

How to Use Local Media to Influence Public Opinion & Shape the Debate on Autism

By
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Agenda

- ▶ Types of media
- ▶ The current state of autism in the media
- ▶ Importance of local media
- ▶ How a local media report can turn into a bigger story
- ▶ Tips for speaking to the media & becoming a source
- ▶ How to figure out if the reporter is friendly, unfriendly or impartial
- ▶ Speaking out is critical—just do it the right way

Types of Media + Pros & Cons

- ▶ **Print**—newspapers, magazines, on-line articles
 - Pro—more credibility & educated audience
 - Con—smaller audience
- ▶ **Radio**—talk shows and news reports
 - Pro—easier to do and reaches a medium sized audience
 - Con—only reaches a medium sized audience
- ▶ **TV/Video**—news reports, talk shows, prime time TV, and cable
 - Pro—reaches the largest audience
 - Con—least intellectual of the three, shooting for a ninth grade level audience

Subjects commonly covered by the media concerning autism

- Vaccines and Autism—specifically Dr. Wakefield
- Measles and Whooping Cough outbreaks
- Feel good stories—accommodations made for a special child
- New treatments
- New studies
- Prevalence rates
- Court cases—Supreme Court ruling and Omnibus Autism Program decisions

Why is local media so important to parents with children with autism?

- ▶ We have no money.
- ▶ We aren't represented by million dollar public relations firms.
- ▶ We typically can't buy advertising.
- ▶ We can blog, but that is typically preaching to the choir.

Why is local media so important to parents with children with autism? (cont'd)

- ▶ A local media story will reach the mainstream.
- ▶ Your hometown will be discussing your issue.
- ▶ We live in a social media world. A local story covered in Des Moines is just as important as a story done in New York City once our community blasts that segment through internet.

A local story can lead other places

- ▶ KPBS San Diego's Full Focus Vaccine and Autism story in 2003
- ▶ Won the San Diego Press Club's "Story of the Year" Award
- ▶ A mom who sat next to me in OT saw it. She sent it to her brother who was a reporter in Detroit.
- ▶ Steve Wilson's expose' on vaccines and autism was the result.
- ▶ You never know where a story will end up!

Another local news example

- ▶ FOX News tends to be our friend.
- ▶ In 2005, Nancy Aziz worked on a three part series on the S-3 Bill which would have protected pharma from liability from a vaccine injury.
- ▶ It won FOX San Diego an Emmy that year.
- ▶ Nancy called to tell me the good news and I congratulated her. She said, "Don't congratulate me, congratulate yourself. You did most of the work on that series."

Holy cow, that is when I became a "source!"

- ▶ Now you are going to learn how to become one also.

Give the reporter a complete story package & become a "source."

- ▶ Have contacts.
- ▶ Provide literature—studies, journals, articles, etc...
- ▶ Give links to online information.
- ▶ Organize this information so it flows!!!!

Getting Your First Story

- ▶ Think about your story—what you want to say.
- ▶ Make it as simple as possible.
- ▶ Write a succinct letter or email to a reporter or station. Make your point and find your "hook."
- ▶ Don't vomit information.
- ▶ The reporter is a little birdy, and you want he or she on your window sill.
- ▶ Leave your tin foil hat in the closet.
- ▶ Don't put your eggs in one basket, reach out to many or all the media outlets in your market.
- ▶ If you are working with one outlet, use it to compete with another outlet.

Be an opportunist!

- ▶ When a national news story breaks surrounding autism, start calling media outlets to be the local angle.
- ▶ If there is a local story that has an autism tie in, contact the media and pitch them your angle. (e.g. school budgets, vaccine mandates, etc....)

News can flow both ways

- ▶ Many times local news outlets will want to take a national story and give it a local connection or hook.
- ▶ Other times, the national news can be inspired by a very good local story.

When you get a story

- ▶ Eat something BEFORE they arrive! (You and your starlets)
- ▶ A film crew will be coming to your house. Decide which rooms they can use for filming. This means tidy up, all the way. They may rearrange your furniture.
- ▶ Have activities ready for “b roll” swinging, baseball, doll house, bike riding, reading, instruments, etc...
- ▶ Have baby and family photos for reporter.
- ▶ Expect crew to be over for 2–4 hours.
- ▶ 2–4 hours will probably translate into 2–4 minutes of air time.

Dressing and Appearance

- ▶ For TV appearances:
 - Dress as a parent
 - No patterns
 - Avoid horizontal lines
 - If you are dark, wear for lighter colors. If you are light wear, darker colors.
 - Heavier make up— Becky’s Nordstrom trick
 - Even if station says that they will do your hair and make up, have it done just in case!

