

Start spreading the news

A Proactive Media Relations Handbook for Mohawk Staff

April 2006

Start Spreading the News was written by Mohawk's Marketing, Communications, Alumni and Development department (2006)

For more information, contact:

Jay Robb
Mohawk Media Relations
(905) 575-1212 ext. 3965
(905) 979-8893 (cell)
jay.rob主@mohawkcollege.ca

Forward

What do you say to friends and neighbours when they ask about what you do at Mohawk?

Here's how I answer that question. I talk about you. I explain how you help students succeed, give employers a competitive advantage and strengthen our community. I explain how Mohawk puts students and learning at the heart of all we do. And there's always a new and memorable story to proudly share.

Talking with reporters gives Mohawk a way to share our success stories with the entire community. Our stories will reach prospective students, donors and employers who may be thinking of enrolling in a program or taking a continuing education course, supporting student bursaries or hiring a Mohawk graduate. With every good news story we share, we further strengthen our relationship with the community.

If you know of a success story, I encourage you to start spreading the news. Give our Media Relations department a call and together, you'll come up with the best way to get your story in print, on air and on the web. The media relations guide you're about to read also offers best practice strategies and advice for working with the media.

If you're willing to find time in your day and make the effort to talk with a reporter, then you have my complete and unconditional support to work with our Media Relations department in spreading the good news. And I look forward to sharing your success stories when I meet with senior leadership, with Mohawk's Board of Governors and with anyone in the community who asks me about the remarkable work we're doing here at Mohawk.

MaryLynn West-Moynes
President
Mohawk College

Table of contents

5. The Coles Notes version
6. Helping you tell Mohawk stories
7. 5 ways to start spreading the news
8. Proactive vs. reactive media relations
9. Why talk with a reporter
10. Why you're a perfect spokesperson
11. Putting to rest 3 common concerns
12. Making news at Mohawk
13. 25 potential story ideas
14. The life of a reporter
15. The Golden Rule for good media relations
16. 5 ways to impress a reporter
17. Key messages
18. Bridges and transitions
19. Interview pointers
20. Newspaper interviews
21. Radio interviews
22. TV interviews
23. Talk shows
24. Helping you succeed with your interview
25. Background: Mohawk's media relations strategy
26. Background: Key message worksheet
27. The final word

The Coles Notes version

Every reporter and editor is tuned in to WSIC

- Why should I care?
- Why should I do a story about Mohawk?
- Why should my readers, listeners and viewers care about what's happening at Mohawk?

The stronger our answer to WSIC, the better the chances of getting good media coverage for your story idea.

- Mohawk's Media Relations department will work with you to plan, prepare and deliver an effective pitch to the media.

If the media is interested in telling your story, we need to make the reporter's job as easy as possible. We can do this by being:

- Prepared. We know what we want to say and we know how to respond to questions the reporter will likely ask.
- Accessible. We're responsive to deadlines.
- Quotable. We talk in soundbites and say memorable things.
- Helpful. We find other people for the reporter to interview and pull together background information.

Helping you tell good news stories

Mohawk Media Relations is here to help you get the word out. If you have a potential story idea, call Media Relations at 905-575-1212 ext. 3965 or e-mail to jay.rob主@mohawkcollege.ca.

To get started, Media Relations will ask you 3 questions:

- What do you want to accomplish by telling your story?
Increased enrolment, attendance, donations, awareness, pride?
- What do you want to say?
- Who do you want to reach?

Media Relations will then help you:

- Draft a set of key messages.
- Assemble a strong supporting cast to help tell the story.
- Find the best backdrop and visuals for telling the story.

Media Relations will then:

- Determine the best way to pitch your story idea and identify who to pitch your story to in the media.
- If needed, draft a media release or advisory, fact sheet and backgrounder for your review.
- Pitch your story to the media.

If reporters are interested, Media Relations will help tell your story by:

- Practicing before you talk with the reporter by doing a mock interview and anticipating the questions a reporter may ask.
- Getting you background on the reporter.
- Being the on-campus escort and tour guide for the reporter.
- Offering a quiet office for phone and in-person interviews.
- Sitting in on interviews at your request.
- Handling questions you can't answer and finding information that a reporter may request during your interview.

