

RESEARCH AND SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENTS AS MEDIA EVENTS

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Introduction

In Polish science much more is going on, than what media reports suggest. Why is that the number and volume of these reports is small, they appear rarely and their rank isn't really high?

Participating in various kinds of events devoted to scientific achievements (eg. conferences, meetings) it is possible to notice that representatives of the media are present only at few such events. Even when press conferences or other events for representatives of the media are held, the interest of the media is low. After all one of the key instruments of public relations is press conference at which we can provide the media with important and up-to-date information. Moreover, it can not only bring particular effects in the media (articles, relations, information in the media), but above all bring about effects in the public opinion (growth of interest, change in opinion, expanding knowledge).

Obviously, in many cases presenting information at a press conference is far too little. If a scientific institution has really important information (groundbreaking news), which may arouse the interest of a major part of the society and thus also various media – then it is worth taking into consideration a different form of meeting with the media. This can obviously be a traditional press conference, but also a briefing or a press party. Certainly, everyone who organizes such events is able to choose a form appropriate for the rank and importance of information (news), which he wants to present.

Undoubtedly, European Forum “Marketing of Scientific and Research Organizations” is the right place to talk about it and exchange experiences.

The purpose of the lecture is to try to answer the following questions:

- Is science mediagenic?
- Can scientific achievements, scientific research be presented in the media?
- If we have doubts, how should we do it so that such a presentation is possible?

Research and scientific units have to face these issues whenever they feel the need to present their work to a group broader than a usually very small number of specialists in a particular branch and want to take advantage of the media (press, radio, tv, electronic media).

At such points in time there is much room for skeptics who don't believe either in the effectiveness of such actions or even that such actions make any sense and their opinions very often constitute the basis

for a decision no to inform the media or at best to adopt a passive attitude: „As soon as they come, we will show something to them and explain it“.

What may be the reasons for resigning from meeting with the media?

- the subject is regarded as not mediagenic,
- employees don't know how to deal with it,
- the fear that „we will look bad“,
- expecting lack of interest or very low interest of the media,
- the conviction that the message won't be understood and that the conveyed information will be distorted,
- the institution doesn't enjoy good opinion (it has difficult, unresolved issues, it is associated with controversial subjects and opinions),
- lack of funds for a meeting (in other words: the venture is very expensive),
- such a meeting has never been organized.

After all, meetings with the media are organized in order to deliver very important (not only for the organizer) information in a reliable way and in a form suitable for dissemination in the media, which enables reaching possibly the broadest group of recipients.

What may be the reasons for holding a meeting with the media?

- The need to inform about an upcoming important event,
- presenting information at the end of conferences, conventions, debates and similar kinds of meetings,
- presenting information about achievements and conclusions finishing a particular project or venture,
- the need to present the opinions of an institution, stance on an important issue.

It is necessary to remember here about the golden rule of public relations: **never call a press conference, if you have nothing important to say.**

Scientific and research institutions are not political organizations, which excel at organizing such meetings regardless of the time of day (and night) and whose purpose is solely to comment on a particular event, before other parties do it.

The reason for inviting representatives of the media has to be really important and the information has to be interesting for the public opinion. If this is not the case, at the next, but this time a „really significant“ conference few (or no) journalists will appear.

Every, even the most hermetic branch of science is mediagenic. The main problem is to prepare very well (or even better) such an event as meeting with the media.

We need to remember that communicating with the environment by means of the media is on the one hand very attractive and beneficial – in the relation: costs of the venture – the group of recipients we can reach this way, growth of interest etc. However, at the same time carrying out eg. a conference in an incompetent way may also cause serious losses – above all in terms of image, scientific authority,

credibility, prestige or reputation of a scientific institution.

That's why about a dozen practical hints for carrying out a successful meeting – successful for the media and the research and scientific institution – based not only on the author's experiences, are presented below.

The term „meeting“ is used here on purpose – as it doesn't necessarily have to be a big international press conference – it is advisable to start out with modest but efficient events. There are no suggestions for theoretic considerations here, only simple, tested action plans.

The goal of the author is to present in form of a guidebook-manual all elements of a meeting which determine whether the venture is a failure or success.

Detailed discussion of about a dozen basic elements will be presented in this work. Carrying out these elements in a perfect way should guarantee that both the media and scientific institutions, will be satisfied with their interaction.

Information or news

Undoubtedly, information-news which constitutes the leading motive or the subject of a meeting to a large extent determines the success of the whole venture. On the other hand most important news items are presented in an uninteresting form.

Let's try to think how to pick such a subject well and how to formulate it in a substantial and attractive way. We should take into consideration the fact that meetings with the media should serve two groups of goals:

- our goals – eg. the presentation of achievements, research, scientific events, presentation of people of science and our institutions – serving mainly the purpose of promoting science and
- goals of journalists invited to the meeting – eg. bold and inquisitive search for interesting information, sometimes scandals or sensation, negative aspects of an event or institution – serving the purpose of raising the reader's, the viewer's or the listener's imagination and as a result serving the growth of popularity of a given news source.

