

How to Improve Your Communication with the Media

A guide for non-governmental organizations

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INTRODUCTION



THIS SIMPLE GUIDE is primarily intended for non-governmental organizations in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia to help you improve your communication with journalists and draw attention to all those socially important topics which are often absent in the news.

TO IMPROVE YOUR COOPERATION WITH THE MEDIA, you need to know how the media organizations work and how the journalists think. Especially in situations when you want to address the media and general public through the new communication technologies (otherwise known as the *new media*).

THIS GUIDE WILL HELP ANSWER COMMON QUESTIONS raised by the NGO community, such as: how can you make and keep journalists interested in development aid? How can NGOs become an irreplaceable source of information for the media? How can you write a great story, which will grab the attention of your first external reader – the journalist?

*The authors Daniela Balážová and Vladimíra Bukerová wish you a successful cooperation with the media
– the old and the new ones.*

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1. SHORT DIVE

into the depths of journalistic work



MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS. The seventh world power, if we talk about influence. For some – the hyenas. They are cheeky and nosy, ask too many questions and can be very insistent. If you throw one out the door, he will get in again through the window. They are mainly interested in scandals and celebrities.

This is a very simplified view of the members of media and the world power, which in the times of new media lost something of its previous glory and importance.

However, journalists are only people like you, who are just trying to do their job. The result of which, to great extent, forms a picture of the state of society. A mirror of society, if you will. It is not only the serious scandals which journalists uncover and how the politicians and the public react to them. It is also the choice of topics preferred by the media.

Journalists would not chase and create celebrities and would-be celebrities if there was no interest in them among their readers and audiences. Private media, which are in the majority, operate on the old market rule of supply and demand.

Demand is represented by the circulation and audience numbers, as well as the website traffic and the interest of the visitors in discussing the news. These numbers are used by the PR agencies when they are deciding where to place an advertisement so it reaches the largest audiences.

TIP: IN EVERY COUNTRY THERE ARE ORGANIZATIONS WHICH MONITOR THE SUCCESS OF VARIOUS MEDIA. FOR EXAMPLE, THE NUMBERS OF PRINTED AND SOLD COPIES OF THE NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES ARE MONITORED BY AUDIT BUREAU OF CIRCULATIONS. SIMILARLY, THERE ARE ASSOCIATIONS OR AGENCIES, WHICH PUBLISH LISTS OF THE MOST VIEWED TELEVISION CHANNELS, MOST SUCCESSFUL RADIO STATIONS AND MOST VISITED WEBSITES. FOR ANYONE WHO IS INTERESTED, WE HAVE LISTED SOME SUCH ORGANIZATIONS AT THE END OF THIS BOOKLET.

Media and journalists have a certain feedback on which stories interest their recipients, but it doesn't mean they are 100-per-

cent sure about what people want to read or view. However, if you make an impression on a journalist, there is a good chance that your story will capture attention of others as well.

INFORMATION – commodity on the market

Some say that when you are a journalist, you are a journalist 24 hours a day (or at least all the time you are awake). It is because from the time they wake up until they go to sleep, they live with the information which is the basic commodity of their trade.

Journalists use many sources of information. Information is continuously produced by the news agencies, radio, websites and television (BBC World, CNN and some other news channels broadcast 24 hours a day). News agencies are the main source of information for most other media. Their service is divided into several sections – domestic, international, financial and sports news, photo service, and more recently video.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION: THE DOMESTIC SERVICE OF THE SLOVAK NEW AGENCY SITA PRODUCES ABOUT 70 STORIES DAILY, THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS DEPARTMENT OF REUTERS AGENCY PUBLISHES APPROXIMATELY 300 STORIES DAILY, INCLUDING THE FEATURES, ANALYSIS, FACT BOXES AND INTERVIEWS.

At the same time, journalists are bombarded with scores of other information and invitations to various events and press conferences, which they usually receive by e-mail (less and less by regular mail). Sometimes, they are unable to respond or confirm the attendance, despite their interest in the event.

That is why the main problem for the journalists is the news selection and choice of topics to follow. The news story must be so interesting or important that the journalist will be able to convince his editor that it MUST be published.

The editorial meetings decide on which from the currently available topics should be covered. They provisionally state the extent of coverage and other details – how long should the article or radio/TV report be, what journalistic tool (news

story, feature, analysis or interview) is best to use, what graphic materials are available and when is the deadline. The deadlines depend on the section and type of media. Magazines have longer lead in times than daily newspapers and broadcasting media.

