Hello everyone. Welcome to today’s webinar. Today we’re going to cover: Content the media will love.

January and February are the slowest times of the year for newsrooms. The holidays are over. In much of the United States, people are huddled in their homes waiting for Spring. This is your opportunity to fill the news vacuum with stories that are NOT event driven. In the news business, we call these evergreen stories. These are stories that are not timely and can be used whenever they are needed. These types of stories fall into the category of human interest. Even if you are not prepared to pitch these stories now, we hope this webinar will get you prepared to earn media coverage for your club in whatever season you are pitching them.
Today, we’ll focus on four points to finding content the media will love. We’ll look at ways to identify an interesting story about your club and its members. We’ll look at some examples of how other clubs have earned media attention this way. (advance)
We’ll also talk about figuring out which reporters to pitch and (advance) then making the pitch, looking at specific examples. (advance)
Finally, we’ll discuss publishing the content on your own channels.

If you have any questions, raise your virtual hand or write it in the chat box and we’ll answer it. We’ll also make all this material available to you after today’s webinar. If you’re ready, let’s get started.
The type of stories you’re looking to pitch are considered human interest stories. Admittedly, these types of stories are harder to get coverage. These stories are not driven by an event like a service project, a donation or an anniversary. These are simply stories that journalists believe their audience would find interesting. You sometimes see these in the paper or on tv on a slow news day. Many reporters keep a file of these stories somewhere on their desk, so when an editor shouts out that they need something or the reporter has a slow day, they can pull something from their file.

Human interest stories are good PR for Kiwanis. They get our name and mission out to the public so that others who are interested in serving the community can learn about us, then ultimately join us. We believe there are two kinds of human interest stories Kiwanis clubs can tell.
The first kind would be a story focused on a person. Someone in the club doing fantastic things. (advance) The second type of story to pitch would be a profile on the club and the impact its making in the community.
Let’s first talk about the people stories. Research shows that people like to read and hear about other people. That’s why so many news stories are personalized. When I say personalized, I’m referring to the storytelling tactic where the journalist focuses on one person and shows how the news event is affecting him or her. The research shows that personalization connects the audience to the newsworthy event. The audience can see themselves in the story. That’s why we at Kiwanis International always give the advice to focus your events on the kids and community you’re serving. It gives the journalist the opportunity to personalize the story...which gives your club a better chance of getting coverage.

Here are some examples from the Kiwani-verse of human interest stories focused on people.
The Post-Tribune in Northwest Indiana wrote about a Kiwanian who helps the homeless. Joan Ray is a retired teacher. The story goes on to tell about how she was the one of the first women in the community to join Kiwanis and what service projects the club does. We believe the journalist found this story interesting and worthy to print because people can emotionally connect with teachers. We’ve all had beloved teachers in our lives. But that’s not all that makes Joan’s story newsworthy. After shaping the lives of hundreds of students during her decades teaching, she’s now working to improve the community by helping the homeless. She takes food to places where the homeless congregate. She provides blankets and coats during the Winter. That’s why she’s newsworthy. She’s not the club president. She’s not an elected city leader. She’s a grandmother who is making a difference in the community. Do you have any people like Joan in your club?
Here’s another example...

This is a story the Great Falls Tribune in Montana just did. They wrote about a longtime volunteer who has been organizing the club’s community Christmas party for 35 years. Loren Rice talked about how he picks out the gifts the kids will receive. He talked about the experiences he’s had handing out toys for the past 35 years. Loren also talked about inviting other people to join their club so they could help more children. Loren is a great example of what Kiwanis does. We help kids and the media loves stories of people helping people. These are the kinds of stories you can be pitching.
So tip number 1.
Find someone who has an emotional connection with the journalist’s audience. He or she must be relatable to a larger audience.
(advance)
Tip 2:
The person has to be interesting with a story to tell. You know the people in your club. You know who tells good stories and who has a genuine heart for service. Those are the stories you want to pitch. Make sure you ask them if it’s ok to pitch their story to the media first. Most Kiwanians won’t think their accomplishments are newsworthy. That’s ok, tell them you’ll leave that up to the journalist to decide.

The club president may be pushing for you to get the local media to do a story about him or her, but if the president isn’t relatable or isn’t interesting, a reporter isn’t going to do the story. It’s the same for other members in the club. Sitting on a board or going to meetings isn’t interesting. The person needs to be physically doing something. A reporter isn’t going to bite on the story unless it’s good.
We just talked about profile stories.

