

Libertarian Strategy Gazette

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Distributing Press Releases

Okay Stephen how do you distribute it once you have it written? FAX, snail mail, email, or hand deliver it?

The most effective means I have of gaining attention from the media is actually "none of the above". My best coverage generally comes from me dialing a number which has already been programmed into my cell phone and beginning a conversation similar to this hypothetical one:

"Hey, John. This is Stephen Gordon from the Finkelstein campaign. We met last month at the grocery store/AIDS Benefit/football game/political event. I just wanted to let you know about..."

As much as possible, I try to meet as many reporters as I can, and then use that knowledge when I most need it. I always ask reporters for their business cards, and then enter their information in my computer and cell phone. I'll state the following very strongly: Personal contact with someone you already know works the best. If a phone call isn't feasible, I'll place a personal line on a personally delivered e-mail — in addition the automated e-mail they will get from whatever internet system the campaign I am currently working for uses. Here is an example:

John,

Congratulations on the promotion to the city desk and great article on the rat infestation at city hall yesterday. Was there some hidden double meaning with your choice of wording?

BTW, we will be holding a press conference on the south stairs of the County Commission building on Wednesday.

Hope to see you there and congrats again.
Steve

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Contact: Stephen Gordon
email@address.com
(222)333-4444

Finkelstein to Hold Press Conference about Tax Moratorium on Wednesday

Chicago, Illinois — Due to the increase of...

While it is critical to personally know as many reporters as possible, it is unlikely that you will know every one who may be beneficial — even in a small town. Obviously, it is impossible to know everyone when dealing with state or national issues or campaigns. In order to reach the people we don't already know,

[Distribute Press Releases] (Continued on page 2)

Writing Effective Press Releases

Often I find myself arguing with other members of the LP about what content should be provided in a press release. The most common issue is over whether the information presented is actually of interest to the average reader. Quite simply, many issues which are important to libertarians don't register with the media or the general population. Of the ten steps provided by Press-Release-Writing.com, the most important to them is:

1. Make sure the information is newsworthy.

Another issue is action. Thomas Knapp has written many press releases for libertarian political activities. Often I'll submit a release for his review or ask him to write one and he refuses my request because there was not significant action in the release. Newspapers don't report on libertarian philosophy, so why send them essays and theses disguised as press releases? Send them information about an event or activity, and they are much more likely to cover it.

Another critical issue is the title. An article from Stetson University indicates their most important aspect of a good press release:

2. The Headline.

In about ten words — or less — you need to grab the attention of the editor. The headline should summarize the information in the press release, but in a way that is exciting and dynamic; think of it as a billboard along a highway — you have just a few words to make your release stand out among the many others editors receive on any given day.

Again, Knapp is the master at titling. Here is a short list of some of the creative titles he has come up with:

There's gold in them thar states
We're here, we're queer ... and we're voting Libertarian
Once More into the Breach
A Modest Proposal
Across the Divide
With Friends Like This
"For Courage of Conviction"
Choices, not echoes, in shadow of GOP convention
Permit? We don't need no stinkin' permit!
Badnarik Wonders if Bush and Feinstein Know the
Meaning of "Infringe"
Fool Me Once, Shame on You; Fool Me Twice, Shame
on Me
Lighting the fires of liberty, one monitor at a time
and my wife's favorite: Left turn at Albuquerque?

Of course, not all titles have to have literary references, and sometimes a simple description of the action works very well. Some recent ones either Tom or I have written include:

Alabama Libertarians Unveil New Internet Community
Bodenhausen Declares for Birmingham District Two

[Write Good Press Releases] (Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 1) [Distribute Good Press Releases] press release distribution becomes incredibly important. To answer Michael's question again, my answer this time is "all of the above" and then some.

First, I generally use a press release distribution service. PRWeb is the one I recommend for general libertarian use, as basic use is free of charge. However, by paying a bit of money, you can obtain a greater level of service from PRWeb.

Generally, I choose the \$30 option. They will not only distribute your release to the people on their list, but they will submit it to Google News, which means that it will hit a lot more people interested in the topic. For major releases, I choose the \$80 option, which also includes inclusion in Yahoo News and the news services of some of the minor internet search engines.

PRWeb owns EMediaWire, and here is an example of the output, along with one of the results it accomplished. I've used the more expensive distribution services, but the results have never been any better than those I get with the lower cost services PRWeb provides.

Unfortunately, I don't use snail mail as often as I would like. The advantage is that the recipient gets to hold something in his or her hand which came from me. That makes it much more personal. In practical reality, there generally is not enough time to use normal mail delivery to distribute press releases, as new issues will be the top stories by the time mail can be delivered. The other disadvantage is that it is difficult to control when in the news cycle the story will be covered. When the use of mail can be effectively accomplished, I'd recommend it, though.