BREAKING NEWS – an adrenaline shot

The situation is different in events of extreme importance, unexpected breaking news or disasters. The topic is clear but the information is fragmented. Often, journalists cannot rely on or wait for other media sources and need to get the information themselves as quickly as possible. They want to be ahead of their competition and give their audience the best answers for their immediate questions.

Important breaking news also means that some previously planned topics will have to wait their turn or might not even get to the news bulletin.

In the case of exceptional events like the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the editors will immediately change the whole production plan, and the coverage of such an event- from various angles- will take up most of the news editions.

However, there is no lack of stress even on a normal day full of „common news”. Even less important events can change the course of a news edition. This often happens when an expected article or report does not materialize for various reasons and it needs to be promptly replaced by something else.

That is why the journalists are never 100-percent sure of anything. On the other hand, if there suddenly opens a spot in the news, this could be an opportunity to use some backup standby material (for example a report on development aid).

For your information: Summer holidays (especially in August) are a good times to place stories on development. It is a time of parliamentary and governmental recesses and journalists look for interesting stories.

SOURCES AND CONTACTS – suitable for reuse

Journalists in domestic news and economic departments mostly follow political and legislative process. In larger news organizations they specialize even more, for example in education, health, police, defence, finances, economy, agriculture, etc.

According to their specialization, the journalists build their networks of collaborators, sources and contacts. They follow the most important topics from the time of legislative proposals until these become laws and are put into practice. They bring news from the government office meetings, parliament or even the deliberation of parliamentary committees. To keep the news objective, they request information from the government and its political opposition, and also independent experts from NGOs.

Good contacts (which sometimes remain unnamed) are not only a source of useful information and background facts, but could also be a great help in case of unexpected events, when a journalist needs to get a fast response/statement or some other relevant information.

2. GAINING ENTRY

to journalist's contact list



“Sometimes we ask ourselves: How many people must die in an Asian storm to create the same interest as a death of one Slovak citizen in neighbouring Austria?”

An editor of foreign policy department of the Slovak daily SME

IT IS NOT REALLY TRUE THAT JOURNALISTS ARE NOT INTERESTED IN DEVELOPMENT AID AND POLICIES, as sometimes NGOs suspect. The main problem, addressed by both sides, is usually – how to trigger the interest in such stories.

Casual contacts with journalists can be one way of communicating the importance of development aid. This can be teamed up with your ambition to become an invaluable and reliable information source with expertise and experience from the field.

BUILD CONTACTS with specific journalists

As we said earlier, journalists usually specialize in certain fields, and in different regions of the world. When building contacts with journalists, try to approach them as specifically as possible, based on their focus.

When contacting an entirely new media you can try to request a meeting with the editor-in-chief or his deputy. But please remember that their time is limited and that managing the content of news editions is only one of their many duties. By any means, speak to them if you have a proposal for long-term cooperation or a joint project. Lesser issues or day-to-day submissions are best taken straight to staff journalists or the editor of the day.

Systematically build contacts with journalists, but always approach them with something specific – like an offer for an interview with an interesting person, invitation to an event, proposals for some new projects, etc.

JOURNALISTS NEED A STORY – give it to them

Cynical, but proven journalistic experience says: When someone dies, it is a tragedy. When hundreds die, especially in some far away country, it is statistics. Use your advantage and give journalists a contact or a story of someone, who „was there”, someone with personal experience that readers and viewers can relate to. Prepare some „case studies” for each of

your projects, use your project trips to gather interesting stories of specific people in the field – record how they live, find out how they perceive their situation and let them talk about the problems they tackle. Through the story of one specific person you can easily capture the attention and imagination of your audience and still describe the situation of hundreds.

Besides, even a very complicated subject or difficult situation can be described in a simple and captivating way. Even negative situations usually conceal some positive aspect. People need to be motivated and uplifted, not depressed. Disaster without some hopeful outcome will make people remember their own disillusion, and that is not what we want. For example, even talking about the famine, you can probably find some inspirational project, which will show positive approach and inspiration.

PROMPTLY REACT to current crises in the world

The other cynical but proven journalistic experience says: Bad news is „good” news. Be prepared to answer journalists if something happens in the country where your organization has or had some projects. There are many examples when NGOs of our region were approached by journalists for information and views: post-election violence in Kenya, conflict in Georgia or the expulsion of the humanitarian organizations from Darfur triggered by the international warrant for Sudanese president.