(advance)

The second kind of story to pitch is a profile on the club and its impact in the community. For this type of story, you should have numbers and statistics available. The numbers that reporters would find interesting would be how many people does the club help and how much money does it raise. The reporter will probably ask about club membership and if it is growing or shrinking. That would be a great opportunity to tell the community about what the club is doing to make itself attractive to potential members so it can continue to help children because kids need Kiwanis.

Let’s look at some examples of club profiles.
Here’s a story from the Holland Sentinel about the Kiwanis Club of Holland, Michigan. The reporter wrote about the club’s signature project, Kiwanis Kamp. The story talks about all the groups that have used this facility and how the club serves the community. We believe the journalist decided this story was newsworthy because of the 300 children who have a connection to this camp annually. Plus, this paper profiles a nonprofit organization every week, so they’re always looking for a story to fill this spot. If the media in your community has a weekly or monthly feature like this, make sure you’re pitching Kiwanis to be featured.
Here’s a story from the T-C Palm, a newspaper that covers the Treasure Coast communities in Florida. The headline reads Kiwanis Youth in Action always willing to go extra miles. The story reports on Kiwanis through our youth members and the work they are doing at a shelter for domestic abuse victims in the community. There is no event. It’s not timely. It’s a human interest story on kids doing good in the community. As we have talked about before, reporters love stories about neighbor helping neighbor. Does your club help people, especially children? That’s a story reporters will love... If you catch their attention...and that’s the hardest part.
Journalists are busier than ever. Every reporter has several stories to write. They have to post to Facebook and live tweet breaking news events. They have to cultivate sources and stay current on current events. Plus, they have to stay on top of their email inbox so they don’t miss a hot tip or an exclusive scoop. Plus they’re getting pitched stories non-stop. Businesses want stories about how great their businesses are. Other non-profits are trying to get exposure just like we are. There’s a lot of clutter in a reporter’s inbox. You think you get a lot of email, just imagine how many messages a journalist gets every day!

Our job as PR professionals is to cut through the clutter and get the reporter to read our pitch. If the reporter never reads the pitch, there will never be a story. So let’s look at some ways to make our pitches stand out.
The best way… pitch someone you know and who knows you. When the reporter sees your name in his or her inbox, there’s a good chance the message will be opened. It’s important to build relationships with journalists. (advance) That’s what the Emporia Kiwanis Club near Topeka, Kansas did. They invited a TV reporter to be their speaker at one of their meetings. That got them covered on the news. Plus, now the club’s PR chair knows who to email when the club has something newsworthy going on.

(advance)
If you don’t already have a professional relationship with a reporter, pitch a reporter who has covered your club or a nearby club in the past. Go to the media’s website and type Kiwanis in the search bar. Look at the stories that come up. Look at the byline. Send your pitch to that person. Make sure you point out that you see how they’ve covered Kiwanis in the past. And make sure you thank them for their past coverage.

(advance)
If no reporters come up in your search, look through the paper and find the reporter who writes about non-profit and philanthropy. Another option, find the journalist who does feature stories. Those are your best prospects to get coverage. Most outlets will attach the reporter’s email address to their stories. If they don’t, call the newsroom and ask for their email. You can always pitch the reporter by phone, but most reporters won’t have time to talk, because they’re busy.
(advance)
If all else fails and you’re struggling to find the right person to pitch, call the front desk of the media outlet and ask for the email address for the assignment desk or general assignment editor. If the pitch is worthy, that person will assign the story to the right reporter. So let’s look back at our examples and see how those PR chairs possibly pitched the story.
You remember the story about Joan, the retired teacher. Here’s how I imagine the pitch went since the club already has a working relationship with the reporter.
First the PR chair needs to identify a potential story. He was talking to Joan at the last club meeting, not looking for a story, just being friendly.
After the conversation, the PR chair thought that Joan’s story would make a great feature in the newspaper.
So he asked Joan if it was ok to pitch her story to the newspaper. She reluctantly said yes.
So the PR chair sent an email to his buddy at the paper who has covered the club in the past.
(advance)
The email may have looked like this.

Hey Jeff.
We always appreciate your coverage of our Kiwanis club. I was just talking to one of our members. She’s a retired teacher who has shaped the lives of hundreds of kids throughout her decades of teaching. Now in retirement, she’s changing the lives of the homeless. She would make a great human interest story. If you’re interested, I’d be happy to tell you more and set up an interview with Joan.
Hope you’re well,
-Steve
Just because the reporter has covered you in the past doesn’t mean he or she will cover you again. You still have to make your pitch interesting and noteworthy. What might have peaked Jeff’s interest in this case is that Joan changed lives as a teacher and now in retirement she’s changing lives of the homeless by taking them food and clothes. Let’s look at another example.
You remember the story of Loren, he’s the man who has been organizing his club’s holiday party for children for the past 35 years. The PR chair thought Loren’s dedication to the project was worthy of a story. The PR chair got Loren’s permission to pitch the story to the local newspaper, but she doesn’t already have a working relationship with any of the reporters there. She went online and found a past story about the Kiwanis club in a neighboring town. She jotted down the reporters name and email address. I imagine the pitch went something like this.

