



Media Training Manual July 2018
The Gardens Trust:
Humphry Repton's 200th anniversary



Images (top left, clockwise): Catton Park, Norfolk; Haileybury School's Repton Pond, Hertfordshire; Repton's Cottage (with overlay) in Hare Street, Essex; and Pentillie Castle Cornwall.



Media Training Manual

If you are opening your garden/heritage site/visitor attraction to the public or organising special events on site, there are some simple, practical things you can do to publicise these. The following guide outlines how to:

- ✓ Identify media opportunities
- ✓ Build a press list
- ✓ Work with journalists
- ✓ Write a press release
- ✓ Prepare a press pack
- ✓ Give good interviews
- ✓ Promote your site and activities on social media

Identifying media opportunities

Media activity may be reactive or proactive. This depends on whether you are responding to something that is already happening at your site, or whether you are creating a media opportunity with the specific aim of generating coverage for your site or event. Possible stories could include:

- Garden previews and openings
- Your events programme, e.g. talks, tours, trails, family-friendly activities, etc.
- Special occasions, e.g. an anniversary, late opening etc.
- Your staff and volunteers
- Competitions
- Conferences including eminent speakers

Tips:

- Plan ahead – look at the year or several months ahead and create a 'PR calendar' of potential media opportunities
- Identify news 'hooks' (e.g. special anniversaries, etc.)
- Identify what audience (e.g. young people, families, etc.) you are trying to reach and think about what sort of media would be most suitable to target
- Focus on unique angles where possible – e.g. 'first', 'oldest', 'never seen before' etc.
- Think sights and sounds.... use photographs for print stories, and interesting backdrops for TV

Building a press list

Keep an up-to-date list of all the key media contacts you would like to keep informed. Here are some categories to consider:

- Garden media, including print, online and broadcast
- Regional print – don't forget magazines such as county publications
- Regional broadcast, e.g. local BBC radio and TV, commercial stations
- Event listings
- Specialist sectors e.g. heritage sites, education, arts, science etc.

Depending on what kind of story you are trying to pitch, think of tailoring who you speak to in order to maximise the chance of achieving good media coverage. This could be a gardening correspondent or an arts editor for example.

You can build up your database of media contacts using a number of different sources, from the simple to the more specialised:

- Reading the media you want to be in and checking who is writing about those things
- Business / telephone directories
- Internet searches / websites / social media
- Media directory

The simplest approach is to research the top ten media channels in your area, such as daily newspapers, local radio and TV and check who is reporting on what. You can purchase specialist online media directories which list outlets, names and contact details, however these can be expensive. If you decide to purchase a directory, there are a number of different providers, so it is worth doing some research to see what is best for you. You could try Vuelio, PRmax or Meltwater.

Tips:

- Make sure you keep your list up to date – add details of any new people you speak to, so you can ask for them by name next time and delete anyone who doesn't work there any more
- Try and get the direct line of relevant contacts so you can get through to them directly and try and build a rapport through ongoing contact
- Keep notes of who has visited your garden / shown interest / etc. for future reference
- Follow journalists on social media, as this is a way for them to find stories too

- Be targeted in who you contact – a scattergun approach does not always lead to the best coverage

Working with journalists

- What do journalists want from you?
- A news angle - the “so what?”
- The story - in a nutshell
- Key facts and statistics
- A good quote - “the sound-bite”
- Good images that are high resolution (1 MB or above)

Sometimes a journalist may approach you for information, or to provide a comment for a story they are writing. If you feel unprepared when a journalist calls, don't be afraid to say you need to verify the facts and call back – this will give you time to collect your thoughts and prepare your response.

Find out as many details as possible, for example:

- The journalist's name, phone number and publication/broadcast station
- What is their story/angle?
- What information do they want from you?
- What prompted them to call you?
- Who else are they talking to?
- What is their deadline?

Always consider whether you are the most appropriate person to deal with the journalist's query and if not, pass the request over to a more suitable colleague - however always ensure that the journalist knows who is dealing with their query.

Tips for working with journalists

Do:

- Be available & return calls promptly
- Prepare your facts in advance
- Keep it simple - 3 to 4 key points
- Research your target media before you call
- Stick to what you know
- Follow-up – don't keep media hanging or waiting as you might lose the opportunity

Don't:

- Make promises you can't keep

- Guess, speculate or lie
- Talk in jargon
- Go 'off the record'
- Be drawn into commenting on other organisations
- Use controversial language
- Say anything you don't want to see in print

Writing a press release

A press release is a document written for journalists, containing all the facts and information about the news or 'story' and your key messages. It should include everything that a journalist will need to know to understand and be interested in your story or event.

Press releases usually follow a standard format:

1. The headline
2. The opening paragraph
3. The body of the release
4. Notes to Editors

1. The headline

The headline is a summary of the content – make it interesting and relevant – you want to entice the journalist to read your release, not delete it straightaway.

2. The opening paragraph

This needs to summarise all the key points of your story at-a-glance. Try to encapsulate these key questions:

- WHO? · WHERE?
- WHAT? · WHY?
- WHEN? · HOW?

3. The body of the release

This is where you can expand your story, including your key messages and providing additional information and a quote or two.

Tips:

- Put the paragraphs in order of importance – the release will be edited from the bottom up
- Use simple and colourful language and aim to write in a way that everyone can understand

- Keep the content as clear and concise as possible; use short words rather than long ones
- Remember to acknowledge key speakers, but check first that they are happy to be quoted before issuing the press release
- Include a quote to bring the release to life – if the journalist doesn't have time to get in contact, they have an authorised quote to use (think carefully about who is the most appropriate spokesperson to illustrate your story, e.g. CEO, a sponsor, an expert, a third party, etc.)
- Include full names for any acronyms and definitions for any unusual terminology
- Include your website address at the bottom of the press release
- Include contact details – your name and telephone number/e-mail address so that they can reach you to ask more questions (include a mobile number if appropriate – you may need to be contacted outside of office hours)
- After the final line, insert the word 'ENDS' to indicate the end of information that can be published

4. Notes to Editors

This section can include any other details which you feel may be of interest to the journalist, or to support your story. For example, opening times/prices, funding grants etc.