When contacted by journalists in such situations, try to give them the information they want, as fast as possible. In news agencies, the writers will have up to an hour – in best cases – to publish the story, and journalists in daily newspapers, radio or television will have only several hours, sometimes much less. Even if you cannot directly answer their question, briefly explain the situation (e. g. We don't have any projects in Darfur, but we haven't experienced any problems in southern Sudan, where we are active.) Propose, that you will inform them about the development and try to get them contacts or information from your other sources in the field.

How to Improve **Your Communication with the Media**

Active cooperation in crisis is your best investment into good relationships with the media. Your immediate reaction will influence whether the journalist will call you next time. Everybody remembers a helpful person with good ideas.

However, journalists do not know about all activities of the NGOs, neither have they the time to follow them. So, if something happens in the region where your organization works, the media will notice that, but they might not know that you are there too. Don't wait for them to find you, call them yourself.

USE INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGNS, ANNIVERSARIES and important dates

Journalists will often need an up-to-date reference for their topic- the reason why we talk about that news right now. Do you think that March 8, the International Women's Day, is profaned by the communist regimes? In reality, it can be a good opportunity to break stereotype and point out the problems of women in developing world and specific projects designed to help them.

Some organizations use December 1 – World Aids Day – in a similar fashion. There are several world campaigns organized by the UN agencies (such as International Children's Day or World Water day). NGOs can use these opportunities to talk about their experience and results – maybe even more effectively than large international agencies, since they carry the local element (the project is run by people from your country, paid for by contributions from your people) which makes it more interesting for local audiences.

To effectively use such dates and campaigns, you need to plan and prepare well in advance, even risking that in the end, you might not make it to the news on the day. Ideally, you should alert your journalist contacts at least two weeks in advance – for example, most dailies prepare their next weekly plans on Friday.

The news agencies produce the weekly brief about the important dates and events, but the journalists will usually skip these

special international days, unless something interesting happens in this connection, or someone convinces them to use the date to publish a corresponding story. That someone could be you. Offer them something special that goes with the important date (story of an interesting person, example from your own project, contact or interview...)

If you were successful in your endeavour on one occasion, next year offer something else. Even UN agencies use specific topics in their global campaigns – a new one every year. For example, World Water Day Campaign focused on hygiene and sewage one year, and the next everyone was talking about access to drinking water.

Similarly, you can use anniversaries like One year after... Five years after... For example: Situation in Kenya one year after the post-election violence (How did they use money from SOS Kenya collection?), Afghanistan five years after the fall of Taliban (restructuring agricultural production of former opium producers), etc. In these cases, you also need to prepare the ground in the media and talk to journalists well ahead of the date.

PRESS CONFERENCES

Do not hold press conferences too often. It may be waste of energy. However, a press conference can be very useful when you have interesting guests from developing countries or if you have an important announcement to make (for example, you are publishing the results of a nationwide survey on development aid, or you want to raise hell because the government cut the development budget by half).

Remember to send out the invitations at least one week in advance. If possible, news agencies should get it by Thursday, since they publish weekly briefs about expected events on Friday morning. Ask the invited journalists to RSVP, at least provisionally. The day before the press conference, call everyone who did not confirm and find out if they're coming. A day or two before the conference you also need to send a reminder to all those who accepted your invitation.

WHAT IS DEVELOPMENT AID AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

(RESULTS OF AN INFORMAL SURVEY AMONG 12 JOURNALIST FROM THE CZECH REPUBLIC, HUNGARY, POLAND AND SLOVAKIA, TAKEN DURING THE REUTERS WORKSHOP)

- *most journalists think development aid is important, because in today's interconnected world the rich countries cannot act as if the third world poverty does not concern them or that it is “far away”*
- *world security is one of the main reasons for development aid – poverty causes frustration, which is a breeding ground for terrorism (Afghanistan) and forces migration to Europe (from Africa)*
- *development aid needs to be effective, because – as experts from developing world warn – it can be harmful when it creates some form of dependency*
- *development aid and development journalism must include not only the specific development projects but mainly trade and economic policies which can fuel or hinder development*

The workshop was a part of the project To Act You Have to Know (March 2009)

Don't make the conferences too long- half an hour is ideal. Instead of long speeches, give journalists some useful printed materials. After the press conference, there is always space for individual interviews.

KEEP YOUR WORD – exclusive means exclusive

If you offer someone an exclusive interview, trip or story, you have a better chance that they will take up the offer. However, you need to always keep your word and guarantee the exclusive coverage. If you are refused and you want to present the same offer to another media, do so only with the knowledge of the journalist who refused you in the first place. They might want to change their mind.

Several exclusives can be given if you are clear about what you are offering. For example – you can offer an broadcast exclusive and print exclusive. The key thing is that you are honest and clear about what you are offering to the journalist.