How should the subject be formulated?

Obviously, it is possible to propose something with a sensationalist „flavour“, but it can only be scientific sensation. Unfortunately, groundbreaking discoveries or inventions don't take place every day. However, scientific events of lower significance which have an indisputable impact on our life here and now (or in the near future) take place quite often. We can also predict future events and herald them. We shouldn't be afraid of megalomania, unless we exceed the limits of sound reasoning. If a scientific event itself doesn't constitute a sensation, the road to the discovery may have been extraordinary. Looking at the history of science, we know that many groundbreaking discoveries were made by chance during other research and the very path which led to a particular discovery can be regarded as sensational.

The following are examples of pieces of information which contain a „bud“ of a news item:

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- A team of scientists from the XYZ Institute has a chance for Nobel Prize (or any other prestigious prize) in the area of...
 - If Nobel Prize were awarded in the area of... the team of researchers from the XYZ Institute would be a likely candidate,
 - Very soon the lives of... (inhabitants of Poland suffering from..., users...) will... (change, improve, be free of suffering...) thanks to... (research, discovery, invention...) a team of scientists from the XYZ institute,
 - Already for... (20, 50, 100 ...) years the XYZ Institute has been serving... (the humanity, the population, the inhabitants...).

Obviously, I cannot provide here a ready recipe, but I would only like to show that giving an attractive, unique or even a slightly sensationalist form to an apparently unattractive subject may draw journalists and thus raise the chance for the creation of interesting publications or shows.

In science much is going on all the time. Scientists conduct research projects unknown to broader groups and many of these projects lead to important, often watershed discoveries, which have a significant influence on our life and its quality. All it takes is to choose them competently and present them in an interesting form. The scientists' workshop may also be attractive and the image of a scientific institution may be far from the stereotype of an organization which requires a huge budget for research of unknown usefulness.

However, when we choose and formulate an attractive subject, we need to remember: we have to tell the truth, whole truth and only truth. Our information, our news item must be attractive, but also essentially credible and objective. Let's not turn to science-fiction. However, undoubtedly we can to a certain extent predict the effects of our research and its impact on new technologies, inventions, etc.

In what form should we convey our subject?

In my opinion a „live“ example is the best. This may be, for example:

- a company where a technology was implemented,
- an institution implementing a presented solution,
- institution-beneficiary, which achieved a success thanks to our solutions,
- patient (patients) who have experienced positive effects of using our therapy (our medicine) etc.

Demonstration or animation?

Let's try to think whether we can offer the journalists something more than just a verbal message or „talking heads“ and printed materials. Perhaps, the message will become clearer as soon as we decide to apply some form of presentation: demonstration or animation. We need to remember that sight constitutes 87% of human's perception.

Table 1. Senses and their share in perception

eyesight	87%
hearing	7%
smelling	3,5%
touch	1,5%
taste	1%

Source: Jan Młodkowski - „Aktywność wizualna człowieka”, PWN, Warszawa 1998.

According to the author a meticulously prepared animation is better. Under the condition that the essence of the subject is explained in a clear and comprehensible way, for example, by comparison with a commonly known thing/device or phenomenon. Unfortunately, demonstration is very risky – in case of a malfunction all credibility can be lost.

A good example may be a piece of information which recently appeared in a news program on one of tv channels. The information concerned graphene – that is, using a mental shortcut and simplification – a substance which in the nearest future may replace silicon, which is the basis of contemporary electronics, including for example our PC's. This year the Institute of Electronic Materials Technology and the faculty of physics of the Warsaw University of Technology informed that they had worked out a technology for production of big pieces of graphene of highest quality. This may be a breakthrough in most technologies. Instead of talking about the advantages, qualities and parameters etc. the scientist speaking to the video camera used the following example: in the new technology a tablet we use will be similar in size to a sheet of paper, which will unfold to the required format and this will be our tablet. This is a piece of information we need – presented without unnecessary flamboyance, in an essential and brief form and what's most important, in a convincing way.

Summing it up: an interesting subject in an attractive form guarantees high participation of representatives of the media and thus can make the whole meeting with the media successful.

Form of meeting – budget – organization

This part of preparation is most important and least expensive. On paper we estimate the profits and the costs. We make the decision to either hold or not to hold a meeting only after such a detailed planning procedure.

We start this stage quite early, because depending on the scale of the venture the time devoted to preparing a conference can range from a few weeks to a few months.

First of all, depending on the importance of the piece of information, we need to choose the type of meeting:

Press conference – typical, short press conference, at which the latest event is discussed, at which we inform about latest developments, new projects, a sensational discovery etc.

Briefing – a press conference called in order to supplement information, comment on the latest events, especially when we want the media to interpret facts in a correct way.

Press party – the least formal type of meeting with the media, which we organize in order to, for example, win over the media for lobbying in favour of a particular solution or venture. It is necessary to take into consideration all details of a meeting, as each of them generates particular costs – has an impact on the budget of a venture:

- the scale of a conference, the number of participants,
- whether there is any catering and what type of catering it is,
- the need to provide interpreting,
- venue for a conference (own or rented),
- the need to rent audio or video equipment for presentation etc.,
- the need to secure additional technical or organizational services (eg. hostesses, waiters),
- preparing conference materials.

