

ASA Public Relations Essentials

**Easy-To-Use Guide and Tool Kit
For Chapters and Members**



Why Do I Need to Worry About Public Relations?

Public relations boils down to the way you communicate with the public and the media about what ASA members and chapters do and why they do it. Why do we want to let people know what ASA members are doing? It will generate more business for ASA members, it will help increase membership and it will raise awareness that ASA members are the experts when it comes to valuation.

At the national level, ASA has an active public relations program that generates media stories on all the disciplines in national publications as well as local publications and trade publications across the country. The national office sends accreditation notices to the local newspapers, responds to media calls and proactively puts out press releases to the national media on topics ranging from BV tips, to jewelry-buying tips at Valentine's Day, to tips on caring for antiques, etc. We also respond to news events like Hurricane Katrina with helpful information about getting appraisals after the fact.

Rest assured there is an ongoing effort nationally to get media coverage for ASA and its members; however, there is still plenty that the local chapter can do to garner media attention for itself and its members. Here are some suggestions:

- **Calendar notes**—Publicize seminars, courses, meetings, etc., by sending the information to the calendar editor of your local newspapers and business journals. This will help drive up chapter attendance and keep ASA in the press.
- **Local media want local stories**—Local newspapers, TV stations, magazines and journals, without a doubt, want to run stories about business and business trends in their local area. You know what is going on of interest in your chapter. For instance, if you see a trend in home appraisals, or see that business valuations are picking up, your local business writers may be interested. Look at what local business writers are covering. If you have an angle that is new, or newsworthy, send the reporter a quick e-mail (three paragraphs) that says who you are, what the story is, why it is newsworthy and why it would be interesting to readers. Feel free to contact the ASA PR staff at Headquarters or representatives from Bendure Communications for advice and assistance. (Find their contact information on page 14.)
- **Offer your expertise**—If you see a trend or an ongoing story reported in the news, offer your members as experts to the media. For example, if the paper is writing about real estate values fluctuating and one of your members can speak about this, send real estate reporters in your local papers a quick note telling them that an expert is available for interviews on changing real estate prices and give them a quick background on the member. Include the fact that they are ASA members and provide contact information, preferably including a cell phone number.

ASA Messages

Organizations often develop “key messages” that clearly state the basic mission of the organization and highlight the key points they want the media and the public to understand. ASA wants members to identify themselves to the media as members of ASA and to use some of its key messages in interviews. These messages are created to make sure that people understand that all appraisers are not created equal and that it is important to hire an accredited appraiser.

ASA’s core messages, in simplest form, are

1. Hire an accredited appraiser for valuation work.
2. ASA-accredited valuation experts are the best because of their training, ethics and experience.

The following more detailed messages are designed to position ASA’s accreditation as a must-have credential in the appraisal/valuation marketplace.

- The ASA designation is granted only after completion of a rigorous training and evaluation process and is the most difficult appraisal accreditation to achieve outside the real property discipline. (Note: In those instances involving a discussion of real property appraisals, this message will be altered to indicate that the ASA designation is as difficult to achieve as any designation granted by sponsoring organizations of the Appraisal Foundation.) We like to stress that tested, trained and experienced ASA-accredited appraisers offer independent opinions of value.
- Appraisers with the ASA designation have a minimum of five years of experience.
- Appraisals from ASA-accredited appraisers are credible because those who prepare them are well-trained professionals who follow nationally recognized standards and codes of conduct. (We like to stress that our members follow USPAP, the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice.)
- ASA accreditation enhances witness credibility in litigation.
- If you use an ASA-accredited appraiser, you have access to accredited appraisers in all appraisal/valuation disciplines. (We like to stress that ASA is a “one-stop shop.”)

What Makes News?

Before you pick up the phone or start striking the keyboard, make sure what you have to say is really newsworthy. We're not talking Watergate-caliber news; we're talking about anything that makes a person say, "Hmm, interesting." We're especially talking about anything that makes a person say, "Wow!"

Try to find a "news hook." A news hook is something that "hooks" you or your story to something that is currently newsworthy. For instance, if you are an expert on 18th-century French fine arts, there would normally be no reason for a newspaper to do a story on that. However, if there was a period museum exhibit coming to town, a famous 18th-century piece at auction or a fire that ruined a number of expensive pieces, that would be different. Those are all "news hooks" to allow you to talk about your expertise in 18th-century fine arts relevant to something current. When pitching media, think of a news hook and include it in your "pitch."

As you prepare to pitch a reporter or draft a news release, ask yourself if your story meets any of the following criteria.