When the opportunity is there, hand delivery is perfect and I would recommend that mechanism whenever possible.

I generally fax releases, too. For local campaigns, a fax machine with a memory (to store media fax numbers in memory and broadcast one fax to the list stored in memory) works fine. For state and national campaigns, I use an online blast fax service. I've used JBlast and BlastFax before, and would recommend either of them. Faxing is often more effective at getting your release to an assignment editor's desk, who hopefully will assign some reporter to cover your story.

While faxing is important, I receive fewer positive results from this mechanism with each passing year, while seeing a greater rate of return from e-mail. I don't think I have ever sent out any press release which was not e-mailed, even if no other distribution method was used. It is free and personally goes to each and every reporter on your media list. It is easy for the reporter to gain additional information simply by typing in his/her question and hitting the reply button. This happened to me just today, and I now know that this press release will be covered in a future version of the Political Skinny column at the Mobile Register.

With e-mail, it is easy to also hit website owners and bloggers with your release. Many have simply cut-and-pasted my release onto their website. Other may at least provide some commentary on the subject. It is also easy to over e-mail people. I have a large list of reporters in my address book, and there is an urge to add people to the bcc: line who may have no interest in the particular issue at hand. There is generally (there are exceptions to the rule) no sense sending a national reporter something about a local race or issue, and it is likely to irritate the national reporter. For each campaign or issue, I generally develop a special list of reporters to avoid problems such as this.

A personal thing I do (I don't know if it helps or not) is to place the words PRESS RELEASE or MEDIA ADVISORY in the subject line of the e-mail, followed by a colon and the title of the release. An example would be:

PRESS RELEASE: Christian Libertarians to March in Gay Rights Parade

More complex websites generally have the ability to use send out automated e-mailed press releases. For larger campaigns, this is an incredibly valuable tool.

Another important opportunity many people miss out on is placing their press release on their own campaign or party website. To begin, everyone who visits your website gets the benefit of reading the material you have worked so hard to present. It also shows your supporters that you are attempting to obtain positive press coverage. Oftentimes, they will help you to distribute your release — internet grassroots activism helps a lot. If you get the coverage, they may even feel that they were a part of it — and they probably were. If you don't get the media coverage they feel you deserved, they will know you did your part, and likely become angry at the media. This is energy that can be channeled to assist any political campaign.

An often overlooked place to send out press releases in on Yahoo Groups. If one is running for some LP nomination or position, what better place could there be to submit your releases? You can directly hit your target audience with one click of the button. And believe me, there are a whole lot of libertarian Yahoo Groups. Also, if there is a specific issue unrelated to LP politics with which you are dealing, there are probably Yahoo Groups which are specifically based on that issue. It makes sense to add related Yahoo Groups to your e-mail press release lists. Simply ensure that the from: line on the sending e-mail account matches a valid Yahoo account.

My general opinion is that one should use as many mechanisms of press release distribution possible. You may be dealing with an older assignment editor who refuses to use newfangled and impersonal e-mails, or some young reporter right out of college who has never even used a fax machine. Covering all the bases generally brings about the best results, and will likely help your campaign achieve the greatest level of media coverage possible.

...Steve Gordon

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Council Seat

A majority of Americans disapprove of the Republican and Democrat conventions

Russo releasing TV commercials urging Americans to resist military draft

Media Advisory: Presidential debate in NYC on August 31, 2004

Style is important. I generally prefer the inverted pyramid style, but sometimes vary from it slightly, depending upon the content. Also, it is important to consider your target audience when writing a release. My choice of wording varies significantly when I am targeting the local press from when I wish to be picked up by national libertarian media sources.

PR.com provides that a press release should be around 400 words long, and never more than one page. The only exception I make to that rule is when I have to include additional information. As an example, when polling data are the topic of a release, I may cover the basic polling numbers in the press release and attach the cross-tabs for further reference.

The Stetson University guide has what is perhaps the most important advice I would suggest to libertarians writing press releases:

Editors will quickly trash media releases that make outlandish promotional promises — “the best ever,” “everyone wins,” “one-of-a-kind,” “changing human-kind forever.” You get the idea. Instead, press release writers must think like a reporter. Media releases must follow journalistic style in order to be given any kind of consideration.

Thinking like an editor, and making the job as easy as possible for the reporter has always provided the best results for me. To see how this works, I'll provide an example of the latest press release I've written, and then an example of the results.

