

# VIVA! Communications – guide to media relations & pitching

## OVERVIEW

This guide is designed to assist new team members with the media relations and pitching component of media campaigns at VIVA! Communications. It aims to provide you with some tools and tips for achieving the best media outcomes for campaigns.

## KEY STEPS – PREPARATION

1. Always have a thorough read of the media release, key messages, profiles and research backgrounder before you pick up the telephone to speak to the media, so you are completely conversant with the material
2. Always have the pitch spiel in front of you before you speak to a journalist
3. Make sure the media materials and spiel are as targeted to the individual media outlet as possible i.e. This may mean tweaking the wording slightly to suit the media outlet. For example, see the difference in the two pitch spiels below:

The spiel on the left is for a **QLD** audience and the one on the right is for a **national** audience. Obviously, all references to the local area need to be removed for the national version and the same applies for the headlines in other media materials such as Media Release and Media Alert. These things seem obvious but are often overlooked and could mean the difference between a busy journalist/Chief of Staff (COS) deleting your story from their inbox or otherwise:

### Queensland version

Queensland school-leavers heading offshore to the exotic hotspots of Bali, Thailand, Cambodia, Fiji and Vanuatu to celebrate 'Schoolies' this weekend may be unwittingly exposing themselves to potentially fatal infectious diseases, including rabies, hepatitis A, meningococcal disease, measles, gastrointestinal infections, malaria and dengue. (See attached media release for more information).

Today, leading travel health pioneer, Dr Deb Mills, will be urging scores of Queensland Schoolies to 'travel and party safely' overseas by following three simple steps:

1. Have your shots;
2. Pack a medical kit; and
3. Learn about the local hazards and how to avoid them, to have a good time.

"Many school-leavers mistakenly think because they have completed their routine childhood vaccines they are protected against various vaccine-preventable diseases. Unfortunately, routine vaccines do not provide sufficient protection for overseas travel," said Dr Deb.

The Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) estimates 48,500 students will graduate from Queensland high schools this year, many of whom will be oblivious to the potentially fatal health hazards common to their party destinations.

To learn more about the potentially fatal health hazards facing travelling Schoolies and how to travel and party safely overseas, tee up an interview with:

- Dr Deb Mills, Travel Doctor & spokesperson for the Travel Medicine Alliance, BRISBANE
- Michael Cameron, 20, AV technician/musician who fell victim to an unprovoked monkey attack while celebrating Schoolies in Bali last year, MELBOURNE (former Gold Coast resident)
- Brittany Fowler, 19, engineering student who celebrated Schoolies in Fiji last year, BRISBANE
- Helen Driscoll, 18, journalism student who celebrated Schoolies in Fiji last year, BRISBANE

### National version

School-leavers heading offshore to the exotic hotspots of Bali, Thailand, Cambodia, Fiji and Vanuatu to celebrate 'Schoolies' this weekend may be unwittingly exposing themselves to potentially fatal infectious diseases, including rabies, hepatitis A, meningococcal disease, measles, gastrointestinal infections, malaria and dengue. (See attached media release for more information).

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ABS statistics show that Since 2008-09, tourism to Indonesia has more than doubled, while the number of Australians heading to Thailand and the US has increased by about 60 per cent.

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- Brief your spokespeople thoroughly! They need to stay on message. You can do this verbally in addition to sending them a hard copy with a few bullet points with key messages ahead of media interviews/appearances and tell them to read the materials, to prepare for potential media questions.
- Look at the media outlet's website or a couple of past stories to get a feel for their style/demographic/kind of stories they cover etc. This way you can be more confident that you have a chance that the story will appeal to them. Ideally you should try and watch/listen to as many of these programs as you can on a fairly regular basis (or read the paper/magazine from time to time) – this is the best way to know what story suits them. Use whatever hooks, words and phrases you can, to leverage your knowledge of what they normally cover. **Being as targeted as possible and giving them a strong reason to cover your story is key:**

i.e. ***“This is really suited to your demographic at Ten News,” or “Given the ABC’s national focus, this story dovetails perfectly.”***

- If there is a current topic/event in the news that you can leverage off, this is always good. For example, if you are trying to drive vaccination uptake with your story, you could say,

***“Given the recent controversy over children who are not being immunised, this story is currently timely and front of mind for many Australians.”***

- Other useful phrases to use if you are not getting a good response from a particular outlet:

***“This is an important public health awareness message.” “We have had a great deal of interest in this story from many media outlets across the country/state.”***

## THE ART OF THE SUCCESSFUL PITCH

**This might appear to be an easy task, but it is not!**

### Rule 1.

It is always better to have the name of the person you are calling, but with people coming and going frequently in the media, this is not always possible. If you don't know the name from your media lists, you can always ask the reception desk or general newsroom who the COS and/or health reporter is first.

### Rule 2.

First and foremost, ensure you are calling at an appropriate time. Journalists work to deadlines and this is especially crucial for radio newsrooms (never call a radio outlet 10 mins before and after the hour, and 10 mins before and after the half-hour).

