



REVIVE THE ROAR!

Special Edition

FSE Media Guide

Tips and Tricks handling the Media



Football Supporters Europe

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1. GETTING STARTED

Develop a media plan and building relationships

Make yourself available: Build a media profile for your organization, have a press spokesperson, clearly identify your organization by name, give contact details (address, e-mail and phone numbers). This should be the first step to close the gap between the media and your organization. Journalists do appreciate it if they can use your full and real name. It's also more professional and sends out a message of „we are open & not a secret society in this issue“. At least you need one spokesperson with his or her full name. There may be incidents when only forename or even false names are used, journalists will be accommodating here, but anyway it's good not to feed into the perception of paranoid and secretive ultras.

shouldn't confirm negative stereotypes for your organization to be seen as legitimate.

Divide the work: Identify the experts within your organisation/group. They should then be responsible for answering questions about their specialist area.

Building contacts: Identify journalists you would like to work with and keep a contact list of them. Research journalists and the type of opinion or articles they usually publish. Also try to pick out the journalists you trust – there will always be some that will use the information you give in a negative way. Remember that you are not obliged to cooperate with journalists who proved not to be trusted. In fact, having a „black list“ is almost inevitable.

Media Observation: Have a look how certain media cover the topics you might have to say something about it. Don't hesitate to write to journalists or newspapers if they got something wrong. Helping them correct or avoid mistakes could build a better relationship. Point out the hypocrisy of media coverage of fans, for example in using pictures of pyrotechnics in adverts for sports programme while condemning fireworks in the same program. But remember to be rational and calm as an aggressive response to media releases may cause further complications. Be brief, point out facts, don't show negative emotions and respect your recipient even if you think he published a lie.

Understanding the pressures on a journalist: Essentially, a journalist is the human face of a big beast that is

Why do we care about the media?

Everywhere across Europe, media have a massive influence on the public perception of football supporters as a whole. Many people take the articles/news in media for granted. Positive activities of fans hardly find any platform in the media, whilst negative and sensational reports on fans dominate. The only way to change this is to know how to work with media, and how to interest them in your activities. But keep in mind that as fans we are not the only ones mistreated or underrepresented in mass media. People like reading sensationalist news so journalists produce them. It happens to representatives of all sorts of social groups and occupations. Once you know the mechanisms, you may have a say in how you're represented.

Introduction

You'll see them at many games: Banners in stadiums slugging off newspapers, journalists or TV-stations for their often unfair, one-sided and over-sensationalized coverage of fans, supporters' groups or their actions. In many cases the corresponding article is poor but sometimes the question is: Could an article like that have been avoided? Is it really just a terrible newspaper? Was it a journalist who hates your group? Or did the journalist just have no clue what he/she was writing about? Was a sensation all he/she cared about? Did he/she ask for information but received no reply? Could you have handled the contact (if there was one) with the journalist in a better way? Arguably there are loads of journalists out there who neither care about supporters nor have a clue about fans and their culture at all.

But remember: Not every journalist is your enemy. In fact, many journalists actually know what they are talking about and there are even some of them who have stood on the same terraces as you for years. With this guide we want to help you to find a way of handling media for your group and to avoid common mistakes made by fans while dealing with journalists.



Press at work at Arsenal (credit flickr.com/ksa)



Press conference with fans and delegates from the football authorities after the first german fans congress (credit stadionwelt.de)

Know your stuff: Work out what kind of message you want to publish, what image you want to have, how to „sell“ your organization to the media; Keep in mind that at first contact media representatives may picture you or your group via stereotypes concerning hooligans. Your representative

Basic rules for interviews

- **Agree on Conditions**

Make sure that the journalist only uses information you want him/her to share publicly. Tell him/her directly if an information is "on" (free for use) or "off" (only for his background information) the record. Make sure you have a clear agreement when "on the record" starts. Establishing "off the record" conversations represents a good opportunity to get to know the journalist a bit better.

- **Approve Quotes**

Unless the piece you're about being interviewed on does focus on you or your group entirely the journalist will probably only use one or two short quotes. If in doubt, say that you want to see the quotes in the article before it's being printed. As these quotes could set the overall tone of the piece, don't hesitate to ask to cross check the quotes he/she is going to print. If this isn't possible due to deadlines it might be better to send them only a fairly short quote or just talk for one or two sentences, "on the record" if you're uncomfortable with how your views might be portrayed.

- **Live or Pre-Record**

When recording live don't stress, breathe, visualize that the journalist is one of your colleagues, who asks you about the story, that will help you relax a bit. If the interview is pre-recorded remember that you can always make a mistake and ask to record it again. Always remember to use the off-the-record rule in order to break barriers and create a trustful relationship with the journalist but also keep in mind that it should be very clear when on-the-record statements start.



Demonstration against sensationalized media coverage. (Credit: Hana Kazuo)

demanding stories behind it. As papers have been losing pages by the week and the competition through online media is pretty tough, stories have to go out quicker than ever before. This often means less features or in depth pieces. News stories are what sells papers, so journalists are under increasing pressure to find these now. It's an development we don't have to agree with, but should at least understand.

Reach out to your club: Get in touch with your club's press office. Having a good relationship with your own club press officer will prove helpful, as journalists will come to them in the first place if there has been trouble involving fans. He will (given good relations) put them in touch with you, maybe the club will even defend its own fans.

GOOD PRACTICE

✓ When in Spring 2012 police in Braunschweig started to put pictures online of awayfans from Düsseldorf holding pyros to search for them, many newspapers, mainly of the yellow press, picked this up and also published these pictures. The press office of the club Fortuna Düsseldorf immediately released a statement claiming to be "irritated" by the line of action of Braunschweig police.

