

## PRINCIPLE

# DO THE MEDIA'S WORK FOR THEM

Entice journalists to cover your issue by providing them with print and video materials that do half their job for them, while giving you more control of the story you're trying to create.

## CONTRIBUTED BY

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Andy Bichlbaum (AKA Jacques Servin) got his start as an activist when, as a computer programmer, he inserted a swarm of kissing boys in a shoot-'em-up video game just before it shipped to store shelves, and found himself fired, famous, and hugely amused. Now, Andy helps run the Yes Lab for Creative Activism as part of his job as professor of subversion at New York University.

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**"IF YOU WANT MEDIA COVERAGE OF YOUR EVENT, GIVE THEM A STORY THEY CAN'T REFUSE: ONE THAT MAKES YOUR POINT VERY CLEARLY, WITH GREAT VISUALS, AN UNEXPECTED TWIST, OR A LOT OF HUMOUR."**

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"Don't hate the media, become the media."

—Jello Biafra

If you want media coverage of your event, give them a story they can't refuse: one that makes your point very clearly, with great visuals, an unexpected twist, or a lot of humour. If a journalist already wants to cover an issue, this assist will give them the excuse or extra ammunition they need to sell their editor on it.

Don't worry about squeezing all the relevant information into the stunt or hoax itself. If you can, great, but most of the key info can be conveyed via an accompanying press release. The action itself just needs to provide a hook or entry point by lifting the veil on a black-and-white situation and pointing out obvious but seldom discussed truths. If your action does this well, journalists will enjoy writing about it and public opinion (along with a well-orchestrated activist campaign) can do the rest.

When the Yes Men announced that the Chamber of Commerce was supporting climate change legislation, or that Dow was going to accept its responsibility for Bhopal (see: [STORY: Dow Chemical Apologizes for Bhopal](#)), or that General Electric was giving back its \$3.2 billion tax credit, these were just funny actions pointing to simple, undeniable realities: The Chamber was mad to not support

## POTENTIAL RISKS

Many journalists will be loath to directly use footage that has a strong editorial slant, but it might still prompt them to do their own story.

## RELATED TOOLS

### Stories

- Barbie Liberation Organization
- Battle in Seattle
- Billionaires for Bush
- Brazil's Free Fare Movement
- Countering Homophobic Policing
- Dow Chemical Apologizes for Bhopal
- Lysistrata Project
- Manich Msamah
- Maraiwatsede: the land belongs to the Xavante

climate-change legislation, Dow should clean up Bhopal, GE should pay its taxes. Many journalists want to write about these obvious truths, but for editorial reasons, cannot. Creating a funny, spectacular action that's all about an issue allows them to cover it.

Make the journalists' job as simple as possible. Provide them with what they need: a concise press release, photo with clear permissions, or a good video news release, replete with the facts, figures, and soundbites that illustrate your point.

It's imperative to document your action yourself and make your photos and footage available. The glitter-bombing of Newt Gingrich (see: TACTIC: Creative disruption) wouldn't have gone viral if there hadn't been an accomplice videotaping it. When Brad Newsham organizes human banner actions, he hires a helicopter and professional photographer to fly overhead, then passes those photos to interested media outlets that couldn't make it out there themselves.

The stealthier the action, the more important it is to document it yourself. Nobody but the organizers of flash mobs or guerrilla musicals know when and where they're going to occur, so you have to integrate photographers and videographers into those actions. But afterwards, don't just post your stuff on Flickr and YouTube and hope for the best. Instead, have a plan for getting those visuals out to the media. When Agit-Pop carried out the (see: STORY: Public Option Annie) guerrilla musical, they did a lightning edit of their footage immediately after the action and got it out to key outlets within the day's news cycle. MSNBC, CNN, and Comedy Central all built stories around that footage.

*Originally published in Beautiful Trouble.*

## LEARN MORE

Spin Works: A Media Guidebook for Communicating Values and Shaping Opinion

Independent Media Institute, 2000

<https://www.amazon.com/SPIN-Works-Robert-Bray/dp/0963368796>

Making the News: A Guide For Activists And Nonprofits

Jason Salzman, 2003

<https://www.amazon.com/Making-News-Guide-Activists-Nonprofits/dp/0813340950>

- Pimp My . . . Carroça!
- Public Option Annie
- Pyramid of Shoes
- Welcome to Palestine
- Whose Tea Party?
- Yellow Pigs in Parliament
- "You'll never have a home in your f\*\*\*ing life!"

## Tactics

- Banner hang
- Creative disruption
- Distributed action
- Electoral guerrilla theatre
- Flash mob
- Guerrilla projection
- Hoax
- Human banner
- Identity correction
- Infiltration
- Inflatables
- Light Brigade
- Media-jacking
- Spoof website
- Visibility action

## Principles

- Anyone can act
- Brand or be branded
- Consider your audience
- Lead with sympathetic characters
- Make the invisible visible
- Play to the audience that isn't there
- Show, don't tell
- Stay on message
- The real action is your target's reaction
- Use humour to undermine authority

## Theories

- Artivism
- Society of the spectacle
- The propaganda model

## Methodologies

- Action star

**TAGS**

Action design, Communications,  
Humour, Media, Pranks, Social  
media