The organizer has to take many small, but exceptionally important actions such as, for example:

- taking care of appropriate decoration, company's marks (visible logo), possibly, informative banners,
- providing access to fax, telephone, Internet connection, copying and printing machines, if there's a need for that,
- taking care of the audiovisual system: projectors, lighting, sound devices, the proper functioning of microphones, headphones for interpreting, power sources for journalists etc.,
- providing a detailed plan of access to the venue (also visible signs showing the way to the room – signs, arrows, stands, posters, banners) or even providing transport for participants,
- preparing and packing conference materials in conference files,
- preparing plaques with names and surnames of people sitting at the presidential table,
- designating the person acting as the host, who greets and welcomes the participants,
- depending on particular needs, employing and supervising external personnel supporting the organization of a meeting (hostesses, receptionists, waiters, technicians etc.),
- defining the menu of catering adapted to the time of day – currently providing vegetarian dishes is a standard.

None of these apparently petty and not well visible elements can be disregarded – all of them are important – after all the devil is in the details.

If we sum up these actions and match costs with them – we have a chance to estimate the budget of the meeting with high accuracy. We can now „confront“ it with our capacities and define precisely the kind and form of a meeting.

Even the most modest meeting, if only it is prepared in a professional manner, will be successful and won't turn into our failure.

Location of a meeting

Meeting with the media should be an event, which is supposed to enable presenting important contents, inform about achievements or help build up the image. However, it should also be a nice experience for journalists, guests and ourselves.

What can turn the event into a nice experience? The location of a meeting. This is what to a large extent determines and shapes the atmosphere of an event and evokes either negative or positive emotions and associations, it constitutes a good background for the subject. It also to a large extent determines whether the course of an event is original or usual. The meeting can only be made more attractive – let's not be afraid of that. That's why we have to make the right choice.

Hotel or an unconventional place?

An unconventional place is the best, a hotel is a place of last resort, it is better to use our own headquarters or the headquarters of our partner... - this is the right direction for our decisions.

Why is providing the participants with comfortable and optimal conditions so important? First of all, an interesting place is attractive in itself, second thing is that the participants' impression is very important, especially the first impression. We need to remember that first moments of a meeting may create a friendly atmosphere and give a good impression – there won't be a second chance for that.

The place cannot be chosen by chance. We should „think out” the place and later prepare the meeting in every detail.

Usually, we have to face the dilemma: should the conference take place in an elegant hotel or a conference center, or is it better to choose an unconventional place. The advantages of a hotel or a conference center are: the existing „conference infrastructure” with car parks, own catering or service.

A definitely unconventional place

It is worth looking for an interesting place which may be associated with the subject of a meeting. Despite certain shortcomings and the necessity to put more effort into organization – unconventional place has one, big advantage: it is attractive in itself and... it has a „soul”. Contemporary hotels and conference centres are, unfortunately, very similar to each other.

Last year the Institute of Urban Development held the First Urban Regeneration Congress in Kraków. From the moment the decision to organize the meeting was made, two groups emerged, one in favour of „hotel” or „academic” solutions and the other in favour of „an interesting place”. The second group won and the congress took place in the conference room of the City Council of Kraków (the former palace of the Wielopolski family, which dates back to 16th century – the palace is located near Kraków's main square). The third day of the congress was a slight compromise when discussion was moved to the assembly hall of the Jagiellonian University in Collegium Novum (from just the 19th, but in the location there is the famous painting of Jan Matejko showing Nicolaus Copernicus looking at the sky, the place is also located close to the main market square). It turned out that participants liked these locations very

much, despite some technical drawbacks (lack of elevators, air-conditioning, the necessity to bring all equipment etc). They liked the locations, because they are authentic, stylish and suitable for the subject – and obviously they have a „soul“.

Sometimes a hotel is better, though

In exceptional cases a good hotel or a conference center is the best place to hold a meeting – in case we make a sudden decision to meet with the media. In such case external, professional support of the hotel's or the conference center's personnel, availability of the necessary equipment are priceless when there is little time to prepare a meeting. Moreover, the location is well-known, it is obvious how to get there, where to park – it doesn't require the help of the organizers.

How about own headquarters?

It is possible to organize a conference also at our own headquarters. Obviously, this is possible, if we have appropriate facilities at our disposal (room, infrastructure, technical infrastructure). It is not necessarily a better solution, but its always a cheaper solution. Moreover, we can always decide on the date and time of a meeting.

A disadvantage of choosing our own headquarters may be that the guests will be paying close attention to the whole environment of our institution. They won't miss anything: the state and the look of buildings, conference rooms and other rooms (toilets etc.), equipment. They also have a chance to meet our employees.

Whether these factors may have a good or bad impact on the results of a meeting – this can be assessed only by the organizer.

