



THEATRE PUBLICITY IN NEW YORK

By Reva Cooper

Updated September 2011 for members of A.R.T./New York

Index

P.1-2	INTRODUCTION
P.2-3	THE NEW WORLD OF PRESS
P.3	THE SCENE: COMPETITION
P.4	WHO IS THE PRESS?
P.4-5	SCHEDULING SHOWS FOR THE PRESS
P.5-6	FIND YOUR SELLING POINTS
P.6-15	BASIC PRESS TOOLS
P.6-10	Press Releases
P.10-11	Photos
P.11-12	Pitch Letters
P.12	Critics Invitations
P.12-15	Media Alerts
P.15	PRESS LISTS
P.15	PRESS KITS
P.16	TWITTER, FACEBOOK, OTHER SITES
P.16-17	DEALING WITH THE PRESS
P.17-19	CRITICS – PROCEDURES
P.19	THE PRESS CAMPAIGN
P.20	FINAL REMARKS
P.20-24	RESOURCES TO USE

INTRODUCTION

As a new theatre company in New York, it is important to get publicity, and to know how to get it. Positive publicity can mean increased visibility and ticket sales, and influences the growth of your company in many ways. Most theatre companies, especially in their early stages, cannot afford to hire a professional publicist, but it is not always necessary to do so. It is possible to do a good basic job on your own, since you may, in any case, be able to get just as much press as a professional would. This text is written to guide you in doing just that.

This is written specifically as a guide for Off and Off Off Broadway theatres, although the same principles apply to theatres of any tier. If you are a larger-budget organization, you will probably have a separate, trained Public Relations staff, or hire an outside contractor. However, the more you know about what to expect from the PR process, the better able you'll be to hire the right staff and work with them effectively.

So, first of all, what is publicity? It seems like an obvious question, but it is important to point out that although publicity is a part of marketing—which is the overall effort one makes to influence customers to attend a show—it has its own particular qualities. The most important distinction is that publicity is promotion for free, whereas other types of marketing, such as advertising and direct mail, cost money. In advertising, you yourself create the promotion for the show and pay money to have it printed or aired in the media. If you mail out a direct-mail piece, you, again, create the piece and pay money to mail it. With publicity, although there are minimal costs in creating press releases and photos, they're essentially distributed for free. That's the good news. The bad news is that consequently you have no control over when or if anything runs. The media decides that.

Because PR is so precarious in nature, companies should not rely on publicity for the entire marketing effort. You must still supplement audience development through other marketing strategies: outreach to new mailing lists and specific communities, group sales, special events around shows, etc.

It's important to remember that the world of journalism is changing rapidly, and in only a few more years may be vastly different from what it is now. But at present, the main outlets for publicity include print (newspapers and magazines), broadcast (television and radio), personal (in-person appearances and community outreach), and digital (web sites) media.

THE NEW WORLD OF PRESS

The world of press and publicity has changed greatly over the past ten years due to in part to new technology and, more recently, economic factors. Fewer people read physical newspapers than they used to, resulting in rapidly shrinking sales revenues. That, combined with an equally steep drop in advertising dollars, has resulted in less available editorial space in print publications, not to mention staff layoffs at newspapers across the country.

New York City has traditionally had several major daily newspapers, including but not

limited to *The New York Times*, *The Daily News* and *The New York Post*. At the moment, all three still exist in print as well as online form. But more and more newspapers are going out of business, or reducing the size of their print editions and relying on online-only content. Because the number of live journalists at many news outlets is so greatly diminished, the amount of person-to-person contact you have will be less than it used to. Almost all journalists are now reached through email, and many press releases and listings have to be individually posted by the publicist on websites.

Major television networks and radio shows are also reaching into the digital frontier, supplementing their regular programming with video stories and podcasts available online. As a result of changes in traditional print and broadcast media, the digital world has become paramount in getting the message across, through internet-only publications and networks, as well as the channels you are probably already familiar with, such as Facebook, Twitter, independent web sites and blogs, and the web editions of established print media.

You may also find a receptive audience in the readerships of major magazines, community newspapers, and "special interest" outlets that cater to specific ethnic groups, geographic regions, or those interested in certain subjects. You will continually need to supplement coverage in major theatre outlets with targeted outreach to these other sources. For example, a play by a Russian-American playwright or cast would be of interest to a website like "Russian Mix".

THE SCENE: COMPETITION

Theatre companies must continually find new ways to promote shows and fill their houses. New York has thousands of theatre companies competing for publicity, not to mention the numerous commercial productions on and Off Broadway, and shows at large resident companies. In addition, many outlets have cut back on their arts coverage, especially for smaller theatres and shows without celebrity attractions. This is not said to discourage you, just to acquaint you with the reality of the situation: to get publicity, you will have to work hard and be very creative. And in spite of the stiff competition for coverage, the advantage is that New York City has one of the largest potential theatre-going publics in the world. No matter what kind of work your company does, if you market it effectively, you will find a receptive audience.

Several factors influence how much publicity you get, and as previously discussed, you only have control over some of them. It matters what kind of play you are doing, whether or not the people associated with a given production are well-known, the press response to your previous productions, and where the theatre is located (for example, it will be harder to get many critics to come if the theatre is in an outlying area).

Timing also matters. Fall and spring months (especially October and November and March and April -Tony Awards deadline month) are generally the most crowded times in terms of Broadway and Off-Broadway openings, and so there will be more competition for space in the media. Summer months and January-February are usually easier times to get coverage. Of course, all this is still subject to the particular policies in the media at a given time. For example, a newspaper editor may decide, due to low circulation, to cut back on its theatre coverage—or perhaps even to add coverage. The former would

make it more difficult for you; the latter circumstance would obviously be an advantage. Occasionally, major hard-news stories (such as 9/11 or a major election) will push all other coverage off the pages, sometimes at the last minute.

You will find that publicity is a growth process. Over a period of time, with a creative and diligent effort, the press begins to recognize the name of the theatre and of its press agent. (Note: the words 'press agent' and 'publicist' are used interchangeably here). Journalists attend a show, and if they like what they see. They're more likely to come back. In line with this, it is vital for a publicist to develop long-range relationships with the press. This means, for instance, that a publicist shouldn't get angry with the press (at least not to their faces) because they didn't like a particular show. You need their loyalty, and maybe they'll like the next show. Many times, a writer cannot give you the coverage you want because of factors outside his or her control (for example, the editor gave a directive to cover another story), but maybe next time you'll get in.

