

OTHER WAYS TO ENGAGE THE MEDIA

A picture is worth a thousand words!

A media stunt is an event designed to attract media attention by providing a good photo opportunity. Media stunts are often used by experienced campaigners and even by politicians. The good news is anyone with a bit of creativity can stage a great media stunt!

An effective stunt doesn't necessarily require extensive props or an elaborate set-up. The objective is simply to provide a visual illustration which can be easily described in a sentence or understood in one glance at a photo.



Image: Ainhoa Goma/Oxfam

Brainstorm

Think big and be ambitious but also think about what is realistic and achievable. Take into consideration the resources that you have available to you. Think about the kind of props you could use. The more creative, or funny, your stunt is, the more likely you are to catch the media's attention.

Does it pass the 'no idea' test?

Try to make your message as simple and easy-to-understand as possible. Think about the kind of visual images that you could use to communicate this message. Would someone with little awareness of the issue understand the point you are trying to make? If not, how can you simplify the message while retaining its impact?

Timing is important

Try to ensure that you are not planning your stunt at a time when another major event is scheduled. The less competition for the media's attention, the better. You can even call the major television stations and newspapers in the lead up to your stunt and ask if they are aware of any major events on at the same time.

The best time to schedule a stunt if you want TV coverage, or press coverage the following day, is in the morning or early afternoon. Journalists have to return to the office to compile their stories and images by late afternoon.

Tell the media

It may seem obvious, but if you want the media to attend your stunt, you need to tell them about it! There are a number of ways to do this:

- Send a 'media alert' – this is simply a document which sets out the basic details of your event. It should state what the event is, when and where it is. The objective is to catch the media's attention with an interesting or witty headline.
- Alternatively, you can simply use a media release and include the details of your stunt in that (see template for [writing a media release](#)).
- Telephone key media organisations. Ask to speak to a journalist who might be assigned to your story and explain to them what you are doing and why.

Rent a crowd

It's not absolutely necessary but having a crowd can help to convey the message that there is broad community support for your issue. It can also help to create a sense of excitement which can boost the chances of the stunt being supported.

Become your own reporter

If the media don't turn up, it's time to become your own reporter! Take your own camera to the stunt so you can capture some good images. Write your own newspaper story and send it, together with some photos, to the media you are targeting. This may prompt them to do a story on the stunt even if they didn't cover it at the time. You can also use social media, like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, to publicise your stunt.

Using talkback radio to spread your message

There is no doubt that talkback radio provides a great way to influence individual and community attitudes and perceptions. It is also regularly monitored by politicians so it can provide a good way of getting your message across to political leaders.

Target your station

Try to match your issue with the most appropriate talkback show. As a general rule, morning and drive-time radio programs often include news and current affairs issues, and have a larger audience.

Do your research

Spend some time listening to the show before you call in. Does the host have a strong opinion on your issue? How long is each caller given to speak? How many calls does the host accept on a particular issue? Do they provide an opportunity for listeners to call in about an issue of their choosing?

Be prepared

Jot down a couple of key points that you want to make, or have a few relevant facts and figures in front of you. But be careful not to sound like you are reading a speech. Depending on the show, you might have anything between ten seconds and a couple of minutes on air, so you need to have clear, simple and interesting arguments with no more than three key points. Try to avoid jargon and acronyms.

Keep focused

You will often be put on hold for some time before the host gets to you. This is not the time to start daydreaming! Re-read your key points and be ready for the host to pick up your call.

Keep it personal

People are interested in hearing how an issue impacts you and them. Try to give personal or local examples.

Don't take the bait

It is often the job of the host to create controversy on his or her show. This may be done by making fun of, or even abusing, callers. If you experience this, try to keep a level head, a friendly tone and stick to your arguments.

Wrapping it up

Try to end your call on a positive note or a strong point. This will help to leave a lasting impression in the minds of listeners.