The press release:

Alabama Libertarians Unveil New Internet Community

The Libertarian Party of Alabama recently launched a new website. Utilizing open source technology, the site promises to become an online community for libertarians throughout the state.

Birmingham, AL (PRWEB) November 15, 2005 — The Libertarian Party of Alabama (LPA) unveiled its new website over the weekend. The major redesign of the political website at <http://al.lp.org> provides a wide variety of state-of-the-art features intended to provide an Internet community for libertarians throughout the state.

“The new site serves several unique purposes,” stated newly elected LPA Chair James Hines. “In addition to the obvious grassroots outreach opportunity, we’ve added blogs, a detailed event calendar which even routes the user to a Yahoo! Map, and provides mechanisms for RSVPing and volunteering for events. I’m really excited about the press center, which provides easy access to our spokespeople, press releases, and recent news specifically for members of the media.”

LPA Vice Chair and Internet media veteran Stephen Gordon leads both a web development team and a separate team of content providers. Gordon’s previous Internet activities have been covered by a wide range of media, including C-Net’s news.com, C-SPAN, AP wires, MediaPost, Slate, and a considerable variety of websites.

The revised site utilizes a product called CivicSpace, which is an open-source community organizing process and software platform. According to Gordon, “We used an open source backbone for our site because we believe that the politics, like the Internet, should remain an open source project. People should be allowed access to every level of our government, without the authoritarian top-down approaches taken by the larger political parties.”

Additional information about CivicSpace may be found <http://civicspacelabs.org>. To experience the recently updated Libertarian Party of Alabama web portal, please visit <http://al.lp.org>.

News coverage as a result of the release:

Alabama Libertarian Party Unveils New Web site
The Libertarian Party of Alabama has recently launched a new Website. LPA Chairman James Hines detailed some of the features of the new site in a press release.

“The new site serves several unique purposes. In addition to the obvious grassroots outreach opportunity, we’ve added blogs, a detailed event calendar which even routes the user to a Yahoo! Map, and provides mechanisms for RSVPing and volunteering for events.”
The new site comes complete with a new press center to get the party’s message out to the media.

LPA Vice Chair Stephen Gordon and head of the web development team says the site used open-source products for the new effort. “We used an open-source backbone for our site because we believe that the politics, like the Internet, should remain an open source project. People should be allowed access to every level of our government, without the authoritarian top-down approaches taken by the larger political parties.”

Visit <http://al.lp.org> for more information.

Note that I made it very easy for the writer to develop his/her story, and by doing so I was able to provide better control of the final product.

It is not enough to simply write and distribute a press release. Style and content are critical to the success of your efforts. Many of you are great writers, and hopefully this will help you use your skills to more effectively promote your favorite libertarian cause or campaign.

Tim Crowley's Libertarian Campaign Plans Raising Money

The more personal an appeal is, or appears to be, the more likely it is to succeed. The ways of raising money, in order of their effectiveness, are:

- 1.Face to face solicitation by the candidate.
- 2.Telephone solicitation by the candidate.
- 3.Face to face solicitation by finance committee members.

4. Telephone solicitation by committee members.
5. Group appeals at events.
6. Group event sales.
7. Hand addressed, hand signed direct mail.
8. Obviously bulk rate direct mail.

Personal Solicitation

"Money comes in direct proportion to the amount of time the candidate spends fundraising. The candidate should fundraise 3 hours a day five days a week. Fundraising comes before the chicken and the egg!"

Cathy Allen

President of Campaign Connection, and consultant on over 80 winning campaigns.

Facing someone, explaining why the money is needed, and asking him directly for it will, in the long run, yield the highest contributions from the greatest percentage of people. If it is possible to identify every potential contributor to your campaign and approach that person for money on a one-on-one basis, you should do so.

You will need to develop two distinctly different pitches, one for relationship donors, and the other for shared value donors.

Of course for some people you will combine elements of both. The themes from these pitches should also be used in phone and mail fundraising, and, in the case of shared value donors, should relate to your over-all campaign message.

With relationship donors, you are not out to convert them to Libertarianism. Play up the relationship instead. Your script should go something like: "Dad, good news. You've always encouraged me to get involved, to try to make a difference. Well, I'm running for the state legislature, and I need my family's backing. I want you to give me (3-5% of their gross income, or double the highest donation you know of that they have ever given to another candidate or charity)."

A pitch for a businessman you spend money with might go like: John, you've been my doctor for 8 years now, and I've spent hundreds of dollars with you. I want you to know it's been worth every penny for your good service. You know I'm running for state representative. I'd like to ask you to spend some money with me. Will you write me a contribution of (2-3% of gross income) for my campaign?"