- **Conflict:** Basic good drama. Big guy vs. little guy news is very popular.
- **Prominence:** Involves well-known people and/or a business.
Example: Is a prominent member of the community joining your chapter?
- **Impact:** How many people does the news affect?
Example: Is an ASA member involved in appraising a particularly interesting or unusual piece of property?
- **Timeliness:** The news is happening right now; it's current.
- **Surprise:** A departure from the norm. Something that doesn't happen every day.
- **Interesting people or events:** Situations that are tragic, humorous or mysterious.
- **Something new:** "Firsts"—buildings, projects, people.
Example: Is an ASA member appraising a new building or work of art in town?
- **Trends:** Surveys, changes, what will be in the news next week.
- **Something useful:** Answers the "How will this affect my life?" question.
Example: Is your chapter planning a charity "plan for the future" day?
- **Evidence, solid facts:** Prominent research.

- **Experts:** Doctors, scientists, engineers, professors, appraisal professionals.
Example: Can any of your members provide information to reporters on appraising valuables before disaster strikes, such as a hurricane for those who live and work along the Gulf Coast, or a tornado in the Midwest?
- **Tip sheets and practice information:** Reporters often seek out tips and practical information on subjects of general interest to their readers. ASA's national PR team, working with ASA members from various disciplines, has developed information sheets on a number of topics that chapters can send to local media. Links to several of these tip sheets are located on the last page of this document.

The most effective way to use the tip sheets is to select one related to a current news hook. Write a paragraph linking the ASA tips to the item in the news.

Insert the introductory paragraph and the ASA tip information into the press release template, and send it to the appropriate contacts on your list of local reporters.

10 Questions To Ask When a Reporter Calls

1. Who is calling and from what media outlet?
2. What is the reporter's contact information (direct phone number, e-mail address)?
3. Why does the reporter want the interview or to speak to you?
4. What information is being requested, and what specific question is the reporter most interested in having answered (statistics, background, personal opinion, organizational policy, reaction to event or disclosure)?
5. What is the story focus?
6. Who else is being contacted for information (associates, competitors)?
7. When and where will the interview be held?
8. How long will the interview take?
9. What is the reporter's deadline?
10. What is the possible time or date of broadcast or publication?

Media Interview Dos and Don'ts

Do

- Ask the reporter what topics will be covered.
- Ask who else will be interviewed for the same story.
- Research the reporter.
- Know your subject inside and out.
- Prepare and practice.
- Deliver clear, succinct messages.
- Act confident and nonconfrontational.
- Maintain good eye contact and posture, if in person.
- Stay positive.
- Pause and think before answering a question.
- Stop and restate your answer if you make a mistake.
- Keep everything on the record.*
- Defuse a negative question quickly, then bridge back to your message.**
- Illustrate your points with examples and metaphors.
- Support your statistics.

Don't

- Use jokes and flip remarks.
- Assume reporters know anything about your company or profession.
- Use jargon.
- Repeat the negative or use words that are “loaded” (e.g., scam, crash, monopoly). This could turn into the reporter’s favorite sound bite.
- Guess if you don’t know an answer. (Do offer to provide it later.)
- Say “no comment.” Instead, explain why you can’t answer and redirect the question.
- Answer hypothetical questions.
- Speculate.
- Lie.
- Offer confidential information.

* **On the record:** When speaking with a reporter, anything and everything you say is fair game from the moment the conversation begins until you hang up the phone or leave the interview location. Anything you say to a reporter can be used, quoted or attributed to you—unless you **both** agree otherwise **in advance**.

** **Bridging:** This is the technique of using transitional words to take you where you can deliver your message. Some examples are: *I think the more relevant point is ... The real issue here is ... Perhaps this example will make my point easier to understand ...*

Remember: Your objective is to give the reporter a story based on what **you** want to say.

13 Lucky Tips for Interviews

1. Appear confident and friendly.
2. Don't assume reporters—and especially the audience they're reaching—know anything about ASA or the appraisal/valuation profession.
3. Stick to your key messages. For a list of ASA's key messages, see "ASA Messages." (on Page 3)
4. Use examples/anecdotes to bring your key messages to life.
5. The sooner you get your key messages across, the better (and easier).
6. The more you repeat yourself, the higher the odds are that your messages will get across.
7. Don't over-talk. Deliver your messages and stop. Don't get side-tracked.
8. If you make a mistake, or something just comes out wrong, stop and restate your answer.
9. If you have no idea about the answer to a question, don't guess. Instead, offer to get back to the reporter with an answer, or offer the name of someone reliable who could add insight.
10. Don't repeat a negative—some words are just too loaded (e.g., scam, disaster, monopoly). This could turn into a reporter's favorite sound bite.
11. Avoid answering hypothetical questions. Don't be drawn into discussions of "what ifs" that can overshadow your main points.
12. Defuse a negative question by "bridging" to your messages. This is the technique of using transitional words to take you where you want the conversation to go. For example:
 - *I can't speak to that without first giving you some background ...*
 - *I think the more relevant point is ...*
 - *Perhaps this example will make my point easier to understand ...*
13. Use the "KISS" formula. This stands for "keep it straightforward and simple." Speak in plain English. Avoid using technical jargon, especially when talking with a nontechnical news outlet. How? Visualize that you're speaking to a ten-year-old child.

