



# PITCHING YOURSELF TO MEDIA

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4 tips to garner publicity



2020 was a make-or-break year for many businesses and organizations, and 2021 may see even more fallout from a financially devastating year.

Now, more than ever, publicity is essential to the success of your camp. ►



Before 2020, I would have started this article by saying that publicity is an affordable, long-lasting way to reach your audience. By definition, publicity is “earned media,” which means that no money is exchanged for the media outlet to cover the story.

Advertising, banner ads and advertorial opportunities are “paid media,” where the information is only available for payment and lasts for an agreed amount of time.

Earned media coverage in a magazine, website, podcast or newspaper has no time limit and will be searchable for years to come.

Often, publicity also offers you the opportunity to reach a wider audience than what you could have targeted with paid advertising. And best of all, publicity can help you build lasting relationships with not only the people who attend your camp, but also with media outlets in your area.

Now, in 2021, I submit that earned media is essential to the success and growth of your camp. People aren’t in their cars as often as they were before, so billboards are reaching a smaller audience. Many are working from home, so they are relying on their computers and social media for their preferred source of news. Kids are attending virtual classes, taking away a marketing opportunity at local Christian schools. Churches are limited in their gatherings, so reaching families via youth groups, bulletins, posters, etc. is not as viable.

It’s important to remember that the pandemic and social distancing have made camps essential to the health and well-being of our communities as we move forward. Communicating this fact in fresh, new ways is more important than ever before.

So how do you get the media’s attention?

- Know your story.
- Know your journalists.
- Become the expert.
- Give journalists an experience.

## 1. Know your story

You are one of your camp’s best assets. You see lives changed firsthand. You know the importance of camp. You see opportunities. You know what your camp has to offer. Now you just need to know how to share that narrative in a short, concise way.

Think back to when you were in school and you learned the rules of information gathering: who, what, where, when, why and how.

As a public relations consultant, I always recommend that clients write the answer to these questions before anything else.

**Who** is your camp for? Who are the incredible people that make your camp experience great? Why are the people on your team passionate about camping?

**What** are the types of camps that you offer? What makes your camp different? Is your camp just for kids, or do you do family events as well?

**Where** is your location? What about your location makes your camp special?

**When** does your camp take place? Year-round? Just during the summer? Do you offer winter opportunities? Are you offering any special camps to help kids who are needing a pandemic escape?

**Why** is camp important? Why does your camp exist? Why do you personally do what you do?

**How** can people get more information? How can they get involved?

After you come up with your answers, create a list of key interview questions that you would like to be asked by a journalist. Then, answer those questions. Write out the answers. Ask a co-worker to ask you the questions so you can practice answering the questions. Know your message so you can concisely tell the story of your camp.

Keep in mind, many interviews are only five to 10 minutes long, and if you’re on live radio, you need to be precise in your words. No “ums”! Get right to the point of why your camp is important and why your camp is special!

I also recommend that you write out longer answers to these questions and keep them in a document or on your website so your new media friends can have access to the full story of what makes your camp exceptional. ►

Consider writing a series of opinion articles for your local newspapers. One article could be on the importance of camp. One could share a story on how your camp helped kids during the pandemic. Another could be how camping can help the mental health of teens or families.



Photo courtesy of Forest Springs Camp and Conference Center



## Interview Basics

### *4 simple tips to make your interviews shine*

1. If your interview is on radio or podcast, stand up! Your voice will sound brighter and more positive.
2. If your interview is on video, make sure you have a glass of water handy. If you need a second to think through an answer, take a drink.
3. Practice in front of a mirror or a camera. Remind yourself to smile and to relax. (Even on a radio or podcast interview, a smile can be heard!)
4. Have fun with interviews! If you're enjoying it, the people listening will know.

HEMLOCK GROVE  
SNOWSHOE TRAIL



## 2. Know your journalists

Think about your audience. Are you attracting families from 10 miles or 200 miles away? What are the larger newspapers in your area? Who are the talk show hosts that have local shows in your area? Are there influential bloggers in your area that reach families or home-school groups?

Make a list of the outlets you want to target, and then find the appropriate people at each outlet.

I can't stress this enough: Unless you have a personal relationship with the person at your newspaper who covers state politics, that is not the appropriate person to pitch your story.

