

How to Get Local Media Coverage for Your DI Program

Do you ever wonder why some events get so much coverage in the local media when your Destination Imagination program gets virtually none? It feels so unfair - especially since you know how hard and long your DI kids worked to even get to the regional tournament.

That's how I felt for my first several years in DI. Then, one year I accidentally cracked the code and got great coverage for our DI program. I was so excited that our team had qualified for Global Finals that I contacted the local newspaper directly. And, as a result, a reporter wrote up a great story and they even sent a cameraman to our house to get photos. Since then I've been able to get great DI stories in the local paper every time I call.

The first thing you need to know is this: newspapers don't know you exist. Most of their reporters don't know a single thing about DI. They have no idea when your tournaments are being held or where. They're all too busy following story leads that other people have suggested.

So don't sit around feeling sorry for yourself or your team because sports or other academic and non-school related activities get more coverage than DI. Take it into your own hands and create stories that reports will want to cover. No, I take that back - create stories they'll drool to cover. Here's what you need to do:

Steps to Getting Great Newspaper Coverage

1. Find the Right Reporter

Call the newspaper and find out who specifically covers academic events. If you're from a large town, make sure you mention which neighborhood you're in; different reporters have different beats.

2. Get Prepared

You'll need:

- One-page "What is DI?" overview.
- A synopsis of this year's challenges
- Tournament schedule - with locations & times local teams are competing.
- Written list of team members/managers who could serve as sources of quotes. If you give out kid's names, you need parental permission, but they're usually delighted to be included. Have their phone numbers handy as well.

3. Plan What You'll Say & Make the Call

That's right, think ahead of time about what you want to say to the reporter. The whole key to this approach is to point out what's in it for the reporter and newspaper. Think about what they get out of it and stress this. It's a compelling story with great photos and good kids. They don't "owe" us any coverage. It's our job as DI team managers and coordinators to present the "Win/Win" opportunity to them.

Here's basically what I say:

"Hi. My name is Jill Konrath. I'm the coach/coordinator of the White Bear Lake Destination Imagination program. Next Saturday our teams will be competing in the regional tournament up in Anoka.

"I think it would make a great story for the paper. There are tons of kids competing from the local schools.

"They'll be presenting their solutions - ones they've worked long and hard on for months. It's a great photo opportunity too. The kids will be in great costumes. They've built incredible sets and machines. Plus, it's a chance to highlight a bunch of local kids doing extraordinary things. It will definitely catch your readers' interest.

"What do we need to do to make this happen?"

At this point you might want to take a breath and ask, "Are you familiar with Destination Imagination?" If so, ask them how they know about it. If not, explain the program sharing all your passion.

- Tell them about the specific local schools participating.
- Suggest they come to the tourney and bring a photographer.
- Offer the names of several kids or team managers they can interview.

By this point they should be interested. Your natural exuberance for DI will have drawn them in.

Tell them you have some written information on the program that will make it easier for them to write the story. Fax it over, mail it over, or drop it off. Offer to call them back in a couple days to answer any questions.

If they can't send someone to the regional tourney, here's what else you can do: 1) offer to send the paper photos, or 2) Suggest they might want to get a pre-

tournament photo with the kids working diligently on their project.

Also, make sure you tell them you'll get back to them after the tournament to share the results so they can do a follow-up story. And don't forget to thank them for covering DI.

After the article runs, call the reporter back and tell them how much you enjoyed and appreciated it. Tell about all the calls you've received because of it. And, again - thank the reporter. They hardly ever hear, "THANKS".

4. After the Tourney

As soon as the tourney is over call your reporter back to report the results. But, be prepared first. Make their job easy and you'll significantly increase coverage..

Type up a list of tournament results. Include: Challenge, placement and team members/managers' names. Also, if a team received a DaVinci or other special award, tell who got it and what makes it so special.

If your team(s) is advancing to State or Globals, keep in touch about the stories. Invite the reporter back for further interviews, tell them about your massive fund-raising efforts and more.

Be sure to offer to provide photos of the events. Most local papers will not cover things too far away. So, if you want coverage - make it easy. Give them what they need - the information for the story, photos, placements, and more.

That's my process for getting Destination Imagination coverage in my local press. We've had entire front-pages dedicated to DI kids preparing for or at regional tournaments. We have always had nice stories about how the kids did at the tournaments.

The process works. Getting press coverage isn't magic. There's just a few basic steps you have to cover. And, if you do - DI kids and the DI program will get the recognition we know it deserves.

Good luck!