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I. INTRODUCTION

The American Academy of Audiology has launched a national initiative to raise awareness of the field of audiology and the work of its members. This initiative includes providing tools for members to also gain visibility within their communities.

While the national office will work on obtaining national media coverage to support the Academy’s member’s efforts, your challenge is to localize the opportunity utilizing the tips and materials included herein. As additional releases and tip sheets are added, this kit will be updated on the Academy website.

This American Academy of Audiology Public Relations and Marketing Kit is designed to stimulate your thinking, to suggest some tips and activities to increase potential coverage, and to offer guidelines and strategies for working with the media to promote these activities. It also includes some templates for effective press alerts and releases, pitch letters, talking points and Op-Eds that you can localize by dropping in your information.

The strategy behind this kit is to maximize visibility through a cohesive national and localized media relations effort. The American Academy of Audiology initiative provides various hooks for the media so that you can then discuss the profession, programs, activities, and people involved in your local region. Please use this resource as a guide to develop local messages to speak to the interests of your audiences as part of your overall campaign, tying into message themes of local interest, topical issues, future needs and education on the profession. Think about ways to reinforce positive relationships and expand audience perception of your profession, programs, opportunities and community needs. Your local media wants a local story. Use the themes and news hooks in this kit, but give the media facts and statistics about your local efforts.

If you would like assistance planning a strategy or reaching out to the media, please contact the PR team – Amy Miedema at 703-226-1033, Vicki Bendure at 540-687-3360, or Marcia Massenberg at 540-687-8990, and we will be happy to help you.
II. PUBLIC RELATIONS: EARNED VS. PAID MEDIA

Many people are not certain as to the differences between public relations and advertising. To begin with, public relations is a broad category that includes everything from media relations (story placements in the press), to crisis communications to special events to strategic communications campaigns with outreach, networking, speaking engagements and possibly special events. Anything that positively impacts your brand or corporate identity, is PR. Special events and media relations are the two categories that most people think of when they think PR. There are firms that specialize in each of these categories. Those that specialize in media relations spend most of their time networking with media on clients’ behalf and strategizing as to how best position the client with the media.

PR is not rocket science. It’s all about building relationships—especially with media. Unless it’s breaking news, news stories don’t typically just happen and, even when they are breaking news, there are usually a number of PR professionals behind the scenes working on behalf of clients to ensure the story is told in the way they’d like. These news stories, which run on various media outlets at no charge, are considered earned media. Paid media is placed advertising that created by the client and placed into purchased media space. While paid offers the opportunity to guarantee the message, it has far less credibility than earned media.

Social media (which is rapidly taking over as traditional media) can be earned or paid, or both. Sometimes when a company has received a really great story in a local or national outlet, they’ll post it to their social media channels and boost its reach through a paid campaign.

With a strategic communications plan, special events are sometimes created to ensure additional media and community attention. Whenever you’re planning an event for your company, you should also think about media and whether or not it’s a good opportunity to invite them as well. While it’s difficult to get media out on weekends when your event might work best to ensure attendance, you may want to consider a pre-event that would allow media to visit before the public and learn more about your business, the profession, etc.

III. GETTING STARTED: MEDIA PROTOCOL

Before you begin on a strategic communications campaign, make sure everyone in your office is clear as to who speaks to media and when. You will need to brief all of the gatekeepers on how to respond to media, how to take messages, etc. Many great media story opportunities have been lost when someone answering the phone didn’t handle the call correctly. Remember that news moves 24/7 and media are often on extremely tight deadlines. Even if the reporter states that he/she would like information on a topic that is out of your areas of expertise, return the call. Being responsive will put you on the top of reporter’s “go to” lists and they’ll be more likely to call you for another story that does fit your area of expertise.
When a reporter calls and suddenly launches into questions that you’re not prepared to answer, just ask him/her if you can get back to them momentarily. Ask him/her if there are other questions and you’ll be prepared when you call them back. It’s okay even if you just take 10 minutes to organize your thoughts and call them back. If you need longer, find out what his/her deadline is and honor that. Get back as close to the time of the initial call as possible. If you don’t respond quickly, your competitor will.

