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Advertising the Passive House Days event in the local media

The Passive House Days offer many people the chance to experience a Passive House for themselves. This event therefore turns the abstract topic of efficiency in buildings into a tangible local experience. Many local media services specifically look for such stories. But whether a story is actually printed, telecast or made available online greatly depends on *how* it is presented to the media.

How to approach editors effectively

Huge numbers of press releases are sent to editorial departments daily. An email message sent to a general address (such as info@newspaperXYZ.com) will most certainly be ignored. There is a greater chance of succeeding (i.e. having an article printed) if you consider beforehand exactly which part of the newspaper is suitable for your announcement. Information on a house viewing would most probably be printed in the local edition of a newspaper. From the point of view of the editorial staff, this is best done a few days before the event so that readers can benefit from the report. In addition, an article about the weekend event can be conceived as a follow-up report.

Email addresses of local editorial departments are often available on the newspaper website or on the editorial page. The best thing would be to find out the name of the local contact person and write to them personally (name@newspaperXYZ.com) about one or two weeks before the day if possible. When contacting the relevant person, keep your message to the point. Reporters are usually flooded with information – it is among their main tasks to filter out the relevant from the non-relevant. And checking emails or press releases for relevance is often done in a matter of seconds.

Local newspaper editors are always on the look-out for exclusively local stories, therefore the local reference should be emphasised in the subject line of your email. For example, instead of writing "International event on efficiency of buildings" in the subject line, it would be better to write "Passive House in xxx-town opens its doors to the public this weekend". Don't just write "Press Release" in the subject line – this would make it impossible for the reporter to allocate emails in his in-box. Anyone who is personally acquainted with a local editor should take advantage of this, of course, and draw attention to the event taking place in his or her "territory".

Facilitate the editor's work

Editorial staff are almost always pressed for time – this is often the reason behind the occasional printing of biased articles. Anyone wanting to get their article printed should keep this in mind. If a submitted text is written in a way suitable for a newspaper (in the style of a report, not an advert), then there is a good chance that it will be accepted with very few changes (i.e. with less effort on the part of the editor).

The same applies for pictures; sending off a photographer to take photos is expensive. If suitable pictures are available without any cost, these are usually happily accepted. In practice, this may also be decisive for placement of texts in a larger size and further up on the local pages. It is also important to use photographs which are locally relevant, i.e. instead of symbolic pictures, use a picture showing "xxx-town Passive House", preferably with people in action. It should not appear contrived, but if the architect or residents are shown, the chances of the picture, and thus the text, being printed are higher.

Of course, if the editorial department has the resources, it may be possible that a reporter has the leeway to form his/her own opinion. If possible (in accordance with schedules) the editorial staff should be invited to take a look at the Passive House in advance and to speak with someone on the subject, as well as to take pictures.

Increase the newsworthiness of the event

Reporters choose subjects according to fixed criteria that constitute the newsworthiness of a story. If the story is newsworthy enough, the editorial staff simply can't ignore it. For example, "President Obama visits Passive House in xxx-town" will definitely be worth an article on the front page of a local newspaper in a small town. Even if President Obama is not likely to be coming, there are some ways to turn your local Passive House Days into a newsworthy event.

Approaches that will work in your local area can vary greatly. Here are just a couple of suggestions:

If there is a local politician or other prominent person in the region who is well-suited for the Passive House related themes (environment, energy, construction), he or she could be invited beforehand. Maybe "Mayor xx launches Passive House Days event", or "actor xx learns about the Passive House concept" might be worth an article (of course, the editorial departments of newspapers must be informed in time and also invited).

Including schools, youth clubs, senior citizens' groups or other local institutions might also be a possibility. If, for example, it is arranged that a teacher brings his or her class to take part in a (suitably adapted) Passive House tour, this in itself would be a good thing, of course. But it can also raise the interest of the local newspaper: "Schoolchildren visit Passive House in xxx-town".

Paid advertisements

Sometimes it is expected that an advert is placed in the newspaper in exchange for a parallel article. Reporters actually frown on this practice because it undermines editorial independence and thus calls into question the relevance of their profession. Despite this fact, many publishers are increasingly choosing to use such methods due to financial constraints.

A newspaper article that is paid for is basically an advertisement. Those who have a budget for this might take advantage of this method, of course. Depending on the journalistic level of the newspaper, such a text will be either clearly or not so clearly indicated as an advertisement (the mixing of “real” and paid articles is annoying for the reader, but advantageous for the person providing the text if it is perceived as editorial).

Those who don't wish to pay for the privilege should make it clear when asked to pay. The editorial department and advertising department often have very little to do with each other. Usually, advertising consultants call all potential advertising customers and the editorial department chooses its topics completely independently of this (at least, that's how it should be – and every serious editorial department will have this laid down in their statutes). Anyone who wishes to prevent queries by the advertising department should try to avoid getting their attention. Even though it may be tempting to write the name of one's own architectural office or company in the title of the press release or email sent to the newspaper, this is simply inviting the advertising department to contact you directly.

When contacting the newspaper, anything that smacks of advertising should be put aside. After all, the main objective is getting something published at all. Also, the publicity-generating benefit of an article may even be greater if it is indirect. For this reason, staff in the local editorial department should be contacted personally. If an editor wishes to publish a story, he will do so, even if his colleague in the advertising department keeps telling him ‘but they haven't paid’.

Advertising at the location

Parallel to contacting the local media, it is advisable to directly address potentially interested people, for example, by using the advertising materials provided by iPHA. Tourist information centres and citizens advice bureaux will probably be happy to hang up a poster with details about the possibility of visiting a Passive House in the region added to it. Since prospective building owners are an important target group of this event, the local branches of banks or building supply stores might also be suitable places for a poster (if permission is granted).