

Holiday Hooks

Some refer to “holiday hooks” as “news pegs.” Meaning, what methods or techniques are required to bring the media representatives to your location to do a story about what you want them to cover.

You are probably finding it difficult to attract media reps to your lake. However, when controversial situations occur they are the first to arrive, and usually in force.

How can you get the media to the lake to cover your water safety programs? It’s a tough question and will take planning a specific strategy on your part.

You must understand the media, from the inside. Just what makes news? What makes the media rep jot your name and location on their daily work schedule? Once you understand this, the battle is 90 percent won.

To refresh your memory, newsmakers are: immediacy, prominence, consequence, suspense, oddity, conflict, emotion and progress. Cute babies and animals are sure photographic winners.

Localizing your news is the most important weapon in your arsenal.

Immediacy, matched with consequence, suspense, conflict and emotion are the important elements in your summertime water safety holiday hooks. Starting about January or February -- when most boaters are climbing the walls with cabin fever -- plan your holiday hooks. This is good research time.

For example, when do most of your boating accidents occur? Usually, around the three holiday weekends: Memorial Day, Independence Day and Labor Day. Gather water-related statistics from accidents, drownings and fatalities, from your lake, for five or ten years or more if they are readily available. Also, note where they occurred, what time it happened and maybe the ages. Do not use any names. Create a fact sheet. That’s your research. But, don’t call the media reps yet.

You have completed phase one. Next, plan what you are going to do to help reduce the accidents and deaths during these periods. Coming up with fresh, innovative ideas will surely help you “hook” the media.

Give me an example of a holiday hook, you say. Okay, here goes. Let’s say a couple on the lake has dogs that wear “Pooch Pals” (life jackets for dogs). Check with the dog owners to get their permission to have the dogs in the news. See when will be the best time for the media reps to visit, then set up your timetable. If you want the TV evening news to air the story Thursday or Friday before Memorial Day, call your media contacts about a week or two before the desired airing. Since it’s a soft feature, the film crew could shoot the footage anytime. This soft dog feature might be great to end the newscast. You can imagine the news anchor saying, “We, here at Channel 99, want all of our viewers to be safe on the lakes this Memorial Day weekend. [Dog tape rolls.] So, do as these four Chihuahuas are doing ... wear your life jacket And, to Chihuahuas Chi-Chi, Chili, China and li’l Limbo, thanks for wearing your “Pooch Pal” life jackets on Lake Umptyfrats, to remind us all ... to do the same. Wear that life jacket, friends. Goodnight” See how easy that is? The dog feature did not cost you a dime, just your time. Remember to take some photographs during the filming and some close-ups for other projects.

Another example, you say. There are many television outdoor shows watched by boaters. Why not meet with the host and create a program about the lake to air before the holiday? If you’ve had drowning problems the host might want to cruise the lake and film where some of the accidents took place and how they could have been avoided. The Corps person on camera could have a list of do’s and don’ts to end the show. Then, after the program, as the credits are rolling, the tube could read: “Please Wear Your Life Jacket This Weekend On The Lake. It Will Save Your Life ... If You Wear It!”

Let's say you have worked yourself silly with a media outlet and for some reason the reporters will not come out and cover your event. If you've checked out every avenue, forget it. There are media folks at other newspapers, radio or television stations who will help you. However, if you have given your all and failed, learn from it and attack in another direction the next time. Tell yourself, "My goal is to get ol' Channel 99 out to the lake, period. And, I will not fail." With this never-say-die attitude that media outlet will be at your lake before you know it.

Remember to bring more than one media

group to the site. That means, weekly and daily newspapers, magazines, AM & FM radio stations, cable television, network affiliates, and Public Broadcasting Stations (PBS). There is no reason to think about giving one reporter an exclusive story. You are after as much coverage as you can get, and if you try to play the exclusive game it will backfire one of these days when you least expect it. It is not professional and it is not a good policy.

Have you thought about which holiday hook you are going to start your water safety campaign with? Good luck and happy hooking.