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The logo features a red circular background with the word "RAGAN'S" in white, serif, uppercase letters at the top. Below this, a horizontal red bar with a thin white border contains the words "Media Relations Report" in a large, bold, red, serif font.

RAGAN'S
Media Relations Report

Hear all about it

Audio news releases are a good bet when time is of the essence

With apologies to FedEx, there are times in PR when the news absolutely, positively has to get there overnight. When your pitch needs to land with dead-on accuracy—and if it has good sound—an audio news releases can be the best tool for the job.

Colby Kelly, managing director of New York area PR firm Kelly & Salerno Communications, recently landed coverage that reached a whopping 50 million listeners. Here's how she did it, and how she uses these audio releases to best advantage:

Kelly's firm has worked for several years with PBS, and with the independent producers who create programming for public television stations across the country. Kelly says the firm often uses audio news releases to build buzz for the shows and turns to News Generation Inc.; a radio specialist PR firm based in Bethesda, Md., and Atlanta; to produce and distribute the releases

For a relatively small investment, says Kelly—perhaps \$3,000 to \$5,000—an audio news release can be created and distributed quickly to radio stations around the country. The reach and impact can far exceed that of a print campaign, Kelly says, and offers fast results. Lynn Medcalf, executive vice president of News Generation, points out that audio news releases can be packaged and produced in 24 hours, if needed.

Kelly says it's important to understand what types of pitches are best suited to audio news releases; that is, how to get the most mileage out of this media-relations vehicle. As an example, she describes her recent experience getting placements for a PBS-produced documentary, *Watergate Plus 30: Shadow of History*, which offered a critical look at what Nixon knew, and when he knew it, during the Watergate break-

in and ensuing scandal.

Part of the documentary included an allegation by Jeb Magruder (Nixon's former deputy campaign manager) that Nixon had personally ordered the break-in. The audio from this segment of the documentary would be explosive, Kelly and one of the film's producers realized. They decided to make that snippet of the documentary into an audio news release.

After giving *The Washington Post* and The Associated Press an exclusive on the story on July 27 (The Post got the nod because it had provided archival material for the documentary), the audio release was distributed on Monday, July 28. The story exploded all over the radio and in print, creating an eager audience for the documentary's July 30 air date.

For outreach efforts like this one, audio releases are often the best way to get maximum coverage in a hurry, Kelly says. "Because our clients often have a public-interest value in their messages, what we're pitching often has news value," she explains. "It gives the pitch greater credibility. If you try to make an audio news release out of something that's too promotional, news directors won't pick it up."

News Generation's Medcalf agrees, pointing out that busy radio news directors make spot decisions about whether to use these audio news releases. And with all of the hard-news stories available to them, fluffy audio just doesn't cut it.

Given the on-the-spot nature of radio journalism—news that's a few hours old is already stale—audio releases are well-suited to pitches that are targeted for a specific date. For instance, Kelly & Salerno's *Watergate* effort needed to reach a radio audience within a day or two of the show's air date.

"Our publicity efforts have a very narrow window to get to the market," Kelly says. "It's like point-of-purchase marketing." For something as time-sensitive as a TV show, Kelly & Salerno need to reach potential viewers within a day or two of the air date. Too far in advance, and they'll forget all about it, and obviously, after-the-fact coverage doesn't do any good. Hence, radio has the advantage over print.

Medcalf points out that audio releases are best-suited to stories that can be easily and quickly explained. "My rule of thumb is that if you can get your point across in a one-page press release, then it'll be good for an audio news release," Medcalf says. "If you think you'd need two pages—or if it's a complex subject—you're better off doing a satellite media tour with your spokespeople."

Another bonus with audio news releases: They allow more control over the story, Kelly says. When repping a client like PBS and the documentary—where the news value of the Magruder comment took center stage—it would be easy for news of the program itself to get pushed to the background.

“It’s easy for your client to get lost in the story,” Kelly says, explaining that in a print outreach effort, Magruder’s allegation would get all the attention, while the documentary might not even be mentioned. (Print reporters are more likely to take a pitch in a different direction.)

With the audio news release, “Magruder’s sound bite came directly from the documentary, so it couldn’t help being closely linked to it,” Kelly says.

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