When you’re not available, brief others in your office to take a message making sure they get the reporter’s name, outlet name and phone number. Make sure they know to get that message to you immediately.

Make sure that everyone is clear on who speaks to media and who doesn’t. If there are people who fill in answering phones, be sure to include them on your protocol list. When you’re not in the office, media messages should be delivered in whatever format you monitor regularly—phone call, text or email.

IV. MEDIA OUTREACH

There are a number of ways that you can get attention from the media for your local business. Here’s a list of some of the possibilities:

**Feature Human Interest Story** – The media are often interested in human interest stories. If you have a great patient story that your patient is willing to tell (please be sure to obtain permission before pitching the story to media outlets), put together a written press release or a written email pitch to the reporter, editor or producer. Lifestyle reporters are always looking for great human-interest stories. You could tie this in with a local speaking engagement you’re doing or work you’re doing on behalf of the Academy.

**Feature Business Story** – Local business reporters and editors are always looking for great business stories, especially stories of entrepreneurship, women-owned businesses, etc. A great business story could also tie in with a human-interest story. Always get permission from the entity you’re promoting to the media before you promote him/her story.

Since these stories are considered “ever green” (they’re not breaking news), it may take time to place your story but they can also be pitched at any time.

**Feature Health Story** – Most outlets have a health editor/or producer. The health section would also have interest in a human-interest story as well as the profession of audiology, tips on hearing loss prevention, etc.

**Event Coverage** – Invite the local media to attend/cover a specific event or activity that promotes audiology. This could be an office open house, a volunteer audiology day at a local school, nursing home or hospital or a community health fair. You can also pitch an event in advance to local television and see if they’ll book you as an audiology expert to speak about your involvement with the event. Remember that “events” includes special months that highlight audiology including May is National Audiology Month.
**Editorial** – You may want to submit an opinion editorial that discusses audiology issues in the news to a local outlet. Or, you may want to submit a letter to the editor in response to a news story that ran with a connection to audiology. These pieces should be submitted to the editor. Outlets that take submissions generally include word count and submission guidelines on the outlet’s website.

**Television, Radio and Podcast Interviews** – You may have television/radio programs in your local market that book guests. You can pitch yourself as an audiology topics expert either just in general or with a specific hook (upcoming event, legislative issue, etc.).
V. MEDIA MESSAGING (Talking Points)

Three kinds of messages are suggested for maximum impact:

- Lead-in message (or hook: what’s the event, occasion, featured subject);
- Localized message (how do you tie into it or how does it tie into your ongoing programs and work in the community); and
- Positioning messages (statements about the American Academy of Audiology and what it stands for).

The following messages leverage the themes of the profession, community outreach, commitment, etc. In developing releases or pitches you’d use these messages, that can be edited to best suit your own personal scenario, to develop press releases or media pitches.

Sample Lead-in Messages

- XYZ Hearing Associates is hosting an open house so that the general public can learn about the importance of audiology and hearing loss. (provide date, time and address). Attendees can learn more about the necessary testing available to determine hearing loss.

Sample Localized Messages

- XYZ Hearing Associates treats more than 2,500 people throughout the Metroplex each year. Statistics show that there are X times that number of people throughout our community that are suffering from hearing loss. Some don’t even realize the impact.

Positioning Messages (use only those that are relevant)

- XYZ Hearing Associates is a member of the American Academy Audiology. The American Academy of Audiology, representing more than 12,000 audiologists around the nation, is the leading authority on quality of hearing, balance care and hearing loss.

- The American Academy of Audiology, of which XYZ Hearing Associates is a member, cites the National Institute of Health’s NIDCD statistics that approximately 37.5 American adults aged 20 to 69 have some trouble with hearing and approximately 28.8 million could benefit from hearing aids.