5 ways to start spreading the news

Working collaboratively with Media Relations, you can help spread the good news about Mohawk by:

- Proactively pitching story ideas to the media.
- Being available as a content expert for the media, providing local angles and expert commentary on news, issues and trends. *
- Writing letters to the editor, opinion pieces and guest columns for newspapers, magazines, trade journals and websites.
- Giving speeches and making presentations to groups in the community that could attract media coverage.
- Hosting and organizing events and workshops at Mohawk and in the community that could attract media coverage.

* Mohawk President MaryLynn West-Moynes is the official spokesperson for college-wide matters, such as strategic directions, policies and procedures, budgets and funding and reaction to government announcements.

If a reporter asks about college-wide matters or a topic that falls outside your area of expertise, refer the reporter to Media Relations.

Proactive vs. reactive media relations

Both kinds of media relations offer opportunities to tell Mohawk stories although the approach we take will be different.

Proactive media relations:

- Mohawk initiates the media coverage.
- Media Relations pitches a story idea to reporters and editors.
- Media Relations works with you in advance to plan and prepare for the media pitch.
- You know what to say when the reporters call.

Reactive media relations:

- The reporter calls out of the blue and on their own initiative.
- Media Relations will be monitoring media coverage to anticipate potential stories.
- If you get an unexpected call directly from a reporter you haven't worked with before, refer her to Media Relations.
- If you get a call from a reporter you're familiar with, ask if you can call back and do the interview in 30 minutes or an hour. You need time to prepare your key messages.

Media Relations will then ask 6 questions to determine who should talk with the reporter and then arrange interviews:

- Which media outlet are you working for?
- What's your deadline?
- What's the angle for your story?
- Have you reported on this kind of story before?
- Who else are you interviewing for the story?
- What can we do to help you with this story?

Why talk with a reporter?

- What's in it for you?
 - BE RECOGNIZED AND RESPECTED as an expert in the community, within the college and among your peers.
 - Get reporters and our community more interested in a topic that you're passionate about.
 - Publicly recognize and celebrate outstanding students, alumni, employers and staff.
- What's in it for your program and Mohawk?
 - Higher profile through positive-word-of-mouth and "buzz".
 - Support recruitment, fundraising and employment of students and grads.
 - Bolster sense of pride within the Mohawk community.
 - Tell stories that reinforce and bring to life Mohawk's mission and vision.
- Use proactive media relations to help:
 - **raise awareness**
 - **increase understanding**
 - **build support**
 - **encourage involvement**
 - **secure commitment**among Mohawk's key stakeholders.

"We're in the education business. And I would suggest to colleagues that that business includes the general public, not just students paying tuition."

-- Professor Larry Sabato, University of Virginia

Why you're a perfect spokesperson

- You're passionate about student success.
- You believe Mohawk makes a difference to students, employers and our community.
- You inspire learning, leadership and citizenship.
- You have a wealth of experience and expertise within your field.
- You're trusted and admired by the community. According to the 2006 Profession Barometer by Leger Marketing, 88 per cent of Canadians trust educators. Rounding out the top five most admired and trusted occupations are firefighters, nurses, farmers and doctors.
- You have a Media Relations department that will help you succeed in telling stories about Mohawk.

Putting to rest 3 common concerns

- I'll be asked tough questions I can't answer
- I'll be misquoted
- I'll get in trouble for something I say

I'll be asked tough questions.

- You're helping to tell good news stories so you likely won't be asked tough questions.
- Before talking with a reporter, Media Relations can help you anticipate and answer questions through a mock interview.

I'll be misquoted.

- Media Relations will help you stay on message.
- Learning how to take control of an interview and deliver a set of clear, concise and compelling key messages will reduce the risk of being misunderstood, paraphrased and taken out of context.

I'll get in trouble for something I say.

- If you're working with Media Relations to tell a good news story about Mohawk, you have the complete and unconditional support of the President.
- So don't second-guess what you're saying and instead stay focused on delivering your key messages.

Making news at Mohawk

In deciding what's news, editors and reporters look at:

- timeliness (what's happening now or about to happen?)
- prominence (anyone famous or familiar involved?)
- proximity (what's the local angle?)
- significance (what's this mean for the community?)
- Other common elements: unusualness, human interest, conflict (villain / victim / vindicator) and newness

3 key media relations strengths at Mohawk:

- Reporters are trained to build stories around people.
 - There's a wealth of human interest stories at Mohawk with 10,000 full-time students, 5,000 adult learners, 3,000 apprentices, 70,000 alumni, 2,000 students doing co-op work terms with 300 employers – there is a rich cultural diversity at Mohawk, with people from all walks of life.
- Experienced and expert Mohawk staff can provide reporters with local angles and informed commentary on news, issues and emerging trends.
- Mohawk contributes directly to the economic growth, prosperity and social well-being and makes our community a better place to live, work and play.

