

... 1 *Blow your own trumpet*

1.1 *Some key points to remember*

When you are working out what to say to your local community about Scouting you will find it helpful to consider the following points:

- Many of the things your Group does as part of its normal programme have the potential to be positive and newsworthy. Raising money for other local charities, investing new Members in unusual places or going camping can all be good stories given the right treatment.
- With some simple thought and preparation, you can use the media to give your Group a higher local profile.
- In order to raise your profile you need to tell the media what you are doing. They are not psychic!
- Local newspapers and radio always need material to fill column inches and airtime. They will be interested in what you have to offer if it is presented positively and professionally.

1.2 *The two point test*

Try this simple two point test. Which of the two do you think is the most effective approach?

▶ *Point one*

You have just invested two new Members into a recently formed District Explorer Scout Unit. The local newspaper was invited along together with a photographer. The week before the event the Explorer Scout Leader made sure everyone was well groomed and correctly turned out in the right uniform. The next week a large picture appears in the local paper of the Leader and Unit's Members making the Scout Sign and shaking hands in the Scout hut.

▶ *Point two*

You have invested two new Members into the Unit. You were spending the weekend in Derbyshire and decided to invest them 40ft underground in a pothole. You captured the event on camera. When you got back from the trip you sent the picture and a press release to the local paper. The picture appears in the local paper with a short story.

See sections 2 and 3 for advice on how to take newsworthy pictures and write a press release.

Which newspaper article do you think is best? And which story is more likely to attract young people into the 14 to 25 age range?

Hardly a tough decision and yet both approaches to getting press coverage are regularly taken. The approach described in point one confirms what everyone thinks they know about Scouting. Point two shows what Scouting is really about. With a bit of preparation you can see how easy it is to turn a story around.

1.3 *Sad but true*

By looking at the kind of press cuttings Scouting generates, we know we can get better quality coverage. On average, Scouting gets 150,000 thousand newspaper mentions each year. This amounts to many more than any other comparable youth organisation, but nothing like as much as we deserve. Of this coverage approximately:

- 15% is really positive and upbeat and projects an image of Scouting as a positive dynamic organisation that is fun to be part of
- 70% projects a weak profile and focuses on naff images of ceremonies, badge presentations in Scout headquarters and parades
- 15% is truly terrible and does nothing to project Scouting as a positive forward thinking youth Movement that's fun to be part of. It simply reinforces traditional stereotypes.

1.4 *And we wonder why we have a problem!*

As you can see we do get coverage in the media but the vast majority of it is weak. Too often, we are seen as an organisation that only presents badges and goes on parades.

Currently three things are happening:

1. Groups, Districts, Counties/Areas and Headquarters do not use the media often enough to tell people about what Scouting achieves and how we do it.
2. When we do get coverage a weak image is projected.
3. Sometimes we get it right and get a great splash but this does not happen regularly.

In a MORI survey carried out in the late 90's, half of those surveyed told us that although they thought Scouting was a good thing, they actually knew little about its aims and objectives. This information was underlined by more recent work carried out to support the implementation of the new Programme. The same survey work told us that 58% of people lacked interest in joining us because they knew little about what Scouting did. The reason for this is that clearly we are not telling enough people what we do in a positive or active enough manner.

1.5 So what can we do to sort things out?

We have already said that many of the things a Group does as part of its regular programme of activities are newsworthy. The headlines listed below show the sorts of positive stories you can create.

"Scouting awards for top talent"

"Successful Scouting"

"Recruits welcome as Scouts branch out"

"Scouts adopt new image"

*"Nearly a century after it was founded -
Scouting keeps getting stronger"*

"Scouts prepare for trip of a lifetime"

"Dedication takes Scout forward"

"Skillful Scouts latest Award"

"Scouts prepare for 21st Century"

"Scouting makes a difference"

"Scouts in Worldwide Marathon"

"First Explorer Scout invested"

A good way to start generating positive news about your Group is to compile a list of activities that the Group has been involved in the last year. Quote these when you work with the local press or broadcast media. You won't need all the facts every time you generate a press release, but you will need something to work from. You can mix and match what you use but remember to keep your list up to date.

For example you could compile facts on:

- how many nights your Cub Scouts, Scouts, and Explorer Scouts spent under canvas in the last year
- how many badges in total, the youth Members gained in the last year
- were any overseas expeditions undertaken
- how much money you raised for local charities
- the list of different activities undertaken in the last year (camping, climbing, sailing, abseiling, archery etc.)
- how many Members there are in the Group
- how many years the Group has been in existence
- the unusual places Members have been invested
- how many District, County/Area, national or international camps the Group has attended
- co-education (are you open to girls and boys?)
- how people can join!