

What media people wish law enforcement knew about news

- “BE AVAILABLE!!! Don't put roadblocks in our way in the guise of an administrative assistant who doesn't know me or why I'm calling and always have something even if what you have is nothing,...be truthful and tell us that. The biggest thing to tarnish an image is silence when we need something.”
- “One thing I wish law enforcement agencies knew about news? Probably that we aren't just working on a television story, but a digital story that needs to go up RIGHT NOW. Right away we need info... not when we get to the scene and police hold a briefing. Sometimes it would be great to just get some basic details to determine if we send a photographer, reporter or both. Working at the desk I would get so frustrated when a fire (or police) PIO would be like “well, we will give you info when your crew gets here.” No, we need info now to determine how much of a crew we send. And so that we can get a story up right away! Another thing that annoys me... if when police send a press release without a mug shot. Like come on... you know we need that.”
- “We always appreciate when they do interviews if they can use as little “cop speak” as possible. Flourished? Pulled a gun. Arrived on scene - when we got here. Things like that. “
- “Most of the time, reporters are looking for information quickly because readers (or viewers) can see a large police presence in their area and are looking for us to tell them why they are seeing so many police cars. We understand that not all details are available or can be shared right away, but a general idea of what is happening and being able to tell people if they are or are not in danger (if that is known) helps us keep the public informed. As far as deadlines, with social media and websites, readers (and viewers) have gotten used to being able to find information right away and to return to a website for more information or to wait for a print edition or

that evening's newscast to find out more to the story. Deadlines have become at the very least two tiered, the get out as much accurate information as possible in real time then come back and give the complete story when the rest of the information has been gathered and released. I hope this helps."

- "What's one thing I'd like law enforcement agencies to know about the news? That we're not pestering law agencies with information about a matter just because we have a news hole to fill. We're calling and emailing because there's a public interest in a case. For instance, if there's a homicide, has the suspect or killer been arrested/detained? Is there an ongoing threat to the community? The media is a conduit to the public at large. Use us to keep the public informed. Also, use social media. If a law enforcement agency doesn't want to be bothered with media calls/emails/etc. then use social media to give the facts of a case – the who, what, when and where and ideally why. It's surprising to me how simple and easy it is to post to Facebook or Twitter but yet how relatively few law enforcement agencies take advantage of it as a way to inform the public – and keep the media updated. Again, thanks for reaching out."
- "I think you hit the nail on the head with deadlines. It's only getting worse with digital platforms becoming more important. We're in a rush because any delay allows stuff like "Real" STL News to just spin people up. We need real, confirmed info to get out there. I'm sure you'll get lots of other ideas, so I'm going to mention something that is a particular issue: the timing of press conferences. We have to be on air from 4-4:30, 5-5:30, 6-6:30...you know the drill. The worst time for a press conference is during one of those times. It may seem small, but by having the conference outside of the times we are on air, we can listen to the most important parts and get those to our viewers. Often times a 15 minutes press conference has 15 seconds of worthwhile sound. Let us get it outside of news times and we'll get the important info out."
- "I think Twitter can be a particularly great tool to reach a bunch of reporters at once. If a department has an account that they use for

breaking news updates, reporters can turn on alerts. It seems to be a good way for a department to put out the basics of a call (address, victim info, times) that all the reporters are going to need without being overwhelmed by responding to so many of us when things are breaking. It also lends itself to short updates as information comes in which we prefer rather than having to wait for a press release. I think it works best if then when things calm down, a public information officer then takes calls to answer any questions or fill in some holes.”

- “It might be a pain for departments (especially smaller ones) but anything that they can do to provide a reachable source on nights and weekends would be greatly appreciated. It’s very frustrating to hear “you can call tomorrow morning” when news is breaking. News happens all the time, so we can’t just cover it 9 to 5. Thanks for doing this. If it makes some departments better about providing basic information on a timely basis, your presentation will have been a godsend. “
- “That we need something quickly when event happens. I know they may not know a lot but give us something example: this investigation has just begun at this time it appears that the victim was blah blah blah. Or at the least it appears this is an isolated incident (if true) and we don’t think the public is in danger (If true). We don’t need them to make stuff up just give us something.”
- “If there’s an unfolding situation and you get a call from a tv station, we don’t expect you to have all the information. Often we’re just trying to get a feel for the situation so we can decide how many resources to put into covering what’s happening, if any. We understand you don’t want to put out information that changes and turns out to be different later. But just a quick “sit-rep” (have a report of a shooting, but don’t believe anyone’s hurt) will help us decide to send a photographer, a 2-person crew or 2, 2-person crews. “
- “When a reporter or assignment editor is making a routine call to ask what’s being going on lately, we want to know about more than just the

crime of the century. We're interesting in what's noteworthy or really out of the ordinary. I remember calling once and was told, "nothing but the routine stuff has happened lately." After chatting a little more, the PIO said, " Oh, well there was the situation where a guy put LSD in his co-worker's water." We covered the story and had a very high level of interest by viewers. We're looking for what's big, for a pattern or rash of crime or what's really out of the ordinary."

