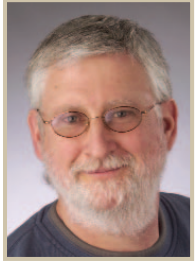


# Celebrities and media can help

Recruiting celebrities and working with the media can establish your group as a credible part of your community. **BY ZACK GROSS**



The Live 8 Concert, which recently took place in major cities around the world and was featured prominently on TV, is a striking example of how celebrities and the media can promote a worthwhile cause and related organizations, raise the consciousness of the public on a particular issue, raise money and change national and international policies. In the case of Live 8 — aimed to take place just before the G8 were to meet on African development challenges — the slogan “*Make Poverty History*” caught on in a big way, similarly to the outpouring of concern and support experienced after the Asian Tsunami last Boxing Day.

But this is just one example of charitable, non-profit voluntary sector groups teaming up with celebrities and the media to further their causes. Whether the concern is the environment, poverty, cancer, sick children, literacy or any other, leaders in the artistic and athletic community seem willing to let their names stand in support of campaigns and organizations, and the media are ready to give a boost to those same groups with coverage and advertising. Some of this phenomenon is motivated by a desire on the part of celebrities and the media to be seen as a contributing, altruistic part of the community, thereby improving their own image and marketability. Some if it is motivated by a sincere desire to lend their names and talents to the leadership pool in their community and around the world.

Interestingly, many voluntary organizations confess to being unsuccessful in recruiting support from celebrities and the media. In fact, many groups would describe themselves as “off the radar” of prominent personalities and “in conflict with” local media. I’ve been told by some groups that they actually avoid the media! They tend to have a negative view of reporters, photographers, editorial writers and so on, fearing that they will be misquoted or embarrassed in front of the public. Some groups look at celebrities as too uninformed or too self-centred to be counted on to espouse a worthwhile cause. I believe that these negative feelings are self-defeating and only hurt the organizations that hold them.

Here are some tips for connecting with celebrities and the media in a positive way. Remember that you won’t always get the response you want, but that on some occasions you will get more than you deserve!

## Celebrities:

- *Select a person whom you think may already have an interest in your cause or organization.* A prominent athlete might see it as a natural fit to work with a youth group. Someone who grew up in poverty or comes from a minority group might be very interested in supporting social or racial causes. You may wish to canvass a number of people by email or letter to see if they have a feel for what your

group is about and might wish to lend a hand. You may find that a certain celebrity’s family has dealt with breast cancer, mental illness or various disabilities that make them the perfect spokesperson for your group. Celebrities don’t need to be athletes or artists. They may be prominent teachers or academics, church leaders, professionals and business people.

- *Make sure that the celebrity understands what your organization wishes to accomplish.* For instance, many international aid groups take celebrities to visit their overseas projects so that they can later speak firsthand and from the heart. You should choose someone who has a very good reputation. Think of the athletes and entertainers whose lifestyles might make your organization look bad.

- *Make sure your celebrity has specific things to do.* These might include signing a fundraising letter, donating auction items, appearing in advertising, hosting events or meeting with political leaders. Set out a timetable and a clear idea of what is expected from each side in the partnership. Keep your “star” in the loop so that he or she always feels a part of the campaign.



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### The Media:

- *Build a long-term relationship with the media.* Start by sending a package of information about your group and cause to the local editor, director or other key media personnel, and then follow up with an appointment to speak with that person, introducing yourself as the contact person, your organization and its concerns. Handle questions openly and tactfully. Remember that the media is there to ask tough questions, but also to bring news to the public. Your job is to let the person you are dealing with know that you are worthy of coverage and support.

- *Keep the media in the loop.* Once you've established your contact, supply frequent Press Releases to the appropriate person with information about your area of concern and initiatives coming up. Don't bury the person in it — they are busy, too. Ask the media to suggest a suitable format for your Releases. Provide them with all the information they need to contact representatives from your group — your media contact, your “experts” on various related subjects, your CEO or Board President, and so on.

- *Don't be demanding!* The media will not attend every event you hold as there is usually too much going on for them to get to everything. Don't complain if they miss your annual meeting. Instead, follow up with an offer of a related interview — for example, on initiatives for the coming year with the new President. Don't complain if you feel misquoted — make sure that your message is always conveyed clearly in interviews, including in writing.

- *Create a Partnership with the Media.* Invite representatives of radio, TV, newspapers, news websites and so on to meet with your organization, or with representatives of many local organizations, in workshop format to explain how you and they can best work together. Thank the media when they make an extra effort to attend an event.

- *Advertise.* While we all want free coverage, we also have to realize that the media pay their bills in part with advertising dollars. Many outlets have charitable rates for non-profits wishing to advertise. If your group can't afford to advertise alone, seek partnerships with other organizations. Ten or twenty local groups can take over a whole page of a newspaper at a reasonable price per group and get their messages across together. Ask your editor or director how you can get the biggest bang for your buck.

- *There is more besides coverage and advertising.* Think about how you can get your concerns before the public using the media.

Consider occasional Letters to the Editor. Do something photogenic — a little bit of street theatre, an athletic event, or something funny. The media and the public get tired of “talking heads” interviews, press conferences and shots of workshop discussions.

- *Use the “alternative” media.* Besides the daily newspaper, local TV and radio stations, there are many other alternatives to getting your word out. For instance, establish your own website and link to other related websites. Use local community cable television channels and campus or co-operative radio stations. Work with rural and ethnocultural weekly and monthly newspapers and radio stations. Contact local magazines, coffee shop news sheets, and community internet listservs. Put out your own Newsletter and put information onto your answering service.

There is no end to the number of ways that you can get your message out to the public. Recruiting celebrities to carry your message is one way, but you can be a celebrity yourself by dedicating yourself to your cause in a way that attracts the admiration and support of the public. You can also work with the media to establish your group as a credible and prominent part of your community. None of these initiatives are the whole answer to raising public awareness, recruiting volunteers, garnering funds or attracting people to public events, but with a commitment to promotion over the long haul, your organization and cause will benefit from your efforts to be recognized. **ITC**

This article first appeared in the April / May 2004 issue of *In the City*. Local “celebrities” promote a worthwhile cause.

sport  
& RECREATION

## Athletic supporters

Kidsport aims to give every kid a chance to play.

BY KERRY CAMPBELL

**F**or Kara Southall, it was a baptism by fire. Attending just her first Kidsport meeting, Southall found herself agonizing last fall with her fellow board members over which kids would get to play, and which wouldn't.

Kidsport is a national charity whose goal is to remove financial barriers preventing young Canadians from playing organized sports. In Westman,

the program is administered by a group of seven volunteers, who organize local fundraising efforts and meet twice a year to review applications and award grants.

The dilemma Southall and her cohorts encountered last fall is one that she hopes won't become too familiar: too many names... not enough money. Last year the organization received 349 requests totaling just over \$40,000.



Back (L-R): Jason Reid, Murray Blight, Jeff Hunt, Scott Blythe.  
Front (L-R): Kara Southall, Wendy Flannigan. Missing: Gwen Snell

Zack Gross is a member of the Manitoba Network of the Canada Volunteerism Initiative (CVI) funded by Volunteer Canada. The CVI is active in many parts of the province, including Brandon, Portage La Prairie, Winnipeg, the Francophone Community, the Interlake and Thompson. For more information, log onto [www.cvimanitoba.com](http://www.cvimanitoba.com).