

Glossary of Media Terms

Breaking News — A piece of news that was not expected and is of great importance. Breaking news does not always come in the form of a national crisis, or local tragedy; for example, breaking news might be extremely windy weather that is creating power outages and causing limbs to fall from trees — effecting or potentially harming residents.

“B” Roll — Video shots which illustrate a story. In a story about a new traffic safety program, the “B” roll might show parents and children at a child safety seat checkup having car seats inspected for proper installation.

Calendar Release — A modified news release designed to provide community calendar editors (TV, radio and print) basic information about an event — who, what, when, where.

Commercial — A paid-for announcement or advertisement. A radio or television sales message.

Editorial (Print and Broadcast) — An editorial is a reaction to another recent editorial, event or news story to make a point, state a fact or offer an opinion. An opinion editorial is generally called an op-ed because it refers to the page or pages opposite the editorial page. It is an area set aside for articles that provide an in-depth and often personal perspective on issues considered to be of current importance. An opinion of a notable public figure is often expressed in a “letter to the editor,” or guest opinion piece, that is sent to the editorial page editor.

Evergreen — The term evergreen describes an item/material that can be used on numerous occasions over a long period of time. Items associated with a special event are not likely to be evergreen since they focus on a once a year or one-time event. Items that are more general and do not need too much detail, such as a general brochure on your organization or program, are likely to have a substantial shelf life.

Hard News — Last-minute, fast breaking news. Usually about information that is previously unknown, such as a noteworthy event, controversy, the release of a study, etc.

Hook — A media hook is the key idea, event or individual that will capture the attention of the media when pitching. The hook may be conveyed through written material, such as the headline of a news release or in conversation during a follow up call.

Media Advisory/Media Alert —A brief, one-page, typed notice intended to notify the media of an upcoming “hard” news event, like a news conference. Advisories should be received (emailed or faxed depending on the preference of the media vehicle) two or three days prior to the event and should be followed up with a phone call the next day. The goal of an advisory is to get media or “crew coverage” at an event.

Press/News Conference —A structured event, with the intent of creating an opportunity to release news simultaneously to all media. A news conference is also appropriate when there is a visual story to tell.

Press/News Release — A news release offers more information than a media advisory, and reaches more contacts in less time than phone calls. A news release may precede a news event you want covered, make an announcement or provide a response or explanation on a current issue or recent story. If possible, limit news releases to one page and include the most important information in the first two paragraphs.

Public Service Announcement (PSA) - A public service announcement, or PSA, is essentially a radio, television or online spot (or web banner ad) that provides an important message to its target audience. PSAs are generally 10, 20, 30 or 60 seconds in length and submitted to TV and radio stations. Web banner ads can take any number of shapes and sizes, such as a square bottom ad or skyscraper. Radio PSAs can also be submitted in script format. PSAs can either be in the form of paid or donated airtime.

Soft News - Also called "human interest," "soft" news stories typically focus on individuals, organizations or families involved in something that may be of interest to the community.

Sound Bite - The brief portion of an interview which is actually used in a story. The average sound bite today is about 8 to 10 seconds in length. The sound bite is often presented as the essential kernel of information around which the story revolves.

Spot - Broadcast messages are often referred to as "spots." They can be either paid-for advertising or PSAs.

Talk Show (Radio and Television) - A talk show provides a structured format in which guests can present issues and concerns of interest to the community.

Tease - A brief news item in a commercial break which hints of an upcoming story "...Details at 11 p.m."

Underwriting - When an item is "underwritten," such as production or printing services, it has been paid for by an organization other than your agency, and the vendor providing the service or product. Underwriting occurs most often when your organization cannot afford what needs to be purchased, and the vendor providing the service/product cannot donate it. For example, your agency might approach a corporate partner to underwrite an event advertisement; in exchange you might offer to include the company name and/or their logo in the ad.

Video News Release – A video news release (VNR) is a pre-packaged story which includes video and narration that is then provided to TV stations for use on air. VNRs are generally costly to produce and are only appropriate in select circumstances.

Voice Over - We see pictures of an event, but hear the reporter or anchor's voice describing the event or activity. The B-roll is often collected from an event, such as a news conference, and a voice over added to narrate the story.