- The American Academy of Audiology, the leading national authority on all things related to hearing, provides information on how to determine when you should see an audiologist as well as information for parents and educators to determine when children should see an audiologist.
XYZ Hearing Associates is a member of The American Academy of Audiology. The Academy represents more than 12,000 audiologists and serves as a resource in providing information on determining and dealing with hearing loss.

VI. HOW TO PITCH THE MEDIA

A reporter should be able to pick up a press release and write a complete story with no additional input. The release should informative, detailed and yet concise. It should be no longer than two pages single-spaced—preferably one page. It should contain an informative headline, a strong lead in and then a boiler plate on your company at the end.

VII. CREATING A PRESS RELEASE

Don’t Bury the Lead
Story telling has made writing a press release for many people backward. Story telling typically starts out slow and lays a foundation, then builds to keep the interest of the listener, reader, viewer. Forget that approach for press releases or you’ll find yourself guilty of “burying the lead”—a common criticism that reporters give to rambling press releases. Instead, state up front what it is you want the reporter to know. Remember that you’re writing this for a reporter, editor or producer, not the general public. They have little time so get to the point as soon as possible.

Associated Press Style
AP Style is the recognized style of news outlets. It has some quirky rules but, if you don’t follow them, you’re basically waving a red flag for the reporter to know that you don’t really know how to write a release or engage with media. If you get stuck, there are AP Style Guides available online and through the Associated Press.

Here's an AP Style cheat sheet:

Here are some of the basic rules:

- Datelines (that is the very beginning of the copy of your release that lists the location and the date of your release—e.g. “RESTON, Va., June 6, 2017”) should always have the city in all caps and the state abbreviated (unless you’re in one of the states that are never abbreviated—Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas and Utah). State abbreviations in AP Style are not the current postal abbreviations. They can be found here under the “AP” column: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_U.S._state_abbreviations.

Months are also abbreviated in the dateline. The AP Stylebook says, “When a month is used with a specific date, abbreviate only Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec. Spell out when using alone, or with a year alone.”
- **Headlines** should be upper and lowercase with the first and last words and all principal words capitalized and the headline should be in bold. Do not italicize subheads.

- **States** used within the release, other than the dateline, are usually spelled out.

- **Numbers** from one to nine should be spelled out. Numbers 10 and above are written out. The endings “th” as in “9th” and “nd” as in “2nd” are not used in AP Style.

- **Titles** written before a name are capitalized; however, when they follow a name, they are always lowercase. In example: George Mason’s President Smith; or John Smith, president of George Mason University. The term “doctor” is used only for M.D.s. Those with Ph.D.’s are not allowed to use the title “doctor” in AP Style. When the title “Dr.” is used, it is used with the first reference of the full name and not in subsequent mentions.

- **Acronyms** should not be used on first reference or in parenthesis following an organization’s name. In example, it is against AP Style to say “National Institutes of Health (NIH).” Instead you would reference “National Institutes of Health” and, if you have a second sentence about the organization, you can then say “NIH” within a specific context. For instance, you would write: The National Institutes of Health released a new study on audiology. NIH researchers found that there’s a link between hearing loss and…”

- **Handling names** in a release should include the person’s first and last name on first reference and include his/her title if applicable. All second references would then use the last name only. So, it would be “John Smith has joined the American Academy of Audiology. Smith has agreed to chair the communications committee.” Further reference would state, “Smith resides in Paramus, New Jersey.” Formal titles such as “Ms.,” “Mr.” and “Mrs.” are never used in AP Style.

- **Serial commas** are not used in AP Style.

- **Phone numbers** are always written using dashes in AP Style: ex. 301-452-6674.
VIII. PRESS RELEASE MECHANICS

Once you’ve come up with a compelling headline and an attention-grabbing first sentence and have included the main information (who, what, when, where) in the first two to three paragraphs of the release, you can provide any concise background necessary to understand the premise. This can be national statistics that put your initial information into better context. If the background is lengthy, abbreviate it and provide a link to your website where the larger document of background information should be housed. If you reference studies in your release, you can provide a brief explanation and then link them to the copy so that the reporter or editor can go directly there to verify your information. The purpose of concise, detailed releases is to make it easy on reporters so they don’t have to work hard to get all of the information they need.

