



Earned Media 101

What is earned media?

Earned media, also known as free media, is publicity or media coverage gained through promotional efforts rather than through paid advertising. Examples of earned media include publicity gained from editorials, interviews, television/radio topic-specific shows, public service announcements, and press releases. Earned media can be in formats that include news coverage (e.g., newspaper articles, letters to the editor, television or radio news shows), journal/magazine articles, and social media.

Why is earned media important?

Earned media is both cost effective and advantageous. Not only is the placement of the story free, but earned media provides a journalistic or editorial slant to a public health message. Research shows that people may trust earned media more than paid advertising, which the public may perceive as one-sided in nature. Some studies show that earned media is more likely than paid media to move a consumer to action, and earned media helps inform decision makers at state and local levels. In addition, earned media helps provide expert content or reframe news stories.

How do I increase the chances of securing earned media?

Having a comprehensive earned media plan and strong relationships with local media, in addition to having a compelling story, will increase the likelihood that you will garner earned media:

- **Develop a comprehensive earned media plan:** Issuing a press release is only one part of obtaining earned media. A comprehensive earned media plan should be multifaceted and include actions such as distributing a fact sheet or information brief on the topic via electronic mailing lists, outreaching to community partners, pitching the story to a local reporter or media outlet, and holding a public action meeting (if appropriate). Develop and maintain a cadre of credible spokespersons who can represent topics you regularly cover (e.g., a cancer survivor, a physician or other health care provider, and a community leader who has adopted a policy that your program supports – such as complete streets or smoke-free multi-unit housing).

- **Foster strong relationships with local media:** Proactively reach out to media outlets to establish yourself (and your program) as a reputable source so that you are the first person the reporter calls when there is a chronic disease-related news story. Establish or maintain these relationships by meeting with local reporters/health news anchors, scheduling op-eds with the editorial board of your local newspaper, sending alert reports to journalists on the publication of public health stories of local/national interest, and sending thank you notes to the press when they cover a topic you support.

How do I develop a story a reporter or other media may be interested in?

Before you develop an earned media plan, ask yourself these key questions:

- Is your information or angle new?
- Is your information relatable and relevant?
- Can you articulate your idea in a unique way?
- Is the information timely?
- Do you have powerful quotes from credible sources?
- Does your idea emphasize local activity/interest?
- Did you tell a story? People identify with personal stories rather than statistics.

Your story angle must capture the attention of a journalist. Think about how many requests for stories and news releases they receive. Your idea must stand out and present new and interesting information that is relevant to public concerns.

How do I determine what the story angle should be?

A key message that addresses the heart of the public health issue and resonates with your audience helps determine your story angle. Your story should have one key message with approximately three supporting points.

Elements of a strong key message:

- Clear identification of the public health issue
- Information that readers will care about or identify with
- Well-defined call to action

The story angle should take advantage of important public health occasions, such as “awareness” months or events (e.g., Great American Smokeout, Breast Cancer Awareness Month), publication of national reports

(e.g., 50th Anniversary of the Surgeon General’s Report on Smoking and Health), or planned releases of significant data.

What else can I do to increase earned media?

Ongoing monitoring of local and national media coverage can provide key insights into the best way to position and pitch your story to increase the likelihood of media coverage. Media monitoring is a critical part of effective media engagement and has a number of benefits:

- **Data:** Ongoing media monitoring provides timely information regarding what topics are being covered, how they are being covered, and by whom.
- **Tailoring:** Knowing current media trends can help you decide how to shape your story angle.
- **Linkage:** You may be able to link your story to current news events or national coverage of other health-related news.
- **Evaluation:** You can hone and refine future outreach based on the success of your last news release.

Is there an easy, free way to monitor the media?

Google Alerts are the easiest and most budget-friendly way (they are free) to monitor online media coverage for your organization and emerging news and trends on any given topic.

To set up Google Alerts:

- Go to the Google Alerts home page (www.google.com/alerts).
- Enter your query.
- Select your result type; “Everything” is the default.
- Select how often you would like updates: “As-it-happens,” “Once a day,” or “Once a week.”
- Select how many updates you would like; “Only the best results” is the default.
- Enter your email address; it does not have to be a Google email address.
- If you are not already signed into your email account when you create an alert, Google will email you with links for verification. Verify your alert and you are ready to monitor.

Best practices when using Google Alerts:

- Put terms and phrases in quotation marks, such as “smoking” and “tobacco advertising.”
- Depending on your goals, consider localizing your search with key words, such as “New York” and “chronic disease.”
- Search for specific programs and initiatives, e.g., “Smoker’s Quitline” and “New York.”
- Monitor journalists to learn their current interests, e.g., “Times Union” and “Reporter Jane Doe.”
- Monitor local publications’ coverage on a specific topic, such as “New York Times” and “Clean Indoor Act.”