Journalists will prefer exclusive coverage because they want to beat their competition. Be the first, the only one, bring something special. After the exclusive has been reported, you are able to distribute it more widely to other press contacts. But bear in mind- the exclusive can be also great for you – the audience will listen more attentively. If people are served the same news over and over again in a short period of time by different media, it will begin to bore them, although at first they might have thought it was interesting.

EMBARGOES

Embargoes are a useful way of preparing a news story before it takes place – for example a flagship report or an event. You can give the information to journalists with the understanding that it won't be reported before a particular time or date. The understanding is that if the embargo is broken by reporting before then, the source will retaliate by restricting access to further information by that journalist or his publication, giving them a long-term disadvantage relative to more cooperative outlets.

SPEAKING OFF the record

There is no such thing as speaking ‘off the record’ to a journalist. In principle, they are entitled to print any quotes you give them. However, in practice, most journalists respect your wishes when you request to be ‘off the record’ or not cited as a source of a quote. So be careful – if you can’t say it on the record, then don’t say it at all.

DO NOT FORCE JOURNALISTS to do your PR

If the journalist decides on a certain topic, it is mainly because he thinks it is interesting or especially important. This goes for development aid as well. He will not talk about it because he wants to promote some organization, but because this organization does something useful or interesting. (And it could be also because he wants to point out some mistakes the organization made.)

Journalists are not employees of NGOs. They try to stay as independent, objective and impartial as possible. It also means that, seeking some controversy, they will usually try to get opinions from both sides. When talking about a broader issue, they will strive to get comments from several speakers who have something to say on the subject.

Therefore, it would be foolish to expect the journalist to write uncritical PR articles about your projects and activities. He is interested in the problems, facts, context and possible solutions.

Professional ethics forbids hidden advertisement for profitable organizations. This does not mean that it is OK to advertise non-profits. And anyway, careful readers would easily discover the partiality of such one-sided articles.

The basic principles of journalistic ethics are usually summarized in the Ethical Codes published by the national journalistic associations. Some media organizations, striving for greater transparency, compiled their own Codes. These can, for example, state that even in the case of trips which are financed by other organizations, the journalist reserves „the right to ob-

jective view, including criticism”. (You can find some useful web links concerning Ethical Codes at the end of this booklet.)

Public collections fall into a special category of public service. Their support is evaluated by the media on a case-by-case basis. In some countries, the media organizations follow special sets of rules for informing about humanitarian aid collections (e. g. BBC in the UK)

3. HOW TO WRITE

a press release and other journalistic tools



“Be honest and tell me, if you saw this story in tomorrow's newspaper, would you really read it with interest?”

Journalist's response to an organization which insisted on having its press release published

NEWSPAPERS AND NEWS BROADCASTS are not official bulletins, the editors are not obligated to publish your announcements. So, before you begin writing your new press release, try to answer these questions:

- What do you want to say?
- Who do you want to inform?
- Why do you need to say it and what do you want to accomplish?

To see whether and how to write a news story or if it would be better to offer a journalist some other journalistic genre, ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the new information you want to report? Is it really NEWS?
- Is it connected with some event or date?
- Is it a development of some issue?
- Why should other people care?
- Wouldn't it be better to explain in an interview, commentary or reportage?

If you decided to go ahead with writing your story and you are sure about what you want to say, we recommend that you follow the basic rules of good news writing. They will help you avoid some typical mistakes committed by people without journalistic training.

THE MOST IMPORTANT – title and first paragraph

If you don't grab your reader's attention right at the beginning, he might not even finish reading your story. (There is an abundance of information nowadays, so he has enough to choose from.) That's why the newspapers often publish exaggerated titles, they need to catch the reader's eye.

The basic journalistic rule says every news story must answer the following five questions: who, what, where, when and why. Therefore, your press release needs to address these issues right at the beginning. Based on the information contained in the title of the

story and its first paragraph, the reader decides whether he wants to know more. Written in the right way, the opening will satisfy the basic curiosity and encourage the reader to continue.

If you are not writing a news story, be creative. It is very effective if you start your reportage or blog with a personal story or some kind of surprise – for example, concealing the subject in the first sentence or undermining some stereotype...

PRESS RELEASE – one page maximum

It is not an art to write a lot, but to write what you want to say succinctly and concisely. Please bear in mind that a short news piece on the radio lasts 15-30 seconds and a report on the TV about one and half minute. Be strict and rid the text of all words which do not need to be there.