You should choose one administrative person in your company to handle publicity. Journalists like to know exactly whom to contact for information, and then they're more likely to get to know that person. That person should *not* be the Artistic Director, an actor, a director, or a designer--that is to say, anyone whose work will be written about by the press. It's important to choose a press representative who fills an administrative position within the company, because the press wants someone they can be honest with, especially if they have something negative to say. They do not want to insult someone to his or her face, or get into a personal conversation, especially when most of their job is strictly business. Even if you have little or no staff, and have to choose someone very young and inexperienced who needs to be coached, or even someone completely outside the group, that is better in the long run than choosing the wrong person.

WHO IS THE PRESS?

The press is a group of working journalists, whose jobs are very similar to yours and mine. They have bosses called editors (or publishers), and they want to get promoted, too.

Some realities about journalists:

- 1) In New York, it is not unusual for a journalist at a major outlet to get several hundred emails a day. That person has to decide quickly what requires immediate attention outside of their regular to-do list. Therefore, a journalist scans through mail and e-mail quickly, and so you want to establish yourself immediately. Having a strong relationship with the press will mean that when they see your address, they'll open the message (or at least you won't find yourself lost in the spam folder).
- 2) Writers are subject to the policies of their company. So even if they want to cover your show, their outlet may not do your kind of story. Many times writers have lamented to me that my project was much more interesting than what they had to write about.

3) Journalists are human beings. This means that some are better than others, and that sometimes they make mistakes (wrong names, dates, concepts). It also means that they respond to solid professional persuasion, which is the art of the press agent. A good press agent does his or her homework before contacting the press—if you know what a particular journalist covers before you contact that person, and can make a clear case for why it is exactly what this journalist is looking for, it will go a long way. So can writing thank you notes to journalists after they do a feature on your show, and pointing out something specifically nice about their writing. (For more on this, see 'Dealing With the Press').

SCHEDULING SHOWS FOR THE PRESS

The first performance of a show is usually a preview, and most shows give themselves at least a few previews for polishing in front of an audience before the press is invited.

Nowadays, major press almost always come at least one night before the official opening. This is because many years ago they started complaining that coming on opening night didn't give them enough time to write a considered review for the next day's paper. Even if you have a limited performance schedule, try to give your show a minimum of one preview, so that you run it in front of an audience, and then call the next performance your press preview, at which the press is invited. Sometimes it happens that a critic may only be able to come to your first preview. In that case, you have to decide in consultation with the show's director and management, whether to let the critic in—especially if it's a major critic who's hard to get. Every situation will be different.

FIND YOUR SELLING POINTS

To begin a press campaign, you have to decide in advance what are the most newsworthy aspects of your project, the things that will be most attractive to the press (occasionally, you may get coverage focusing on another aspect of the show, depending on what a particular journalist is covering at that point). What is newsworthy is what is unique. Key words here are "first", "only", and sometimes "largest." What are you the *first* to do? The *only one* to do? A New York premiere of a play makes you the first and only (no one else is doing it, are they?). If you produce a Moliere Festival, consisting of 16 plays of Moliere, you may be able to claim to be "the largest Moliere festival ever done in New York." Just make sure that everything you claim is true--in this case, for example, you'd want to check out the history of other Moliere productions and festivals in New York. The press finds out everything eventually, especially considering the other 499 emails they receive each day, not to mention their other sources of information. Remember, it's all about facts.

More on this very important point: **PUBLICITY IS A COMPELLING ARRANGEMENT OF THE FACTS.** In other words, the press is interested in facts only, not value judgments. Leave the opinion out – your play isn't "a brilliant new work," (it may be, but the journalist hasn't seen it yet and won't be convinced by your say so), but "a new play about [fill in the blank] by Independent Theatre Award-winner John Doe, whose last play, *In the Spirit*, was called "a fiercely intelligent new work" by NYTheater.com." In other words, try always to use real achievements that will catch the journalist's eye. The

reporter can't argue with the facts.

After the critics come, you can quote them in follow-up press, and later on – that's the only type of hype that will be appropriate for a press release, such as (a fictional example): "*In the Spirit*, called "A brilliant new work" by the Village Voice, etc."

Other examples:

- "Jane Doe, whom TimeOutNY called "an actor to watch" in *In the Spirit* last season at the Ohio Theater, will be featured in [*Name of New Work*]."
- "In the Spirit, the first New York play on the life of the Dalai Lama (make sure that it really is), opens on..."
- "*In the Spirit*, the life of the current Dalai Lama from childhood to his current exile in India, will be presented in the Good Life Buddhist Temple in Manhattan (the uniqueness here is the setting of the production)."
- "*In the Spirit*, which depicts the life of the current Dalai Lama, will feature a cast of 25, including actual Buddhist monks from the Good Life Buddhist Temple (the uniqueness here is the composition of the cast and the size, large for Off-Off-Broadway)."

There are many other ways to promote your uniqueness: the size of the cast, the location (a shopping mall?), the curtain time (11 AM for "Mom's Matinees", a show about motherhood? It was done a few years ago, and received press coverage), the language of the production (a tribal dialect, but with translation provided?), use of disabled actors, etc.

Being objective and fact-focused is hard to do, and by leaving out value judgments you may feel that the release is weak, but being honest about your show is key to building relationships with the press. Again, let the press come and rave about it later; for now, get them interested in the objective qualities of the production. Examples of press release structure follow.

BASIC PRESS TOOLS

First of all, you need company letterhead/logo. This will be either the name of the company, or some acronym or image that identifies (brands) the company. It can be whatever design you feel is appropriate, but should be designed by a graphic artist. These are used for (in addition to other company functions), letters to the press and press releases. You can put the name of your Artistic or Executive Director under it or next to it, but otherwise, leave the rest of your screen for the actual press communication – there's no need to list the board of directors or sponsors, and you want to get to your story as fast as possible.

Your basic PR tools are:

1. Press Releases
2. Photos

3. Pitch Letters
4. Critics' Invitations
5. Media Alerts (also called Photo Tips) for one-time special events.

1. PRESS RELEASES

These are announcements to the press to persuade them to write about your show. Releases are your most important written tool, and should sell your show in a succinct and newsworthy manner. In a press release, unlike other literary forms, the most important point is to get the attention of the press fast. If they're not interested from the beginning (remember those hundreds of other emails?), some of them won't read any further. The format goes from most important points (headline and first paragraph) to least important points (all the following paragraphs).