After you ask for a specific amount, SHUT UP. It is the donor's turn to respond. The next 15 seconds while you are waiting for an answer will seem like an eternity, but keep quiet. If you talk first after the specific request, you'll lose dollars. DON'T say "please give \$500.00 or whatever you can afford." This gives the prospect an out, and is a big mistake.

If (when) you get excuses or objections, listen to the donor's reasons, and repeat them back to the prospect, if possible with a sympathetic anecdote: "Yeah, I know how hard it is to send kids to college. I've got two youngsters in private schools myself." Then answer their objection: "But just think how much more afford-

able it would be for both of us if we could get the government out of the education business. That's exactly why you should contribute to my campaign." You have answered their objection in a way that steers the conversation back to areas of agreement. Be a good listener, and don't interrupt.

Ask at least three times. Use a different hook each request. And don't go down too quickly on the amount you ask for. Let them know what others are giving to the campaign. If they say no three times, ask once more for an amount that anyone can give. If they can't give anything, ask for their advice, for their time, and if it is all right to call back at a later date.

Get the check now. Don't settle for a pledge, settle for a contribution. Try to remove any excuses they have for delaying the donation. If they don't have their check-book with them, ask, "what time tomorrow can I send someone by to pick it up." Thank them profusely. And send them a written thank you also, as soon as possible.

Telemarketing

Most of the advice for face to face solicitation also applies to telephone appeals. While you can't look your prospect in the eyeballs, you're still conveying a very personalized request. A small number of people can contact a large number of prospects this way; generally speaking, a list of 20 or 25 names is not an excessive demand for a telephone fundraiser, which means that four people can contact a list of 100 prospects in one or two evenings of calling.

The candidate should concentrate on calling family, friends, high end donors, and previous donors. Use peers or other volunteers to call lists that are "colder." One good trick is to use two or three assistants to the candidate during phoning sessions. The assistants give the scripted message to the prospects, then the candidate gets on the phone to close the sale. Never let the candidate call alone. The peer pressure of a group is needed for successful volunteer telefundraising.

Here's a hot tip to combine your telemarketing efforts with your mail fundraising into a dynamic, coordinated, and highly personalized program.

1. Personalizing each letter with the prospect's name in the greeting and again in the P.S. is best.
2. The P.S. will read, "I'll be calling you next Thursday between 5:00 and 9:00 P.M. to get your input and advice on my campaign."
3. Mail your letters out 50 at a time to be called in one 3 to 4 hour time slot.

This sets up the prospect to expect to give, and really impresses them with your level of organization, also prompting a donation. Most importantly, it locks the candidate into doing the calls that are so critical to a successful fundraising plan.

The candidate should be able to call 15 prospects per hour, connect with 7, and get money from 4. With a

\$40.00 average donation you should raise \$500.00 per shift from your prime list.

Special Events

Group solicitations are the third most powerful. By this is meant situations such as banquets, cocktail parties, etc., where a group request is made. These can be tremendous successes or total failures depending upon the kind of pitch that is made and the advance preparation and follow-up. Absolute minimum requirements include a skilled "pitch" person, response cards and/or envelopes distributed to everyone in attendance before the pitch is made, and collectors to circulate around the room picking up checks and pledges immediately after the pitch.

Special events which involve the selling of goods or services, such as garage sales, bake sales, car washes, etc. can be successful once people have been drawn to the event and understand that they're not there just to buy the cute little lamp but to contribute to a political campaign.

Banquets or parties which have an admission price far above the cost of the food or beverages fall generally into this category; again, the trick is to get people there. In general, you will make more money for the campaign for the amount of time invested with other forms of fundraising.

Letters on Libertarian Strategy Strategic Objectives for All Party Groups

Above All, Remember

The Objective of a Political Party is To Elect Its Candidates to Political Office and Put its agenda into effect.

To attain this objective, we need to

- build a strong party
- perform needed housekeeping tasks
- create pre-conditions for victory

Building a strong party is based on core activities such as Outreach, Incitement, Local Activism, and creation of a strong Voter Base.

Housekeeping tasks are activities that don't actually elect anyone to office, but that must be done in order to have successful election campaigns: Keeping Promises, Information Management, and Fund-Raising.

Pre-conditions for victory are the groups and operations that will get us Money (PACs and friendly fundraising supports), Ideas and Friends (Think Tanks and Special Interest Groups), Press (Libertarian-Friendly Media), People (Candidates and Incumbents), and Patronage (Using Resources to Help Our Friends).