Find journalists who cover religion, local interests, travel, education or health, and share your story with those people. Think about what types of stories they write. A local-interest writer may want to pursue a story on a camper who started a nonprofit after attending your camp. A sports reporter may be interested in talking about a specific week at your camp that is focused on a sport or discipline. Health writers may want to do a story on how camps help support the mental health of their attendees. Education reporters may cover home-school groups that use your camp for nature classes.

Due to COVID and work-from-home guidelines, many of these journalists are not in the office as before, so I recommend reaching out via email. Most reporters have their email address listed in their stories or on the outlet's website. If you don't hear back, feel free to leave a quick message and then resend your email.

At radio stations, call the general number and ask to speak with the producer of the show you are interested in. Again, you'll likely need to leave a message since so many people are working remotely. Make sure you follow up with an email.

It's also key that you respect the outlets. If they say no, don't take it personally. They may not be interested in your story right now, and that's OK! I recommend that you call no more than twice, and please don't send more than two or three emails sharing your story. When you reach out, it may be a fundraising week for the outlet. The writer may have a family emergency. They may be doing a series on some other topic that is consuming all of their resources. But if you are respectful of their time and share a compelling story, I guarantee the journalist will keep your contact information handy for the next time they are working on a camp story.

No luck? Consider writing a series of opinion articles for your local newspapers. One article could be on the importance of camp. One could share a story on how your camp helped kids during the pandemic. Another could be how camping can help the mental health of teens or families. These articles are typically no more than 200 words, but can be a great way for you to tell your own story, in your own words. The opinion section should have specific information on how their editors would like you to submit a story. ►

Since many journalists have been working from home for several months, I think most would jump at the opportunity to get out of the house and have a safe, socially-distanced experience outside of their home office. Invite them (and their kids) to experience your camp firsthand.





Photo courtesy of SAMBICA

This year, more than ever, we understand just how important camp is in the lives of families. Don't keep these stories to yourself! Your story ideas could be an incredible help to a journalist who is desperate for positive story ideas. Your message could give hope to a struggling family.

### 3. Become the expert

Another angle to reach your local media is for you to become their go-to expert for all things camp. Instead of pitching the story, pitch yourself.

Simply send an email introducing yourself, and let them know that you are willing to help them with any stories they may write in the future. You may even want to bullet point leading story ideas that could make for compelling articles:

“With 20 years of experience working at camps under my belt, and in my current role as executive director at Camp Sunshine, I have a wealth of experience in topics such as:

- How camping has a positive impact on the mental health of its attendees.
- How being in nature instantly reduces stress levels.
- The long-term benefits of camp on a teen’s health.
- How nature offers the best kind of self-care for all ages.
- Stories of at-risk kids who had a life-changing experience at camp.
- Job opportunities, and how camping has a positive economic impact.
- How families that camp together, stay together.”

Also, note that after a positive interview, many journalists and radio personalities may ask to keep your contact information on file so you can be their contact when they need a quick, expert opinion regarding topics related to camp.

### 4. Give journalists an experience

Since many journalists have been working from home for several months, I think most would jump at the opportunity to get out of the house and have a safe, socially-distanced experience outside of their home office. Invite them (and their kids) to experience your camp firsthand.

Bring out their inner child. Don’t just show them your ropes course, let them try out the ropes course. Don’t just walk through the cafeteria, offer them a sandwich, s’mores or at least a really good cup of coffee. Build a campfire. Maybe even offer them a few minutes of quiet time on a kayak so they can enjoy being in nature. If this journalist has been juggling their career with distance-learning kids, this opportunity could help the mental health of your media contact as well.

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This year, more than ever, we understand just how important camp is in the lives of families. Don’t keep these stories to yourself! Your story ideas could be an incredible help to a journalist who is desperate for positive story ideas. Your message could give hope to a struggling family. Your camp could be the answer for a kid struggling with social-distancing.

Publicity will always be one of a camp’s best assets, but for 2021, your camp could be a key asset for a media outlet as well. ■



*Lori Heiselman grew up waiting not-so-patiently to attend and work at Camp Berreman and Camp Maranatha (Ramsey, Illinois), and worked at Camp Burton (Burton, Ohio) while attending college. Now Lori runs Biscuit Media Group, a boutique PR firm specializing in publicity for faith and family entertainment. Lori lives in the woods outside of Nashville, Tennessee, drinking too much coffee and spending time with her amazing husband and three very spoiled dogs.*