items such as hats. And, if you are offering food, sampling is highly encouraged.

Media Advisories:

A media advisory is similar to a press release, but has the heading “Media Advisory” above the headline, and highlights one specific event. Following are two samples:

Media Advisory

Contact: (name)
Contact Information

“Checking Out” life Behind the Counter: [Member] to participate in “NACS In Store” event

[Member] will work at [name of store] in [location], interacting with employees, Customers and Business Owners

[DATELINE] - [MEMBER] will participate in a “NACS In Store” event at [NAME OF STORE] in [LOCATION] allowing the [MEMBER] to interact with employees, customers and business owners and to experience firsthand the economic opportunity and wide range of products and services convenience stores provide the public. The event is a program of the National Association of Convenience Stores (NACS).

who: [MEMBER]
[BUSINESS OWNER], Owner of [BUSINESS NAME]
[NACS PARTICIPANTS AND TITLE]

what: “NACS In Store” Event

[MEMBER] will:
• Receive “clerk training”
• Work behind the counter
• Speak with customers
• Confer with local convenience retailer about issues important to the business and the community [CLOSED PRESS]

where: [NAME OF STORE] [ADDRESS]

when: [DATE]
[TIME]

why: One of a series of NACS In Store events organized by NACS nationwide to offer members of Congress an up-close look at how these vital small businesses address a range of policy imperatives in America by providing:
• A continuous source of entry-level jobs
• An engine for economic growth
• Access to competitively priced consumer products
• Services for underserved areas
• Affordable supplies of 80 percent of the gasoline sold in the U.S. today.

[ANY SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRESS, TV, PHOTOGRAPHERS]
Generating Publicity

Sending out a press release to inform the media about the opening of a new store is an opportunity to generate publicity that you cannot miss. But it’s part of a much bigger, more thoughtful process of media relations.

We’ve provided some basic advice on how to create and share press releases, develop fact sheets and define your communications outreach.

Now you are ready to generate some positive publicity. We’ll conclude by reiterating a few key points and adding a few more pointers.

Know the Stories that You Can Tell

Here are a few ideas for stories that can win you publicity. Let your local news outlets know when:

+ You hire or promote a manager.
+ One of your employees wins a scholarship, or graduates from college.
+ An employee participates in a fundraiser, a walk for charity or other community event.
+ Your company-sponsored Little League team wins the championship — or simply concludes a season.
+ Your stores get involved in neighborhood anti-crime efforts.
+ Your company helps out a local service organization like the Lions Club or Jaycees.
+ Your stores add accommodations for the disabled.
+ Your employees help out in a neighborhood cleanup or civic beautification drive.

And here are some more ambitious public relations projects:

+ Host a “recognition day” for the community groups you sponsor.
+ Sponsor an essay contest at your local school.
+ Get involved in neighborhood anti-crime efforts in cooperation with your local police department.
+ Write a letter to the editor of your local paper expressing your views on an issue affecting the convenience store industry. NACS would be glad to help you with facts and figures to support your statements.

Know Who Can Tell Your Story

Appoint someone who will perform the basic public relations duties (maintaining press contacts, producing press releases, handling media calls, etc.) as well as serve as company spokesperson when the media calls for comments and interviews.

This person should know the operations of the company, be comfortable speaking in public, and be accessible to the media. When your company sends out a press release, your spokesperson’s name and phone number should be at the top. While you may have someone else who oversees social media messaging, your media and social media strategy should be closely aligned.

Communicate Basic Truths

Write up a fact sheet about your business that your spokesperson can e-mail to reporters. It should include information such as:
Communicate Basic Truths

Write up a fact sheet about your business that your spokesperson can e-mail to reporters. It should include information such as:

Facts:
+ When your business was founded.
+ How many retail locations you have.
+ Size of stores and services offered.
+ How many employees you have.

Stories:
+ Examples of how you contribute to communities in charitable giving.
+ A personal element, if appropriate, about your leader(s).

