

Due to the fitness industry's tremendous growth over the past 20 years, health and fitness have become hot topics for all types of media. But this explosion of interest has a flip side: Getting media exposure in such a competitive marketplace can be challenging. With a huge selection of trainers, hundreds of instructors-turned-celebrities and a new facility opening every few minutes it seems, how can a fitness professional stand head and shoulders above the crowd?

A good public relations and marketing program can certainly pave the way toward greater recognition and more opportunity. But where should a fitness professional with limited exposure to marketing and promotion begin?

The first step is to create a media kit that will outline the subject's unique capabilities and selling points. This kit should be compiled in a format designed to meet the needs of prospective recipients, whether they represent publications; radio or television media; or fitness facilities. Preparing a media kit may seem daunting at first. Never fear—this tutorial will take you step-by-step through the dos and don'ts of creating a professional media kit and will have you on your way to increasing your visibility in no time.

Why Create a Media Kit?

Think of the media kit as a virtual representation of you, your facility and/or your product. This kit is often the first representation of you or your subject that anyone in the media sees. For this reason, it is crucial that you outline your promotional goals ahead of time. Here are some sample goals:

- You want to expand into video production and you're hoping to enlist the support of a video producer.
- You've just won a prestigious fitness award and you want the world to know about it.
- You hope to boost your personal training clientele by landing a regular position on a local fitness television show.
- You want to pitch your facility's recent renovation in the local newspapers in order to attract new members.

- You want to promote a new fitness product you've created in industry trade publications like *IDEA Health & Fitness Source*.

Whatever your goal, the main purpose of the media kit is to communicate to your target audience your (or your facility's or product's) particular talents and persuade that audience that you are worthy of inclusion in the respective medium.

While some of what constitutes a great media kit depends on the particular needs of the target recipient(s), here are a few basic components every media kit should contain.

The Press Release: The Headline

The centerpiece of your kit, the press release

is usually the first item editors or program managers will review when considering your pitch. In fact, issuing a press release on its own is often the preferred strategy; once you've followed up and verified that your contacts are interested in the release, you can feel confident they'll want to view the rest of your media kit for more information. But whether used independently or as part of a larger media kit, the press release is your key promotional tool.

To hook your reader, create a strong headline that sells the rest of your press release. Many a release has been used for wastebasket practice rather than publication because the headline failed to alert the recipient to the importance of the release. Your headline should be a short, crisp statement announcing what's important or newsworthy about you or the object of your promotional efforts. Most important, it should explain the key benefits to the recipient's audience or readership.

Let's say you're a group exercise instructor who has designed an innovative workout that you think could be the next

Creating an Attention-Grabbing Press Kit

Catch the media's eye by learning how to write a targeted press release and put together a top-notch media kit.

fitness sensation. You'd like to get coverage in *Shape* magazine and some industry trade publications so other instructors and managers will start including your workout in their repertoire. You might write a release with the following headline:

Joe Jones Announces Next Fitness Craze

Now, if you were Karen Voight, this release might immediately get picked up, because Karen Voight is a well-known expert who has already established credibility in the fitness arena. However, if you're an unknown, your name will carry significantly less weight and therefore, this headline won't work. Furthermore, the headline fails to communicate anything about this so-called fitness craze or its benefits—is it a piece of equipment? Is it a class? This “craze” could describe virtually anything from a new set of yo-yo tricks to extreme mountain biking.

So how can you grab that editor's attention? Get right to the point. Tell him or her what this new fitness craze is and why it is beneficial. A better headline might read:

New Rowing Program Burns Twice the Calories of Traditional Group Fitness Classes

Naturally, the claim you make has to be true and you must be ready to provide proof, but this headline tells the reader exactly what's involved in your new fitness program and why someone would want to participate.

The Press Release: The 5 Ws

Like an attention-grabbing headline, a strong first paragraph goes a long way to closing the deal. When contacting editors, reporters, program managers and fitness professionals who have very limited time and receive thousands of pitches a day from people seeking press coverage, you need to think like a journalist. Assume your reader can't afford the time to read beyond your first paragraph and incorporate in that opener the 5 Ws of journalism: **who**, **what**, **where**, **when** and, sometimes, **why**.

Taking the fictitious example cited above a step further, your first paragraph might read as follows:

Los Angeles, March 30, 2000—1997

IDEA Fitness Instructor of the Year and popular workshop presenter Joe Jones today announced the debut of an advanced rowing class that has been shown to burn twice the calories of traditional fitness and step classes. The new program, called ROW-B-CIZE, not only burns calories effectively but simultaneously promotes upper-body strength—a key factor missing from many group exercise participants' programs. With the ROW-B-CIZE program, instructors and their respective fitness facilities can quickly expand their portfolio of classes, while providing participants with the benefits of a safe, effective and fun workout.