When making a point with statistics, use them sparingly. It is very difficult to follow several numbers in short sequence and make sense of them. However, one shocking number to start with can be very effective. If you feel it is necessary to mention more numbers, list them at the end as a background for the journalist – notes to editors.

Don't forget to include the core information in the subject of your e-mail containing the press release. Pressed by time, many journalists will not open the attachment if the e-mail doesn't get their attention.

TIP: IN THIS TIME OF UNSOLICITED E-MAILS (SPAMS), THE SUBJECT OF YOUR POST PLAYS A CRUCIAL ROLE. BEWARE OF SOME UNSUITABLE WORDS – THEY CAN DISPATCH YOUR E-MAIL STRAIGHT TO THE SPAM FOLDER. (IT COULD BE ANYTHING FROM A REFERENCE TO SEX OR VIAGRA, THROUGH AN UNHAPPY TYPO, TO SOME PHRASE USED TOO OFTEN BY MARKETING AGENCIES). THE SUBJECT LINE OF YOUR E-MAIL HAS TO FLASH IN FRONT OF THE JOURNALIST'S EYES TO BE NOTICED AMONG THE SCORES OF HIS DAILY POST. IT SHOULDN'T BE TOO GENERAL OR VAGUE, BUT NOT TOO SENSATIONAL EITHER. SIMPLY, USE THE SUBJECT LINE TO SAY THE TRUTH IN A SHORT AND GRABBING WAY.

USING NUMBERS – ADVICE FROM THE REUTERS AGENCY:

- *numbers must be used sparingly – while it is true that numbers are useful argumentation tools, one or two good numbers are sufficient; if you use ten numbers, people will lose track*
- *a number or any other fact is most effective, when it is connected with some record of superiority – e.g. The number of people living in poverty will reach one billion for the first time in history... (You know, few will remember the second cloned sheep, but sheep Dolly is a household name.)*
- *even though we said numbers must be used with caution, when talking about the Millennium Development Goals, the measurability is their biggest potential – that's why it makes sense to talk about them, they show us how successful is the fight against poverty*
- *writing about some disease or epidemic: while the numbers of victims are important, the people will be more interested in the impact on the society (children cannot go to school, parents do not work, this slows down the economy, etc.)*

From the Reuters workshop for V4 journalists, as a part of the project To Act You Have to Know (March 2009)

YOU ARE NOT WRITING an analysis – keep it simple

Try to forget your expert background. You are writing for general public- people who probably deal with other issues. An old lady from the village should understand you too. Try to avoid professional jargon. Write in a simple and intelligible way. If you are writing a reportage or blog article, you can use polite informal, colloquial language – as if you were writing or telling a story to your friends.

USE QUOTATIONS and divide the text into short paragraphs

Quotations make your text more dynamic. Feel free to use them, but not too often, in your news or reports. However, make sure the quotations are not too long (10 – 15 words), otherwise the readers will forget who is saying what. Also, do not forget to divide the text into short, logical paragraphs. It will be easier to read and comprehend.

AVOID USING EXCESSIVE ACRONYMS, abbreviations and passive tense

Forget the notion that you will save space by using acronyms and abbreviations, and therefore you will be able to write more. With the exception of generally used and known acronyms such as UN, NATO, EU, write out everything else. You may use acronyms like NGO or ODA daily in your work, but other people might not know what you are talking about. Even if you use them, the news editor will most likely write them out anyway.

Also, try to avoid using passive tense which is unnatural in colloquial speech. This is a common mistake when translating from English or in the articles written by people used to expert language.

USE SIMPLE short sentences

When writing, avoid overlong sentences. Don't try to fit everything in one sentence. If you are writing a feature or blog, strive to change the rhythm from time to time. You will realize that, if you read the text aloud. Short sentence, short sentence, longer sentence...

LOOK FOR comparisons

It is always more difficult to write about far away, exotic lands than about the things happening in your own country. It requires more space and finesse to tell the story. To capture attention and explain your point, you can use parallels with something that is well known to your readers. For example, you could compare the area of the country you write about with some region of your homeland. Or, if you want to explain the lack of social system in some developing country, you can say that the people there have never heard of unemployment benefits...

GIVE YOUR STORY some colour

Try to illustrate your articles – with words and otherwise. If you have any sounds or pictorial information (photos, video), to accompany your story, let the journalist have them. Especially if they can use them for free. This is also the case for charts and tables, which can be used to explain the subject better.

