

Marketing Tips—Old School News Releases Still Work!

by Lisa C. Brown and David N. Boyer, Country Dancers of Rochester



The Country Dancers of Rochester first incorporated news releases as part of our publicity in June 2016 to promote the 40th anniversary of the organization. In just 18 months of using this free marketing tool, CDR has been on television six times and appeared in many print articles. Not only did our first news release get us a (long for TV) segment, it significantly and consistently increased attendance at our contra dances by bringing back dancers who had slipped away over the years. Without a doubt, a regular presence in the media helps attract dancers to your dance series or special event.

The first step in sending successful news releases is to make a list of media (like television stations and newspapers) in your area. Then check their websites or make phone calls to determine the names and email addresses of the contacts who should receive the news release.

Use a simple memo format for the text. The name of your organization and your logo should be the header,

followed by contact information for the group member handling marketing. In the next section include the name of your event, the time, place, cost, and your web address for more information. Then, in paragraph form, briefly describe the event and provide pertinent details like the name of the band and caller. Be succinct and stick to the facts. In the second paragraph, include information about your group—like the type of dancing you do and when and where your regular dances take place.

Keep your news release to one page only and avoid misspellings. At least one person, other than the writer, should proofread the document. Select one or two digital photos to send with the email. Don't make the photo file so large that it will be difficult to open the email. Be sure to include the photographer's name. Most news organizations will not use a photo without crediting the photographer.

Email your news release three weeks in advance of your event. Use "Bcc" (blind carbon copy) to put all the news

On this page: The Country Dancers of Rochester turn out at 5:00 am for the live filming of the morning show *Good Day Rochester* with anchor/reporter Alexis Arnold (center) from FOX Rochester/13WHAM. On opposite page: Good Day Rochester anchor/reporter Alexis Arnold from FOX Rochester/13WHAM learns how to contra dance with Rich Dempsey from the Country Dancers of Rochester with help from former CDR president Kate Holevinski and contra caller Margaret Matthews. (Photos by Lisa C. Brown)

editors' email addresses in the "To" line. If the news editor can't open your document it will be deleted and they will move on to the next email. Make it as easy as possible for the editor to read your information by including three different formats:

- 1) Embed the text in the body of the email
- 2) Attach a Word document so they can cut and paste
- 3) Attach a PDF in case they can't open the Word doc

Some stations might prefer that your group's marketing or public relations person fill out news content in a community news section of their website. Working from one edited news release makes this easier.

Be consistent in your dealings with the media by having only one person from your organization as the main contact with news media organizations. Maintaining a personal friendly relationship with news specialists may help. Social media posts may be written by many folks, because that's how social media works.

A week before the event, follow up by phone or email with the news editors to politely ask if they received your news release, would they like more information, and would they be sending a reporter to your event. If it seems like they may be interested in your event, call the day before the event to confirm if a reporter is coming. Make sure the reporter arrives at your event when the party is in full swing. No one wants photographs of an empty hall.

Communicate with the dance manager, caller, and band about the possibility of a reporter and/or videographer coming to the event. Select two willing representatives from your dance community who are friendly, enthusiastic, and concise, to speak to the media.

During the event, be on the lookout for the reporter so you can greet them upon arrival. Give them a copy of the news release, introduce your "talkers" and offer to help them while they are at the event. Supply the reporters with the number of people attending the event and where they have traveled from to attend.

Leave them to do their job but keep watch so you can speak with them as they are leaving. Remember to ask them when the report will appear, if there will be a web link to the coverage, and for their email address so you can follow up. Sometimes a reporter submits an article or video segment that doesn't get used. Be sure to thank the reporter for



attending your dance even if the public never sees the coverage. You can always send a short post-event article and/or photos with captions later to weekly newspapers showing the fun and fellowship of community country dance. A post-event article can still help attract new members, and show how community country dance adds to the quality of life for your region.

Don't despair if you don't make the news right away. It will happen.

Lisa Brown and Dave Boyer are president and vice-president of the Country Dancers of Rochester, located in Rochester, NY. CDR has both traditional New England Contra Dances and English Country Dances each week with live music. www.cd-rochester.org. #CDRocs

WEB EXTRA: Find a link to a video news story promoting CDR's 40th Anniversary at www.cdss.org/news.

Did you find this article

helpful? Are you a dance organizer who wants to exchange knowledge and ideas with other organizers across North America?



This year CDSS will be hosting a series of **live web discussions** for organizers from our Affiliate Groups. Participants will hear from Groups that have been grappling with a particular topic and get a chance to exchange ideas. Detailed information will follow in emails to our Affiliate members this Spring, so stay tuned!