- **Timing**

The timing issue is a critical factor in media: timeline and deadline are the two most important words for a journalist, it's like their mantra. Remember that what is a good story today, might be of no interest tomorrow. Always act quickly and be proactive as much as possible. That means that you should try to react fast, if there has been some sort of problem amongst the fans at a game – even if you only can say that you need to investigate the incidence more thoroughly.

- **You are the expert**

Remember that for journalists you are the expert. Most of them are interested in getting access to responsible fans in order to get the story right. Have in mind that a journalist cannot be an expert on everything, so be patient and don't hesitate to explain something twice, if you have the impression that the journalist didn't get your point. Fans like you can play a significant role in helping him/her understand issues.

2. DIFFERENT SCENARIOS - DIFFERENT STRATEGIES

Pitching to the media (proactive)

Try to get your work and viewpoints into the media. Don't wait until journalists decide to do a piece about your work, try to offer them something. Be it through press releases or a direct approach through your established media contacts.

- **Use your contacts:** if you have established a good relationship with some journalists it's easier to pitch stories and you can easier get your message in the media. As better you know journalists the better you'll know whom to approach for a certain story.

- **Get involved in discussions:** if there's some discussion going on about the area you're working in, if there's a meeting where things will be decided which could affect you and your work: Say something about it. Whenever it feels necessary, do a press release, get your views along via your website or other channels (see below).

Remember that if you don't show your point of view, it may not be shown at all.

- **Choose your media:** Local or national media? Not always you will need the national media. Sometimes a story is much more interesting for local ones, and you have bigger opportunity to get through with your story. Remember that people tend to trust their local media more.

- **Offer something:** Don't forget to mention the exclusivity of your story to that media, as it is something media are always on the lookout. If doing a press release, always include a quote from one of your spokespersons. Offer quality: quotes, stories, advices, contacts!

- **Know your media:** The different papers and channels are interested in different stories – so pitch the right stories to the right media (omnibus vs. tabloid)

- **Understand your role:** As you have your own agenda in some cases journalists might have also theirs. So try to find out

ALARM! - About Crisis management

Every now and then, there will be an incident happening at your club, which needs an immediate response. That can be quite anything: There has been trouble on the terraces, fireworks were thrown, offensive banners been on display. Now your phone is ringing non-stop and every single journalist in the country seems to be on your back. Just remember:

Don't Panic

Stay calm – breathe and identify your best people;

Focus

Consider all your options but act decisively. Remember: Your initial statement is the heart of everything, so be sure about you come up with. In doubt: Don't worsen the situation!

In some cases silence might be gold!

Be transparent

A good journalist will find out if you are telling a lie. But remember: you can be selective with the truths you tell!

Get Help

If you're unsure how to handle a delicate situation, seek external advice and help. Get in touch with your nationwide fans' organisation, if there is one, get in touch with FSE, as we might be able to help as well. If you're in need of legal advice, get in touch with us at FSE as well as we're setting up a fan lawyer network and will be able to put you in touch with lawyers in your country.



Polish Fans at Wembley

what role you are playing in a story before making any comments. Is it about the work you're doing or about something not directly related to you at all? Does it focus on the positive side of fan culture or are fans to be shown in a negative way?

GOOD PRACTICE: Pyro campaigns

✓ In Norway, Austria and Germany several campaigns for the legalisation and the safe use of pyrotechnics were able to get quite a lot coverage in the media which helped to influence public opinion and prompt the authorities to an reaction.

Handling the media (Reactive)

Way more often than you'll be able to place a story in the media, you're going to be approached by journalists who want to find out something about your organisation or want to interview you on a topic they think you might have something interesting to say about.



Sticker against the Sun (Credit: <http://www.jihad.com/36593372@M4>)

• **Be accessible:** Journalists always use the sources that are easy to get in contact with the most. So make sure one of your

3. DOING YOUR THING

Running your own media:

- **Organise your website:** Your homepage is the centerpiece of your communication work. So make sure that all your relevant information is on there. All topics you want to cover, all contacts who are responsible for the different areas of work. Try to run a new story on your website at least every couple of days.
- **Ensure regular information about your work:** Think about sending out e-bulletin/email loops on regular basis. Do press releases on important occasions/decisions.
- **Tips for press releases:** When sending out a press release or other things via email always use the bcc function. It's very interesting to see whom you are mailing but it's also very unprofessional. Do a spell check on your texts, better yet let someone who has experience with writing do a proof reading. You don't need to adopt official jargon, just the opposite, it's good to show where you come from. But try to avoid "insider language" and too much ultra talk. Always include one or two quotes from your spokespersons to be used by the press.
- **Make use of social media:** Facebook, Twitter, blogs, forums. Agree on an mutual strategy for all people managing the different accounts. Who posts where? What goes online and when? How often will there be updates?
- **Do your own fan magazine or blog!** Some of the biggest and most influential football magazines in several countries (for example When Saturday Comes or 11 Freunde) started out as ordinary fanzines.



Fans of 1860 Munich distributing their fanzine 'Löwenmüll' (Credit: Löwenfans gegen Rechts)

- **Try to establish a counter publicity:**

Be it via your own fanzines, articles you write for newspapers or through your own Youtube channel. It's a great method to show your side of the story. If your voice gains recognition, you will be a free source of insight for journalists who will quote your words. It's very comfortable for them to have an interesting and renowned comment to place in an article so your work may prove priceless.

GOOD PRACTICE: Fansmedia

✓ In Germany and Switzerland there was a website for a couple of years called fansmedia.org. People from loads of different fan groups used it to put their version of incidents at games online, the version many journalists wouldn't write because they either weren't there or didn't bother to get wider picture apart from the official police statement.



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