LET SOMEONE ELSE READ YOUR ARTICLE before sending it off

When you are finished with writing, read your story – best aloud. If possible, let someone else read it – not only your colleagues, but also some „layman“. Your first readers will give you useful feedback and might notice some mistakes which you won't see when reading the text yourself. They will also point out passages which seem too complicated or unclear, even though they may seem totally clear to you because you know the background. In such cases, rephrase or lose the problematic part.

SIMPLY, WHEN WRITING about your work:

- Be creative and playful
- Always think about the regular people – will they understand the issues you talk about?
- And if you are unsure about any part, hold a brainstorming session in your office or even through a Skype group chat, if necessary.

TIP: WHAT YOU MUST INCLUDE IN A PRESS RELEASE YOUR ORGANISATION SHOULD HAVE A STANDARD PRESS RELEASE FORMAT THAT SHOULD INCLUDE:

- HEADLINE
- DATE
- QUOTE
- NOTES TO EDITORS
- CONTACT AND IDENTITY:

(PRESS RELEASE SHOULD INCLUDE A STANDARD IDENTITY PARAGRAPH AND YOUR CONTACT DETAILS – WHAT YOUR ORGANIZATION DOES AND HOW THE JOURNALIST CAN GET HOLD OF YOU)

4. USING INTERNET

in communication with media



YOUR WEBSITE IS VERY OFTEN THE FIRST AND THE MAIN SOURCE OF INFORMATION about your organization. Internet is your portal into the modern world and invaluable helper in your communication with media and public.

ONE SIMPLE PIECE OF ADVICE to start with

Give the journalists as much useful information as possible straight away, without being asked, and encourage them to contact you with further questions. What does it mean?

Your website needs to be clearly structured and easy to read. The journalists must be able to find everything they need in almost no time – and where they would expect to find it (use clear, simple, descriptive links in menu). The info they will be looking for includes:

- News from your „kitchen” (press releases are one thing, but people will be interested in some stories, illustrations and context)
- Information about your organization (main areas of your work, short history, leadership)
- Contacts (clear and simple, divided according to positions and areas of expertise, it might be a good idea to add your office Skype account and pages in social networks such as Facebook)

Any visitor to your website should be also immediately offered the possibility to order your Newsletter or subscribe to RSS feeds (if you have several areas of activity, the RSS channels should be divided into topical sections for the benefit of those visitors who would be interested mainly in a certain part of your website. Let's say you have projects in many parts of the world, so you can have Asian News RSS, South America News RSS, etc.).

It might be useful to create a special section of your web for the media – with a link from the main menu. It should contain an info package about your organization (texts like press releases,

history, official photographs, logo in a print quality, Press Office contact and contacts for officers responsible for the main areas).

TIP: BEFORE YOU BEGIN DEVELOPING OR RE-BUILDING YOUR WEBSITE, HAVE A BRAINSTORMING SESSION. VISIT THE PAGES OF YOUR LOCAL PARTNERS AND COMPETITORS AND SIMILAR ORGANIZATIONS ABROAD. NOTICE WHAT AND HOW THEY COMMUNICATE ON THEIR WEBSITES. RATE WHAT WAS MOST INTERESTING FOR YOU AS A GENERAL VISITOR. SEE WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T. EVALUATE IF YOU CAN EASILY FIND EVERYTHING YOU ARE LOOKING FOR. TRY TO FIND THINGS THAT CONFUSE OR DISTRACT YOU, AND AVOID THEM ON YOUR OWN WEB.

WHAT ARE YOUR trump-cards?

1. You engage in socially beneficial activities and that's always popular. So, if you make yourself heard and seen in right places, you win.
2. You have a network of collaborators and friendly organizations, most of which have their own websites and you can use them in many ways.

ALPHA & OMEGA OF A GOOD WEBSITE – clear structure and diverse content

A clear structure of your website helps people to find what they are looking for without unnecessary delays and frustrations. That means, logically divided content, clear and simple links in menus and the most important information highlighted on the homepage.

TIP: THE DESIGN OF YOUR WEBSITE IS VERY IMPORTANT, BUT IT SHOULD SUPPORT – NOT SUPPRESS – THE CONTENT. PLEASE TAKE IT EASY ON THE COLOUR SCALE (SOME COOL TRENDY COLOURS CAN ACTUALLY LOOK QUITE HORRIBLE ON A BAD MONITOR) AND DO NOT OVERDO IT WITH FLASH. SOME MOVEMENT IN THE RIGHT PLACES DOESN'T HURT, BUT IF YOUR PAGE LOADS TOO SLOWLY, YOU RISK THAT THE VISITORS WILL LEAVE ANNOYED, BEFORE THEY ACTUALLY READ ANYTHING.