Tips for Writing a Press Release

Media are used to getting press releases in standard formats that are written in Associated Press (AP) Style. Please refer to the press release on the next page to see an example of a standard press release format.

1. Create a title for your release that clearly states who is involved and what is happening. This is written in the shorter title style of a headline.
2. At the top of the release, include the name and phone number of your designated contact person in case the reporter needs additional information.
3. After the “dateline,” start the body of the release with a short, concise statement of the news. Be sure to include the essential information necessary for a news story by answering the questions who, what, when, where and why.
Example: Minneapolis, Minn. — Ronald Seaman, FASA, a Fellow of the American Society of Appraisers, has been named International President of the American Society of Appraisers (ASA) at the organization’s International Appraisal Conference Aug. 3, 2008.
4. Follow with a pertinent quote by someone in authority in the second or third paragraph.
Example: “ASA is positioned to make great progress this year under the capable leadership of Ronald Seaman,” said outgoing International President John D. Willey, FASA.
5. Add an informational paragraph noting related news or adding detail to the introductory news lead paragraph. A press release should read like a news story and should be able to be printed verbatim.
Example: ASA has taken the lead in supporting legislation currently before Congress that would set standards for appraisers, possibly requiring them to be accredited members of an appraisal society or to comply with regulations to be set by the Secretary of the Treasury.
6. Be sure to provide ASA’s Web site address, www.appraisers.org, at the end of the release.
7. Conclude with an ASA “boilerplate.” We have included the current ASA boilerplate here.

About ASA

The American Society of Appraisers (ASA) is an international valuation association that teaches, tests, accredits and refers professional appraisers. ASA is the oldest and only major organization in the United States representing all disciplines of appraisal specialists, originating in 1936 and incorporating in 1952. ASA’s headquarters is located in the metropolitan Washington, D.C., area. To locate an accredited ASA appraiser, go online to www.appraisers.org (and click on Find an Appraiser) or call (800) 272-8258.

Copy the press release template included on the next page and insert your own news as indicated. Electronic version is available in the members forms library.

CHAPTER NEWS

For Immediate Release

Contact: NAME
 PHONE NUMBER

INSERT YOUR HEADLINE HERE

CITY, STATE, Date — Insert your news paragraph here.

Insert a paragraph containing a pertinent quote here. Identify the speaker. Be sure to include his or her American Society of Appraisers affiliation.

Insert a paragraph with more detail here.

For more information about appraisals or to find an appraiser near you, visit the ASA Web site at www.appraisers.org.

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About the ASA XXX Chapter

Insert a paragraph about your chapter here.

Tips for Writing a Letter to the Editor

1. Write a letter to the editor to clarify a misconception or to express a unique point of view. Letters are written in response to articles, editorials or op-eds published in the newspaper.
2. Letters are a good way to get your message out because they are widely read.
3. Along with op-eds, letters to the editor represent the only way to convey your messages without the “filter” represented by reporters and editors.
4. Always address your letter to “Dear Editor” rather than using sir or madam.
5. Keep your letter short by using concise sentences and straightforward language.
6. Make only one point per letter.
7. Organize your letter in the following way:
 - The first paragraph contains the name of your organization and the purpose of the letter.
 - The second paragraph conveys some brief background information.
 - The third paragraph includes your opinion.
 - The final paragraph tells readers what you want them to do.
8. Many newspapers accept letters to the editor by fax, e-mail or regular mail. Check with your local paper to determine its preferred means of submission. There are often instructions on the paper’s Web site.

Tips for Writing an Op-Ed

Op-eds appear on the page opposite the editorials in the newspaper. Read the Op-ed page to see what types of articles are being printed.