Who Can Help Share Your Story

Develop a media list (or lists by specific topics) and gather e-mail addresses and phone numbers for:
+ Your area’s big daily newspaper
+ Free community newspapers (which typically come out Thursdays)
+ Local network-affiliated TV stations
+ Local news radio stations
+ Community-based websites
+ Influential local bloggers on specific topics

Until you’ve made personal contact with the right reporters and editors, the best initial contact is “Assignment Editor” for TV, “Business Editor” for newspapers and “News Director” for radio.

Keep Good Records for Future Outreach

Try to create a database that you can use for future outreach. Consider developing different media lists by topic: business, food, fuels, etc. While many reporters today cover multiple topics, many still have specialties.

Also, keep track of your contacts and consolidations. NACS logs every media interview it conducts (more than 5,000 over the past 15 years) to keep track of what topics are of most interest, and how to reach a reporter. If you don’t have their contact information, ask for it. Remember: all reporters want to receive good news stories of interest. Set up files to save the press materials you develop, as well as newspaper clippings that your efforts generate. Even consider adding personal stuff to inspire future small talk. The reporter mentioned his/her kids? If they mentioned anything worth remembering (names, ages, interests), write it down and see how you can use it in conversations down the road, if appropriate. But only do this if you are sincerely interested.

Here is an example of how NACS logs interviews:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>Jacque Froehlich</td>
<td>(list phone number and email address here)</td>
<td>4/1: Interviewed JL about Walmart convenience stores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois Times</td>
<td>Bruce Rushton</td>
<td>(list phone number and email address here)</td>
<td>4/1: Spoke to JL about diesel fuel sales.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dow Jones MarketWatch</td>
<td>Myra Picache</td>
<td>(list phone number and email address here)</td>
<td>4/1: Spoke to JL/JE about ethanol prices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NACS consolidates monthly logs and uses the information to stay in contact with reporters on topics related to their previous coverage. Consider building similar lists around specific topics important to you. NACS has media lists related to fuels, nutrition and a few other topics.

Here are a few final suggestions to help your media outreach program succeed:

+ **Know your data and use it:** Reporters like to refer to numbers in trend stories. Have that information available — don’t make reporters have to do the work to find it.

+ **Show your community spirit:** Share news about your community giving. Are you sponsoring a local youth sports team? Are you donating to those in need? Is your store being used for a fundraising activity? These are great stories to tell.

+ **Make it appealing:** If you have a great new food-service offer, take professional-quality pictures in color. Make the pictures showcase your great food.

+ **Take your time:** Reporters on deadline can often appear in a hurry. And they probably are. It’s not getting the answer that is causing the stress; it’s finding the person to get the answer that is stressful. If they know that you can and will help them, it’s a great relief, compared to having to continue to find someone to comment. So, remember that you can take some time to prepare if you aren’t ready to talk. If you need a few minutes to prepare your thoughts, first get a sense of what they want to know, as well as their deadline, and tell them you are in the middle of something. Call them back when you are ready and prepared to talk.

+ **Teach them your business:** Reporters are often assigned a story that morning without any knowledge of the topic. It’s pretty impressive how they can create a compelling narrative. But make it easy for them to get things right. You may have been in the business for 20 years but they just started learning about it. Break it down into basics for them — it will be time well spent.

+ **Add color:** Even if a question is largely a basic “yes or no” question, try to add a little bit more to the answer that can help deliver your message. Speak in complete sentences that are easier to use as a soundbite. However, if it is a sensitive topic that you prefer not to address, the fewer words, the better.

+ **Forge relationships:** Get to know local reporters before there is news. See if they are available to meet for coffee or lunch to learn about your business. Don’t be surprised if they don’t allow you to pick up the tab. Some news organizations, particularly the larger ones, have significant restrictions on what their reporters can accept.

### Share Your Successes

Stay in touch with others in the convenience store industry through NACS. Share your successes with them and the NACS communications team. There are many opportunities to get your company’s name in the media. By learning what works best, and coordinating your efforts with others in the industry, you can generate positive coverage for your stores and for the entire industry. Send stories and releases to news@convenience.org.
Outreach Tools & Additional Resources

There are a variety of ways that public relations professionals organize their messaging and coordinate how they message.