Ideally the visitor should get the desired information after one or two clicks or after entering keywords in the search box.

During the initial contact with your organization, the journalists will need mainly:

- outline of the history of your organization, preferably in chronological order;
- contacts divided according to the main areas of expertise;
- logo and official photos they can use;
- press releases (if you publish them);
- and statistics, research or reports produced by your organization alone or in cooperation with other institutions.

It must be easy to navigate through your pages. Information about your organization and contacts should be linked within the main menu, and you can have a special media section, too. It is up to you how you name it (Media section, Press releases, Journalists' Corner...) but it must be clear: Journalists, here's some extra info for you, click!

When returning to your website, the journalist will quite logically need – The News. Just like any other visitor who comes to your pages more often. Therefore they must be highlighted on the homepage.

DO NOT FORGET about the copyright

It is advisable to clearly state, which content on your website is for general use, what can be used only with authorisation or reference to your organization and which material cannot be used in certain media (you might have some photos or videos with specific copyrights – for example, that may be used for free in your own publications and website, but not in commercial media).

Ideally, every news story should end with a name and number of a person who can be contacted for more detailed information.

CREDIBILITY OF YOUR WEBSITE = credibility of your organization

The first impression of your website can significantly influence the visitors' view of your organization. If they do not know you personally and do not frequent your events, the website will be their only reference point.

One thing is aesthetic experience, something else is building confidence. The main test of which is the first click. The visitor should get an answer to the question which led him to your website. If he clicks Photo gallery and finds only one or two pictures, he will be most likely disappointed. If he clicks Current projects and finds one from two years ago, he will at the least raise his eyebrows.

And if he clicks the title claiming that „Our project enchanted the Dalai Lama” and then- in the fifth paragraph- learns that the office of the Tibetan leader sent your International Headquarters thanks for the information about your project, he might even feel cheated. So, the moral of this story is: thoroughly check all your links and do not stretch the truth.

Some other ways to build confidence in your organization include previously mentioned contacts, references (in your case, it could be joint projects or grants), and the network of links. There are links leading from your website to other pages (it shows 1/ you want to be helpful to your visitors, and 2/ what or who you find important), and there are also so-called back links leading from other pages to your website. These show your importance.

It is quite usual to have a back link (with good description of your organization) from various online catalogues and directories. More useful will be links from topical articles. Always try to ensure that a link to your web is published on the most suitable page. For example, if a page of a special Interior Ministry project about domestic violence points to a Hotline for abused women, this is a well used opportunity. However, a link to Homeless asylum from the Foreign Ministry web page talking about government policies in social area, is mostly useless.

How to Improve **Your Communication** with the Media

You can build your web of links through other media, partner websites, governmental offices, as well as through interesting announcements in social networks such as Facebook (many prominent organizations have their profile Facebook and actively use it to promote their cause), through expert articles in Wikipedia, various professional or personal Blogs, even photographic blogs or servers such as Flickr.

The possibilities are endless – tackle weaving your web with creative enthusiasm but also good judgement, keeping in mind the ethical principles and integrity of your organization. Always realize what you are publishing and where. Not all affiliations are beneficial. That said, use every smart opportunity to promote good things – people are generally good and they like to read about how someone does good.

NEWSLETTERS and e-mail bulletins

Newsletters allow you to easily inform the journalists and other groups about your most recent activities. Also, you will remind them of your existence once in a while – we are still here and working hard! It is probable, that one day they will struggle to find a good story to write and your newsletter will come in handy.

Do not overdo it with frequency, send news only when you really have something new to say. Try to capture attention but unobtrusively so. When people get tons of unsolicited emails, an interesting, unpretentious subject line is the key to their hearts (and even their mailboxes).

TIP: PLEASE MAKE SURE YOU DON'T SEND OUT SPAMS – EVEN UN-INTENTIONALLY. FREQUENTLY CHECK YOUR WEBSITE TO SEE THAT IT WAS NOT „HACKED” (CERTAIN GROUPS „HIJACK” SITES WHEN THEY LINK THEM TO SOME DUBIOUS BUSINESS IN ASIA OR ELSEWHERE AND THEN UPLOAD SO-CALLED DATA DIGGERS TO VISITORS' COMPUTERS. OR THEY CAN SEND OUT UNSOLICITED EMAILS TO YOUR CONTACTS.) GET A GOOD ANTI-VIRUS, WHICH CAN HELP. BECAUSE, ONCE AN INTERNET PROVIDER BLACKLISTS YOU, ALL YOUR EMAILS MIGHT END UP IN THE SPAM FOLDER AND YOUR WEBSITE MIGHT BE BLOCKED. IT CAN BE UNDONE, BUT IT IS AN EXPERIENCE YOU CAN CERTAINLY DO WITHOUT.

