

Guide for GIS Day™ Outreach to Local Media





Exciting opportunities exist to get positive media coverage for your GIS Day event. Since most GIS Day events are local in scope, they carry clout in the local community. They often tell the story of how an organization is sharing exciting new technological developments with their community. They describe the benefits of GIS to the organization, its clients, and the surrounding world. We encourage you to publicize your GIS Day event via print media, radio stations, the Internet, and television stations. Remember that the public is often unaware of how much the GIS professional does to make cities, companies, research efforts, and other areas work effectively and intelligently. Now is your chance to make this happen.

For those who do not have experience working with the media or need a fast refresher, this is a quick guide on how to spark media interest in your news. There is also a press release template available on the GIS Day Web site to help get you started.

Prior to Getting Started

Assign one person in your organization to be the media coordinator/contact for press activities. This person will have the primary responsibility of dealing with reporters and their assignment editors. This will include pitching the story and/or event to the media as well as possible follow-up conversations.

Identifying Types of Media

For the purpose of this Media Guide, we are referring to newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations, and the Internet. They produce products designed to appeal to certain audiences.

Understanding What News Is

The audience of each news organization affects how news is defined. To the editor of a small community newspaper, a GIS Day event can be big news. Reporters gather information from many sources, selecting only the information they believe is of interest to their audience. Reaching out to the media is far easier than most people think. Though it does require time and planning, it can also be very worthwhile.

Getting Started

Gather information on the ways in which GIS is helping your organization and information on what prompted the development of this system. This information can be important when trying to convince the local media to carry your story. Decide what you want your community to know about your GIS and your GIS Day event. Make sure that people hear your message. A consistent message can give your plan much more power. Some tips for using the various media outlets follow this section.

- Develop a list of all possible local media outlets. You may want to talk to the editor of the local paper, the manager of the radio station, the producer of a cable television talk show, and/or the Webmaster of your community's home page before you decide which outlets will be the most effective for your message.



- After talking with key people at the various outlets, choose the ones you plan to use and develop a timeline for submission of stories, calendars, and other materials.
- Keep a file of good quotes and action photos. You never know when you might need them in a hurry. We live in the age of the sound bite and visual image. To be effective, you need to capture the attention of your readers or listeners in the first few seconds.

Once you make media contacts, you need to keep the connection alive. Stay in touch throughout the year with items of interest. Let them know that stories about GIS are newsworthy. An occasional thank you note to a reporter or a letter to the editor will not hurt either. Journalists like to know their work is read and/or heard and appreciated!

Newspaper Coverage

- There are many ways to get your story into the newspaper. The key is to be creative and persistent.
- Keep your story suggestions short and to the point. Use facts and figures, but don't forget the human interest angle.
- Use plain English. Avoid technical terms, acronyms, and jargon.
- Be prepared when you suggest a story. Have the information at hand. If you don't know the answer to a question, find out, but don't guess.
- Think visually. Suggest good photo opportunities whenever possible.

Story Ideas

- Prepare a story about your organization's use of GIS and how it has impacted the community. Send this write-up to the press, allowing for a lead time of one month. Use the story in your own agency publications as well. You can develop your own press release or base it on our press release template, which includes background information on GIS and GIS Day.
- Develop a list of facts and figures on the surprising and unique contributions of GIS innovation, and send it to local newspapers and agency/department newsletters.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper about the importance of what your agency is doing to improve service, share information with the community, improve decision making processes, operate with increased speed and efficiency, etc.
- Have your event listed in the calendars of newspapers, television and radio stations, and the local community home page.