This opening paragraph works because it answers the initial questions the media might have about this new workout:

1. **What?** It's a new rowing program called ROW-B-CIZE.
2. **Who?** Award-winning Joe Jones is introducing it. Group fitness instructors, their facilities and their class participants will benefit.
3. **Where and When?** This information is included in the dateline—a standard opening that tells the recipient where the news is coming from (usually where you or your company is based) and the date the news was issued.
4. **Why?** This question is difficult to answer in just one paragraph, but in this example, we've explained how members of the target audience benefit: They burn twice the calories they would in a traditional class and also gain upper-body strength.

The Press Release: Establishing Credibility

In a press release you must use facts or support from industry leaders to give what you say some weight. So you're not Karen Voight. Go for the next best thing: a quote from her stating that your workout is the best thing since group indoor cycling hit the clubs. A quote from an expert or industry leader can lend credibility to you and your cause. If you're pitching a fitness product geared to kids, for example, a quote from a leading expert on youth fitness extolling the virtues of

your equipment can give you the added stamp of approval you need to grab that editor's attention. If you're a personal trainer and have celebrity clients who are willing to state how much you've helped them maintain their fitness levels, by all means include one or more testimonials in the press release. If you can't secure a quote, consider using statistics to validate your story. For example, if your facility has recently been part of a study that shows your members have the highest satisfaction rating of any facility in the city, consider paraphrasing the results of that study in your release. You can also use statistics from IDEA industry surveys that appear periodically in IDEA publications.

The Press Release: Keeping It Simple

Nowhere is the acronym “KISS” (better known as “Keep It Simple, Stupid”) more applicable than when you are writing press releases. If you deluge your readers with the technical details of your product, long-winded narratives of your life or simply irrelevant data, you are certain to lose them. Focus on information that is crucial to the readers. Convince them there is nothing else on the market like your new fitness gadget and tell them exactly why it benefits the demographics for whom they are writing or broadcasting.

Most important, remember that editors and reporters, in particular, are looking for easy-to-read, factual information they can turn into a story. The more you help them do their job, the better results you'll achieve. Keep your press release short (2 pages is usually plenty), double-space it and consider using bullet points to call out key features or benefits. Use a serif font, such as Palatino or Times Roman, because serif fonts are easier to read than the sans serif alternatives. Also, consult a tried-and-true guide like the *Associated Press Stylebook* for help with grammar, punctuation and style.

Your press release should be factual in content, devoid of hyperbole and free of unnecessary adjectives. It should *not* read

like an advertisement or a sales pitch. Take the time to read the publications, view the programs or visit the facilities to which you plan to send your release or media kit. See what kind of articles and programs prospective recipients produce or what kind of people they employ. Tailor your release accordingly and you're much more likely to see it in print.

The Press Release: Contact Information

Nothing irks reporters more than getting an interesting press release about a subject they desperately want to write about and then not being able to contact the sender with questions or a request for more information. Make sure you include *current* contact information on each page of your press release. Include your name, title, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail address. If you're going to be out of town the day your press release arrives on recipients' desks, make sure you assign someone else to respond to inquiries.

The Backgrounder

Now that your release has the attention of media staff, they will want to read the other items in your press kit. The first should be a "backgrounder" that tells your unique story and provides some in-depth information about you, your product or your facility. This piece can take the form of a short fact sheet or lengthier document.

If you're a group fitness instructor or personal trainer, the backgrounder might be a one-page overview of your most important accomplishments and awards and your most recent job positions. If you're a product manufacturer, on the other hand, the backgrounder might be a lengthier document detailing the history of your company, the market for equipment like yours, brief descriptions of all the products in your product line and some biographical information on key company management.

Like the press release, the backgrounder should be a factual document, so continue to avoid using sales pitches. If you

use the lengthier format, it's often helpful to break the backgrounder into segments. Let's say you represent XYZ Company and own a series of fitness centers. Your backgrounder might include sections on the following topics:

Introduction to XYZ Company. This section would give a brief overview of your company's mission or philosophy. ►

The Market. In this section you would talk about the fitness industry in your particular region or about the health and fitness market in general.

XYZ's Facilities. Here you would discuss how your specific facilities provide what's needed in the fitness market. You would also highlight your clubs' key features.

XYZ Management Team. This section would include a brief biography of each of the key members of your executive management team.

Supporting Collateral and Reference Sheets

Here are the last two important elements

for your press kit.