Invite visitors to subscribe to your Newsletter – in a visible place, in a friendly and simple way.

RSS – information channel for your fans

News should have its own RSS channel on your website, so people can subscribe to it and view it in their web browser. For those who do not use RSS – these are aggregated new articles, either from the whole website or from a specific section (your web master will be able to set it up according to your request). They will be shown on a separate page in a simple list of headlines, with links to full articles. RSS news can be regularly sent out to subscribers by email or – as is more common nowadays – the subscribers can read them through the RSS reader installed in their web browser.



GENERAL RESOURCES

Resources page for aid workers from THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION:

<http://www.alertnet.org/aidresources.htm>

For your inspiration:

Some websites specializing in development politics, projects and humanitarian aid:

<http://www.panos.org.uk>

<http://www.ipsnews.org>

<http://www.irinnews.org>

ETHICAL CODES FOR JOURNALISTS (in national languages unless otherwise stated):

Slovakia:

Slovenský syndikát novinárov – Etický kódex

<http://www.ssn.sk/?id=50&num=10&lang=sk>

Etický kódex denníka Sme

<http://www.sme.sk/c/3498627/eticky-kodex-dennika-sme.html>

Czech Republic:

Syndikát novinářů České republiky – Etický kodex

<http://syndikat-novinaru.cz/1/5/36/etika/eticky-kodex>

Poland:

Dziennikarski Kodeks Obyczajowy

http://www.radaetykimiow.pl/dokumenty_kmp1.html

Karta etyczna mediów

http://www.radaetykimiow.pl/dokumenty_kmp1.html

Hungary:

Ethical Code of the National Association of Hungarian Journalists (in English)

http://ethicnet.uta.fi/hungary/ethical_code_of_the_national_association_of_hungarian_journalists

Magyar Újságírók Országos Szövetségébe

<http://www.muosz.hu>

All European Journalism Ethical Codes:

EthicNet

<http://ethicnet.uta.fi>



MEDIA AUDIENCES

Slovakia:

For newspapers and magazines: **Audit Bureau of Circulations** www.abcsr.sk

For TV stations and Teletext: **PMT- Peoplemeter** www.pmt.sk

For press and radio: **Median agency**, www.median.sk

For radio audiences: **Rádiá** www.radia.sk

For websites: **Asociácia internetových médií Slovenska** www.aims.sk

All media: **Mediálne.sk** (Trend weekly) www.medialne.sk, **Stratégie** www.strategie.sk

Poland:

For newspapers and magazines: **Związek Kontroli Dystrybucji Prasy** www.zkdp.pl

Teleskop online <https://www.teleskop.org.pl>, **Polskie Badania Czytelnictwa** <http://www.pbczyt.pl>

TV audiences: **AGB Nielsen Polska** <http://www.agbnielsen.pl> – commercial monitoring of TV programs and commercials (some information is available for free)

Various reports on media and statistics: <http://www.tns-global.pl>

Czech Republic:

For newspapers and magazines: **Unie vydavatelů ČR** <http://www.uvdt.cz>,

Audit Bureau of Circulations <http://www.abccr.cz>

For press and radio: **Median** <http://www.median.cz>,

TV stations' Peoplemeter: Asociace televizních organizací <http://www.ato.cz>

For TV audiences: **Mediaresearch** – <http://www.mediaresearch.cz> – see section **Měření televize**

For websites: **Netmonitor** – <http://www.netmonitor.cz> – see section **Veřejné výstupy**

All media: **MAM (Marketing a Media)** <http://mam.ihned.cz> – **Mediální výzkum (Media Research)**

Hungary:

For press: **Magyar Terjesztés-Ellenőrző Szövetség** <http://www.matesz.hu> (Audit Bureau of Circulations)

Global Commercial service for World Media: **Eurodata TV Worldwide** – <http://www.mediametrie.com/eurodatatv>

About the authors:

Daniela Balážová is a journalist with background in foreign affairs, international politics and EU issues. After 10 years in Slovak daily Pravda, she decided to move into the non-governmental sector. Currently she serves as a Policy and Press Officer for the Slovak NGDO Platform.

Vladimíra Bukerová had worked in various news, print and electronic media for 15 years – including the BBC World Service in London. Nowadays, she specializes in internet and new media, building websites, training and advising organizations on how to use all website elements for their advantage.