Organizational hint

Let's remember – an attractive place has to be booked in advance (sometimes even a few months ahead) – it is not always possible at the last moment.

The date and time of a meeting

How should we set the date so that it is most convenient?

This is an extremely important element of planning a meeting with the media. In this respect we cannot rely on chance. We need to remember that even the most interesting news item won't „sell“ if it is presented at a bad time. Sometimes it requires much patience – we simply need to wait for a better point in time.

In order to make the best choice of the date of a meeting, we should prepare the schedule of other events which may „overshadow“ the importance of our meeting and draw people's attention away from it, for example:

- important public or religious events (spectacular visits, elections, inaugurations, speeches, funerals, celebrations and national anniversaries),

- sports events (eg. Euro 2012),
- local events of high significance,
- social events (strikes, protests, blockades),
- other competing events in our branch of science or from a similar area (congresses, conferences), and we should avoid colliding with the dates of these events.

Such events may not only diminish the importance of our meeting, our news, but may actually make it go unnoticed – additionally our guests may have problems with getting to our meeting.

Summer months may also be disadvantageous due to the holiday season. However, this time of the year also has its advantages – in these months there are fewer events of high significance and our announcements may reach the media easier.

We need to remember that the date of a meeting cannot be too distant from the date of an event-news the meeting is about.

A well-chosen date has a significant impact on the journalists' attendance. However, we may sometimes have to face fortuitous events – but this is something we cannot plan.

What about the choice of the day of week and the time of day?

Experts in public relations don't have a clear and unanimous answer to this question.

With regard to the day of week the proposed optimal dates are as follows:

- from Tuesday to Thursday and Friday afternoon,
- only from Tuesday to Thursday,
- not on Monday morning and Friday afternoon (days after and before the weekend),
- definitely not on Saturday, Sunday and during holidays.

Personally, I support the suggestion „from Tuesday to Thursday“ - in science it is rather uncommon to have a situation, where we need to organize an urgent conference or briefing on Saturday or Sunday. Only extraordinary events (natural disasters, catastrophes) force us to hold meetings on these days.

There are also various concepts with regard to the choice of the time of day:

- from 10 a.m. to 12 a.m. and from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.,
- from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.,
- from 12 to 4 p.m.

Unfortunately, there is no single, good and tested solution. In this respect we have to rely on our knowledge, obtained information, intelligence and intuition supported with experience in order to make the right choice.

Scenario of a meeting (time, accuracy, attractiveness)

We should treat conferences like important family events (eg. weddings) or celebrations (eg. in church). Every element has to be prepared, planned and rehearsed thoroughly. We need to remember that participants will be following everything closely and will notice and often report (film, photograph) all short-

comings. This may have a negative impact on the desired effect of our meeting. If we need to improvise, we should prepare for such eventuality beforehand.

Duration

A meeting with the media shouldn't be longer than 1 hour. It seems that the best duration is 30-45 minutes. Exceptionally, if the subject is complex and requires detailed presentation or if we expect a big number of questions – a meeting may take up to 1.5 hour. However, it is good to plan the scenario in such a way that the statements of particular presenters don't exceed 5-7 minutes (we also need to take into consideration the need for interpretation), which sums up to a total of 30-45 minutes and the remaining time can be devoted to the journalists' questions, answers and possibly a discussion. Obviously, it is necessary to inform the invited journalists about the planned duration of a conference.

We need to be prepared for a situation in which not all guests will be punctual – some will come ahead of time, some will come on time and the rest will be late. We need to have a 15-minute reserve – unfortunately, delays are rather common at most press conferences. We should have a film about the institute or a multi-media presentation at our disposal, so that we can fill waiting time for those who came on time, so that they don't get bored and don't feel neglected by the organizers.

Scenario

We should try to make it:

- very precise,
- attractive for journalists,
- diversified, for example, by means of an unannounced presentation, performance,
- organized in such a way that the participants don't get bored waiting for the main part.

We have to take care not only of the substance of a meeting and its organization, but also of attractive decoration, design. It is good when the scenario is built in such a way that following presentations, speeches, raise interest, tension from the very start till the end. Sometimes an important element of the scenario may be an unannounced guest, presentation, etc. In the scenario we:

- designate people responsible for conducting a meeting,
- designate people responsible for particular presentations (most competent, with greatest knowledge of the subject) – we determine the duration precisely (short, concise statements), taking care of exhaustive, but concise statements (this eliminates doubts and questions),
- secure the audiovisual background for the presentations (boards, visualizations, films, presentations) – in many cases it is good to concentrate most of the message in the image,
- define the roles of presenters (minute after minute) – most important is the role of the leader – the „conductor“ of a meeting who:
 - is responsible for the course of the whole meeting – he moderates the meeting,
 - invites speakers and controls the duration of their presentations,

- gives the floor, initiates discussion involving participants,
 - prevents digressions, non-essential subjects, repeating the same questions,
 - asks thought-provoking questions himself, formulates controversial theses in order to heat up the atmosphere of a meeting, impose the right pace and course.
- specify the time and way of presenting the main message – news (solemn or humorous – this depends on the creativity of the organizers),
 - specify the sequence of presentations,
 - designate people responsible for particular groups of questions.

