

Increasing your club's coverage in the local press

It is important for the long term health of the game that clubs seek media coverage. Many people think of bridge as a game that died out with their grandmothers, but publicity dispels this myth by demonstrating that the game is alive and flourishing. It encourages people to think about taking it up, so the more coverage, the better for us all.

Many local newspapers are looking for content. If you can provide a concise, well written piece, which has local interest, and is of relevance to the readers, then it may well get printed. Very few stories in local papers have been sourced by the journalist themselves – most are reliant on leads from the public, and the less input they need to have in the final story the better. If you do the work for them they will thank you, and you are in a win-win situation as your story will likely be printed.

Providing press releases to the media can produce valuable extra publicity for your bridge club. A press release, news release, media release, or press statement is a written or recorded communication directed at members of the news media for the purpose of announcing something of news value.

A press release provides reporters with the basics they need to develop a news story. Press releases can announce a range of news items such as: scheduled events, personal promotions, awards, news products and services, sales, etc. For example, you could send a press release to your local media if your bridge club or one of its members has won a competition, is celebrating a special anniversary, has been given a medal, is organising a new course, raised funds for a charity, or achieved something else which might be newsworthy.

Essentially, a press release is a short, typed document of news or information. It's a mini-article that you prepare and then send to the media (newspaper, radio, television, magazine, etc.) for their use. The press release will be used either as background information or verbatim.

Contact your local paper

The paper will ultimately want a press release, or some written content of some kind, but before you start it may be appropriate to contact someone at the paper to introduce yourself and say that you intend submitting something to them. This may generate the name of the member of staff who would deal with the columns in which your article would appear, so you can send your press release directly to them. You may find that some would be interested in a regular submission (some clubs have a monthly 'news round-up'), others may be interested in sending a reporter and/or photographer to cover the event you are proposing to report in the press release. The news department at most local papers is fairly small and personable, so you are unlikely to be met by the same 'firewall' you might find at a larger organisation.

It may ultimately lead to nothing, but that should not stop you submitting your press release. You are merely trying to increase your chances by developing a relationship with someone ahead of time. Even if your first conversation is fruitless your press release, when submitted, will be judged on its merits.

To whom should you send it?

Your 'introductory phone call' mentioned above may have yielded a specific contact.

If not, then you can often identify the best recipient of your press release by looking on the newspaper's website, as they often specify the journalist's 'beats' on the 'contact us' page. Some papers divide the work by topic, in which case you may try to identify the journalist who covers 'recreation' or 'community activities' or whatever you think best fits your topic. Some papers have journalists who deal with particular villages or areas within the region that the paper covers, so you can sometimes identify the person who would write about activities in your location. Sometimes it will be an obvious fit, other times it will be the closest fit available – in both instances this approach will often get through to a personal inbox, which is often more successful than using a 'generic' email address.

You should, however, also submit your press release to the main news desk address. This can sometimes be a 'belt and braces' approach, but if your contact is on holiday – or just too busy to get through all their emails – it may be picked up by someone else at the paper, so you haven't missed your opportunity. Most papers will have an address such as news@, or newsdesk@ - this should be easy to find through their website, or in the paper itself.

How to send a Press Release

Always try to send your press release as an email, but either paste it into the body of the email, or include it all in the attachment. Don't split the information between the body of the email and the attachment. If the two parts become separated then important details, or simply context, may be lost and your hard work may be undone. Afterwards, you may wish to follow up the press release with a phone call to confirm its receipt.

What you need in a Press Release

- Contact information: Bridge club name; the name of the contact; phone number and email address.
- Release Date: When the press release can be released (if immediately, simply put: For Immediate Release).
- Headline: Quick snappy headline to get the Editor's interest.
- Body: The information you want to tell the media about.

- A footnote giving some additional context or background to the club or individuals involved is sometimes needed. This may be in the main part of the story – for example if you are announcing your club is holding lessons then the club’s details are integral to the story – but that is not always the case, so should be provided as a footnote. The story should stand on its own without this information, but gives additional information should the journalist be unfamiliar with your club, or even bridge itself. It may also help the journalist include extra information if they wish to flesh out the story, or undertake their own research in to the topic to add more to what you have written.
- For more information: Always add this at the end to help remind the media of your contact details.

News in the Press Release

It is so important to put news in your Press Release. Editors get lots of press releases during the week, and will throw away many of them. However, a good press release (especially locally) is one that has content which will be read and used. These tips will assist you in having that perfect press release:

- The subject of your press release needs to be important for the publication’s readers: If it’s a local newspaper – is your press release interesting and relevant to locals? Or is it relevant to potential bridge players?
- Make sure the release is news and not just an advert. Editors are unlikely to publish advertisements and will likely discard anything that is an obvious advert.
- Ensure it contains information which explains the greater benefit of the news you are reporting. For example, don’t simply say you’re your club is holding lessons for beginners – include that bridge is a game which offers social and mental health benefits. This also gives a subtle plug for the game, without it being an obvious advertisement.
- Keep it short and to the point. Space is always limited, especially in local newspapers. Tighten the writing and keep sentences concise.
- Include the facts to back up statements. The editor needs the who, what, when, where, how and why details too.
- Make sure the press release stands on its own. Never include a covering letter - anything you want to say in the letter should be in the press release. If the story is printed off and handed to someone else, do they have all the information if they don’t have your original email?