Journalists learn to use an inverted pyramid when writing stories which puts the most important information at the top of the release, the least important info at the bottom.

Here are some more tips for writing a great release:

- Have a compelling headline and attention-grabbing first sentence.
- Put the important information at the top and work down to the least important.
- Don’t use quotes just to interject someone’s name into a release. Quotes should say something meaningful not just “we’re so glad we’re here today.” Instead, they should point out a problem or solution, state a fact or good statistic.
- Don’t quote more than two people in a release. The fewer, the better.
- Make sure your contact information is easy to find on the email. Be sure to include your cellphone, full name, title, business name and address.
- Make sure the release is in Word format. Do not flip it into a PDF. Reporters don’t want to retype. It’s easier for them with a Word document to cut-and-paste.
- Use Times Roman type. It’s the most widely recognized typeface for news outlets and it makes cutting-and-pasting easier.
- Use end marks so reporters are clear your copy has ended. The most widely used is simply three hash marks, “# # #.”
- Below the hash marks include an about section that explains more background information on your organization. This is a boilerplate and is used consistently on all of your releases. It is background information for reporters as well as confirmation on your organization’s web address.
Here’s the boilerplate for the American Academy of Audiology as an example:

The American Academy of Audiology is the world's largest professional organization of, by and for audiologists. The active membership of more than 12,000 is dedicated to providing quality hearing care services through professional development, education, research, and increased public awareness of hearing and balance disorders. For more information or to find an audiologist, go to www.howsyourhearing.org.

Your boilerplate will be localized to your company but should not be longer than three to four sentences.

IX. CREATING A MEDIA LIST

As we’ve stated before, in a perfect world, you’ll have cultivated some media relationships with area reporters before you embark on looking for story placement. If that isn’t the case, the best time to start is now. Think through a strategic approach to your communications and your company needs. You have to decide if you’ll reach more of your stakeholders through a business story or a health story. If your goal is to influence professionals and/or investors, you’ll be better off in the business section. If your goal is to increase patients, you’ll want to be in the health section. And, you can be in both if you strategically pitch different story angles to both sections. You just want to make sure that you’re not pitching a business story to the health section and vice versa. Know the reporters you’re pitching to—read their past stories, go online and research their beats and areas of interest. They largest complaint that media have is the fact that they get pitched stories and sent releases that have nothing to do with the kinds of things they write about.

Don’t overlook bloggers! There are bloggers with numbers of followers significantly larger than traditional media outlets. Mommy bloggers, health bloggers and others may have an interest in writing your story.

Make sure your media list includes all of the various options. You can then pick and choose which releases and pitches go to which outlets.

X. DISSEMINATION OF THE RELEASE

Once you’ve created a list, thoroughly review it and decide timing. Some outlets compete with one another and will not tell your story if the competition wrote about it first. You have to think through which outlets will give you the largest stakeholder audiences. For instance, there are two outlets in one major market that are fiercely competitive. If Outlet A gets the story first, Outlet B absolutely will not cover it. Outlet A, however, is less concerned about Outlet B. So, the approach is to give B the story first and then change it slightly for A. That way the story runs on both outlets.

If you do have competitive outlets or you have one outlet in particular that would be your choice above all others, then just send your pitch to them and tell them that you have not sent it to anyone else yet and wanted them to have an advance. Many outlets appreciate this
and will do your story as long as they’re the only ones that will get it. You have to weigh your options.

The best way to send your pitch and press release is via email. As we’ve mentioned before, most outlets (or the reporters themselves) will provide you with an email address.

XI. FOLLOW UP

Wait a day or two after sending the release and follow up with a phone call to see if the reporter has interest. If not, graciously thank them for their time, accept their lack of interest and move on.