All organizers and presenters have to be accustomed well with the scenario's details – schedule of the meeting. There should be no unplanned presentations or statements. There also should be no unprepared presentations, when the speaker says something „straight from his head or from nothing“.

We need to remember that following the conclusion of the official part, among the participants, there will be people willing to conduct an interview or a discussion. We have to be at their disposal all the time, we have to talk, answer, provide details and explain more complex issues.

Our scenario may make our meeting even more interesting and may make our participants feel they spent their time well.

Press materials (form, volume, way of preparation)

Journalists often complain they receive press materials of low quality, which are unattractive, too lurid, laconic, written in a sophisticated, specialist language. Thus, it comes as no surprise that later they don't use such texts and no press reports are published.

What can we do to make the quality of texts delivered to journalists in press materials good enough, to have a chance for an article or at least a mention in the press?

Preparing the so-called press kit is unfortunately one of the hardest and an exceptionally important element of preparing a good meeting with the media. Writing such texts isn't only about talent – they require a lot of work.

First of all, we have to follow a few basic rules and prepare press materials:

- containing information concerning exactly the subject of the meeting,
- highlighting information which is particularly important for us, so that it is not unnoticed and/or distorted,
- which are interesting and comprehensible, which stimulate imagination,
- not too extensive,
- containing new, unknown, important and interesting information,
- enriched with illustrations, simple diagrams, tables, charts etc.,
- in a form suitable for the creation of a press report („on a plate“),
- broader materials for analysts,
- avoiding impudent advertising (but containing, for example, the logo of an institute or a project),

However, we should avoid materials in form of:

- extensive dissertations, lectures, etc.,
- written in the language of a small group of specialists,
- boring and unattractive eg. in form of huge sets of statistical data.

The moment of distribution of press materials is also important:

- before a meeting – materials are supposed to help journalists gain knowledge of the subject and the course of a meeting,
- after a meeting – materials should constitute a summary, a synthesis of the presented information.

The possible forms of materials are above all:

- printed texts,
- if we present the subject using Power Point, we can also include printouts from the presentation together with texts expanding the presented issues,
- tables, charts, photographs, films,
- copying all materials to a CD/DVD (in quality suitable for printing).

Additionally, we can provide information about speakers, their scientific achievements, the course of their academic careers – prepared as carefully as for example application for funds for financing research.

Another important issue, which is obvious in science – we must have copyrights to all provided materials.

It won't be a faux pas, if we prepare an attendance list and ask all journalists who have come (and who take materials) to sign it, and if we collect their business cards. Contacts verified this way may be used for monitoring the effects of a meeting and for the organization of subsequent meetings.

During preparation of press kits we should think whether a meeting of a scientific institution with the press is the right moment to give the invited journalists gifts-gadgets. Gadgets are present in all marketing situations and a meeting with the media is certainly such a situation. We need to answer the question if – and if yes – then what kind of gadgets should a scientific institution distribute?

The most popular gadgets on the event market are: pens with logo, key leashes, t-shirts, hats, key pendants, ecological bags and naturally a whole range of rather useless items regarded by the providers as funny and evoking positive associations etc. Journalists attending numerous such meetings have whole „collections“ of such gadgets and for them they don't mean much at all, if they have small children, only these children are happy about these gadgets. At the beginning of the gadget „craze“ in Poland, during a conference devoted to marketing issues, in discussion on this subject one journalist suggested: t-shirts are ok as long as there are sizes for children!

Thus, maybe it would be a good idea to abandon gadgets? If gadgets could ruin your budget

or be obtained at the expense of other elements of a meeting – it is definitely advisable to abandon gadgets.

However, if we decide to prepare gadgets, we need to make a big effort to find the right idea for a gadget or a ready gadget.

Let's try to make this effort. A scientific institution – in my opinion – should have a well thought-out, unique and surprising gadget. Here are a few examples from the category closest to science: numbered reprints of an artwork of a well-known graduate, a book associated with the subject of the meeting, with a special exlibris prepared for the occasion or the autograph of a well-known author.

A good gadget should bear four traits:

- bring joy, pleasure to the recipient,
- evoke positive emotions with the subject or the host of a meeting,
- it should be exceptional – routine always kills the effect,
- it cannot be too expensive, as it may raise suspicions of bribery and a hidden „payment“ for publishing a message.

What could we think, if at a conference presenting a new car model, journalists are given top-end laptops and later a whole series of enthusiastic articles appears in the press?

Database - invitations - mailing – first follow-up

Database of the recipients

The journalists invited to a meeting will determine its quality and as a result the quality of presentation in the media. For this reason a good database is so important.

We can prepare it ourselves basing on previous contacts and the knowledge of the journalists interest in the presented subject, however, we can also use databases provided by specialist companies dealing with public relations.

