

MEDIA & MESSAGING TOOLKITS:

HOW TO KNOW WHAT'S NEWS AND WHAT ISN'T



extinction
rebellion



The golden rule for everything is ‘what is in it for me/my cause?’ Every item of news you issue must further your cause in some way. Do not mistake news for publicity, because unless you are in advertising, just “raising awareness” will not do. You want to achieve some change, so always consider how the news you are issuing will be likely to lead to the change you want in the group of people you are speaking to.

What is “hard news” and what to do with it

All of the following qualify as hard news:

- Scandal
- Significant political events
- A new scientific discovery
- A new “happening”
- An action, particularly if controversial/large scale
- A controversy happening now that people don’t already know about

Hard news is extremely time sensitive, with a very short window in which it’s valuable. This means that:

It needs to be released immediately for maximum impact.

It needs to not have already been released by someone else.

It needs to be genuinely new.

Send hard news to news desks. (See the toolkit “how to write a press release”)

Only pitch the story as an “exclusive” (ie one you’re willing to give to one outlet before any others in exchange for guaranteed coverage) if the outlet is 100% the best one for reaching your target audience.

What is “soft news” and what to do with it

All of the following qualify as soft news:

- Human interest stories
- Animal stories (these are extremely popular in the UK)
- Celebrity
- Lifestyle
- New “thinking” or ideas
- Anniversaries or other milestone events

There is less urgency around soft news, but it still needs to be pitched in a short time frame in relation to the event happening (“news”=new).

Soft news is often great for regional outlets.

While most hard news is released to a lot of media at once via a press release, soft news is often best pitched to specific outlets directly, with particular sensitivity to that outlet’s audience. (See the toolkit “how to pitch features”)

What is not news

- Things already known/covered in the media.
- Things that happened weeks ago.
- Things the media and/or your target audience don’t care about.
- Opinion (unless it comes from someone very significant).



Photo: Brackly's Action, 6/7/20 © Marina Ilaria