When distributing press releases through e-mail, always paste releases in the body of the email – do NOT send them as attachments – a lot of outlets won't open them, fearing viruses. (Photos, on the other hand, may be sent as attachments.)

Format for press releases (there may be one or two diehards who want snail mail, but you will, for the most part, rely on e-mail to distribute your releases):

SUBJECT LINE:

You'll need an e-mail subject line that will catch the journalists' attention immediately, and motivate them to open the release (and not delete it). Look at your story and identify your most important points. For brevity's sake, it's OK if your subject line is a phrase rather than a full sentence.

Examples:

For A Doll's House

12/6: (CELEBRITY NAME) IN "A DOLL'S HOUSE"

For Mother Courage

12/6: Newly-discovered "Mother Courage Part II"

All you're doing is compressing the story to a headline, but the briefest one, with the most important point or points. Save space wherever you can, to insure the full phrase gets on most people's screens. It's a good idea to start with the date; that immediately sets the time frame for it in the journalist's mind).

A final point: the release will not reveal every point about the show. That's OK. Think of it as BAIT, to get the journalist to attend or write about it. You want to get their attention; once they come to the show they'll see the entire work.

BODY OF THE RELEASE:

a) At the top: the company logo/letterhead.

b) In the upper left corner: the words "For immediate release." This tells the press that the information in the release can be used as soon as they receive it. There are certain circumstances where you would put "For release as of [date], such as a press conference, where a story is released to all press on the same day—but you rarely will have to deal with that.

c) In the upper right corner: the name contact information of the publicist:

Contact: John Doe
(212) 000-0000

NOTE: Always include the area code with the phone number, as the release will be mailed to various geographic areas.

d) **Headline:** The headline of the release should sum up the main selling points (again, the unique features) of your production, to make the reader want to read more about it. It should include the name of your company, the title of the production, and the preview and opening dates (sometimes a journalist will write about it immediately, but most file the release and revisit it nearer to opening). A few examples of headlines (all fictional) are:

- A well-known actor (a celebrity is a person who is **UNIQUELY** well-known) is in the cast:

(CELEBRITY NAME) TO PLAY NORA IN IBSEN'S "A DOLL'S HOUSE" AT FRIARS THEATER. PREVIEWS BEGIN DECEMBER 6, OPENS DECEMBER 12

- Unique subject matter:

"RASPUTIN," NEW MUSICAL ON THE RUSSIAN MYSTIC, HAS NY PREMIERE AT FRIARS THEATRE. PREVIEWS DECEMBER 6, OPENING DECEMBER 12

- Rarely-done work by famous author (**UNIQUELY** rare production):

BRECHT'S NEWLY-DISCOVERED "MOTHER COURAGE: PART II," TO HAVE NY PREMIERE AT FRIARS THEATRE. PREVIEWS DECEMBER 6, OPENING DECEMBER 12.

NOTE: Once again, these headlines are all based on facts, not value judgments, therefore the press cannot contest anything in them.

You're selling through the facts. In a headline, the first words should be the most attention-getting ones: Celebrity name, "Rasputin," BRECHT'S "MOTHER COURAGE" - (putting BRECHT in front of the title is more succinct and compelling than lengthening *it* to "Mother Courage by Brecht," and establishes the play more quickly - - get the press attention FAST. Other examples would be "Rodgers and Hart's *Pal Joey*, Arthur Miller's *Incident at Vichy*."

If you have more than one selling point (again, uniqueness, such as a celebrity playing the title role in "Mother Courage: Part II," get both points in the title. *It's okay if the headline is three lines.*

e) Body of the press release:

- The first paragraph should repeat and elaborate on the headline, and can also include logistical information:

"Mother Courage: Part II," a newly discovered work by Bertolt Brecht, which deals with descendants of the famous title character from the original "Mother Courage," will have its New York premiere on December 12 (previews begin December 6), presented by the Friars Theater Company. The production is directed by John Doe. Performances will be at the Savoy Theater, 1000 King Street, New York, N.Y., on Tuesday through Sunday at 8 PM through January 23, and tickets are \$20.00 (TDF accepted). For reservations, call (212) 000-0000.

(Some press agents put ticket information in the last paragraph - it can be in the beginning or the end of the release, but I recommend putting everything essential in the first paragraph; then it can be lifted out as a whole, to reprint, making it easier for the journalist.)

- Content for the second and third paragraphs will depend on what the major story is. In this case, if there is more to the story about the discovery of the play, this would be considered "newsworthy" background information:

"Mother Courage: Part II," which was performed in Europe only once, in 1947, was recently discovered, along with a director's promptbook from the original production, by accident as part of a bequest by the Brecht estate to the University of Chicago. "

OR: if there's a celebrity, the second paragraph would be a few bio lines about the celebrity (you can list the rest of the cast in the next paragraph). If it's the (fictional) play about the Dalai Lama, the second paragraph might be about the research on the play and another line or two on the Dalai Lama's story, his exile, etc.

- After this paragraph, write a new paragraph with the names of the cast and any designers or other creative personnel. List the cast alphabetically. In the celebrity-focused press release, the celebrity would be listed in the first paragraph, and then you can list the rest of the cast, if not well known, would be here: it could read "The cast of [name of show] also features..."
- The next (and probably last) paragraph should consist of a few lines about the Friars Theatre Company and its mission, its accomplishments, and/or perhaps a few review quotes from past productions. Alternatively, you can put ticket-buying information as the last paragraph after this. But there should be at least a boilerplate paragraph on the theatre company,

listing its mission and more of its accomplishments.

A FEW MORE GUIDELINES:

1. Limit press releases to around one page, and not more than two (you can see the page breaks in the email). Most press won't read beyond that unless you're established as a theater of major importance to them.
2. Again, do not make a value judgment on the production - that is, don't write "a brilliant new work" or "the internationally acclaimed Friars Theater" - **stick to the facts**, to actual accomplishments and to what is unique. The press will have a very "show me" attitude, and will want to see the play before accepting your assertion that it's brilliant or anything else. Let the press create the hype, and then you can quote them in succeeding releases.
3. Don't send out more than one release unless there is news—the play is extended, a celebrity is added to the cast, the play moves to a larger theater—in other words, something new happens. Even though you want publicity, journalists will appreciate it if you don't waste their time, which will do more to establish the publicist as a professional and in the long run, which may in turn serve to get you more press coverage. If they're interested, they'll write about the show, even though you may have to wait until opening week (that's when most publicity appears).