In both cases we shouldn't avoid checking the credibility of contacts and updating them. Journalists move from one editor's office to another, quit journalism, lose interest in a particular subject of a meeting.

It is also advisable to investigate the work of particular journalists – it allows us to assess mutual expectations, we can even find out what questions we should expect – sometimes it is enough to just read the press carefully.

If we haven't managed to identify the data of a particular journalist, we should enter into our database the data of the head of a department, the secretary of an editor's office or of the editor-in-chief.

An outdated list may contribute greatly to the failure of a meeting or due to low attendance diminish its importance and the response.

Thus, we should check, verify and update our database of journalist contacts

Using such address database we will send invitations to journalists:

- from media dealing with a particular area (specialist magazines, thematic channels etc.),
- eg. from nation-wide media, to journalists who may potentially be interested in a particular subject,
- in numbers not exceeding the capacity of the used room,
- so that nobody is favoured or missed out (neither people, nor titles, nor kinds of media).

We should also think whether we could boost the importance of our meeting by inviting experts, authorities on a particular subject, representatives of authorities or well-known representatives of social life.

Invitations for journalists

In a flurry of various events journalists are usually unable to take advantage of all invitations. According to estimates, in Warsaw, invited journalists from the leading media choose only about 30% of events.

What should help them choose is their first impression, that is, the invitation:

- clear and comprehensible,
- distinguished by its esthetic, quality and unique form,
- attractive in terms of substance and graphic design,
- enticing and encouraging.

We should prepare them as meticulously as we prepare advertising – after all it's a business card of our institution – in such case the chances that journalists will come grow.

In the content of the invitation to a meeting we should include:

- name and surname of the invited person,
- name of the organizer of a meeting,
- the date of a meeting (precise date, starting time and the expected finishing time),
- place and precise address,
- information about the program and subject of a meeting, including the purpose of the meeting,
- attached informative materials, access plan,
- information about the recommended attire,
- information about the invited guests,
- request for confirmation of participation (R.S.V.P. - French: Repondez s'il vous plaît – please respond)
- data of the person responsible for contacts with the participants of a meeting.

Most journalists won't come without knowing the details. Those who come and are disappointed, may leave the meeting before the end, which might make a bad impression on other participants.

Sending invitations or mailing

If, according to our database, we know the right contact journalist, we send only one invitation to a single editor's office.

There are no restrictions with regard to the way of sending invitations – we can deliver invitations in person, send by post, by courier, fax or e-mail. Inviting someone by phone is not elegant and is often unsuccessful – it is easy to forget about a conversation.

We need to send invitations so that they reach the journalists 10-14 days before the meeting, in exceptional cases it may be 4-5 days ahead.

However, we need to remember that important guests (eg. experts, representatives of authorities) should be invited to a meeting even earlier.

First follow-up

After sending out invitations we can remind the participants about the planned meeting by email one week ahead. 1-2 days before the meeting we can phone journalists and ask for confirmation those who haven't confirmed it yet.

If we don't manage to get a confirmation, we suggest sending a full set of materials or another meeting on another date. We can also encourage journalists with a special offer: „a 15-minute interview especially for You“.

According to PR specialists the effect of confirmation of attendance should bring the desired results: 50% of the people confirming will come and 50% of them will write a text concerning the meeting.

It is necessary to remember that a lot depends on the number of journalists who come to a meeting. We cannot allow to have a situation in which ten organizers meet five journalists.

Media training with participants (presentation, inconvenient topics, moderation)

In case of every public appearance the first impression is most important, first three minutes create opinions and there is no second chance.

Hosts have to present themselves to the media in the best possible way. We need to focus here on the basic elements of the message:

- visual (appearance, body language),
- tone and way of speaking (loud, clear, concise),
- concerning the content (interesting, comprehensible, well-prepared).

Mistakes made in these elements (eg. boring presentations, unclear, too long or incomprehensible or insufficient preparation) have caused the failure of many meetings with the media.

We can avoid it through earlier media training with participants or even by mock appearances.

Contrary to a common conviction, this is a serious problem in scientific institutions. Almost all scientists have big experience in public appearances: numerous presentations at conferences and seminars or giving lectures. There are some talented speakers who are able to captivate the audience. Unfortuna-

tely, there is also a group of speakers who don't pay attention to the basic elements of a good speech (incomprehensible, stretching out beyond the time limit, uninteresting), assuming that the content is more important than the form. This is not true. In order to achieve the desired reception of our information we need to follow a few rules concerning the form of a meeting.

Media training

Vast majority of speakers are well prepared for public appearances, but still all of them should undergo media training, especially that the conditions for filming or recording speeches differ from conditions at a lecture or press conference.

The basic elements of media training are:

- issues of external appearance
- appropriate choice of language and arguments,
- non-verbal language, that is, body language,
- following the schedule of an appearance,
- reaction and behaviour at hard/crisis moments:
 - working out a set of hard, inconvenient questions,
 - working out answers to these questions,
 - training this element with the speakers.

Only this way is it possible to eliminate or at least reduce the element of surprise and add confidence to the statements and equip them with an appropriate set of arguments.