Supporting Collateral. This could take the form of a high-quality, glossy color brochure of your facility—a piece you would typically send to prospective members. On the other hand, your collateral could be a low-cost, black-and-white data sheet about your kids' fitness product, giving a breakdown of its elements. If you're a personal trainer or group fitness instructor, this item in your media kit could simply be a one-page listing of your key attributes or the services you provide. If you've been published or profiled in trade or consumer magazines or newspapers, you could include reprints of these articles. Most of the items that qualify as supporting collateral can be used for other purposes but also do just what they say—that is, support the main items in the media kit and provide further details.

References. References are particularly important for trainers or group fitness instructors who are promoting themselves. A list of clients or past employers will give

Using Artwork and Graphics

"A picture paints a thousand words" may be cliché, but the statement is often true. Sometimes an idea is best communicated visually, whether in the form of a photograph, a diagram or a drawing. If you have a stunning new fitness facility, nothing helps your recipient envision it like a glossy color photo. If you're promoting a new piece of fitness equipment, a diagram showing exactly how someone would use it might be just the thing.

Not all publications use artwork, so do your homework before including it in your media kit. Try to find out which of your target publications use artwork and in what format they prefer to receive it. Some will use only black-and-white photography and some only 35-millimeter color slides. Increasingly, many publications will accept graphics only in an electronic format, such as an e-mail attachment or a CD-Rom. In any case, reproducing your artwork can get expensive, so before you make a thousand copies of that color photo, find out if there's a need for it.

If you can't afford to include graphics, say "photo available upon request" in your press release. Then make sure you have a supply on hand so you can send one out at a moment's notice. If reporters or editors do ask for a photo, they'll need it immediately to make their deadline.

When creating photos or graphics, think beyond the ordinary. A standard head shot may be okay if you're a personal trainer, but a better choice would be a photo showing you in action, training a client. Likewise, if the product you're promoting is a piece of weight room equipment, a photo of someone using it would be more interesting than a stationary shot of the equipment in a room.

you added credibility and assist in the “fact checking” that an editor, program manager or prospective employer will likely want to conduct before writing about you, including you in a program or hiring you. For facility managers and product manufacturers, the reference document could be a list of satisfied customers or industry experts who are willing to say good things about your facility or product.

Using Your Media Kit

If you send your media kit to an editor or a reporter to announce the launch of a significant product or program, it's good to follow up afterward. E-mail works well, being less intrusive than the telephone. If you do call, always ask if the person has a moment and then proceed as quickly as possible.

After you've sent out your media kits, you're on your way to developing a successful public relations program. The following tips will help ensure that your media kit becomes a valuable tool in your promotional efforts:

Reaffirm Goals for Your Promotional Efforts.

Make sure you continually review your goals, as these may change depending on your experiences and accomplishments.

Continually Update Your Media Kit.

Materials can quickly become outdated. It's important to incorporate recent press releases; changes to your reference list or contact information; and new supporting collateral.

Update Your Contact List. It is critical to get to know the publications, programs and people to whom you plan to send your media kit. Keep your contact list up-to-date to ensure you are always reaching the right people.

Customize Your Pitches. Include a cover letter (no more than one page) that expressly states why you are sending the kit and how you think your recipient will benefit from the information. This shows you've

done your research.

With these tips in mind and your top-notch media kit in hand, a starring role in your own fitness career can't be far behind.

Lori S. Hultin is a public relations and marketing consultant specializing in high technology. She is also a certified group exercise instructor who teaches step classes at The Spectrum Club in Thousand Oaks, California. She resides in Westlake Village, California, with her husband and two daughters.

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Marketing in the 21st Century: The Electronic Media Kit

Many of the publications, programs and people you'll be targeting are technology savvy, and they will expect the same from you. Today, an Internet account for sending and receiving e-mail is practically a standard requirement for communicating with the media. Having your media kit materials available in electronic format may also be desirable—particularly for writers needing to file their stories electronically. Create your documents in a popular word-processing program, such as Microsoft Word, and provide graphics in a widely used digital graphics format, such as JPEG or TIFF. You can then attach these electronic files to the e-mail messages you send your contacts.

Many people are taking technology a step further by establishing their own Web sites and posting media kits on these sites. This system is popular with media staff, since they can visit your site at their convenience and either download or simply view the information they need. It's also a cost-effective system for you. You avoid the expense of photocopying and/or printing your materials and developing film, not to mention the cost of using “snail” mail. Arranging links to your Web site from other sites will increase your exposure.

If you haven't become computer savvy yet, take a course or ask a computer-literate friend to help you get started. The savings in terms of time and costs—both on your end and on your contacts' end—make the electronic media kit an attractive alternative.