2. PHOTOS

Publicity photos are another great selling tool, and must be included in any publicity campaign. Shoot and email the photos in color, the outlet can print it in color or black and white. Photos are usually required to be 300 dpi, so send those unless otherwise requested.

Each photo should have a caption that identifies the actors and the production pictured. Never send out a photo without a caption, as it is apt to be lost or discarded by a rushed and confused editor. Captions should be very simple, identifying the actors by name "from left to right", giving the title of the play and its performance dates, and the name of the theater company. You should also include the publicist's contact information and a photo credit ("photo by John Doe"). Some outlets will print the photo credit, some won't, but it is only fair to give the photographer (who doesn't receive royalties for use) this consideration.

You can write the caption across the very top of your email (even though you'll include the image as an attachment). If you do, the body of your email will look like this:

PHOTO CAPTION: From left to right: (names of actors) in (name of show).
Photo credit: (name of photographer)

(LOGO OF THEATER)

Then, insert the press release.

A FEW MORE GUIDELINES:

1. Always include a press release with the photo, to give a journalist all the information he or she might need. Never send a photo without an accompanying release. Sometimes a photo will then be printed with a longer caption, which gives you more coverage.
2. Publicity Photo Composition - Publicity photos traditionally include only two or three of the actors, in a setup from the play with bodies close together, preferably touching, against a medium-hued background, preferably on the set. It should represent a moment in the show. If the actors aren't normally that close together, fake it (unlike the press release, publicity photos don't have to be strictly faithful; they're there to reasonably represent and sell the show). The bodies need to be close together so that the editor can crop around the bodies, if needed. Look at the photos in the arts outlets - many times the background is completely cropped out due to space limitations. Sometimes, nowadays, editors print more "artsy" images, with, for example, a set design populated by wide-apart tiny figures of actors. You can send these kinds of images to selected outlets (such as the Village Voice) but make sure to include traditionally formatted photos, too.
3. You should have at least a few different photos taken, with different combinations of cast members (if there are several actors). However, if any of the actors are well known, most of the photos you send to the press should include them.

ABOUT THE PHOTO SHOOT:

You'll need photos by a certain pre-opening deadline (more on that later), and your sets and costumes may not be ready yet. One way to get around this is to shoot prearranged setups against a medium-colored opaque background (which may be in the photographer's studio). Actors can be shot from the waist up in bits of costume or facsimiles of the costumes. Make a list of setups and have the stage manager (or whoever is directing the shoot) announce each setup by giving the actors their first line of dialogue, so that they can get into position and start running the scene.

If you have the budget, you might also shoot real production shots that can be ready in time to accompany reviews. Have a photographer take action shots during a dress rehearsal and then, depending on what you get (maybe you don't have enough of the right moments, or the stage lighting was too dark, or the bodies weren't close enough together), do a few select setups afterwards of those scenes you still need. You can confer with the photographer after the run-through, who should be able to advise you on what he or she got or didn't get. Then run the shoot much the same way as described above, giving cue lines for the actors and for the light board operator to begin setting up each scene you want to photograph. During the shoot, your photographer will usually direct the actors to move a little closer together, further apart, into the light, etc. This is often the way that production photography is done for Broadway and other larger-budget shows, because it gets the most spontaneous shots during the show, as well as specifically desired set-ups.

Just know that because it involves more of the photographer's time, however, it is going to be more expensive.

Either way, when you have the selects, choose a few particularly good prints to email out. Try to have several ready, in case an editor asks for more.

3. PITCH LETTERS

These are letters not longer than one printed page (or the length of one computer screen window), aiming to persuade a journalist to write a feature on your show. In most cases, the *New York Times* Sunday Arts & Leisure section is not going to do a feature on you until you are better known. Of course, there are all kinds of other possibilities.

Many involve pitching to other sections (or other papers): for example, if you have a play about a famous hero from Brooklyn, it might be of interest to the Brooklyn Section of a newspaper and to Brooklyn community papers. (They probably won't be interested just because one of the actors lives in Brooklyn, but if that actor is well-known or has a unique hobby or second profession, that might be another possible angle). Sometimes the press will pick up on an outrageous or humorous (again that word—*unique*) angle (all the characters are gorillas) or human interest (all the actors are former substance abusers). Getting a story in the community section is good, too, and can attract audiences.

You write to the journalist selling the unique story, suggesting photo and interview possibilities (for example, "You can come to a group discussion session after the performance, where the actors, who are former substance abusers, will discuss the play and how it impacts their lives, and you can take photos, too" or "This is a play with animal characters and we can set up a photo shoot at the dress rehearsal and you can shoot the actors in their gorilla costumes.")

4. CRITICS' INVITATIONS

These are emailed letters inviting critics to the show. They generally begin "Dear Critic" or "Dear Reviewer" (You do not have to fill in the individual critic's name) and repeats the basic information and selling points of the play, press preview(s) and opening dates, and whom to call for press tickets (again, your contact information).

The same letter can be sent to editors, who may not come to the show (if they want to, of course, you should let them in) but will need to be reminded so that they know when to send a reporter, and when to run the review in the paper.

This is a separate mailing from the initial press releases. Alternatively, you can put the press dates at the bottom of your press release. For example, draw a line at the bottom of the release, and write: OPENING DECEMBER 7, PRESS PREVIEWS DECEMBER 5 AND 6. FOR TICKETS, CALL JOHN DOE, 212-000-0000. If you do this, you can simply follow up with phone calls and emails to the press nearer to the press previews.

5. MEDIA ALERT (or, PHOTO TIP)

In line with the example cited above (substance abusers and gorilla costumes), unique events created around a show can often get publicity when the show itself wouldn't otherwise attract. This can also include your gala or special fundraising event, with a specific theme and noteworthy guests.

Humor is a very powerful tool here, too, so if you have a comic show, humorous tie-in events can get the attention of the press. I have orchestrated dog auditions to try out dogs to pull the sled in the ballet "The Nutcracker," groundhog hunts in February, Valentine's Day promotions (show your marriage certificate at the door or make a declaration of love and get a free glass of champagne), and so on. If you do this type of event, you'll need to send out a separate press release about it. However, always make sure to include a paragraph about the show with pertinent ticket information—you're always selling the show.

