

Techlink Media Kit
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Do you have a great student project and you think it would make an interesting story? Then it would be great for the student to get some recognition for their work. Media coverage can be a great way to celebrate your student's achievements and raise your school's profile. You would also be contributing to lifting the profile of technology education. What do you do next?

Three easy steps to get your story covered by media

Many of you have found success with getting stories published in local media. You probably have contacts you prefer to deal with and a system of informing them of new projects. If you haven't had much experience the following is what works for me.

So what makes an interesting story?

- A positive theme
- A unique or new project
- A local story
- A celebration (student excellence, local/national/international prize winning, community help or support, school event)
- Timeliness (projects that are current and happening now)
- If you are unsure you can either ring the journalist anyway, and get their opinion, or contact me and we can discuss it.

Remember, schools are at an advantage with the media; people love reading about bright and happy students, and kids make great photos. Remember that national newspapers often have pages dedicated to education or students' successes. These journalists are a great starting point. Community newspapers, which can distribute between 10,000 and 130,000 copies weekly, also love stories from school, especially when they can get a great accompanying photo. National newspapers scan for interesting stories published in community papers.

Step 1 – Before you call a journalist- try writing a media release

A media release is basically a written summary of your project but with an interesting angle which will appeal to the journalist. Try giving your media release a strong headline / title followed by a short introduction which should tell the journalist what your project is about who is involved.

Layer the information so that the most interesting points are towards the top as journalists always want the most important details first. Your introduction should say why your story is interesting. If your story has a unique / punchy angle it will increase your chances of getting your project into the media.

The purpose of a media release is to inform the world of your news item therefore this should outline the 5 W's of the story- Who, What, Where, When and Why. Once you have provided these details you can then go into more detail. It is always a good idea to include some quotes from students and other key people who have been involved with the project in your media release.

Most important – include names and contact details for those relevant to the story so that the journalist can access more information (remember to get permission from your contacts to share their personal details).

The core question for any media will always be how is this story relevant to our readers/viewers/listeners? By preparing a media release, not only will you have something to send the journalist but it will also give you points to talk about when you contact a newspaper – having the information prepared helps you stay focused and avoid missing any key points. You should be able to answer any questions they have quickly and confidently.

Below is a template for writing a media release. This illustrates what information should go where and the proper formatting which is accepted by most media outlets.

Hint 1 – How would you tell the story to your mum/husband/wife/friend? It's the same principle when you tell the story to a journalist. Think about successfully conveying an interesting story idea.

Media release template

MEDIA RELEASE

DATE (in full) _____

Headline (in bold) _____

Introduction – hook /angle, 25 words, 5 W's and How

Paragraph 2 – build on previous paragraph, place important useful info, 25-30 words

Paragraph 3 – expand on previous points, include quotes, 25-30 words

Paragraph 4 – expand on previous points, key messages, 25-30 words

Paragraph 5 - expand on previous points, include quotes, 25-30 words

Paragraph 6 - expand on previous points, include quotes, 25-30 words

Paragraph 7 - key messages, wrap up release, end on positive note, 25-30 words

For more information please contact:

Name: _____

_____ Title: _____

_____ Organisation: _____

_____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

Notes for the editor: *(background info / context)*

ENDS

You may find it useful to have bullet points of the key points for your story before you contact the journalist. Here is an example of the notes I made before contacting The Christchurch Mail about a Westburn School story:

Logan Glasson, Year 8 Electronics student, Westburn School

- Excellent Technology student worked closely with Dept of Conservation (DOC)
- Designed a remote stoat trap monitor which monitors the status of stoat traps in remote locations
- Innovative
- Addressed a real relevant issue
- His innovation can make a real difference to the way DOC operate
- Logan's design has received an enthusiastic response from DOC personnel
- Lots of hard work. Trial and error creation
- Stoats kill 60% of all North Island brown Kiwis- that's 15,000 a year or 40 a day- and the population is halving every decade
- For his project Logan won the Best in Fair prize at the 2008 Canterbury Westland Regional Science Fair and gained second place in the 2008 Bright Sparks Competition for the 12 years and under category.

Contacts

- Logan Glasson (<Email and Phone number>)
- Vanessa Lai (<Email and Phone number>)

Hint 2 – Timeliness is everything so don't delay. A journalist may not be interested if your story happened yesterday. Contact local media early as possible, so the Chief Editor can diary it and do some planning. If a journalist is keen on the story they will want to see your students in action.

Step 2 – Give them a call

Telephone a journalist (if you have their contact details) or call the news desk. Briefly outline your story and ask who would be the best person to talk about it with. Let them know why you think it would make a great story. Education publications aside, it is likely that most of the readers/viewers/listeners will have a limited understanding of technology education. This is actually an advantage because media are continually surprised to find out how sophisticated our projects are.

Let them know that you are going to send some information through via an email. Most journalists receive a huge amount of emails each day so calling first helps bring attention to yours.

Step 3 – Email them your media release

Here is your chance to make sure they have all the relevant information. I like to mention in my email the conversation I have just had with the journalist so they remember who you are.

Then either attach your media release to the email or copy and paste it right into the body of the text. Always include your contact details at the end of your email in case the journalist needs to get a hold of you at a later date. If you have a photo or two that supports the information include those as attachments on the email.

The best tip I ever got about dealing with the media was from TVNZ Journalist. He said that you have to do as much of the work as you can for a journalist without them feeling like you are writing their story (they don't like that). What works best for me is to give them all the highlights and make it effortless for them to get more.