This sample worksheet can be used, in particular, to communicate your positive messages. These are just sample messages to give you ideas for how you might want to develop customized messages.

Messages To Communicate

Community anchor: As part of the fabric of the community, we support many local charities. From youth sports teams to food drives, we strengthen the communities that they serve.

List examples:

Kings of Convenience: Our primary focus is delivering convenience, in whatever way the customer defines it, whether speed of service, convenient locations, extended hours of operation or one-stop shopping.

List examples:

Healthy options: Our stores are increasingly offering fresh and healthy options to give more choices to our customers, from freshly prepared foods to healthy packaged snacks like nuts to a slew of low- or no-calories beverage options like bottled water.

List examples:

Growth opportunities: A position at our company can begin the growth ladder in an employee’s career. Our company has numerous examples of individuals who started as a sales associate and is now a [management position(s)].

List examples:

Competitive and forward-thinking employer: Here are some areas in which our company has taken steps to be an employer of choice.

List examples:
Get Your Message Heard

Contacts to regularly communicate our messages to:

Local Newspaper(s)

Business editor: ________________________________
+ How he/she prefers to be contacted/contact info: ________________________________
+ Last contacted/topic: ________________________________
+ Result: ________________________________

Other reporter: ________________________________
+ How he/she prefers to be contacted/contact info: ________________________________
+ Last contacted/topic: ________________________________
+ Result: ________________________________

Op-ed editor: ________________________________
+ How he/she prefers to be contacted/contact info: ________________________________
+ Last contacted/topic: ________________________________
+ Result: ________________________________

Television Station(s)

Assignment editor: ________________________________
+ Last contacted/topic: ________________________________
+ Result: ________________________________

Radio Station(s)

Assignment editor: ________________________________
+ Last contacted/topic: ________________________________
+ Result: ________________________________

Employees

+ Story/message shared with employees:
  ________________________________
+ When: ________________________________
+ Feedback: ________________________________

Community Group

+ Contact person: ________________________________
+ Interest in presentations/tour: ________________________________
+ When: ________________________________
+ Feedback: ________________________________
+ Last contacted: ________________________________
NACS
NACS has a number of resources to help retailers tell their story.

NACS Magazine: NACS Magazine is a member-only benefit. Articles are available to non-members following the month of publication.
nacsmagazine.com

NACS News & Media Center: See NACS Daily News stories, NACS press releases, NACS Member news and other relevant media information.
convenience.org/News/Pages/default.aspx

NACS Retail Fuels Report: The NACS Retail Fuels Report, now in its 14th year, explains market conditions that affect gas prices and fueling.
convenience.org/gasprices

NACS Ideas 2 Go: Since 1994, Ideas 2 Go has featured hundreds of interviews with retailers, showcasing the industry’s best practices to not only retailers but to the community at large. Stories from the past decade are online and searchable by topic.
convenience.org/ideas2go

There also a number of web resources that describe various elements of developing an effective public relations program. Here are a few that we found:

Public Relations Toolkit: How To PR (by Steven R. Van Hook, a former journalist/producer):
aboutpublicrelations.net/toolkit.htm

PR Basics (by Entrepreneur magazine):
entrepreneur.com/publicrelations/prbasics/archive115992.html

How Public Relations Works (by How Stuff Works):
money.howstuffworks.com/business-communications/how-public-relations-works.htm

Public Relations, Explained (by Forbes magazine):
forbes.com/sites/robertwynne/2013/09/04/public-relations-explained/

How To Do Your Own PR (by Inc. Magazine):
inc.com/geoffrey-james/how-to-do-your-own-pr.html

How To PR Like A Pro: A Guide To Getting Media Attention (by Ecommerce University):
shopify.com/blog/4404772-how-to-pr-like-a-pro-a-guide-to-getting-media-attention