Why is it worth organizing a mock meeting?

- we can find out how long certain points of the program really take,
- we can assess the appearance and visibility of elements of decoration, get used to finding our way around the scenery,
- rehearse presentations – above all of the main speaker,
- check the theses of the presentation,
- check the functioning of a presentation,
- check the sound system and work with microphones.

We will certainly reveal the weak points of our meeting and thus we should plan such rehearsals in advance, big enough to introduce changes.

This shows that we need to avoid situations in which a meeting is organized ad hoc, without previous planning etc. - risk of costly mistakes is too high.

We need to emphasize again that the success of a meeting depends on precise and possibly early planning and preparation of activities.

List of difficult questions and answers

We need to emphasize the exceptional importance the so-called Q&A Catalogue, a set of difficult questions and answers for the success of our meeting.

Every institution organizing a meeting may have to face circumstances provoking hard, inconvenient and troubling questions that its representatives would never be eager to answer. Journalists will certainly not miss out on such an occasion. We can adopt 2 strategies:

- we make an optimistic assumption that such questions won't appear and we don't prepare anything for such eventuality (it is very risky if such questions do appear),
- or we start work on the catalogue (difficult, but it can minimize the danger).

The Catalogue of Difficult Questions and Answers should include not only questions about disputable issues, but should also try to predict substantial questions, which it is hard to answer in a concise and comprehensible way.

It is necessary to emphasize here that answers to inconvenient questions have to contain only truth, nothing should be hidden. In the long term such facts will be revealed anyway and in such situation the reputation of an institution may suffer and bad opinion will be present in the media for a very long time.

An indisputable advantage of a catalogue is eliminating or at least minimizing the effect of surprise and pre-emptive preparation of credible answers.

The catalogue should be written down and it is good to train with it. Thanks to this the speaker can react in a calm way during a meeting, and can avoid getting provoked or irritated and provide confident and credible answers.

Additionally, thanks to the catalogue (even if difficult questions do not appear) we obtain precious knowledge about our institution or issues presented at a meeting. We can also improve our skills in the area of argumentation, rhetoric or public appearances and conducting public discussions.

The main result of not preparing for hard questions and answers is a very dangerous and disheartening silence following the question and which is caused by lack of knowledge or competence. A scientific institution personifying scientific authority cannot allow something like this to happen.

Conducting conferences

An essential element of a good meeting is the leader – presenter, moderator, host. A good host is like a business card of a meeting and the institution organizing the meeting.

In practice we can identify a few possible solutions:

- the institution has its own spokesperson,
- in the institution organizing a meeting there is a person with a sufficient authority and predispositions for conducting a meeting – this possibility is the best solution in case there is no spokesperson,
- employing a person from the outside who knows the subject well, eg. a TV presenter – third good solution if we cannot find people mentioned in points 1 and 2,

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- we employ an actor, presenter, animator who professionally conducts various kinds of public events – risky solution: we can expect the person to play his role in a professional way, but is it going to make the scientific institution credible?,
 - we invite a person well-known in the media – the person may boost the significance of the event thanks to increased interest of the media, but there are similar doubts as in point 4 (exception: we have such a person in our own institution),
 - we invite a well-known sports, film or TV star – a solution only for scientific institutions dealing with sports, cinema or TV, for others it is definitely not a good solution.

Meeting with the media

A proper meeting with the media is the culmination of meticulous preparations described in the parts from *Information or news* to *Media training with participants*. Now, all previously prepared elements of the scenario should work together.

The schedule of a conference should be as follows:

- opening: greeting guests and thanking them for attendance,
- presenting main participants (independent of the list included in the press materials) as well as the goal and program of a meeting,
- main part of a meeting (according to the schedule):
 - providing the main information – announcement,
 - appearances/presentations,
- inviting journalists to ask questions,
- time for questions and answers,
- thanking all participants,
- possibly, distributing gadgets to journalists and guests,
- inviting to refreshments (if this is included in the scenario),
- distributing press materials (if there are plans for post-conference materials).

Meetings carried out professionally, according to the scenario and schedule, without gaffes and blunders may still be unsuccessful if during the Q&A session there are few or no questions.

How can we enliven a meeting at such a moment? How can we protect ourselves against such situation?

This is above all the duty of the moderator, who:

- has a few questions to the speakers,
- can announce that „there can be just two more questions“ (then many journalists submit their questions),
- has a befriended journalist, with whom he can arrange 2-3 questions in advance.

At this moment it is necessary to pay attention to an essential element of every meeting with the media, that is, catering, which varies depending on the time of day (snacks served at 10.00 are different

than those served at 14:00).

Usually, organizers choose one out of two options:

- coffee and tea, cookies, salads, sandwiches present on tables throughout the whole meeting,
- catering after the meeting, only beverages available on the tables.

Definitely, the second option is more practical and elegant.

We should allow the participants to focus on the content of the meeting and not offer food in a space devoted to the presentation of information.