Other tips:

- Always put the date on your release – if it is buried in a pile of other releases, the journalist will know when it was issued and that it's new and not out-of-date
- When sending the release by e-mail, paste the text into the main body of your message rather than as an attachment; sometimes messages from an unrecognised e-mail address that contain attachments will be refused by the recipient's firewall, or journalists won't bother to open attachments

Photo opportunities

You can also send invitations to journalists, for example to an garden opening, or to take photographs. Keep these invitations short and simple, and don't forget to include obvious information like dates/times and your address.

Preparing a press pack

A press pack is a collection of documents which you can give to a journalist to provide information about your garden or event. It doesn't have to be a huge

document, but it should contain information which may be useful when they come to write up their story. You should have a 'standard' press pack in place, which you can update regularly and tailor to suit a specific event or particular story.

Common components of a press pack include:

1. Press release / listings release / photo opportunity invitation
2. Background information about your garden/heritage site/visitor attraction
3. Biographies of key individuals
4. Information regarding available images

1. The press release / listings release / photo opportunity invitation

This will give specific information about the particular story or event you are publicising.

2. Background information

This could include:

- The history of your site (e.g. key dates and developments)
- Information regarding buildings and collections
- Key statistics, facts or figures
- Funding grants, acknowledgement of investors / sponsors
- Information about education initiatives
- Details of any research projects

Think creatively here and try and use visual and comparative data, such as size comparisons to provide a sense of scale, e.g. "the preservation of ancient examples of clothing is a very delicate art: each individual cotton fibre is 10 nanometres in diameter - about a tenth of the width of a human hair"

3. Biographies

If any individuals are particularly central to your story or event, you may wish to include a brief biography (this only needs to be a paragraph or so). Alternatively, you may wish to provide details of key spokespeople (e.g. Director, Head Gardener, expert)

4. Stock images

A great image (or the potential for one) can be a great selling point for a story, and often drives whether a story will be publicised or not, so it is a good idea to have a selection of free digital images that can be sent to journalists on request.

Hiring a professional photographer to take photographs can pay dividends in the longer term as the quality will be evident. If this is not possible however, make sure that any images you take yourself are high enough resolution for press use (1MB minimum) and that you have the permission of anyone who features in the photographs to use them. Always caption your images and credit the photographs by name or institute.

If you are inviting press to visit for a specific event, they may wish to send their own photographer to take pictures to accompany their story.

Use a file sharing site to share high resolution images with, as these will be large files that might get blocked on email or take a long time to send. Try Dropbox, Picasa or WeTransfer instead.

Giving good interviews

Questions to ask before the interview, whether it is for print or broadcast on radio or TV:

- Who will be doing the interview?
- How long will the interview last?
- Is the interview live or recorded?
- Where will the interview take place, in a studio or at your venue as an 'outside broadcast'?
- What is the format of the interview? If it is a discussion programme, who else will be on the panel and what is the general tone of the piece?

At a radio or TV interview:

- If the interview is on site, make sure you are in front of an appropriate backdrop
- Ask the interviewer what the first question will be
- Ignore the camera/microphone and talk to the interviewer
- Speak clearly and try not to rush
- Be concise and don't get bogged down in detail, the average soundbite is 7-8 seconds long
- Don't be too technical and avoid 'jargon'
- At the end of the interview, the microphone may still be recording and the cameras may still be running – don't say or do anything until you are sure you are off-air

Tips:

- Spend some time preparing your key messages (e.g. what, who, when...etc.)

- Think carefully about your audience and the level of detail needed
- Have examples to illustrate your points if necessary
- If you are going to be on TV, wear clothes that are smart but not too formal and avoid stripes/checks/patterns that might be distracting/or produce a 'zebra effect' on screen
- Promote your brand on TV – if you have one, wear a uniform/t-shirt with your logo (make sure this is at shoulder or chest height to avoid it being cut out of the shot!)
- Remember to smile!

After the interview:

- Find out when the interview will be published or broadcast as times and dates can change
- Post links to your interview on social media

Social media

There are lots of social media platforms that you can choose from to publicise what you are doing and engage in dialogue with visitors and other audiences, including the media. The most popular sites are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest.

Finding a PR agency

When considering some external communications support to help promote your garden and events, working with a PR agency is an option to consider. It is important to begin by writing a brief, as this will help identify the support you are looking for and the skills required. Third party recommendations are always valuable, so do speak to other established sites and visitor attractions in your area and ask if they have worked with a PR agency before and if they have any recommendations to share. For more information, visit the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) website: <http://www.cipr.co.uk> who will be able to provide details of suitable agencies in your area.

Further reading & references

We would recommend looking for PR books in any reputable bookstores, such as Waterstones. There are some books recommended on the CIPR website, but to access these a membership may be required. You can also look on the two websites below for further information, which may also be of interest:

- Chartered Institute of Public Relations: www.cipr.co.uk
- Public Relations and Communications Association: www.prca.org.uk



Firebird Public Relations
Little Barn
19 The Green
Steventon
OX13 6RR

T: 01235 835297
M: 07977 459547



www.firebirdpr.co.uk
[@firebird_pr](https://twitter.com/firebird_pr)
Firebird Public Relations