25 potential story ideas

1. Students doing great work in the classroom
2. Students doing great work in the community
3. Alumni with rewarding careers and making a difference
4. Staff doing great work in supporting students
5. Partnerships with the community
6. Partnerships with employers
7. Solving community issues and problems
8. Local – provincial – national awards and recognition
9. Innovations in the classroom
10. Research projects
11. New funding
12. New programs
13. New courses
14. New equipment
15. Guest lectures
16. Workshops
17. Special events
18. Annual events
19. Student competitions
20. Milestones
21. Anniversaries
22. New hires
23. Published articles and reports
24. Speeches and presentations
25. Donations and sponsorships

**Build every story around a person
or group of Mohawk people who have a
compelling story to share**

The life of a reporter

- High pressure job
- GET IT FIRST, GET IT FAST, GET IT RIGHT.
- Professional questioner.
- Generalists who know a lot about a little, quick studies.
- Well educated – college, university or both.
- Constant deadlines and juggling multiple stories.
- Demanding editors who assign and reassign stories and who need to be sold on story ideas.
- Short-staffed newsrooms and tight budgets.
- Unpredictable and long hours.
- Competition:
 - With other media
 - Within the newsroom – get the top story, best assignments, awards, promotions
- Needs a steady supply of story ideas and a network of reliable contacts.

“What reporters really want is usually pretty simple. They want their calls returned, they want a quote for their story and they want to do their job and go home. Don’t make your relationship with reporters complicated.”

-- Sally Stewart, **Media Training 101: A Guide to Meeting the Press**

The Golden Rule for good media relations

Make it as easy as possible for a reporter to tell a story about Mohawk.

- The number one request from reporters is RETURN PHONE CALLS. And don't wait a week to call back. Most reporters are working to a daily deadline.
- If you've been working with Media Relations to pitch a story to the media, be accessible once the story's been pitched. Check your phone messages. Stay in touch.
- Work to the reporter's deadline.
- Be quotable. Don't talk in jargon or industry-speak.
- Tell a story rather than recite facts and stats.
- Simplify the story for the reporter. Give executive summary highlights. Don't go into great detail unless asked.
- Be passionate and excited about your topic. Enthusiasm is contagious. Stay positive at all times.
- Recommend other people the reporter can talk with -- students, grads, employers and staff.
- Offer to e-mail or fax background information, reports, weblinks to help the reporter tell our story.

5 ways to impress a reporter

- DON'T ASK TO REVIEW THE STORY before it's printed or goes to air. Trust the reporter to get the story right. The only person who reviews a reporter's story is an editor (and even then the reporter doesn't like it much).
- Don't talk for 30 minutes and then tell the reporter that you don't want to be quoted. Everything you said before, during and after the interview was on the record and can be used by the reporter.
- Don't ask the reporter for a copy of the story after it's printed or has gone to air. Media Relations can get one for you.
- Don't tell reporters that Mohawk advertises with their newspaper, magazine, TV or radio station. Reporters don't care and some might think you're trying to blackmail them. Editorial judgment is not influenced by advertising.
- Don't tell the reporter "here's the real story you need to report." This would be like a reporter telling you how to teach in the classroom or run your department. Our job is to give the reporter the people and information they need to do their jobs. It's then up to the reporter to use their news judgment and tell the story.

The key (message) to a great interview

- Know what you want to say and how best to say it before doing an interview. Focus on what's most important about the story you want to share.
- Every reporter is looking for that one great quote to “punch up” their stories.
- **TALK IN SOUNDBITES.** In radio and TV interviews, you may get 10 seconds of air time. In a newspaper interview, you may get 1 or 2 sentences. Make it count and stand out from what everyone else is saying.
- Delivering key messages greatly increases the odds of being quoted directly instead of edited, paraphrased, misunderstood or not quoted at all.
- Hallmarks of a great key message: brevity, boldness, simplicity, impact and familiarity.
 - Limit your key message to 1 sentence, 30 words or less.
 - Say something that gets noticed and remembered. Leave others wishing that they'd said the same thing.
 - Simplify complexity. Get to the heart of the matter.
 - Use references, comparisons and metaphors to everyday experience that others can easily relate to.
 - Talk in complete sentences.
- Flesh out your key message with 2-3 supporting facts and stats, examples, 3rd party validation, study results.