You'll want press photographers at these events, too. So in addition to sending out press releases to the arts press, you can mail and fax (some photo and video outlets for this still want faxes) a form of press release called a "Photo Tip" or "Media Alert" to the Assignment Desks and Photo Desks of newspapers and TV stations. Most of the time you won't need a specific journalist or editor's name, so you can just address it to those designations.

A Photo Tip or Media Alert is formatted like a memo. Type the contact information at top (you don't need "For Immediate Release" here), then type the title "Photo Tip" or "Media Alert" as your headline. Then, deliver the relevant information in categories: **When** (date, time of event); **What** (one or two-sentence description of event; any well-known names involved), **Where** (location of event), **The Photo Opportunity** (describe what they will have to shoot - in other words "more than 15 dogs, of different breeds, each at least 65 pounds, being tested as sled-pullers for the ballet "The Nutcracker"). Finally, offer background information, such as "This event is part of (and put two or three paragraphs about your show, including ticket information)". All together, your memo should all be no longer than one page.

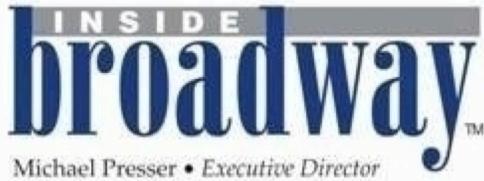
NOTE: if there's a difficult-to-pronounce name of a theater or person, put a category named "PRONUNCIATION," and write out the name and next to it, the phonetic spelling. You don't want to hear it said wrong on the air.

The first place you should send a Photo Tip, a few days before sending it to anyone else, to is the Associated Press local Day Book. They have a daily calendar of events which goes out to all major media outlets in the New York area, so keeping the AP in the loop helps the maximum number of outlets will know about it. Mail to: apnyc@ap.org.

At least a week in advance, mail the memo to your theater's press list, and then, 24 hours before the event, to the Assignment and Photo Desks of newspapers, where an editor literally assigns coverage (they don't work if you send them farther in advance than this). You may fax (because many papers still want memos that way) or e-mail (see Media Alert list, attached). The photo desks are different because they also cover hard news stories, so you are in competition with whatever other events happen that day (political events, burglaries, etc.) which makes it very chancy. A news crew can be on its way to you, but if a hard news story breaks that they have to cover, they'll turn around and travel to the other story.

When you're looking to keep a record of media coverage, know that your photo may wind up near the front of the paper, as another event of the day, and it can air just about any time during the course of a TV news show (like a 'New York Minute' type of segment) not strictly around the arts coverage. You have to check with the station as to when it will run – they often don't know until the last minute, and may just say something like 'The five o'clock news,' so it's a good idea to simply put on your tape for one or two hours beginning at 5 PM and see if it shows up. If it doesn't, you call the desk again to see when it's on. Sometimes you can get copies afterwards from the station, but usually for a price. Sometimes the story will be posted on the station site afterwards, or even on Facebook, if the outlet has an account there. Otherwise, you probably have to call a video monitoring service, which can send you a copy (again, for a price).

(MEDIA ALERT – EXAMPLE)



Contact: Reva Cooper, (917) 763-2165(cell); revacooper@earthlink.net

MEDIA ALERT

WHEN: THURSDAY, JUNE 25,
5:30 PM (cocktails); 6:30 PM: Ceremonies

WHAT: **Broadway's** **CONSTANTINE MAROULIS** (*Rock Of Ages*) **LAURA BENANTI** (Tony-winner for *Gypsy*) **STEVEN PASQUALE** (*Reasons To Be Pretty*) and **JUDY KUHN** (Tony-winner for *Les Mis*) **AT INSIDE BROADWAY'S BROADWAY BEACON AWARDS**

WHERE: The Players Club, 16 Gramercy Park South, Manhattan

PHOTO OPPS: Celebrities at cocktail hour
Awards ceremonies with presenters
Musical theatre students from J.H.S. 278 in Brooklyn singing "There's No Business Like Show Business"

PRONUNCIATIONS: Constantine MAROULIS - mar-row'-liss
Laura BENANTI - behn-ahn'-tee
Judy KUHN - kyoon

BACKGROUND: **Constantine Maroulis**, Tony-nominated star of Broadway's *Rock Of Ages* (and former *American Idol* contestant), **Laura Benanti** (Tony Award-winner for *Gypsy*) and **Steven Pasquale** (star of the recent *Reasons To Be Pretty*) will be honored on Thursday, June 25 by Inside Broadway, the acclaimed theater for young audiences, for their support for arts education.

Inside Broadway, founded and directed by **Michael Presser** and now in its 26th year, works with schools throughout New York City, introduces children to musical theatre and develops their creativity, through CASA (Cultural After-School Adventures) and other programs.

Tony-nominated **Judy Kuhn** (*Les Mis*, *Chess*, *Rags*, *She Loves Me*) will perform songs from the Broadway songbook and more, and Fox 5 TV News Entertainment Reporter **Julie Chang** will emcee the ceremonies.

Inside Broadway presents unique, edited 50-minute professional productions of musical theatre classics, directed especially for children. Its 2009 school tour was the delightful *Smokey Joe's Café: the songs of Leiber and Stoller*. All shows provide student study guides and teacher lesson plans. Other *Inside Broadway* programs include "Build A Musical," where teaching artists work with children to create their own musical theatre; and "Creating the Magic," a demonstration by the production team of a current Broadway show at a Broadway theatre, which in May 2008 was *Hairspray*, of how it is created. *Inside Broadway* has received much critical praise: its production of *Richard Rodgers' Broadway* caused the New York Times to say "Rodgers continues to enchant and entertain, and he couldn't ask for better cheerleaders, in all senses of the word."

PRESS LISTS

An average New York theatre's press list contains between 150 and 300 names. It's up to you how many names and what kind of sources to keep handy. It usually consists of critics, editors, listings writers and feature writers, some of whom are likely to give you immediate coverage, and some of whom probably won't (but should get in the habit of seeing your name). Photography lists are usually 15 to 25 (we're not talking Broadway show lists here). Critics' lists (part of your regular theatre list) usually run 25 to 50.

