

8 BASICS TO GET YOUR MEDIA WORK STARTED

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Media work is so important for getting our messaging out into the world, but when you haven't done media work before it can often feel difficult to know where to start.

WHERE TO START?

Media work is all about building up your own process and learning what works for you and your campaign. These eight points serve as a guide for starting out and cover some of the basics. It's OK to do things a little differently, but make sure that you provide for the essential needs of the journalists that you're hoping to cover your issue. Remember: they are your customer, not the other way around!

1. IDENTIFY WHAT YOU WANT TO COMMUNICATE, AND TO WHOM

Before you start reaching out to the media and journalists, it's important to think about the message you are trying to convey. What is your story? A journalist needs a story and it's up to you to provide one to pique their interest but that also is fundamentally a story on the importance of banning killer robots.

Secondly, do your research! Who are you trying to influence? Are you trying to reach a particular demographic to raise awareness? Are you trying to start a social movement? Are you trying to influence political leaders? Whose interest, support, action will move us closer to banning killer robots and what media do they (your target audience) consume? Who influences the decision-makers and what outlets do they themselves engage with? What type of content do they consume?

Take the time to work out your key messages. What are they? Key messages are what you want your target audience to hear and what you want them to take away. They provide access points to the issue or story that you want to discuss. They enable you to shape your communications outputs, and deepen your relationship with your target audience.

Key messages

- ▶ If you're not clear, others won't be either. Your key messages should be short and focused on your audience.
- ▶ Have a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 5
- ▶ Is there a hook? Are they newsworthy? (See more below on what constitutes a hook)
- ▶ Is your message timely, on-trend, in keeping with public interest?
- ▶ Ensure your key messages link to our goal of a treaty banning killer robots

Pro tip: Remember the preconceptions that your target audience may already have. You are not creating messaging in a vacuum. Frame your messaging while keeping in mind what preconceptions your target audience may already have.

Target audience

- ▶ Which demographic do you need to influence or move to further action?
- ▶ Who do they listen to?
- ▶ Which outlets/platforms do they pay attention to?

2. IDENTIFY A HOOK

A good starting place when you're trying to wrap your head around the media is to get to the root of what makes a journalist tick. News. They want a story that will result in traffic for their article or further coverage of the story they have covered. So what is news? While it can often feel abstract, it's possible to break down.

Generally, your ‘news’ could be a story that hasn’t been told before or a new angle to an existing story. A new fact or statistic (not usually a problem for the ever-evolving world of AI), a human or personal story that will grab at the heartstrings or cause a reader to react in shock or a new event, protest, stunt or action. Your news doesn’t have to have all of these, but including at least one of them should cover the bases.

In your messaging, try to provide one or more of the following newsworthy elements:

- ▶ **Injustice.** Is there mistreatment or potential mistreatment? Are you able to highlight an injustice?
- ▶ **Broad population interest.** Will this issue affect a lot of people? Or a particular group that will cause concern among the general population eg. children.
- ▶ **Seasonal/holiday link.** Is there an angle, story, policy goal that can be linked to a holiday, national or international day, seasonal event?
- ▶ **Breakthrough/milestone.** Does your story mark a historical, political, cultural ‘first’? Will this change the landscape?
- ▶ **Personal angle.** Is there a person who humanises the story and who can speak to a direct experience?
- ▶ **Celebrity.** Is there an influencer or celebrity who is a champion for the cause?
- ▶ **Irony.** Is there a contradiction to point out between how things are and how they should be?

- ▶ **Controversy/conflict.** What drama or controversy can you highlight? What is at stake? Who wins? Who loses?
- ▶ **An action/stunt/picture-worthy happening.** Will there be an opportunity to take photos or video footage that they haven’t had before?

Pro tip: Each outlet, journalist, or editor will have their own take on what constitutes news for their audiences so it's worth doing your homework beforehand and seeing what style their outfit adheres to.

3. MEDIA WORK CHECKLIST

Press release

We’ve all heard about press releases, but what are they? A press release is “a written statement about a matter of public interest which is given to the press by an organization concerned with the matter.”¹

So what does a press release look like?

- ▶ A press release needs to summarize the fundamentals of your story while also ensuring that it is interesting and likely to grab the attention of journalists.
- ▶ Keep the release as short as possible. Our aim is to ensure that journalists read it. If it is too long, they may not. If they want more information, they will contact you.