1. Use an op-ed to make a point. This is your chance to craft an argument and sway opinion.
2. Along with letters to the editor, op-eds represent the only way to convey your messages without the “filter” represented by reporters and editors.
3. Read the op-ed page of your local paper and a major newspaper to get a feel for what works and what they’re covering.
4. Contact the editorial page editor or visit a newspaper’s Web site for a set of guidelines on how to write effectively for a specific paper.
5. Many newspapers accept op-eds by fax, e-mail or regular mail. Check with your local paper to determine its preferred means of submission.
6. Whether an op-ed gets printed is often determined by the strength of its argument, the appeal of its subject and the quality of its writing.
7. Craft a provocative and engaging headline that immediately engages your reader.
8. Make the importance and immediacy of the op-ed evident in the first paragraph, ideally in the first few sentences.
9. All paragraphs must support your main point.
10. Tailor your overarching point and the structure of your argument to relate to the publication’s audience. For example, an op-ed for the trade press can be more technical in nature than an op-ed for the consumer press.
11. Write clearly and logically.
12. Consider using interesting examples, metaphors or analogies; but don’t be too “cute.”
13. Stick to the word limit set by the publication that’s receiving your op-ed. If your op-ed exceeds the word limit, your piece won’t get read. Op-eds are generally between 600 and 800 words in length.

12 Winning Best Practices in Chapter PR

1. Keep public relations in mind as you plan chapter events.
2. Invite members of other groups and organizations (including potential clients, prospective new members and related trade groups such as the American Bar Association) to pertinent chapter programs.
3. Inform local media outlets about chapter events, new Candidates, interesting speakers or guests at chapter meetings, chapter participation at public service events, etc.
4. Designate a chapter member to develop media lists (reporters' names with regular mail and e-mail addresses) for local media outlets. Designate a chapter member to write and distribute press releases to these lists on your chapter events. (Make sure your lists focus specifically on business calendar of events media.)
5. Designate a chapter member to keep track of deadlines for the media in your area. Make sure you send your notices and press releases in a timely fashion with plenty of advance notice.
6. Designate a chapter member to follow up with local media representatives. Be sure to send a thank you note or e-mail. This is not the time to be critical. Be sure to mention what was good about the story.
7. Send your annual chapter schedule to the calendar section and pertinent reporters of local media outlets.
8. Invite a member of local government to a chapter event, perhaps to speak on appraisal issues from a local government perspective. Make sure you inform the reporters who cover local government for your community newspapers, radio and television stations.
9. Develop relationships with local reporters who cover pertinent beats, including real estate, business and the arts. Invite them to a chapter social event.
10. Include a public service event in your annual chapter calendar (e.g., helping with a fundraiser, working on a Habitat for Humanity project, assisting with a holiday toy drive). Make sure the local press knows you are doing it.
11. Staff the ASA exhibit at local trade and professional conferences. Send press releases and photographs of the event to local media outlets.
Call Laura Wood at (703) 733-2129 or e-mail laura@appraisers.org for information on reserving one of ASA's exhibits.
12. Consider starting or beefing up your chapter Web site. If every ASA chapter had a crisp, informative Web site, the PR reach of the society would be multiplied many times. Visit chapter Web sites including San Diego (www.sandiegoappraisers.org), Los Angeles (www.socalappraisers.org) and Chicago (www.appraisers.org/chicago) for ideas and inspiration.

Help Is Only a Phone Call Away

Members of the ASA public relations Headquarters staff and professional public relations consultants from Bendure Communications Inc. are always available to help with media queries and PR questions. Here's who to call:

Lisa Schaumann
Bendure Communications Inc.
(540) 687-5099
E-mail: lisa@bendurepr.com

Betty Snyder
Headquarters Director of Communications
(703) 733-2107
E-mail: betty@appraisers.org

Vicki Bendure
Bendure Communications Inc.
(540) 687-3360
E-mail: vicki@bendurepr.com

For an electronic version of ASA Public Relations Essentials, visit the ASA Web Site and login to access the "For Members" section. This document is located in MyASA/ASA Info/Documents.

ASA tip sheets are located in the consumer library.

- **Tips for Hiring and Working with an Appraiser—**
www.appraisers.org/Consumer/ConsumerLibrary/HiringandWorkingWithanAppraiser.aspx
- **Estate Planning Tips for Personal Property—**
www.appraisers.org/Consumer/ConsumerLibrary/EstatePlanningTipsforPersonalProperty.aspx
- **Top Five Reasons Why Every Company Should Have a Current Business Valuation—**
www.appraisers.org/Consumer/ConsumerLibrary/TopFiveReasonsWhyEveryCompanyShouldHaveaBV.aspx
- **Go the Extra Mile To Enhance the Value of Your Car—**
www.appraisers.org/Consumer/ConsumerLibrary/EnhancetheValueofYourCar.aspx
- **A Soft Housing Market Makes for a Hard Sell—**
www.appraisers.org/Consumer/ConsumerLibrary/SoftHousingMarketMakesforaHardSell.aspx
- **Step by Step Process for Buying and Appraising Jewelry—**
www.appraisers.org/Consumer/ConsumerLibrary/BuyingandAppraisingJewelry.aspx