- Keep your news at the top. At the start of the press release make sure you mention 'the news'. Don't hide it in later paragraphs or summaries. Don't start with too many introductory sentences – 'setting the scene' is not usually appropriate.
- Use straightforward headlines.
- Make it 'colourful' without being hyperbolic or verbose.
- Make it factual without making it dull. Remember that the general reader may not understand bridge terminology so try not to use it. "A very narrow victory" is more meaningful to the general reader than "won by only 2 IMPs"; "a very high score" is more meaningful than "scored 72%".
- End releases properly. End each release with contact details and a generic paragraph about your club, as the media may choose to use it.
- Send in your press release before the news 'goes cold'.

Remember – it may be edited

Even if you think every word of your press release is important, and you believe it has been polished to perfection, it will likely be changed in some way. The editorial team have to fit every story in to the space available, and sometimes words must be cut, or changed. Of course they are aiming not to remove or change anything crucial, but if they do then remember that whatever is printed is better than them saying, "This is too long, let's use another story instead".

If they do remove something which fundamentally affects the story then contact the editor and ask that they re-print the correct information in the following issue. If they recognise that what they have printed is wrong, then they should be willing to do so.

Of course, the more concise, and better written, your press release the less chance there is that it will be edited.

Remember – it may not be printed immediately

The production schedule, the importance of other news, etc may affect when your item is printed. If it is of a time sensitive nature then ensure it is submitted in plenty of time, and if necessary state on the press release that it should not be printed before a certain date.

Using social media

If you have a twitter account then it may be effective to mention your local paper when tweeting relevant information which would be of interest to the general public in the area. It may get a retweet – which widens the audience of your tweet – and/or generate interest from someone who may wish to write a story about it.

Further help and information

For further assistance in dealing with the media contact the EBU's Press and Communications Officer Peter Stockdale on peter.stockdale@ebu.co.uk, or 01296 317215. Peter is always willing to help and will be happy to check your proposed press release before you send it out.

Sample Press Release 1

Press Release from Anytown Bridge Club

For immediate release

2 April 2011

Anytown Bridge Club team wins County tournament

Anytown Bridge Club has won the Disney Cup, an Anyshire County Bridge Association event for players of intermediate rank. The victorious team, Don Duck, Mick Mouse, Olivia Oyle and Pop Seaman beat teams from eleven other clubs from all over the County in a hotly contested tournament at Barnyard Green on 1st April.

All members of the team started playing three years ago as a way to stay mentally stimulated following retirement. "It keeps our minds sharp," said Don, the team captain, "and we have made great friends through the game too".

Anytown Bridge Club meets at Barnyard Green Church Hall on Tuesday and Friday evenings and Thursday afternoons, with additional sessions and lessons also available. For details, contact Don Duck on 01234 123456 or visit the Club's website at www.anytownbc.com.

For press enquiries, please contact:

Don Duck

Chairman, Anytown Bridge Club

15 Duckpool Drive,

Anytown AT1 1DD

Tel: 01234 123456; Email: don.duck@duckmail.com

For more information on bridge visit the website of the English Bridge Union, www.ebu.co.uk/about-bridge

Sample press Release 2

Press Release from Anytown Bridge Club

For release after 14th April

2 April 2011

Learn bridge and support the Bigcity Hospice

Anytown Bridge Club is launching a new course of bridge lessons for beginners on Friday afternoons from September 16, with all profits going to the Bigcity Hospice.

Club Chairman, Don Duck, said “Bridge is a fantastic activity for all ages, and everyone is welcome”.

“Whether you want to play competitively, or just for fun, bridge offers a great way to socialise and be mentally stimulated. The club is delighted that our lessons will be supporting the work of the hospice” he added.

To find out more, visit the club’s website www.anytownbc.com. Alternatively call Don Duck on 01234 123456 or email him at don.duck@duckmail.com.

For press enquiries, please contact:

Don Duck

Chairman, Anytown Bridge Club

15 Duckpool Drive,

Anytown AT1 1DD

Tel: 01234 123456; Email: don.duck@duckmail.com

Bigcity Hospice, on Maidup Road, Bigcity, helps children in Bigcityshire affected by life-limiting and life-threatening conditions, and offers support to their families.

www.anytownhospice.co.uk

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