¹ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/press-release>.

Campaign press release template:



**CAMPAIGN TO STOP
KILLER ROBOTS**

Release time/Embargo:

Date

Location

PRESS RELEASE: **Headline**

-
-
-
-

Coordinator of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, Mary Wareham of Human Rights Watch, said:

“Quote 1”

Paragraph:

“Quote 2”

Link to website/post:

To schedule an interview or for more information, please contact:

Name

Title

Tel./WhatsApp:

Location:

Email:

Website: www.stopkillerrobots.org

Facebook: [@stopkillerrobots](https://www.facebook.com/stopkillerrobots)

Twitter: [@BanKillerRobots](https://twitter.com/BanKillerRobots)

Instagram: [@stopkillerrobots](https://www.instagram.com/stopkillerrobots)



CAMPAIGN TO STOP KILLER ROBOTS

EMBARGOED until:

00:01 EST, 22 January 2019 / 05:01 GMT, 22 January 2019

22 January 2019

PRESS RELEASE: 61% opposed to the development of Killer Robots

- In the 26 countries surveyed in 2018, more than three in every five people (61%) responding to a new poll oppose the development of weapons systems that would select and attack targets without human intervention.
- Two-thirds (66%) of those opposed to lethal autonomous weapons systems were most concerned that they would “cross a moral line because machines should not be allowed to kill.”
- More than half (54%) of those opposed said that they were concerned that the weapons would be “unaccountable.”
- A near-identical [survey in 23 countries](#) by the same company in January 2017 found that 56% of respondents were opposed to lethal autonomous weapons systems, opposition has grown to 61% as of December 2018.
- A majority opposed killer robots in China (60%); Russia (59%); the UK (54%); and the US (52%).

The results of this poll show that public sentiment is against the development of killer robots. A minority of states at the 2018 November meeting of the annual Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) at the UN in Geneva, used consensus rules to thwart meaningful diplomatic progress. Russia, Israel, South Korea, and the United States indicated at the meeting that they would not support negotiations for a new treaty. Currently, [28 states](#) are seeking to ban fully autonomous weapons. Austria, Brazil, and Chile have formally [proposed](#) the urgent negotiation of “a legally-binding instrument to ensure meaningful human control over the critical functions” of weapons systems. The next round of CCW talks will take place in Geneva from 25 - 29 March 2019.

Coordinator of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, Mary Wareham of Human Rights Watch, said:

“The window to prevent the development of fully autonomous weapons is closing fast. This poll shows that public opposition is rising and with it the expectation that governments will act decisively and with urgency to deal with this concern.”

“Governments should take note and listen to the voice of their people. Our shared security and humanity hinges on retaining meaningful human control over the use of force. Now is the time for political leadership to begin negotiations of a new treaty to prohibit fully autonomous weapons systems.”

“The results of this poll show that public views in nations often identified as most in favour of killer robots, such as the US and Russia oppose the development of these weapons.

The survey by the market research company Ipsos was commissioned by the [Campaign to Stop Killer Robots](#) and conducted in December 2018. Sample size 500 - 1,000 people in each country. Ipsos will publish their poll [here](#) at 05.01 GMT & 00.01 EST on Jan 22 2019. For more detailed poll results, visit our [webpage](#).

To schedule an interview or for more information, please contact:

Name
Title
Tel./WhatsApp:
Location:
Email:

Website: www.stopkillerrobots.org

Twitter: [@BanKillerRobots](https://twitter.com/BanKillerRobots)

Facebook: [@stopkillerrobots](https://www.facebook.com/stopkillerrobots)

Instagram: [@stopkillerrobots](https://www.instagram.com/stopkillerrobots)

Pro tip: Don't send your press release as an attachment. Put it in your email so that you remove an additional step that the journalist will have to take and always double check that you have included your phone number in the contact information.

Media advisory

A media advisory serves a different function to a press release. It gives journalists and media information about an upcoming event, happening, potential news ahead of time, usually two - three weeks before the event. This can then be followed up with a press release to remind them closer to the time with more detail.