Figure Out Your Talking Points

- ▶ Have one, maybe two messages that you want to convey.
- ▶ Practice those messages in the mirror or with a friend or significant other.
- ▶ Stick with those messages or talking points.
- ▶ Say these messages over a few times while you are on camera. Sneak it into the conversation as much as possible.
- ▶ If you think you need to say your major talking point again because it didn’t come out well the first time, repeat it.

Speaking to the media

- ▶ Speak in sound bites—short easy to digest phrases.
- ▶ Keep it simple—remember 9th grade level.
- ▶ Speak like a politician—meaning no matter what, you get out your message.
- ▶ Don’t let the reporter put words in your mouth.
- ▶ Emotion—some reporters use it to get the tears following. Figure out if you are comfortable being emotional on camera.
- ▶ Don’t think about the camera. Have a conversation with the reporter. Keep eye contact with the reporter.

Speaking to the media cont’d

- ▶ Never say anything that you can’t back up.
- ▶ If you are going to use statistics, you better know them cold.
- ▶ You risk making yourself look foolish if you have your facts wrong or misrepresent information.
- ▶ Don’t over reach.
- ▶ You are representing thousands of families like yours, don’t blow it.
- ▶ Present yourself as a parent that has lived this story and researched the issue.

Parent vs. Doctors

- ▶ Please avoid this situation.
- ▶ Always ask the reporter who the opposing voice is going to be. If it is a doctor, have the name of a doctor who will back you up. See if they can be interviewed also.

Longer interviews should be bumped up to community elders

- ▶ Know when one of our seasoned veterans would be better for an interview.
- ▶ These would be national news stories that are in depth or even 30–60 minutes interviews.
- ▶ We need our experts going on as much as possible.
- ▶ We have to work smart, not necessarily hard.

When a reporter is pursuing you

- ▶ Be cautious—many times they have an agenda.
- ▶ Ask the angle of the story.
- ▶ If they are working on an article or documentary, ask the title.
- ▶ Get their email address. Get them to state in writing what the project is about.
- ▶ No one should pressure you!!! If they start going on about a deadline and it isn't for a report later that day. Pump the brakes.

Reporter pursuing you cont'd

- ▶ My rule—NO SKYPE!!!!
- ▶ We are already the underdog, there is no need to look stranger than we already appear.
- ▶ Don't let the reporter be the bad boyfriend who honks for you at the curb vs. coming in to meet your parents.
- ▶ If possible, go into the studio and do the interview. The lighting is better.

Audio taping

- ▶ Print journalists will sometimes want to record your interview.
- ▶ If that is the case, it is completely reasonable for you to record the interview also. (Think IEP) Smart phones are excellent for this.

Phone interviews

- ▶ These usually occur for print stories.
- ▶ They can be done fairly quick.
- ▶ At the end of the interview, ask the reporter to read back some of your notes so that you can troubleshoot any misquotes or misunderstanding. Most issues surrounding autism are really complicated.

Publicizing your media

- ▶ If you feel that you hit a media homerun, alert the yahoogroups, Facebook friends, Age of Autism and Twitter followers to watch as it airs or read when it is published.
- ▶ If you are unsure, let it air first and then decide if you want to distribute via the internet. Always DVR it!
- ▶ Unless you are on live television, your story is going to be edited. You never know what you are going to see until it airs.

Publicizing your media cont'd

- ▶ Cruise the stations, newspaper or magazine's website for the link that contains your report.
- ▶ If it is good, share it EVERYWHERE!
- ▶ We live in social media world. Use it to get out your message.
- ▶ Ask your friends to write to comment on the station's website.
- ▶ Those comments=Ratings. Ratings= more news stories for us
- ▶ More news stories= shaping public opinion

Make a log of your media appearances

- ▶ Create a record for yourself.
- ▶ Cut and paste link and detail who the interview was with and the date.
- ▶ Perfect for sending to other journalists who need background on the topic.

We need MANY parents speaking out

- ▶ It's critical that as many parents speak out as possible.
- ▶ Hearing from the same parents makes it appear that the autism problem may be only affecting a small subset.
- ▶ There are times when some of the veteran media parents should be doing the media (e.g., 30-60 minute talk shows, high visibility documentaries.)

Margaret Mead

- ▶ *"Never underestimate the power of a small group of committed people to change the world. In fact, it is the only thing that ever has."*

End Game

- ▶ The government is not going to help our community until they have to. Unfortunately, there aren't many leaders found in DC and your state capitols. It is up to us to change the opinions of the public. Once we win in the court of public opinion and citizens demand change, the government leaders will have to follow the wishes of the public. This is when we will see justice for our children.

If you need help with a story

- ▶ Shoot me an email
- ▶ Rebecca.Estepp@ebcala.org