Not all releases get picked up and, even if the reporter doesn’t want to do your story at this time, you’ve now been able to educate him/her on what you do. There are many times where a reporter will pass on a story but later call that contact to do another story. Timing doesn’t always work for the news entity and they may find themselves needing an audiology expert at another time. You have now raised visibility with them that you exist and this is another great opportunity to see if you can meet them for coffee for 15 minutes and learn more about the types of stories that interest them and what they’re working on. These exchanges are extremely valuable and will help you further create your media relations campaign.

Reporters Interested in Additional Information
You may find in speaking with the reporter when you follow up that he/she has a larger interest in your business and audiology and may be interested in receiving additional information. In this case, you may want to send one of the Tool Kit fact sheets as a follow up. Again, cut-and-paste the fact sheet and put it into the body of the email. Be sure to customize it with your information.

XII. AFTER THE STORY RUNS

After a story runs what you do with it is critical to the amount of visibility you’ll receive. If the story is positive, send the link to all of your stakeholders—“In case you didn’t see this in today’s news…” post it to all of your social media channels (consider boosting the posts) and use it as much as you can. News stories have a shelf life and, in a week, it will be forgotten. If the story runs on TV and the station cannot provide a link or doesn’t post a link, there are clipping services you can call to purchase a copy.

Send a follow up note to the reporter/editor or producer and thank them for the story. Many PR manuals will tell you not to do this but we seriously disagree. Reporters work hard and getting a good story deserves a “thank you” and helps with relationship building.

What if they Got It Wrong?
If there’s a glaring error in the story that you consider significant that negatively impacts your business, contact the reporter and ask for a correction. Be polite. If
they stated in the local newspaper that you’re a $1 million company and you’re a $10 million company, they’ll run a correction in the next issue. If the story is online, they can correct it there immediately. Television and radio are trickier and, unless the error hurts your business, you may get a correction online but not much more. Remember that, for radio and TV (and event print and online), the general public only retains a few facts and that will be an overall impression of you, your business and your name. Weigh the value in the correction versus the relationship.

XIII. SOCIAL MEDIA

If you’re not on social media, now is the time. LinkedIn is valuable in reaching professionals and businesses, including reporters. Instagram is an easy way to reach younger audiences and Facebook provides a great venue to reach an older audience and moms. Twitter reaches a huge crossover of young, old, professional and businesses as well as reporters. Post on these accordingly and build up these channels. Once you have collected some great news story placements, post them and boost them. Be sure to use the media links (where story links directly to the source) so that you don’t have to worry about copyright infringement.

Share your posting and tag organizations (area bloggers, patients, etc.).

If you don’t have a blog you should consider writing one. While time consuming, it provides an opportunity to disseminate additional content that you can then post to social media channels including media outlets. If you start following local reporters and they follow you back, you can then Tweet about your blog and post to all other channels.

XIV. USING THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF AUDIOLOGY TEMPLATE RELEASES & FACT SHEETS

The Academy will continue to regularly provide template press releases for use by members in their local markets. Please feel free to take these releases, customize them, edit them if necessary so they accurately portray your business. Make sure in your email pitch to reporters that you state specifically that you have expertise in the area that the release talks about. Provide specifics or personal stories, if you have them. For instance, with the fireworks release template, you may state that you have treated XX numbers of children over the years with hearing loss from fireworks or you may state that you’re an expert on hearing loss and have helped XX members of the community over the years. Good numbers and statistics are important to media as are “first,” “largest,” etc. So, if you’re the “largest provider of hearing aids in the region,” be sure to state that. If you’re the “first company to provide hearing aids to the region,” state that. Whatever makes you biggest, best or first will impress media as will the numbers of people you care for (assuming the numbers of good.) You can always say, “we help hundreds throughout the region annually.”

Follow the instructions on the press releases. Remove all of the colored type before you send them out—very important. Red type on the releases provides instructions. Blue type suggests what should go into that paragraph.
The Fact Sheets have been customized to reflect national information. Please feel free to add your own company information as indicated. Again, be sure to remove any red or blue type from the fact sheets before you place them on your website pressroom or send them to media.