Example of an email following a phone call:

Hi Tracey

As we discussed, here is the media release on Logan Glasson's project, which I believe would make a great story for The Christchurch Mail. If you are interested in this story please let me know and I would be happy to provide any further information if needed.

MEDIA RELEASE

Student Invention could help New Zealand's Native Wildlife

Paparoa's Ranges could be stoat free, thanks to the hard work of local Westburn school student Logan Glasson. The Year 8 student worked closely with the Department of Conservation (DOC) and designed a remote stoat trap monitor which monitors the status of the traps in remote locations, as a part of his school Technology project.

Logan, whose design uses a radio transmitter to communicate to a base unit and signals whether the stoat traps are tripped, identified the need after helping his uncle clear stoat traps on the Moonlight track in the Paparoa Range. The traps are set every kilometre on the 9km trap line and Logan found that no stoats had been caught at the top of the line.

"It was a lot of walking for no reason," says Logan. "I thought, you must be able to invent something to go in each trap that communicated to a receiver at the bottom of the track whether it had caught a stoat or not."

The design has been received enthusiastically by DOC staff as stoats kill 60 per cent of all North Island brown Kiwis. This equates to more than 15,000 a year or 40 Kiwis a day and the population is halving every decade.

Logan investigated the radio signals and frequency involved with his design, explored various timing systems to turn the transmitters on and off as required and created a prototype operating program for his monitor.

"I have enjoyed making my pest trap monitors, and I think it is great that by using my enjoyment of computer programming and electronics I could help New Zealand's native wildlife," he says.

Logan won the Best in Fair prize at the 2008 Canterbury Westland Regional Science Fair and gained second place in the 2008 Bright Sparks Competition for the 12 years and under category.

Logan's work has been compiled into a case study and is published online at www.techlink.org.nz as a Student Showcase, which promotes and celebrates students' success in Technology.

For more information please contact: Vanessa Lai, Techlink Communications Officer, ph: 04 495 1647 or email: vlai@techlink.org.nz

To view the resulting article please visit: <http://www.techlink.org.nz/latest-news/resources/articles/2009-02-11-TheChristchurch-Mail-Stoat-Trap.jpg>

Key Points

- Developing a good relationship with the journalist can ‘grease the axels’ for further stories in the future. Even if they do not intend to publish your current story, ask if they mind if you call with other ideas in the future (they won’t mind at all because they need the story leads)
- Let them know about interesting projects, even before they are finished (if you are comfortable with that) because it gives them a chance to plan
- Also, invite them to any presentation or school celebration involving your class
- I have found that journalists appreciate these relationships as much as I do and clear communication lines make their job a lot easier.

I have included (below) some notes from a John Bishop media communication presentation I attended (<http://www.johnbishop.co.nz>). He passed on comments from Bernadette Courtney, Assistant Editor of The Dominion Post. Not all of them are relevant to the types of human interest stories that come out of schools but other points do require consideration.

Ms Courtney’s comments were:

What we (media) like

- Advance warning- it helps with planning of stories/features and allows us to have a better shot at proper coverage, not rushed reporting
- Access to the people we need to talk to
- If you have to invoke embargos ensure they are clear (embargo- ban the publication of (documents), as for security or copyright reasons; "embargoed publications")
- Basic information. It is amazing how many emails/faxes that come to our office have vital information missing
- Timing. News is news as it happens. Don’t send us a release 2 days after the event
- Change of plan. Let us know if a late release is coming and, more importantly, if one isn’t
- Let journalists/photographers do their job.

What we don’t like

- Being played off against other media
- Being told what to write and photograph
- Being given poor access to the relevant people
- Promises of ‘we will get back to you with that information’, and then you don’t
- Dropping media statements late at night with no warning
- Slipping information onto websites in the hope no one will notice

- Tactics to keep stuff out of the paper- we'll just go elsewhere and be more determined
- Expecting us to wait two hours on deadline for a statement to be typed, tell us down the phone or find someone who can
- Products plastered as background on photo opportunities- I have seen too many event photographs ditched because the sponsors name has been plastered everywhere

Promoting Technology in your community

Although gaining media coverage for your students' work is a great way to promote your school to a wide range of audiences at once, there are other ways you can celebrate your students' achievement, promote your school, and lift the profile of Technology in your local community. Below are a few alternatives that are just as effective in getting your message out to the public.

School Newsletter

If your school sends out a regular newsletter to parents try to get a few paragraphs in about a student's project or an update what's been happening in your Technology classes. If your school currently does not send out regular communication to parents, look into sending something out yourself or ask around to see if anyone else in your department is interested in contributing. It does not have to be a lengthy newsletter; it can be brief and conversational and can be sent out electronically.

Explore other media channels

Traditional media channels are not the only sources of news and information. Some of the more popular channels now tend to be online mediums such as social networking sites, blogs, and mini blogs. You can keep your audience up to date and publicise your students' achievements through the use of Facebook and Twitter and there are other blog sites out there that are free and easy to use. These channels allow you to get your story straight to the audience without having to deal with a journalist.

Get your students involved

Get your students involved with promoting their own work. Encourage your students to be enthusiastic and to promote their projects on their personal Facebook or Twitter page or write about what they are currently working on at school on their blog.

Informing your colleagues

It is also important to ensure that your peers and principal are aware of the impressive outcomes that your students produce. Techlink regularly produces a wide range of promotional materials, all of which are available from Techlink's Media Section online. To keep your colleagues well informed hand out copies of this material to them or try leaving out a few copies of Techlink's Technology brochures in the staff room or school library.