7 Tips for Getting News Coverage from Great Photos

The news media loves good photos. In fact, a terrific photo will often be accepted by the media over a news release. Unusual subjects, action, the unexpected, people doing crazy things.

“Eye candy” is what some news photographers and editors call great pictures. You see them all the time in People magazine, photos taken by skilled photographers who are always looking for appealing and clever angles to tell the story.

Not everyone can hire a professional photojournalist to help promote an event. But there is another option. Today, digital cameras have opened up new opportunities in visual media relations for all the rest of us.

With the availability of affordable digital cameras, we can take “newspaper-quality” photos of nearly any occasion. Pictures taken by amateurs and photography enthusiasts are used all the time by the news media.

1. Take a picture, not a snapshot. A “snapshot” is a random point-and-shoot. Take look at the elements you have for a photo – never more than three or four people. Can you include relevant signage in the background? Can you show people in action and enjoying themselves?

2. Be the picture director. When people are getting their picture taken, they want to look good. Take control of your picture-taking and watch your pictures dramatically improve. Become a picture director, not just a passive picture-taker. A picture director takes charge. A picture director picks the location: "Everybody go outside ..." A picture director adds props: "Girls, put on your pink sunglasses." A picture director arranges people: "Now move in close, and lean toward the camera." Make them look good!

3. Use flash outdoors. Most digital cameras will allow you to switch on the flash to fill-in shadows outdoors. That helps to cut down on harsh sunlight. On a cloudy day, using the flash will brighten up your picture and make colors more vivid.

4. Move in close. There’s usually no reason to stand way back and take a picture of people head-to-foot that may show the whole banner or an entire building. Get up close. Stand about six to eight feet away from your subjects in most cases. In that way, you can better capture expressions and action.

5. Move it from the middle. Center-stage is a great place for a performer to be. However, the middle of your picture is not the best place for your subject. Bring your picture to life by simply moving your subject away from the middle of your picture.

6. Lock the focus. If your subject is not in the center of the picture, you need to lock the focus to create a sharp picture. Most auto-focus cameras focus on whatever is in the center of the picture. But to improve pictures, you will often want to move the subject away from the center of the picture. If you don’t want a blurred picture, you’ll need to first lock the focus with the subject in the middle and then recompose the picture so the subject is away from the middle. Usually you can lock the focus in three steps. First, center the subject and press and hold the shutter button halfway down. Second, reposition your camera (while still holding the shutter button) so the subject is away from the center. And third, finish by pressing the shutter button all the way down to take the picture.

4-H is a community of young people across America who are learning leadership, citizenship and life skills.
7. Set the camera for highest resolution. Always shoot the highest resolution photos you can if you believe they might be used by the news media. This simple technical consideration can make all the difference. The picture resolution of most digital cameras can be manually adjusted though either the Menu or Function settings. You will need to play around with it to find the highest resolution for your particular camera brand and model.

It is always best to take high-resolution photos with a digital camera. Incidentally, you can solve everything by purchasing a larger capacity memory card and keeping your digital camera set at the highest resolution all the time. Now, you are ready to capture your own “eye-candy” photos.

Let’s say you are doing media relations for an event. You have put together a list of media and drafted a news release in advance. Then, the day of the event arrives, and you get lucky by taking a digital picture that tells the whole story, a “WOW!” type of picture that people will rave about.

What you may have is something potentially more valuable for promoting your event than a news release or anything else. A great picture creates a lasting impression and is often preferred by editors rather than a news release to tell the story. All you need is a photo caption, a witty two or three lines that sum up the story that the picture tells. Then, get it into the hands of the media.