XV. WEBSITE

Your website is a critical tool for media to use to write stories on your business. Once you begin sending out releases regularly, media will begin to recognize you, recall you and your business and will begin to write about you. Many reporters work after hours. For this reason, it’s critical that you have the materials they need included in your website. The best thing is to create a “pressroom” with a tab at the top of your webpage so that media can easily determine where to go.

It’s very important that you do not place the news stories that have been written on your company in this section. Media are competitive and, if they open your press room and see news coverage from the competition, they’ll very likely move on.

The news stories you receive on your company are valuable with your patients and customers and should be in one of your general sections on your website.

While any reporter digging around may come across these stories on their own, you have at least not placed them in your press room where they’ll be right in the reporter’s face as he/she logs on.

The Pressroom should contain a backgrounder on your company, bios on any company executives, customized fact sheets, press releases and any photos you have of your company—personnel, building, logo, executive team in front of building, use of any unique equipment or products.

Website search engine optimization
News stories will help in getting your website greater SEO. There are also companies that can help with this. Due to changes in Google analytics, it’s a constant effort to keep your company name at the top of the search engines. You’ll have to evaluate whether or not you need a professional to assist with this or if you’re willing to let SEO increase organically.

XVI. ONLINE REVIEWS

Bad reviews can take down a company and ruin its reputation. If you or your company receives a bad review, make sure you correct it immediately. While many online review sites forbid you from asking customers for good reviews, you can ask those customers who like you to review you. If you feel that you’ve received a bogus bad review, you can protest it. In some cases, Yelp and others will remove a review that is either in bad form or written by someone with another agenda. The best case scenario is to resolve a bad review and have the reviewer update the post.
Reporters will look up reviews and read them when they’re doing a story on you so it’s important to correct bad reviews, make sure you have some positive reviews and be prepared to address any bad reviews with reporters if they ask. (Don’t bring it up otherwise.)

XVII. **HOW TO HANDLE NEGATIVE COMMENTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

There are people who troll social media sites and news stories and post a variety of irrelevant comments and information. If there are posts on your social media sites that have nothing to do with your business or are crude in their comments, take them down and block that person. You should also report them to the social network. Be careful about removing negative comments that are aimed at you or your company, unless they are bogus. Social media is designed to be a conversation and, if you rush to remove comments, you may create a backlash. Often, negative comments will be corrected by other customers or patients who have had a great experience, love your product, etc. You will have to carefully weigh your approach and make sure you monitor all of your social media channels or have someone else monitoring them regularly.

As for comments that run beneath news stories, unless there is a relevant comment aimed at you or your company that you feel needs correcting, ignore the comments.

XVIII. **CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS**

Unfortunately, crisis presents another opportunity for media to call on you. All businesses are vulnerable to everything from miscommunication to intoxicated driving to embezzlement. Fired employees can take all types of action steps to take revenge. This includes social media channels and review sites. For this reason, make sure that you have multiple administrators running your social media, if you’re not doing it yourself. With multiple admins, you can remove the employee before they’re removed from employment and prevent a social media backlash. Many companies have learned this the hard way when an employee, who was also handling social media and was the sole administrators is suddenly let go and the company finds itself locked out of its own social media channels. It takes a lot of work and hours of calls and significant proof to regain your social media channels. Meanwhile the employee is free to post. For review sites, you can only go to the organization handling the reviews (Yelp, etc.) and report the incident. They typically quickly assess the situation and will get back to you.

For other crisis, you should have a good company crisis communications plan that you review regularly with your employees. Decide who, in a crisis, is allowed to speak with the media and figure out the best approach to handle press in the event of calls or media on-site. You should have your attorney review your initial plan and then update it when you hire new personnel.

XIX. **Press Release Templates** (see [www.audiology.org](http://www.audiology.org), search keywords “release templates.”)
XX. American Academy of Audiology Fact Sheets (see www.audiology.org, search keywords “fact sheets.”)