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An invitation is extended to all those involved in the field of animal production to apply for membership of the New Zealand Society of Animal Production at our website www.nzsap.org.nz

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How to get an article published in print media

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INTRODUCTION

Getting an article published in a newspaper is simple. Your success will hinge on four factors: exclusivity, topic, timing and relationships.

Exclusivity

Nothing excites a journalist (or an editor) like exclusivity. It should be regarded very highly in your arsenal of bargaining chips when you start the process of getting an article published in any newspaper. The same applies to radio or television.

There are levels of exclusivity and there are ways to maximise the impact of your article or idea. I'm not suggesting you attempt to seek money in exchange for your involvement in the article, but you can maximise its impact and uptake by offering a number of different papers their own exclusive angle.

Press conferences are common in Wellington when politicians are clamouring for votes in the lead-up to an election. More common elsewhere in the country, and certainly in rural media circles, are news briefings. These involve gathering journalists together, giving them background on the topic and then offering each one the chance to interview those involved on a one-on-one basis. In this way, each journalist and newspaper comes out with their own story, their own angle and their pride intact. Often, all it takes to get most journalists appearing is the promise of good food and beverage.

Topic

There are obvious benefits in being able to target newspapers with articles or ideas that suit their slot in the market. I have the utmost respect for daily newspaper journalists, but generally, they know little about agriculture. This is a perennial problem, also noted by Wilson (1977). It's unlikely to improve in the short-term in spite of the 'purple patch' farmers are currently experiencing. Indeed, the Guild of Agricultural Journalists and Communicators is currently investigating opportunities for encouraging university students to consider agricultural journalism as a career. I can speak from experience when I say journalists with good knowledge of farming and writing skills are almost impossible to find.

Daily newspaper editors will have a totally different set of demographics in mind when they consider the content of each edition. Generally, they aim at urban, middle New Zealand. Daily newspaper editors and journalists tend to be more interested in oddities like twin calves or lambs born out of season.

Rural newspaper editors and journalists are more likely to focus on detailed research breakthroughs.

The choice for the scientist should be obvious. Pick your newspaper and your journalist carefully and be prepared to help in whatever way you can. If you want a good job, make it as easy as possible for the journalist.

Provide some background information to help answer complex questions. I don't know any journalist who will turn down information.

Timing

Timing is closely linked to exclusivity. It is vital that you consider the timing of releasing information or your ideas. Monday is always a good day to release news or stage press conferences because journalists are often more available. The point is, be aware of the constraints your target newspaper or journalist has in terms of timing.

Relationships

Journalists earn their living by talking to people and writing articles. Most learn the art of getting information out of people very early in their careers. One of the most fruitful sources of news for any journalist is their regular phoning of contacts. It is referred to in most newspapers as 'rounds'. Journalists are assigned to one or more of a series of rounds, or broad categories of contacts who are phoned on a regular basis. For the scientist's part, building a relationship with journalists doesn't mean meeting them for lunch. It means being prepared to chat when they phone to find out what's happening. It is a valuable trust-building exercise for both parties. From the journalist's perspective, it's also much harder to write negatively about something or someone who is a valuable contact or source.

SUMMARY

To summarise, getting your article published is simple. Offer exclusivity, think about which newspapers will be most interested, time the release of your information to maximise its uptake and be prepared to build relationships with journalists and editors.