(advance)
Hi Scott,
I saw your story on the Kiwanis Club of Carmel. Thank you for covering such a great service project. You should meet Loren Rice from the Kiwanis Club of Great Falls. He’s headed up our club’s Christmas party for needy children for the past 35 years! He has some great stories to tell. If you’re interested in talking to Loren, I’d be happy to connect you to him.
Best,
-Vicki

Look at the subject line for the email: Man hosts Christmas party for needy children for past 35 years. That’s interesting for two reasons – it’s a Christmas party for needy children and he’s been hosting it for 35 years. A reporter is going to open an email like that. The first line tells the reporter you’ve done your research and you know he’s covered Kiwanis in the past. Then there’s the pitch, with the focus on helping children.
In Holland, Michigan, let’s assume they didn’t know to whom they should pitch their story about Kiwanis Kamp. So they looked through the paper and found a weekly feature column about nonprofits. The PR chair immediately knew who to pitch. We imagine the pitch going something like this.

(advance)
Dear Austin,
I love your nonprofit of the week feature. The Kiwanis Club of Holland founded a local facility that annually hosts 300 boys and girls for camping weekends. Our 35 acre property has a lodge, fully accessible bathrooms and has been used by scouts for the past 42 years. If you’re interested in writing a story about our camp, I’d be happy to take you to the property for a tour.
-Steve

In this pitch, again you’re showing the reporter you’ve done your homework and you know about his weekly feature. It’s always good to butter someone up, especially when you’re going to ask them to do something for you. The second line talks about how many kids stay at this campground annually. Then you give a few more details. And finally, you make the pitch about writing a story. Your email is short, sweet and to the point. There’s no need to write long pitches. Reporters don’t have time to read every word you write. If they’re interested, they are going to know right away and will write you back.
And finally... here’s an example of a pitch when you don’t know who you are pitching. That’s possibly what happened in Florida. This club wanted to highlight its sponsored youth programs and the work the students are doing in the community. The club hasn’t worked with the media before. They couldn’t find the right reporter to pitch. So they send a blind pitch to the assignment desk. We think it went like this:

(advance)
Dear editor,
Meet the kids who are improving the community. These high school students aren’t like most students. These teenagers give up their evenings and weekends to do community service. Right now, they’re working on painting the domestic abuse shelter but they’re always doing something. I’d love to introduce you to them so you can see just how special these kids are.
-Sarah

The pitch needs to start with a catchy subject line because the email recipient isn’t going to recognize your name. The subject line: Kids improving the community, that just piqued the interest of the assignment editor to open the email. It’s ok if the subject line and the first line of the email are the same. The pitch goes on to point out that these kids are special, they’re doing something kids don’t normally do. They’re giving up their free time to volunteer. You’ve just convinced the editor to pass this story on to a reporter.
So the tips on pitching reporters...
Tip 1: Give information about the potential story will pique a reporter’s interest (advance)
Tip 2: Find the right reporter to pitch (advance)
Tip 3: Focus on the benefit the community gets from the person or club (advance)
Tip 4: And keep the pitches short. These are not news releases.
And remember, just because you think a story is interesting, it doesn’t mean a reporter is going to think the same thing. There are many factors that go into deciding what gets covered and what doesn’t. (advance) If this pitch doesn’t get any attention, try it again in a few months or try a different reporter. But make sure you are respectful. (advance) If nothing happens after the second attempt, move on to another story.

(advance) If a reporter doesn’t bite on the story, there’s nothing stopping you from writing and publishing it on your club’s website and social media channels. Club members will share the story, which will then show up on their friends’ newsfeeds, bringing knowledge about Kiwanis and our mission, which ultimately is our goal.
We hope we gave you a good foundation for pitching human interest stories to the media. We’ll now take your questions. Let’s first answer any questions on this topic, then we’ll open it up to any topic on public relations at Kiwanis International.
Thank you for your time today.
We hope this has been productive. You’ll get a survey shortly telling us what you liked and what we can do better.
We hope you’ll join us for our next webinar. It will be on Tuesday, February 7 at noon Eastern time — 9 a.m. Pacific.
We’ll talk about the brand assets that are available to you and the best ways to use them. We’ll see you then.