Campaign template media advisory:



CAMPAIGN TO STOP KILLER ROBOTS

REMINDER: [Headline](#)

Media Advisory - [media advisory date](#) - [Announcement of press conference/event etc.](#)

Date & time: [...](#)

Location: [...](#)

Speakers: [...](#)

[Campaign call for action from decision makers/public etc.](#)

[Paragraph](#)

[Visual stunt/ element of event announcement.](#)

For more information or to schedule an interview, please contact:

German: [Name + Title](#)

Tel/Whatsapp: [...](#) Email: [...](#)

English: [Name + Title](#)

Tel/Whatsapp: [...](#) Email: [...](#)

Website: www.stopkillerrobots.org

www.killer-roboter-stoppen.de

Twitter: [@BanKillerRobots](https://twitter.com/BanKillerRobots)

[@KillerRoboterSt](https://twitter.com/KillerRoboterSt)

Facebook: [@stopkillerrobots](https://www.facebook.com/stopkillerrobots)

Example of a Campaign media advisory:



CAMPAIGN TO STOP KILLER ROBOTS

REMINDER: Campaign to Stop Killer Robots comes to Berlin on 21 March 2019

Media Advisory - March 2019 - The [Campaign to Stop Killer Robots](#) is holding a press conference in Berlin on 4 March 2019, on the eve of a major global gathering of its campaigners from around the world. This will be the

Date & time: 7 March 2019 at 11:30 am

Location: Tagungszentrum im Haus der Bundespressekonferenz, Room No. 4, Schiffbauerdamm 40

Speakers: Nobel Peace Laureate Jody Williams, Roboticist Noel Sharkey, Facing Finance Director Thomas Küchenmeister, and Campaign Coordinator Mary Wareham of Human Rights Watch.

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots urges on German Government to help launch and negotiate a new treaty to prohibit killer robots. Last September, Germany's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Heiko Maas, called on states to "to ban fully autonomous weapons — before it is too late!"

These weapons systems would cross a moral line, create accountability gaps, and raise a host of other serious concerns. It's time for Germany and other states to demonstrate bold political leadership by launching negotiations on a new international treaty to prohibit weapons systems that would select and attack targets without meaningful human control.

Multimedia outlets are also invited to film and photograph a **visual stunt by the campaign at the Brandenburg Gate at 9:00am on 21 March**, featuring a robot and campaigners.

Media are also welcome to register to attend a **public event by the campaign at 6:00pm on 21 March**.

For more information or to schedule an interview, please contact:

German: Name + Title
Tel/Whatsapp: Email:

English: Name + Title
Tel/Whatsapp: Email:

Website: www.stopkillerrobots.org

Twitter: [@BanKillerRobots](https://twitter.com/BanKillerRobots)

Facebook: [@stopkillerrobots](https://www.facebook.com/stopkillerrobots)

www.killer-roboter-stoppen.de (German)

[@KillerRoboterSt](https://twitter.com/KillerRoboterSt) (German)

Spokespeople

Spokespeople are essential for a journalist. If your press release or media advisory has successfully raised their interest, having a spokesperson who can provide further expertise or information is invaluable.

Selecting your spokesperson:

- ▶ Does your spokesperson match your key messaging?
- ▶ Do they have the right expertise?
- ▶ Are they the right messenger?

If the messaging is related to killer robots and a specific social injustice the spokesperson should have expertise on that topic. Profiling spokespersons who have lived experience is crucial and will help the credibility of your message. Will their delivery style resonate with the target audience? Are they charismatic, studious, warm, serious? Will your target audience like, respect or respond positively to them?

Prepping your spokesperson:

- ▶ Preparation. Provide media talking points based on your key messaging.
- ▶ Practice. Anticipate journalists' questions - hostile and neutral - and have your spokesperson answer them to you beforehand. Keeping cool, calm and sticking to key messaging will ensure they stay on message and is more likely to impress the audience.

Know the medium for the interview beforehand.

- ▶ Live television or radio. This requires the spokesperson to think a little more on their feet so practice is essential,

but they have more control over the content because it won't be edited.

- ▶ Pre-recorded. This results in less control because the content can be edited, so sticking to key messages regardless of the questions is essential.
- ▶ Panel debate or multiple interviewee scenario. Ensure the spokesperson has practiced in situations where they are spoken over, interrupted, contradicted, etc.

Pro tip: Best way to practice is in front of a camera and watch it back together. Look at body language, facial expression, tone of voice/delivery, speaking speed and ability to stay on message.