- "When we get to the scene and there's crime scene tape that's been put up, we understand we have to follow the rules and stay behind it. We don't understand when the public is allowed to go anywhere they want. In those situations it appears that police are just being vindictive and trying to put the news media in it's place. We see it as a sign of a lack of professionalism."
- "In the world of non-stop social media postings---our goal is to always get the FACTS out fast and remove on-line BS. I'd ask law enforcement to be aware of that and to actually take advantage of reputable media outlets to get the facts out quickly. To that end:
 1. Let us know what you know quickly to remove the rumor rampage.
 2. Don't be afraid to give us information on reportable background or with attribution like a "sheriff spokesman" when specific people don't want to be IDed.
 3. Update often as you know more in a breaking news situation.
 4. If you can't say something on the record, just say that ("I can't provide any information on that right now") but DON'T lie. Won't know to believe you now or later if you don't tell the truth.
 5. Be aware at a breaking news briefing you can/will be live or streaming in most cases. No re-dos or off the record moments.

I could write for hours and that is more than you asked for---but thanks for the opportunity to make suggestions.

- "If you are holding a news conference, and it's not breaking news, please schedule it at least an hour before any newscast. 30 minutes is okay if it starts on time. As a producer, it's very difficult to coordinate a live news conference during a newscast. If it's too close to the start of the newscast

it's difficult to get the information to our viewers in a succinct, timely manner.

- “Thank you for doing this. In our viewing area we cover multiple counties in southeast Missouri, southern Illinois and western Kentucky, so we deal with a ton of different agencies in just a week’s time. We also don’t have an assignment manager any more, so the duty of calling to confirm information or just communicating with law enforcement falls on whomever has a free minute, which can mean an anchor, reporter, web producer, etc.”
- “To me, the most important thing I would want them all to know is that in an ideal world, we’d get the full who, what, when, where, mugshot, scene photo, scene video of every story we come across. Especially if we’re trying to make it to a scene that’s an hour or more away. We know officers can’t always provide all of that, but we’d take anything. Even if all they can tell us is they’re on the scene of a shooting on Main Street, more details to come. And then be available to follow up with more information later.”
- “We’re trying to help you serve your citizens, our viewers. In a world of social media, in most cases, people are going to have an idea of what’s happening (whether it’s true or not) and are looking for facts. It’s not a good time to be silent.”
- “One other thing I would mention is we hear sometimes from sheriffs or officers that they’ve been burned before and because of that aren’t willing to share information right away. They’ll send a release when the investigation is over. OR they can only talk to one specific person in the newsroom because they’ve been burned and only trust that person; no matter the day, time, holiday, vacation, sick day, whatever. I understand being burned and being cautious afterward. What I would encourage they do is talk to the news director or assistant news director or even the general manager as soon as that happens. I know in our newsroom the last thing we want to do is burn a bridge with an important contact, so if they’re

unhappy about something we would want to address it and work out a better chain of communication.”

- If I had to pick just one thing I wish law enforcement knew about the media

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In your dealings with the media, learn which reporters you can trust and which ones to avoid. There are good ones who strive for fairness and accuracy, who wouldn't think of burning a source, whose only goal is to get every detail right ... and then there are those who are sloppy or have an agenda or bulldoze whoever is in their way to get a story and end up giving the profession of journalism a bad name.

Most are good, even great, and value the job of reporting factually and fairly.

- “The one thing I'd say is that there often seems to be a misperception that we're out to get police or sensationalize a story. For the vast majority of legitimate media (I'm not counting bloggers or self-proclaimed media) that is not the case. We mostly want to report in a straight-forward way on crimes that catch our attention. There are certainly circumstances when the defensiveness is understandable – for example, if we're inquiring about an officer accused of stepping over the line, etc. But even then we're trying to report the news as fairly and accurately as possible, and we can only do that by asking tough and sometimes uncomfortable questions.”