Feature Articles

Even major metropolitan areas have a community newspaper that often is a more effective communication tool than a paper with a national focus. Read through several days' papers to see where your message can be expressed most effectively. Business, metro, and city sections all have good potential. It's possible the paper even has a technology or education section that could fit your event's focus. Look for the names of key reporters for each section. These are the people you want to contact. This is where it pays to do your homework. You can make a persuasive



case about why your story or event should be covered if you are armed with the facts. Whether you meet with reporters in person or over the phone, you'll need to convince them that the story you have to tell will warrant their time and their editorial space. Find out the best way to contact them with story information and their deadlines. The best story in the world won't do reporters any good if their deadline has passed.

Community Calendars

These are key places to list your event if you want the community to attend. The reason given most often for unsuccessful outreach efforts is lack of publicity. Find out what the deadlines are and if you can submit photos with your listing. Be sure your date, time, and location are clearly stated.

In-House Newsletters

In-house newsletters or monthly magazines by and for employees in your industry are often overlooked outreach opportunities. You can include an article that emphasizes the importance of GIS and your activities or highlights your event. Contact the editor about deadlines and potential story ideas.

Radio and Television Coverage

Local radio and TV stations are also good outlets for information. Again, it is important to do your homework. Does the station offer a community news segment or talk show that might offer an outlet for your message? Call the stations in your area and learn the names of the news director, the assignment editor, and the contact person for public service announcements. Is there a "drive-time" segment on a radio station that is willing to interview one or more of your employees about their accomplishments? Call and find out who you should contact about scheduling. Because GIS Day occurs during National Geography Awareness Week (sponsored by the National Geographic Society), it is possible that an education-focused show or local news program would be interested in your event. You may find that there is a station interested in doing a remote broadcast from your event site. Just as you do with the print media, you should start developing your electronic media contacts early.

Cable Television

Most cable TV companies must offer a public access station. Possibilities may exist for producing your own program by and about GIS organizations. Many public access programs are also more interested in promoting community activities. Many cable access channels have video bulletin boards. Ask if they will run a message about your GIS Day event.

Public Service Announcements

A public service announcement (PSA) is a short informational item that usually announces events or provides educational information of interest to the public. If a station agrees to use a PSA, it is at no cost to you. The station will usually schedule the PSA to run periodically for a week or other given period. Every station has different format requirements for the PSAs it will accept. Some stations take written PSAs and have their own announcers read them on air. Others require broadcast quality tape. Find out from the station which format it prefers. Again, if you



are advertising a special event, be sure the date, time, and location are correct. Your community access station may assist you in the development and recording of your PSA.

In-House Publicity

- Arrange for a photographer to be at your event. Give copies of the photos to your public affairs office and local newspapers.
- Publicize plans to your own employees through computer bulletin boards, posters, flyers, and tent cards.

Preparing for Media Interviews

- Have some handouts available for the press, preferably before and during the event. Ideas for these handouts can include a 5" x 7" photograph (preferably black and white) of some photogenic use of GIS within your company, a press release, and a short statement about GIS and your organization.
- For those who will be interviewed, remind them to be brief and concise in responding to a reporter's questions. This holds especially true with radio and TV reporters. While being interviewed, the subject should take five seconds (more if needed) after the reporter's question to think about the question and the best way to answer it. If the interviewer wants more information, he/she will ask another question. The reporter wants to get the best and most accurate story, so he/she will not mind waiting for an answer.
- Gaining familiarity with the reporter's style is also important. Review several articles or programs before the actual interview. You can help the interviewer know your representatives by sending copies of their biographies a few days before the scheduled interview. Remind your representatives not to try to fool the audience. If they do not know the answer to a question, have them say so and move on.
- When working with the local radio/TV talk shows, it may be beneficial to provide a list of questions and answers to the producers to give them a better understanding of what the story means and how it affects the local/national scene.

Conclusion

We have given you a lot of information about media relations. Keep in mind you don't have to do everything at once. If you haven't been involved with the media in the past, decide what you're comfortable doing. The important thing is to do something. Starting small is better than doing nothing!

Many of the ideas and concepts of this guide were obtained from the Public Employees Roundtable's "How to Celebrate Public Service Recognition Week."