Press kit/resources

A press kit is hugely helpful for journalists who take up your story and want additional facts, figures and visual resources. Ensure that you have one space online where they can access the images, video content and further written content that they may need. This will save time for everyone involved.

A good press kit/ resources for media page should include:

- ▶ Photographs/graphics
- ▶ Video content
- ▶ Additional facts, figures, full report
- ▶ Named spokespersons with listed expertise
- ▶ The phone number and email for the media liaison/press officer

Mailing list

A mailing list is a bedrock for most media work and hard earned media contacts are usually safely guarded.

- ▶ Use the right platform. Everyone has their preference in terms of mailing list platform but using a service like Mailchimp can save a lot of time.
- ▶ Keep it up to date. In order to build your audience and your reach, keeping an up-to-date list of relevant journalists is essential. Services like Mailchimp can help by automatically removing email addresses that are not receiving mail, providing information about who is opening the emails, and how they are engaging with your content.
- ▶ Contact details. Gather as much contact information as possible. It's not just a case of email addresses and phone numbers; can you get the city they are located in? Note their title and outlet. The more information you have, the better.
- ▶ Emailing the right journalists at the right time. A journalist based in the United Nations in New York is unlikely to be interested in writing about a Campaign event in Berlin. It is better to avoid sending irrelevant information to journalists or they will be less likely to open your emails when it matters.

Digital presence

Promoting your press release online can be a great way of drawing attention to your story. It isn't always necessary though, particularly if you have a solid mailing list. Often it depends on context.

To tweet or not to tweet?

If you are at a tech convention with lots of journalists you haven't interacted with before, then it could

be the right moment to send a tweet announcing the publication of a press release. You can tweet the press release directly at the journalists who are tweeting from the convention. If you are at the United Nations in Geneva and dealing with a more traditional media contingent, then sending out an email is probably the best approach.

4. THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE TALKING TO JOURNALISTS

They are the customer, not the other way around.

Journalists need you to provide a service. If you want to get media coverage, it is important to approach the relationship with journalists from a service perspective.

- ▶ Anticipate their needs, their questions, their concerns and go above and beyond to facilitate their requests.
- ▶ Be familiar with your resources and content. Journalists want to be as well informed as possible but often they don't have time to do a deep dive. It's mutually beneficial if you can provide expertise/information for them in a timely manner.
- ▶ They want your recommendation. You or your colleagues will likely know more about the topic than they will. While they will have an angle, providing further information or a steer is often welcome.

They are really busy.

Journalists are usually working to a deadline and can often have more than one story to prepare at a time.

- ▶ Be fast. If you can provide what they need quickly, they will come back to you again if they know you can be relied upon to be responsive and helpful.

- ▶ Be concise. It is important that you can give them the story and make it clear why your story is 'news' in under 3 minutes.
- ▶ Adapt. If they are not keen on the angle or message that you are giving them, is there another approach you can take? Can you prepare a few options in advance?

Identify the right journalists.

- ▶ Do your research. Journalists are often inundated with information. Make sure that your issue is something that is of interest to them.
- ▶ Give a new angle. If they have covered your issue before, don't pitch the same story, make sure you're bringing a new angle to the issue for them.

Build a relationship.

- ▶ Get in touch with time to spare. You can often be more successful in securing coverage if the journalist knows you and is familiar with your issue before you send out a press release.
- ▶ Build a rapport. This can help prolong their interest in your issue and keep them coming back when you have a new angle.
- ▶ Keep it professional. While it's great to be friendly and on good terms with a journalist, always remember that their first loyalty is to the story and their audience. Never say anything to them that you wouldn't be OK to see in an article.

You have power too.

- ▶ Engage on your terms. Research their publication/outlet before engaging

to see if their coverage is likely to be damaging to the Campaign or confuse the issue. Just because they're interested does not mean you have to engage.

- ▶ Triage. If you are inundated with media requests, it is important to prioritise responding to the journalists and media outlets who will reach your target audiences.

When it is quieter, it is important to follow up and to respond to all requests you received. Being responsive is important.

Pro tip: Be helpful. If a journalist doesn't bite on your story but wants to be put in touch with someone else, in general it's good to be helpful. They are more likely to come back to you in the future and note your press releases as they arrive in their inbox.

5. HOW TO TALK TO JOURNALISTS

Finding contact details

Emails are not always easily available via a search engine and it can be a time consuming process. Most journalists are reasonably active on Twitter. Often you can direct message a journalist or they provide their email address in their bio.