### Rule 3.

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T	02 9968 3741
E	pj@vivacommunications.com.au
W	www.vivacommunications.com.au

Have a strong one-line opener ready which encapsulates the story. Waffling or pandering won't win favour with the media. Your opening line needs to be very punchy and succinct, and the tone should indicate 'this is the story and this is why you need to run it'.

Use active, powerful, attention-grabbing words (underlined below), spoken with conviction and purpose.

### Journalists smell fear!

Don't waste a lot of precious time introducing yourself and where you are from. Simply say: **'Hi, It's [Name] from VIVA! Communications'** and then go straight into your pitch.

i.e. **"I'd like to inform you/give you a heads up on a strong news story. A leading travel health doctor will be issuing a health warning to Schoolies travelling overseas this year to help prevent their exposure to potentially fatal diseases."**

### TOP TV TIPS

- TV news teams normally enter their editorial meetings at around 9:30-10:00am, so avoid calling then.
- Because at VIVA! we are in the business of health, it also pays to ask for the details of a dedicated health journalist if the outlet has one (nowadays many TV newsrooms do not) and if you can speak to them or email them as well as the COS. This gives you a better chance of getting the message through.
- If it is not a physical announcement i.e. press call, always be as accommodating of the journalist's deadlines for interviews i.e. I often **ask the journalist** when it is convenient for them to interview the talent, not the other way around. If it is for an afternoon/evening bulletin, they will always try to organise the interview around mid-morning, so try to have your talent prepared in advance for this timeslot for TV.

### TOP RADIO TIPS

- Radio newsrooms work to hourly and in many cases half hourly news bulletins, so avoid calling on the hour and half hour, or your call could be met by a grumpy journalist or editor and that's never a good start when you need to try and 'sell' a potential news story to them.
- When pitching a story into radio after you have sent the media release, the best time is the afternoon prior to announcement/launch day, so they can use it for breakfast news on the actual day of your launch. For Drive or Breakfast programs you need to call the day before; for weekly format programs you need to find out what day they go to air and

often they will need to know a week or a few days earlier than launch, as they often put their programs together well in advance i.e.

- If the story lends itself to feature-style media coverage, identify the appropriate program by looking online and call the producer/s of that program also. **Do your research on these programs in advance if you can.**
- Make sure your talent always has their **phone switched on and in an appropriate environment for mobile reception** around the time that the station has indicated they want to interview them. **NB a landline is always better for radio as it avoids poor/noisy reception and/or the line dropping out.**

## TOP PRINT MEDIA TIPS

- Key for daily newspapers is to follow up your media alert distribution a day or two ahead of the actual launch/announcement/event day with the media release as print journalists are usually deciding on, and writing their stories the day prior.
- For weekly newspapers such as the local suburban publications i.e 'Inner West Courier', they will need the full media kit about a week and a bit in advance of publication date. If uncertain, try to ascertain what their deadlines are in advance for receiving media material for stories.
- For monthly magazines etc, think well in advance – often a couple of months to send media materials and follow up with a call, especially for some of the medical/ pharmacy publications. So the key is **knowing the publication deadline and their material deadlines.**

## THE ART OF MEDIA FOLLOW-UP

### Rule 1.

- Never call up the media and say ***"I'm just following up on our media release..."*** You need to do a fresh pitch of the story again when you follow up. One of a journalist's pet peeves is having someone call and say they are following up a media release, which oftentimes has been deleted or lost, or re-directed to someone else.

### Rule 2.

- **Use this call as an opportunity to sell the story all over again to the outlet.** Once you have re-pitched, they should either say they haven't seen the media materials, or ask you to re-send them.

### Rule 3.

- **You need to use this call as an opportunity to gauge their level of interest in the story.** If they are sounding lukewarm about it, remember to **ask why** they might not want to cover it, as this is good feedback for future reference, also if you can come at them with a new angle, or reason they should cover it (if you really believe the story is still appropriate for them) do that at this time. Handy phrases include:

*i.e. "I take your point, but I still think it's perfect for your audience demographic because of XYZ," "All of the other media outlets are covering it, it has really gained traction because of the topical XYZ."*

#### Rule 4.

- **If they have indicated they are covering the story, it is ok to send them the Media Release and profiles ahead of launch/announcement day so as they are armed with more information, but ALWAYS UNDER STRICT EMBARGO.** Where possible, ask them for their direct phone number and email rather than a general news desk number/email, as you will be liaising with them directly to organise interviews, location, logistics and anything else they may need to accommodate them covering the story.

#### Rule 5.

- **Remember it is fine for a journalist to piggyback on other media outlets to cover the story. The TV media often share vision/interview footage, so always be open about which other TV people are interested.** Also, they will all want to meet at the same time to do interview or doorstops with the talent, so this is fine also. Just make the interview subject aware of this, so they know they will be interviewed by more than one journalist oftentimes and put them at ease about it.

#### Rule 6.

- **Always follow-up after the interview to see how it went, confirm that it took place and check again that the media are still covering the story,** as stories can be pulled/cancelled from the TV/Radio/Print news line-up even at the last minute should a bigger, breaking news story emerge. Obviously always follow up with the spokesperson/case study how the interview went.

**ends#**