Eating during presentations is not good behaviour – it diverts attention, disturbs speakers and the audience. Moreover, a common meal after the conclusion of a meeting is a great place for less official, behind-the-curtains talks, making acquaintances and exchanging ideas.

Second follow-up

The work of the organizers doesn't stop at the moment the guests leave. After the meeting the organizers have to make sure that the information presented at the meeting is transformed into publications in the media (press releases, reports, etc.).

After the conclusion of the meeting it is necessary to maintain contact with the invited journalists:

- thank for participation,
- ask about impressions and opinions,
- offer sending supplementary materials,
- ask whether there will be a publication,
- send materials also to those who didn't come to the meeting.

The organizers should also:

- thank all people who contributed to the preparation of the meeting,
- make a report on the event containing information and hints for future meetings,
- prepare a report on the usage of the conference budget together with applications.

Press reports

The measure of efficiency of our meetings with the media are press reports appearing after the meetings. We need to prepare media monitoring on the basis of a list of media (journalists) present at the meeting – in practice there are two modes of conduct:

- organizer himself gathers information monitoring publications, shows, conducting press monitoring,
- monitoring can be carried out by a specialized company, an information agency.

The choice depends on the institution's organizational abilities and financial capacity.

Media report

Collected media releases create a media report. **Media report is the only foundation for the assessment of the effects of a meeting with the media – the effects of our efficiency.**

The structure of a report should be simple – it should contain:

- a collection of all releases (together with the assessment whether what the media reported meets our expectations, whether it has been reported properly, with due understanding of the issues),
- a list of elements which turned out to be effective (were praised, „passed the exam“)
- a list of shortcomings.

Such a simplified diagnosis including both strong and weak points of a venture will allow us to find out what we should change in the future meetings and as a result avoid mistakes in the organization of further meetings with the media.

The assessment of the effects of a meeting with the media has the following dimensions:

- non-material – eg. the content of reports builds up the image, the authority (or destroys it), attracts the attention of new partners to the institution, generates further reports and contacts with the media etc.
- material – it is possible to apply calculations eg. the size of articles to advertising modules (or the length of a report to the advertising time) and apply the scaler of credibility of the media (eg. the press 3 to 5), multiply it by the advertising surface (advertising time).

According to companies dealing with public relations, the effect of a successful meeting with the media is much greater than, for example, sending an even very well-prepared press release.

Conclusion

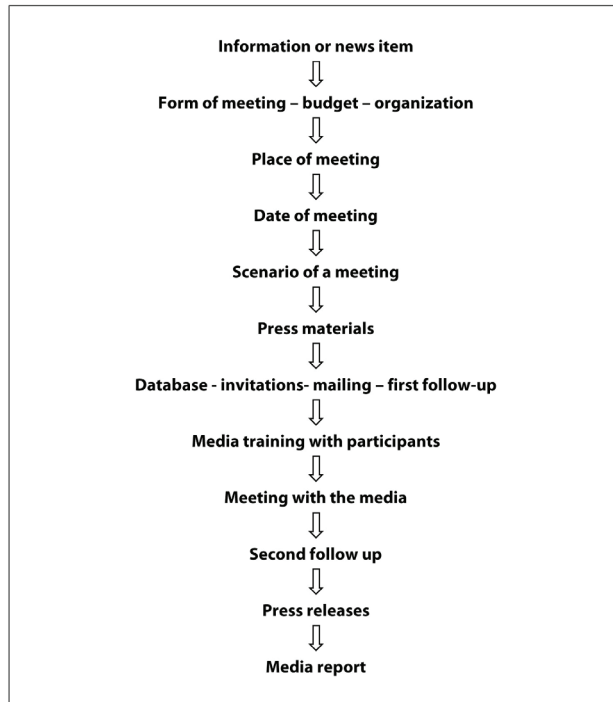
Obviously, the above-mentioned hints are not enough to fully cover the subject of relations with the media. They should be treated as an introduction to broader works.

However, no hints and suggestions can substitute practice, as most experience comes from own mistakes. However, every mistake can be spotted in the media by many people and for this reason we need to be very cautious. In this respect professionalism is not just routine, but meticulous preparation and constant monitoring of every step on the way to building the image of our institution.

The organization of a meeting with the media is similar as the organization of a press conference. If we want to invite someone, take some of our guests' precious time, we need to do our best to give them important, interesting information, so that they don't feel that they wasted their time.

What proves the importance of contacts with the media with regard to publicizing scientific achievements is the research carried out in 2008 within the USEandDIFFUSE project financed by the European Commission under the 7th Framework Programme. The analyses concerned European research and development projects carried out in the research areas of Health and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The analysis of successful projects revealed that among 10 most popular channels used for publicizing intellectual property, number 7 and 8 were articles in magazines and press reports.

Asked which channels are most efficient both research units and representatives of small and medium companies answered the same¹.



Source: Author's own materials.

Let's hope that the presented information will motivate research and scientific institutions to hold meetings with the media more often – also according to the presented action plan – and the assessment of effects will bring these institutions a whole „ocean“ of results.

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