Press lists are always flexible and change depending on the needs of the show. Every theatre's press list will be different, depending on the type of theatre, the experience level of the company, and the kind of project. As a press representative, you should have a basic list that you always send releases to, but for certain shows, you can always add more. For an Irish show, add the Irish Echo, the Irish Voice and other such outlets. For a show by a Latin author, add The Viva section of the New York Daily News and other Latin press that are appropriate; and so on. Also, once a journalist has shown interest in you and/or writes about you, add that person to your permanent list. If there are personnel changes in the press (sometimes the writer notifies you, sometimes the email bounces back and you may have to call or email the media outlet to find out who the replacement is), update your list.

PRESS KITS

These are to be created as needed on a case-by-case basis. When you put one together, use common sense: what would a journalist need to know to write accurately and completely about my show or theatre? Press kits usually consist of background information on the show and on the theatre, your press release, previous press coverage (including reviews – although some press agents believe you should never throw other reviews in front of a journalist, I disagree. It shows your achievements, and professional endorsements, which you strongly need), and stick a current playbill in there, too. Press kits are not sent to everyone, only those who ask, or to journalists who are writing stories about you. Have a few with you at the press preview in case a journalist asks, and if a journalist is new to your theatre, offer one as an introduction. They can be put in a 9x12 envelope or in a folder with pockets. Make up labels with the name of your theater and attach one.

TWITTER, FACEBOOK, OTHER SITES

Nowadays, press agents also post on Twitter, Facebook (where your theatre should have a page) and other sites – do use these as an addendum to your regular press mailing, sticking to the key newsworthy angles, and posting a message about the show. Things are changing fast in the media, and a number of journalists at outlets are beginning to rely more on these rather than traditional releases – so, by this time next year, press processes could be significantly changed.

DEALING WITH THE PRESS

The more professional you look to journalists, the better they will treat you. This means knowing some basic rules of the game:

1. Your most important asset as a publicist is **CREDIBILITY**. This means giving them the truth (put positively). The first responsibility of a journalist is to be accurate, and if you feed them incorrect information and they are shown to be wrong, they won't want to deal with you again. Not only should you always tell them the truth, you should also alert them if anything changes, such as if the opening of a show is delayed, the cast changes, an event is called off. They will remember and appreciate your attention. If something negative happens at your theatre, and the press asks about it, you should tell the truth, but also let the press know the immediate constructive action you are taking to correct it – that is vital in damage control.

Also: sometimes a journalist who is unfamiliar with your company will ask if you are an Off-Broadway or Off-Off-Broadway show, and you have to be honest. Even though being contractually Off-Broadway (from a Mini-Contract up) will bump you up one tier and get you more consideration, the journalist will find out anyhow (the low ticket price will be a giveaway), and you won't look good for not being honest. It's better to build the relationship from the beginning.

2. To repeat an earlier point: Do Your Homework Before You Call Them. To pitch a reporter a story that he or she never does and never will do makes you seem like you don't know what you are doing.
3. Designate an administrator as the publicist, not one of the creative participants in the show.
4. Know when to telephone the press and when not to. This is a very individual matter with each journalist and if you don't know, simply ask the journalist what he or she prefers. In general, don't call a newspaper or magazine the day it goes to press (unless they're doing a story on your show and there's a major change of information), or a TV or radio show too close to airtime. Beyond that, reporters have different schedules and want and don't want to be contacted at different times. Some reporters don't want you to call them at all, or at least until they know you better. It will then take a bit of time until you can call them.

A NOTE ABOUT MAILINGS: you can e-mail whenever you like, and they'll get to it when they're working.

4. Respect and meet deadlines: if you send something to a media outlet past their deadline, in most cases you may as well have not sent it.
5. Check your email and phone messages at least twice a day. Journalists often work around the clock and need information at the last minute. You don't want to miss these messages (it's not unusual to check in at 8 AM and find an email

from 11 PM the night before).

6. You will often have to take no for an answer - when you try to get a feature or a critic and you've made your best effort and someone says not, you usually have to accept it. Try to get a reason (maybe there's some condition that is preventing coverage, and maybe you can correct it), and try again on your next show, but rejection is a part of every publicist's life.
7. **Stay objective:** Yes, One More Time: Even if you believe deeply that a particular play is a masterpiece, telling that to a journalist is dangerous. They hear it all the time and won't be impressed. You want to establish long-term relationships with the press, and if, for example, a critic comes to the show and doesn't like the play, why would that critic believe your opinion next time? Keep selling the unique qualities of your show, using your knowledge of what the press wants. In other words (and this is part of doing your homework), if you know that a critic liked the work of a particular author, and your play was written by that same author, you can point that out. Likewise if the critic liked a particular actor that's in your play. Then, when the critic says the following week "But you said this was great!" you can say "No, I thought you would like it because you liked John Doe in his last New York appearance," or words to that effect. And so you are protected. Your (skilled) honesty is the quality that will build long-term relationships.

CRITICS - PROCEDURES

There is no mystery to approaching critics: you send them releases, and try to get them to the shows, following up with phone calls and emails.

A point: besides their interest (or lack thereof) in your show, there is enormous competition for critics, and a lot of the reason you don't get them is that they simply don't have time. Or perhaps their editors are simply not interested in Off-Off-Broadway.

Also: If you don't think a play is ready for the critics, don't solicit them. You should be using the press for your advantage, and showing your best work. A production should be at a professional level. One reason it can be hard to get critics to come out for Off-Off-Broadway is that they're not sure the shows will be professionally done. If the production isn't up to certain standards (the actors are consistently inaudible, there are obvious technical problems), don't invite critics: they won't get angry if they simply don't like a play, but if they consider it amateurish, they'll consider that they've wasted their time, and won't come back. Again, be honest. The show doesn't have to look big-budget, but it does have to look cohesive. It's imperative to look as professional as possible, which is why I feel it's right to show them reviews from other outlets – it's an endorsement, and will have an impact.

It is a good idea to open your production at a slower time (as stated before) in the theatre season, or in the summer. Also (this is a press agent 'trick'), try to schedule one of your early performances at an off hour - that is, at a time when not every other show is scheduled. For example, if you've got a 5 PM show on Saturday, and you know the running time of the show is two hours or less, a critic might be able to fit you in between

the matinee and evening shows he's obligated to cover. You may only get a few lines by way of a review, because you were an extra show squeezed in, but that's still a review. And always know the running time of your show, you'll often be asked about it on press nights. Critics may ask if the play will be over in time to make a later curtain, and you should be prepared to say yes (if not, schedule your show at a time when someone can get to an evening curtain afterwards).