“Speak their language. They know you're smart – that's why they're interviewing you. So avoid big words or workplace jargon. Speak simply and conversationally. If the reporter doesn't understand you, then she can't explain it to the reader.”

-- Karen Friedman, “How to shine in the media spotlight”

Bridges and transitions

- Take charge of the interview. Don't sit back and wait for the reporter to ask questions. Turn it into a conversation.
- Try to lead off the interview with your key message. "Before we get started, let me tell you about what we're doing here at Mohawk and why we're so excited..."
- If you're asked a question, answer it to the best of your abilities and then transition to your key message.
- Transitions and bridges can include:
 - The 3 most common bridges – and, however, but
 - Another thing folks would be interested in knowing is
 - Building on that point...
 - At the end of the day, what this is all about is...
 - Now, having said that...
 - It's also worth noting that...
 - What's important to keep in mind here is...
 - Looking at the big picture...
- If you're asked a question you can't answer, explain why (I don't know, that's confidential, I'm not going to speak on someone else's behalf, that's outside of my area of expertise) and then say "now, what I can tell you is..." and transition to your key message.
- The reporter may wrap up the interview by asking if there's anything you want to add. Here's your opportunity to drive home your key message one last time.

Interview pointers

- Interviews are two-way conversations, not confrontations, interrogations, sermons or lectures.
- Say Mohawk rather than “us”, “we” or “the college”.
- Stand when doing phone interviews for added energy.
- Don’t lie, guess or make stuff up.
- Think of what your audience wants and needs to know.
- Stay positive and avoid talking in negatives. “We’re helping more students succeed” rather than “we’re making sure fewer students fail”.
- Don’t answer hypothetical or speculative questions. It’s impossible to know what might happen.
- Don’t speak on someone else’s behalf. Ask the reporter to talk to that person or organization directly.
- BE BOLD, BE BRIEF AND BE QUIET. Don’t rush in to fill a pregnant pause -- it’s a common interview technique that can knock you off message.
- Don’t volunteer bad news by saying “I’m glad you didn’t ask about...” or “we could really use some positive press because...”.
- You’re always “on the record” before, during and after an interview. Never go off it or say anything you wouldn’t want to see attributed to you.

Getting it in print: newspapers

- Daily newspapers: Hamilton Spectator and Brantford Expositor
- Community papers: Mountain News, The Satellite, Burlington Post (weekly publications)
- Deadlines are usually same day, with reporters writing their stories by mid-afternoon and filing by 5 – 6 p.m.
- Most of the stories we tell will wind up in print – newspapers have the biggest “news hole” to fill.
- Talking with newspaper reporters is a good place to start if you want to build up your confidence – there are no microphones or cameras.
- Interviews will be done in person or by phone if the reporter is too busy to leave the newsroom.
- Always agree to have your picture taken – everyone looks at photos. Not everyone reads stories.
- Your interview may only be used to provide background – don’t be disappointed.
- Stories are generally written at a Grade 6-8 reading level so talk at that level too.
- Editors – not reporters – write headlines.
- Reporters may call back with more questions or to follow-up on a point you made in your earlier conversation.

On the air – radio interviews

- Radio stations: CMHL 900 (Hometown Radio), C-101.5 FM, 102.9 K-Lite FM, Oldies 1150, CHAM-AM, Y108, Wave 94.7 FM, CKPC Brantford
- Deadlines are usually hourly.
- News stories and newscasts are very brief – 30-second stories with a 10-second soundbite.
- Most interviews will be done by phone, taped and edited for broadcast.
- Reporters may show up for events and announcements.
- Radio listeners only hear you once. They can't reread what you've just said so speak clearly, simply and slowly.
- Use short and complete sentences.
- Energize your voice to give it character and colour and grab listeners' attention.
- Smile (radio pros call this "putting teeth in it"). Listeners won't see your ear-to-ear grin but they'll hear it in your voice.

