

CHESAPEAKE

BAY JOURNAL

What makes a good story?

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About the Bay Journal

- ▶ Independent environmental reporting for the Chesapeake region
- ▶ Nonprofit news organization
- ▶ FREE subscriptions at bayjournal.com
- ▶ Reaches about 200,000 people each month
- ▶ New podcast, Chesapeake Uncharted
- ▶ Lesser known local government edition, also free: localgov@bayjournal.com

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Starter questions

- ▶ You're selecting a movie to watch with an 8 year old. What do you choose?
- ▶ You're selecting a movie to watch with a 25 year old. What do you choose?

Probably NOT the same thing!

What makes a good story?

No simple answer!

- ▶ Yes, good stories have common elements.
- ▶ But in **practical terms:**

Good stories depend on what your audience **THINKS** is a good story.

So you want to ...

- ▶ Pitch a conservation story to a reporter or editor?
- ▶ Promote a conservation project to a legislator, funder or potential partner?
- ▶ Promote the work of your organization or agency to members or stakeholders?

Your challenge: You need to sell the story. There is a LOT of noise out there.

Pitfalls

1. Simply telling the story in the way that's most familiar to you
2. Failure to **TRULY** identify your audience(s)
 - There is *no such thing* as the “general public” (loosely speaking)
3. Failure to prioritize your audience(s)
 - You have limited time and you may waste it.
4. Over-reliance on press releases and press events
5. Telling the story after it's over
6. Making communications an afterthought

Strike that, reverse it

To put this in positive, pro-active terms:

1. Make a yearly communications plan. Think ahead about priorities and opportunities.
2. Identify your priority audiences. If you had to pick 3, what would they be? **Be as specific as you can stand to be!**
3. Think about what matters to them. **Shape the story around THEIR values and interests.**
4. Think about where they get their information. What sources do you control (newsletters, social media)? What sources must you “sell” to? Traditional media is not always the best answer.
5. Think about the timing of media outreach.

Find the on-ramp

You are looking for talking points – what to emphasize, how to frame your pitch, **with your audience in mind.**

Examples:

- ▶ People angles for local news
- ▶ Faith-based angles for church pubs
- ▶ Fish angles for anglers

Find the on-ramp

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Examples:

- ▶ Return on investment for local gov't reps
- ▶ Farmer profiles for ag associations

Working with the media

1. **Reach out** to reporters/editors before you need them. Ask what they are looking for. Ask about timing issues.
2. **Photos matter.** Hire a photographer or recruit skilled volunteers for images you can share with media.
3. **Consider a fact sheet** if it will help establish credibility and impact.
 - Cite (and link to) OTHER sources, not just yourself. Sources should be cited, varied and credible.
4. **In general – Invite media when the action is happening.** Don't stage things.
 - **BUT** your sense of timing may not match theirs. Sometimes you can successfully pitch a story months after the deal has been made.

About press releases

Each situation/audience is different but...

- ▶ Emails or phone calls are often better than press releases.
- ▶ Your audience is a reporter or editor...
Does the opening show why they should care?
- ▶ Alarmist, emotionally charged press releases — or over-the-top gushing — often flop.

Summary

1. A good story depends on who you are telling it to. No one-size-fits all.
2. **Analyze your situation:** audience, venues, priorities. A few strong stories in smaller circulation might hit a much higher percentage of the people you really want to reach.
3. Prepare with story-telling tools: photos, facts and interview options.
4. Make way for reporters to tell the story well.
5. Plan ahead and build relationships.

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Thanks!

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