At press previews, wait in the lobby or in front of the theater to distribute press tickets--don't let critics go to the box office. Always give critics a pair of seats on the aisle, mid-way back, not in the front row and not in the back. Of course, it all depends on the show. If there's a large wide set, you may seat them a bit farther back to get a better picture of the stage. If there is general seating, rope off the seats, escort the critic to the seats and take the ropes off. Many critics will need photos. If it's a major media outlet, ask whom to email photos to in advance--there may be an editor for that, or you may send photos directly to the critic. Almost no outlet nowadays, except the *New York Times*, sends a photographer to the show. If this happens (and if a *New York Times* critic comes, you'll get a call from the photo desk, usually the day of the performance, about an assigned photographer), they can be placed in the back or side aisles, so as not to get in the way of the audience. They should not use a flash, so as not to disturb the actors (although a photographer from a major outlet will know this, you can confirm that with them). They also may stay for only part of the show, or until they feel they have enough shots. In addition, they may ask you beforehand about the significant scenes or actions in the play to shoot, and you can discuss the play with them.

After you've done all of the above, leave the critic alone. He's there to do his job, and you've done as much as you can. And NEVER ask a critic on the way out what he thought of the show. That is a serious breach of theatre etiquette.

About reviews: The review will run as soon after opening as the editor has space, or according to the timeline of the outlet, whether a daily, weekly or monthly. Sometimes on a daily publication you may have to wait a few days--that's normal. Occasionally the review won't run at all, either because the critic didn't like it, or the editor doesn't have enough space anyway. Sometimes you may have to wait because the critic *did* like it, and the editor is waiting for a day when there will be more space available to devote to it. Hopefully the review will run while the play is still in performances. It's not something you ultimately control. However, on a daily, if it doesn't run in a few days, you can email the editor and inquire (nicely) about it. If there are positive reviews, you can have them enlarged and mounted outside the theater or in the lobby while the show is running and, of course, send them to your mailing list. If there are only good quotes, you can create a flyer with these to circulate (if you can afford to advertise, you can now create quotes ads). **Make sure to quote accurately and don't distort the meaning**--in other words, if a critic said the costumes were beautiful, don't simply excerpt the word "beautiful", as that will imply the critic liked the whole show. Critics don't like to be misquoted.

THE PRESS CAMPAIGN

A campaign is a complete strategy to include all the basic elements that have already been cited in this handbook.

A campaign means:

1. Plan early, so you don't miss deadlines of any applicable press.
2. Make a schedule: Usually a basic schedule looks like (with average quantities-these will vary from theater to theater):

6 weeks before: Press releases, listings memos mailed (150-300 pieces)

4 weeks before: Any applicable pitch letters (10 or so)

3 weeks before: Follow-up phone calls to pitch letters

Photo mailing (15-25 pieces)

Critics invitations (75)

2 weeks before: begin follow-up emails and phone calls to critics

Individual deadlines may vary, so you may have to mail out, for instance, one or two photos earlier.

NOTE: monthly magazines have very long deadlines, usually two to six months in advance. So if your show might be of interest to a specific magazine's readership (such as *ArtForum*, if for instance your show had strong connections to the visual arts), you may want to contact that outlet sooner rather than later, once you have all the essential details about the show.

FINAL REMARKS

This has been a broad, general outline, to give new theatre groups an idea of how to begin doing their own publicity. However, there are many details not covered and many other specific situations you will encounter. Even experienced press agents find they are always learning new things. You should therefore try to find a mentor, an experienced publicist you can go to for advice when unique or difficult situations arise. This will help you to avoid mistakes and to gain confidence.

It is hard to say how much publicity you'll get on shows. No publicist ever knows for sure. But with a persistent professional effort, you should be able to begin to be listed, to get an occasional photo, and to begin to attract critics from smaller and sometimes larger outlets. Getting publicity requires consistent work, producing worthy and newsworthy shows, and sometimes just plain luck. But a good product will ultimately prevail, and overall, over time, there should be growth in the amount of publicity, as you and your theatre develop professionally.

RESOURCES

BASIC THEATRE PRESS LIST

This is a basic list of New York theatre contacts. It is not meant to be exhaustive, because no one list will apply to everyone. This does not include press that is only applicable to Broadway shows, such as Tony Award voters and Broadway League names, and there are some outlets that only cover Broadway or Off-Broadway, although they may pick up an Off-Off-Broadway show if there's a well-known name or other particularly newsworthy aspect. I have included some of the latter, because you may have something applicable along the way. Also, there are many individual journalists whom you each will add, based on your experiences and coverage. In addition, personnel and emails change, so it is important to keep your list current. And finally, in some cases I've included more senior editors (or not) because of the way the outlet is run. However, this should get you started in contacting the press. (NOTE: None of these addresses are case-sensitive):

NEW YORK TIMES

Dave Itzkoff, "Arts, Briefly" column – Ditzkoff@nytimes.com
John Landman, Culture Editor – joland@nytimes.com
Patrick Healy, theater reporter – pdhealy@nytimes.com
Ben Brantley, senior theater critic – Brantley@nytimes.com (check)
Theater desk – theater@nytimes.com
Scott Veale, Sunday Arts and Leisure Editor – veale@nytimes.com
Weekend Section – weekend@nytimes.com
Ann Mancuso, Weekend listings – amancuso@nytimes.com
Metropolitan Section (occasionally does arts stories) – metro@nytimes.com
Erik Piepenburg, arts writer – erikp@nytimes.com
Patricia Cohen, arts writer – patcohen@nytimes.com
Robin Pogrebin, arts writer – pogrebin@nytimes.com
Scott Heller, Theater Editor – scott.heller@nytimes.com
Rachel Lee Harris, "Arts Briefly," "Weekend Miser" – raharris@nytimes.com
(also: besides OOB online listings, there is a Community Calendar, for special events: click on "Community Affairs" on the left-hand menu of the web site, follow instructions)