Say it with pictures – television interviews

- Television stations: CH-TV, Cable 14, Rogers Cable
- Deadlines are usually morning, noon and afternoon.
- Brief stories – 60 or 90 seconds, with 20-second soundbites.
- Strong visuals are key to TV news. Show people doing things and have interesting things going on in the background.
- Interviews are usually taped on location and then edited (rarely live).
- Talk with the reporter and ignore the camera.
- Viewers are both watching and listening to your interview so pay attention to your body language.
- TV interview tips (From George Merlis, **How to Make the Most of Every Media Appearance**):
 - Dress right: blue / gray best, avoid bright colours or stripes
 - Sit right: straight in the chair, lean slightly forward
 - Stand right: straight with your feet shoulder width apart, one foot slightly ahead of the other, don't rock
 - Move right: talk with your head, shoulders, hands, use gestures to reinforce your key points
 - Emote right: expression should match what you're saying
 - Look right: look the reporter, not the camera
 - Talk right: short, simple and lead with your strongest messages, assume the microphone is always on
 - Leave right: no heavy sighs of relief, grimaces or bolting for the door

Can we talk? TV and radio talk shows

- Talk shows: CH TV (CH Morning Live, Smith 'n Hayes, CH Live @ 5:30, CH Straight Talk, Cable 14, CHML 900 (morning and afternoon shows))
- A great opportunity to raise your profile as a Mohawk content expert.
- Talk shows are always looking for dynamic guests who are informative and entertaining and can keep audiences tuned in.
- 3 talk show formats (you'll know ahead of time which one you're doing):
 - You're it. You're the only guest talking with the show's host. If it's a good news story, you'll be on the same page. If you're talking about an issue, you may be taking opposite sides and debating.
 - You're part of a panel with other guests who will likely have different points of view. The host will play moderator and provoke debate if there's a lull.
 - You're taking calls for listeners and viewers.
- Talk shows are usually broadcast live to air.
- Think of a talk show appearance as a conversation rather than a sermon. Everyone likes to eavesdrop on a conversation. No one likes to be lectured to.
- If you get into a debate....always take the moral high ground and stay on the right side of an issue. Calmly state your key points and back them up with facts. Don't respond to hostility, don't get flustered and don't take any of it personally.

Helping you succeed with your interview

Media Relations at Mohawk is always available to help you:

- Develop and deliver a great key message.
- Prepare and practice for your print, radio or TV interview, anticipate questions and rehearse answers with mock interviews.
- Join you on media interviews.
- Handle the tough questions that are outside of your area of expertise and answer questions about college policies, procedures, positions and strategic directions.
- Provide a quiet office for interviews.
- Pitch your story idea or upcoming event to the media.
- Review articles and letters you've written and presentations and speeches you've prepared.
- Do post-mortems on the media coverage and your interview – constructive feedback only.

Contact:

Jay Robb, Media Relations

Marketing, Communications, Alumni and Development

Phone: 905-575-1212 ext. 3965

Cell: 905-979-8893 Home: 905-523-4742

E-mail: jay.rob主@mohawkcollege.ca

BACKGROUND: Media relations strategy

Objectives:

- Enhance Mohawk's reputation with key stakeholders and opinion leaders
- Support student recruitment
- Support college advancement
- Bolster student, alumni and staff pride in Mohawk

Strategies:

- Build strong working relationships with the media
- Promote faculty and staff experts to the media
- Promote Mohawk and program events, initiatives
- Celebrate student, alumni, faculty and staff success

Tactics:

- Media releases and advisories
- Custom pitches to targeted media
- Contact Mohawk – subject matter experts for the media
- Mohawk bylined authorship program
- Mohawk Speaker's Bureau

Evaluation:

- Qualitative / Quantitative
- Number of media stories published
- Analysis of media coverage (tone, prominence, key messages, headline mention, photo plus story, first / only mention in the story)

BACKGROUND – Key message worksheet

Be bold and be brief (30 words or less).

Focus on benefits and solutions.

Aim to have the reporter use your key message verbatim.

Why should other people care about your story idea?

Summarize your story idea:

Who:

Is doing what:

Why:

When:

Where:

How:

Write the headline to go with your front page story
in tomorrow's newspaper.

The final word – how to ace your interview

- Be yourself.
- Relax.
- Smile.
- Celebrate.
- Simplify.
- Be bold. Be brief. Be quiet.
- Put Mohawk Media Relations to work for you.

Thanks for helping to tell and sell
the Mohawk experience.