How do we build a strong party?

- **Outreach** puts our ideas before the public. We may use letters to the editor, speakers' bureaus, press releases, or web sites. The Internet is an ef-

fective way to mobilize large numbers of people very quickly on issues that they care about. However, half of America does not use the Internet at all; the Internet cannot replace all other outreach methods.

- **Incitement** is the task of persuading Libertarians to Stand Up For Liberty! by running for office and by offering their time and talent as volunteers. Without volunteers, our party will not go very far.
- **Local Activism** is the basis for political victory. It is local activists who speak to their neighbors, get out the vote, distribute pushcards and lawn signs, and hold placards for their friends, our candidates. It is local campaigns that can involve people, because they are small enough that one person can believe that she personally can make a difference in the campaign.
- **The Voter Base** is people who Vote Libertarian! because there is a Libertarian on the ballot. Each of the other major parties can win elections because it has a vote base of 25 or 35% of the electorate -- people who show up and vote for their party simply because it is their party. The parties also spend money on advertising. That advertising only moves the 20-30% of the electorate who will consider voting for more than one party. Without a strong voter base on which to build, advertising avails you next to nothing. Building a voter base by regularly running candidates is critical to our success.

What is housekeeping?:

- **Keeping Promises** -- we must perform the deeds that show we are a serious, law-abiding, promise keeping organization: comply with our own by-laws, comply with state and Federal laws and filing requirements, deliver products as promised to the membership [for example, publishing newsletters on the promised regular basis.]
- **Information** is the lamp that leads us through the dark toward victory. We have volunteers, donors, contacts -- we need to keep track of them. We have issues, positions, press releases, and web sites, usefully kept where they can be accessed and examined. There are election laws and filing deadlines; candidates and campaign treasurers need to be reminded of them.
- **Fundraising** is a housekeeping action. It's something that needs to be done. It should use a substantial part of our total time, especially for our elected officials. However, money will not buy us victory. As the Forbes presidential campaign is showing, money without solid local organization is basically ineffective.

What are pre-conditions?

We cannot see the exact path that will give us a Libertarian victory in our lifetimes. We can, however, identify circumstances that would exist as part of a victorious Libertarian Party machine. We can work to attain those circumstances, as discussed in previous letters.

How do we get from here to there?

The final objective is electing a Libertarian Majority. It remains worthwhile to emphasize that election cam-

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(Continued from page 5) [Strategic Objectives]

paigms are an effective way to build a stronger party, encourage Libertarians to support housekeeping tasks, and create the pre-conditions needed for a Libertarian future. Many people are not interested in donating an evening a month to a talking shop. The same people will donate much more than an evening a month, if they see that their time is being spent in a constructive and effective manner.
...George Phillies

Stand Up for Liberty!

Chapter Six

Activities for Particular Groups

This Chapter considers Activities that are suited for federal, state, or local political parties, but not all of them. I begin with activities for the national party, and then work up to state and local groups, because this arrangement gives the clearest discussion. Many of the activities that I discuss are already performed by some groups. Other activities could be performed at a different level than the one that I propose.

Activities for the Federal Level

We have a national committee and a national party because some actions are readily carried out at the federal level. There are also activities that need to happen in every single state, but some state organizations aren't ready to perform them, so it is in the interest of Libertarians from elsewhere in the country to see that they happen. State and local groups benefit when corresponding groups in other states become stronger.

Some activities must be done by the National Committee itself. Other activities need to get done by someone. The National Committee could do them, but other groups could take the National Committee's place. Finally, there are national activities that the National Committee can nurture, but not perform.

Activities Which the National Party Itself Must Perform:

* Cooperation with Other Libertarian Groups. A few simple principles are self-evident. State and Local Libertarian groups should be allies that the National Party actively supports, not competitors that it hinders. Independent libertarian groups such as the Cato Institute should be friends with which we actively collaborate, within the limits of tax and election laws, not hostile forces we resist or ignore. Outreach to the greater Libertarian movement is a necessary task for the National Party.

* Washington Lobbying and Congressional Testimony: Only the National Party can convincingly represent the Party to Congress. Why should we lobby? Lobbying on strategically chosen issues introduces Libertarians to reporters, columnists, and other lobbyists. Lobbying puts into play Libertarian ideas. Lobbying can reduce the damage done to the United States by the duopoly party before the Libertarian Party wins, as witness the DefendYourPrivacy web campaign. One can get carried away and spend too much time lobbying. However, some measures are cheap and effective.

To Be Continued

Let Freedom Ring
c/o George Phillies
87-6 Park Avenue
Worcester MA 01605