NEW YORK POST

Margi Conklin, Features Editor – mconklin@nypost.com
Barbara Hoffman, arts writer – barbh@nypost.com
Friday arts highlights – calendar@nypost.com
Elizabeth Vincentelli, senior theater critic – evincentelli@nypost.com
Frank Scheck, theater critic – scheckfrank@aol.com
Erie Norton, Online News Editor – enorton@nypost.com

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Bob Heisler, Features Editor – RT@nydailynews.com
Joe Dziemianowicz, theater writer/critic – jdziemianowicz@nydailynews.com

(Listings come from zvents.com site, enter separately)

NEWSDAY (mainly does Long Island now, but lists and sometimes covers New York City events):

Arts Listings – events@newsday.com

Linda Winer, Senior Theater critic – linda.winer@newsday.com (mainly Broadway, occasionally other events)

TIMEOUT NEW YORK

Theater section – theater@timeoutny.com

David Cote, Theater Editor – davidc@timeoutny.com

Adam Feldman, theater writer – adamf@timeoutny.com

Amy Plitt, This Week In New York section – thisweek@timeoutny.com

NEW YORK MAGAZINE

Theater listings – theaterlistings@nymag.com

Mary Kay Schilling, Arts Editor – mary_schilling@nymag.com

David Haskell, Features Editor – david_haskell@nymag.com

Chris Bonanos, senior/arts editor – chris_bonanos@nymag.com

Josh Wolk, Online Entertainment Editor – josh_wolk@nymag.com

NY1.COM

Stephanie Simon, cultural reporter – Stephanie.simon@ny1news.com

Rebecca Spitz, Manhattan reporter (if you're in Brooklyn or Queens, there are regional reporters for those, listed on the NY1 site – firstname.lastname@ny1news.com) – rebecca.spitz@ny1news.com

Donna Karger, "On Stage" – donna.karger@ny1news.com

Frank DiLella, "On Stage" – frank.dilella@ny1news.com

David Cote, theater critic (see TimeOut New York for contact email; also David Sheward at Backstage reports on-air here).

Listings can be entered on NY1.com calendar.

TDF

staff@TDF.org (they now have an online magazine with a variety of coverage)

BROADWAY WORLD

General address – newsdesk@broadwayworld.com

Gabrielle Sierra, news editor – gabrielle@broadwayworld.com

Adrienne Onofri, features – infopleaseus@yahoo.com

BACKSTAGE

Editorial – editorial@backstage.com

Andrew Salomon, editor – asalomon@backstage.com

David Sheward, editor – dsheward@backstage.com

Erik Haagensen, New York theatre reviews editor – ehaagensen@backstage.com

Simi Horwitz, theater writer – shorwitz@backstage.com

Tom Penketh, online editor – tpenketh@backstage.com

NYTHEATRE.COM/INDIETHEATER.ORG

General address, for listing and to reach Martin Denton – listings@nytheatre.com

THEATERMANIA

Editorial – editorial@theatermania.com

Brian Scott Lipton, editor – bsl@theatermania.com

Dan Bacalzo, editor – dan@theatermania.com

Peter Filichia, columnist (also at the Newark Star-Ledger) – pfilichia@theatermania.com

Listings – listings@theatermania.com

TALKIN BROADWAY

MikeReynolds@talkinbroadway.com

AnnM@talkinbroadway.com

VJ@talkinbroadway.com

L MAGAZINE (mainly for Brooklyn/Williamsburg)

Editorial: info@thelmagazine.com

editor@thelmagazine.com

VILLAGE VOICE

Michael Feingold, theater critic – mfeingold@villagevoice.com

Brian Parks, arts editor – bparks@villagevoice.com

Alexis Soloski, theater critic – ags110@columbia.edu

Listings – enter on web site, www.villagevoice.com

AM NEW YORK

Julie Gordon, arts editor – jgordon@am-ny.com

Scott Rosenberg, entertainment editor – srosenberg@am-ny.com

METRO NEW YORK

Dorothy Robinson, arts editor – dorothy.robinson@metro.us

Amber Ray, arts editor – amber.ray@metro.us

MANHATTAN MEDIA (several newspapers/sites)

Marissa Maier, editor, Our Town (Downtown edition) – mmaier@manhattanmedia.com

Allen Houston, editor, Our Town (Upper East Side) and West Side Spirit –

ahouston@manhattanmedia.com

Armond White, editor, CityArts – awhile@manhattanmedia.com

Mark Pelkert, editor, Chelsea-Clinton News, Westsider –

mpelkert@manhattanmedia.com

THE VILLAGER, DOWNTOWN EXPRESS

Scott Stiffler, arts editor – scott@thevillager.com

Jerry Tallmer, theater writer – jerrytallmer@earthlink.net

WKCR RADIO (Columbia University, covers Manhattan events) – arts@WKCR.org

WBAI RADIO

David Rothenburg – drothenberg@fortunesociety.org

Janet Coleman, Arts Editor, also Cat Radio Café – jcoleman@wbai.org

Barika Edwards, “Artsy Fartsy” – wbaidrama@gmail.com

OTHER WEB SITE LISTINGS & CALENDARS

(To Individually Enter Events or Send Press Releases: check each one)

nytn.org

edgepublications.com

newyorkcool.com

nyc.com

cityguideny.com

nyc.gov (Dept of Cultural Affairs cultural calendar)

wfuv.org

upcoming.org

eventful.com

feminist.org, gomag.com (for events of interest to women, also gay/lesbian)

dailycandy.com

theateronline.com
offoffoffonline.com
offoffbway.com
nyitawards.com (New York Innovative Theatre Awards)
nycupanduut.com

MEDIA ALERT LISTS

Associated Press Day Book – apnyc@ap.org

Assignment Desks:

NY1.com: assignmenteditors@ny1news.com (also, fax: 212-379-3575)
CBS-TV: fax (212) 975-9387; phone (212) 975-2161
NBC-TV: fax 212-664-2994; phone (212) 664-2731
FOX TV: fax: (212) 452-5512; phone (212) 452-3800
ABC-TV: fax 212-456-2381; phone (212) 452-3173
NY Times: fax 212-556-4275 (they say “don’t call” – the general # is (212) 556-1234)
New York Daily News: 212-643-7825; phone: (212) 210-1510
New York Post: 212-930-8540; phone: (212) 930-8500
Associated Press photo desk: fax 212-621-7980; phone (212) 621-1902
News 12 TV (Brooklyn, Bronx): look on News12.com for appropriate site and contact information.

###