Have you ever wondered how stories appear in the local newspaper, television news program, or even on the radio? Often times, it is a person just like you or I sending information to the media alerting them to what is going on.

How wonderful it would be if more of the stories that were produced spoke about the positive things that are happening all around us. How many positive things can you think of that are happening right in your church, or things that your church is doing for its local community?

In the past, when I have shared with reporters story ideas about the Seventh-day Adventist Church, some have responded “What is a Seventh-day Adventist?” These news stories that they are developing are a form of witnessing to many who for the first time, would be learning about the Seventh-day Adventist Church through a news story. WOW. What a powerful witnessing tool!

In the book *Evangelism*, Ellen G. White said, “Let every worker in the Master’s vineyard study, plan, devise methods to reach the people where they are. We must do something out of the common course of things. We must arrest the attention.” I believe that the power of the news story can and will “arrest” the attention of the public and witness.

Would you like to learn how to witness in this way? Here are seven steps that will help you to share story ideas with your local media.

1. **Identify YourMedium**

   Where will you try to have your story reported? Will it be the local daily newspaper, a local radio station, or a local television news station? Each of these entities...
has a different reporting style, and you must understand the types of stories they report on before you try to get them to report on a story.

**Homework:** Watch your local news station’s news program (morning, noon, evening, or night), read your local daily paper, and listen to your local radio station’s programming. Determine what types of stories they cover. Do you think you have a story of interest?

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**2. CONSIDER YOUR STORY**

Think about the story you would like to see reported about on the television news station, printed in the local newspaper, or reported on the local radio station. Will it be religion, health, education, youth, etc.? All of these are areas that the Seventh-day Adventist Church can speak to.

**Homework:** Schedule some time to speak to the ministry leaders of your church. Find out if the things being done in their ministry are newsworthy. Here are some examples of what types of stories may be interesting to your local media:

- Adventist Community Services being active in the local community
- Church providing unique needs based programming (i.e. cooking classes, health fair, financial seminar, or famous guest speaker)
- Mission or service trip taken by members
- Awards given by church to local community service leaders (police, fire, etc.)

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**3. OUTLINE SELLING POINTS**

Remember, there are three main things that determine newsworthiness or news appeal. These things will help you decide what angle you will spin the story on. Take, for instance, the 2005 Pathfinder Camporee in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Below is what I used to help “sell” the story to the local Oshkosh media:

**Impact** – “The largest camping extravaganza in the Adventist Church’s history.”

**Oddity** – “The Pathfinders will try to break the Guinness World Record for the most teeth brushed simultaneously.”

**Proximity** – “The North American Division president, who is a native of Wisconsin, will be speaking during one of the nights at the Camporee.

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**4. SELECT EXPERTS**

If the media decides that your story idea will be one they want to pursue, you will need to have people in mind for them to interview. Identify those who can be quoted in the story. This may require a “pre-interview” by yourself to ensure that the person(s) you selected will be comfortable during an interview.

**Homework:** Since you know what story idea you are sending to the media, develop questions that you could ask your expert. You can also develop message points, i.e. canned statements about your organization. Listed below is a statement about the Seventh-day Adventist Church:

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a mainstream Protestant church with approximately 14 million members worldwide which includes more than 1 million members in North America. The Seventh-day Adventist Church seeks to enhance quality of life for people everywhere and to let people know that Jesus is coming again soon.

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**5. WRITE THE PRESS RELEASE**

Determine the timing that you will contact the media and whether your story idea deserves a media advisory (a very brief “announcement” of the event to the media/public that arouses their curiosity). This is always followed by a press release, a more indepth description of the event that could be used by a newspaper as a stand-alone story, and/or a press kit. Be certain to use quotes from your “experts” that will highlight the angles you are using to support the story. Get all of your selling points in the story while maintaining the theme.

**Homework:** Prior to writing the release, decide what type of reporter would want to receive your release. Even though you represent a religious organization (your local church), there are various reporters or producers that
track of when you place your calls. While at the 2005 Oshkosh Camporee, I learned the following while keeping my phone log: Never call to pitch stories to a television stations during busy times. This would be during 9-10 a.m., as well as the hour right before any of the newscasts. Production meetings for the day usually take place around 9-10 a.m. Phone call pitches worked best when I had their undivided attention.

7. PERSISTENCE

Remember the saying, “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again?” This can be true in your quest for pitching stories to the media. Reporters are often busy on other stories and may not have been “appropriately” focused on your conversation the first or second time around. Call them again and again, if necessary! Sometimes the third time is the charm but it is also helpful to look for other writers in the newsroom who may be more interested than the one you spoke with earlier.

SAYING THANK YOU

At this point hopefully you have gotten the media to see that your story idea is newsworthy, and you are reading the results in the local newspaper, watching the results on your local news station, or listening to a story on your local radio. Be sure to send the reporter, producer, or editor that you worked with a thank you letter. Let him/her know that you are appreciative of his/her efforts and that you would like to sit and speak with him/her more about future story ideas.

Homework: Now that you have your foot in the door, have more story ideas ready to send to your new media contact. Keep in contact with the reporter so that you maintain a healthy relationship.

George Johnson Jr. writes from Baltimore, Md. He works for the NAD as the communication director.
Boxes and Arrows

Hybrid story forms go beyond news and features

“When you have news, report it,” advises Roy Peter Clark, Poynter Institute senior scholar. “When you have a story, tell it.”

But what if you have both?

Some stories don’t fit into the traditional boxes and triangles of the inverted pyramid news structure or the feature-style story structure. That’s where hybrid story structures come in.

I’ve noticed one new structure in press releases recently. It has a feature head and an inverted pyramid tail. The beauty of this beast is that it brings the story to life at the top with a feature lead, nut graph, and background section. Then, once it’s attracted the reader’s attention and established the story, it delivers the details in a hierarchical, most-important-to-least-important body.

Use it when you have a story that would benefit from a feature lead but that needs a just-the-facts-ma’am resolution.

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Color Psychology—What Does Yellow Say?

“Follow the yellow brick road ...”—Dorothy in the “Wizard of Oz”

As the color of the sun, yellow owns the attributes of heat, vitality, energy, and light. This extroverted color is confident, friendly, warm, and inspires the imagination. Yellow is an important color in human development, as one of the most attractive colors to an infant’s eye. It is also the color that is most visible, heightens awareness, and creates clarity. Because of its ability to attract attention, yellow is often used in signage, point of purchase displays, and packaging.

Consider the meaning of various shades of yellow as you select colors to support your messages:

• Light yellow: cheering, happy, soft, sunny, warming, sweet, easy, pleasing
• Bright yellow: illuminating, joyful, hot, lively, friendly, energetic, innovative, surprising, caution (cowardice, betrayal, hazard)
• Golden yellow: nourishing, buttery, tasty, sun-baked, hospitable, comfort
• Amber: jewelry, multi-cultural, mellow, abundant, original, autumn
• Metallic gold: rich, glowing, intuitive, luxurious, opulent, expensive, radiant, valuable

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