



## HOW TO PULL OFF A PRESS-GETTING PROJECT AROUND AN ACTIVIST CAUSE

Below are the stages in the development and execution of a mediagenic, press-getting project around an activist cause—at least in our experience. It's pretty vague, and possibly of no use, but here it is! Whether we're right or wrong about some of these steps, we hope it makes clear that *you can do this too*.

- Know what your goal is. What do you want to change about the world? What do you want to fix? Write it down.
- Connect with people whose actual job is trying to do just that. They're likely to know more about it than you, and already have an overall strategic vision of how to get there. Example: if you're a student and want to stop sweatshops, why not hook up with someone from United Students Against Sweatshops, whose goal is to get universities to stop buying sweatshop-produced apparel—and have in several cases succeeded?
- Think of a funny project to get press around your goal. Hints: (a) Drink beer, and (b) Don't drink alone. Also, get your new knowledgeable friends (see above) to join you. (If they don't drink beer, stock up on their intoxicant of choice, or practice your pole-dancing.)
- If the ideas don't come all at once, go hunting online for info about things other people have done. Also, play some games:
  - Maybe try a game in which you think of stupid, unbelievable, or inspiring headlines you've seen. Collect a list of these on a chalkboard, and select a few and try to think as a group of how to make them better, how to create even better headlines, and how to get them to pertain to the issue at hand.
  - Alternately, try a game in which you come up with great headlines directly related to your campaign goals - headlines that could be instructive and help promote your message. Then, figure out how to make those headlines happen.
  - Come up with another game, and tell us what it is!
- Once you have your idea—typically it'll be obvious when you do, as everyone will start laughing—start figuring out how to carry it out. As you're doing that, some things you might want to keep in mind:
  - Check in every once in a while to make sure the idea makes sense—on every level:
    - Make sure you're not accidentally making the enemy's point, or giving the enemy too much obvious fuel.
    - Make sure it'll reveal something false in the news, or highlight something under-reported, and isn't just about something everyone knows anyhow. Make sure it somehow feeds in to the longer campaign goal of your full-time activist partner.
    - Make sure it doesn't add anything false to the news for longer than a couple of hours, unless it's completely innocuous.
    - Make sure you're hurting only the much more powerful than you. Never go after those weaker, or people helping those weaker, even if you think that they're wrong, stupid, or both.

One reason to make sure it fully makes sense is so that it continues to carry your enthusiasm and energy, of which you'll need a tremendous amount! You'll have to have faith it's truly worth doing. And unless you're a religious or free-market fanatic, or funded by a big corporation, that means you'll have to keep thinking about it.



- Make sure to keep it funny, if it's supposed to be funny. Include funny elements—costumes, weird effects, etc.—but nothing that doesn't make sense and/or that tips off too clearly your target that it's a fake (this is a very big gray area, obviously). The idea is to make funny stuff that a secondary audience (viewing the video of the action, or reading your press releases) will enjoy and understand, but that will not clobber the primary audience over the head so that they chase you into the parking lot. (That happened to us, once. It wasn't pretty.)
- Don't be afraid to add too much complexity to the idea; parts can fall away as need be. Often the complexity that does make it through can grab journalists' attention ("a sophisticated hoax" is a well-worn news phrase). That said, a disarmingly simple project could work as well.
- Once everyone feels good about the overall plan (which you should sketch out as explicitly as you can, even if you know it'll change in the future), start working on its various components at once. Stress, first, those components that are essential for the project to get carried out—like:
  - getting the invite to the conference, or figuring out how to do so;
  - registering and setting up the fake website;
  - collecting emails of journalists to send press releases to;
  - writing the text of any speech or press releases (a first draft immediately is a good idea if possible, as revisions will usually help);
  - setting up any fake press conferences that have to happen;
  - essential costumes;
  - etc.

When you feel the basics are at least a bit underway, start working on extra components to make it even better—e.g.

- a Powerpoint presentation,
  - an animation,
  - a video,
  - testimonials,
  - more funny costumes,
  - a press conference if it's not a key component above,
  - a Video News Release,
  - etc.
- Consider also how you might encourage your target to react badly or stupidly to your action (e.g. the Canadian government spokesman in Copenhagen, the U.S. Chamber representative in D.C., George Bush to GWBush.com, McDonald's reps at various times, etc.). This is a gold mine, your holy grail. Often this will happen by accident—as in the above examples—but there must be ways to make it more likely to happen! Think of them.
  - Launch it!
  - Follow up on the action with the "reveal" press release, using this to drive home the points and offer spokespeople for media appearances.
    - You might want to wait a few hours, or even a night, between the action and the "reveal," to give journalists a chance to do some legwork to figure out who did it and how. Journalists enjoy legwork, and they enjoy breaking stories ahead of everyone else.
    - Never let any false information you created remain out there longer than a couple of hours, unless it's really innocuous. Your goal is to cut through falsehood, not create more!

**That's it! Go to it. And keep in touch. [www.yeslab.org](http://www.yeslab.org)**