LinkedIn also provides a good opportunity to connect and because it's a professional platform, the overture tends to be received well. When connecting, always add a note; it will contextualise your connection request though the character count allowed is limited.

Sample introduction for LinkedIn:

"I work with the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. We are a coalition of x NGOs in x countries working to preemptively ban fully autonomous weapons via new international law. If you would like more info, don't hesitate to contact me email. Name"

Making the pitch

You usually only get one chance to pitch a story. Journalists are very busy so unless you can get your point across quickly either by phone or by email, it will likely be difficult to get them to engage. Thinking through your pitch beforehand will make the situation easier for both parties.

A quick reminder, before you pitch.

- ▶ How exciting, timely and unique is my story?
- ▶ What is my hook/key message?
- ▶ Who is my intended audience?
- ▶ Is the pitch tailored to the media that I am pitching?
- ▶ Is it the right time? Is my story relevant?
- ▶ Have I worked with this journalist before?
- ▶ If yes, am I giving them a new angle? If no, have I done my research? Will this be of interest?

6. WHAT TO SAY TO JOURNALISTS

The first time you try to interest a journalist in the Campaign or in a new angle, it is worthwhile taking some time to prepare your elevator pitch.

- ▶ **Keep it short:** 30seconds - 3mins, or two brief paragraphs.

- ▶ **Script it and practice it.** This is particularly the case for a phone call, and even if you reach out to a journalist via email often they will call back for expediency.
- ▶ **Know your key messages.**
- ▶ **Delivery matters.** Be confident and enthusiastic about the story you're pitching. Know your facts and figures and have a spokesperson lined up if the journalist is interested.

Equally important, if the journalist asks a question and you don't know the answer, it is better to say you'll get back to them with that information than to give them incorrect information.

- ▶ **Be aware of the news cycle.** Depending on the type of journalist your pitching, you could be calling at the busiest time of day. Do your homework, if they are producing articles daily, it is unlikely calling at 5pm will help if their submission deadline is close of business.

***Pro tip:** Don't be afraid of the phone. Often journalists like email, but a phone call is often quicker and can sometimes bypass the sheer number of emails they will receive daily. If you do call, make sure you promptly follow up with an email listing any of the resources and/or information you discussed on the call.*

7. LONGER-TERM PLANNING

The NEON Network in the UK recommends making a 'GAME' plan and it's a really good approach for reducing distraction. For example:

- ▶ **Goal:** Raise the profile of your Campaign with a specific demographic or change a government policy
- ▶ **Audience:** Science and tech journalists or feminist bloggers
- ▶ **Messaging:** What are your 3-5 key messages? What story do you want to tell?
- ▶ **Engagement:** Identify and engage specific journalists.

In addition to your GAME plan, get concrete with a media calendar and map out the coming year, month by month. Identify key moments like national or international days, anniversaries or social media events or other hooks. Note the moments and determine if they link or can link with your GAME plan and Campaign goal. This will allow you to be proactive rather than reactive, and ensure you can have all the answers and resources ready.

***Pro tip:** Media and journalists want scandal. They are rarely looking for a good news story but it is important to remember that despite all of the above, journalists are not your target audience. Your target audience may be intrigued by scandal or impending doom but they won't be inspired to act by them. Ensure that you include positivity, hope and an action those who hear your message can take. This should always be part of your step by step planning as we move closer to banning killer robots.*

8. GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK

Working with media can often seem like you're running in circles. You can reach out to over a hundred journalists, follow up with each of them directly, some of them may express interest and then it doesn't pan out! Sometimes they do cover your story but their angle isn't very helpful or it's factually incorrect. Or you can set up a press conference, do all the right legwork and no one shows up. And then next time you do the exact same amount of legwork and you have a full house! You don't control the news cycle and so long as you do all that you can, it's good to give yourself a break.

These basics should help you get started but if you need more information, there are numerous excellent resources out there. An unexpected resource is YouTube where you can find interviews with journalists sharing directly with the viewer about how they like to be pitched. In saying that, the most comprehensive and excellent guide I've come across is the 2019 Press Handbook by the New Economy Organisers Network (NEON). While written within a UK context, most of it is transferable and it's freely available online here: <https://neweconomyorganisers.org/our-work/comms-hub/press-office-handbook>.