



Keeping Your Community Smart About Safety



Best Practices Guide:

Media Relations & Answers to Common Questions

Contact:

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Introduction

Media relations are an essential component of your community outreach campaigns and a proven way to drive Smart911 registrations. By effectively dealing with area media, the public can be aware of the many reasons to utilize Smart911, with promotion of various campaigns increasing awareness and the positive reputation of your organization. This is an effort that is low to no cost to execute, easily repeatable, and if sent to a media outlet electronically, the editor or other reporter will receive valuable information and be able to follow up with any questions. Using public relations (PR) materials that will be provided by the Smart911 Community Marketing Team, the following guidelines will help ensure that you are able to maximize opportunities, awareness, and increase registrations.

Getting Started

Who should handle media relations?

Often an organization such as yours will have a Public Information Officer (PIO); the ideal person to handle media relations. If not, appoint one person (and a backup in case they are unavailable or media response is high) to spearhead these activities. The person should be familiar with Smart911 and how the service aids your emergency response and preparedness. It's important that one person be the main point of contact to ensure consistency and control over the messages and news you want covered; such consistency allows a relationship to develop with specific editors and reporters.

Who should I reach out to?

Local media outlets are very receptive to efforts that help your community. This includes daily and weekly community newspapers, web-based media outlets, as well as broadcast entities (radio and television). At times you may be in contact with influential area bloggers, or a wire service (i.e. Associated Press or Reuters) may have a reporter designated to cover news in your area – these are also considered 'good targets' for media relations.

If your PIO does not already have existing contacts at such outlets, or you're looking to expand outreach, often local news outlets will have contact information listed on their websites. Consider the examples listed below in your search:

- Assignment Editor: The person responsible for funneling out news to reporters covering specific topics (referred to as "beats").
- Community Editor: Depending on the size of the outlet, the Community Editor will often have a list of reporters and editors to refer you to.
- Editor: Use this contact if there is no Assignment Editor available. Outreach to this person should start by calling and asking who would be the appropriate contact. If more than one reporter or Editor shows interest, it is acceptable to send your information to multiple contacts and refine your media list as you learn more about the outlet.

In the event that the contact information is not readily available, contact the Smart911 Community Marketing Team for support in developing a media list.

What news should I provide to them?

If you are newly launching Smart911, the Community Marketing Team will provide you with a press release template. The press release is the “who, what, where, why and how” of the news, and you should always provide your contact information along with this so the media can follow up with inquiries and promotional opportunities. The template consists of basic information which you will be able to easily customize for your location, including a quote from one of your local officials. The quote should always review and approve of the information before it is distributed.

If you have already launched Smart911, the Smart911 Community Marketing Team will occasionally distribute additional media releases which you can use to further increase awareness of Smart911 in your community. For instance, we often issue SmartSave Awards from Smart911, recognizing and rewarding call takers, dispatchers and emergency responders who are able to effectively use information in a Safety Profile to positively affect the outcome of an emergency. In fact, if you have any instances that fit this description, please let us know!

Tips for Dealing with the Media

One thing to keep in mind is that the media’s main concern is simply covering the news, and, they often share a common goal of helping their communities. That said, you should find them receptive to news about Smart911, and will likely enjoy working with them and be able to develop a rapport.

Still, on occasion, some reporters can be aggressive. As a general rule of thumb, it’s important to remember to avoid saying things that you or your organization wouldn’t want to appear in the news. Here are a few tips to help if you do encounter an aggressive reporter:

Be Responsive

Reporters are often on a deadline or have pressing questions. Therefore, it’s important to respond promptly or let them know that you will be available soon. This ensures that they understand you are not avoiding them and prevents them from reporting that you would not return calls.

Postpone tricky questions

Sometimes reporters ask questions you might not have an immediate answer to. In this case, it’s acceptable to say that you will see if you can find an answer and get back to them. Also, a reporter may ask an unrelated or uncomfortable question, or be overly-aggressive. If that

happens, say you have “no further comment at this time” and feel free to contact the Community Marketing Team.

Keep on Subject

Sometimes a reporter will use news such as Smart911 to try to find out about other public safety or departmental issues. If unrelated questions arise, say you have no comment, and remind them that you’d like to focus on the Smart911 news.

Avoid “off the record”

While the majority of the media is honorable, on occasion, a reporter may ask for an “off the record” conversation which could find its way into a news story. A best-practice is to entirely avoid any off-the-record conversations.

Answers to specific Smart911 questions

Smart911 helps a community and reporters overwhelmingly want to present it in a positive light. However, in rare instances, reporters have asked questions about the security of Smart911 data and how many Safety Profiles have been created. In a way, these two are linked because residents want to know the data they supply is secure, remains private and is only used to aid emergency situations. The following two answers can help you field such questions. If the reporter persists, simply say you can arrange an interview with a Rave Mobile Safety executive to discuss this further and contact the Community Marketing Team.

- Data Security Answer: “Smart911 data is private and secure, is only used for emergency responses and available to the 9-1-1 system in the event of an emergency call.”
- Safety Profile Registration # Answer: “Rave Mobile Safety, creators of Smart911, assures citizens that their Safety Profiles remain private and therefore does not disclose this number. However, typically, Rave reports that across the U.S. 10% of a community will initially sign up over the course of the first year.”
- **Have Fun:** Sometimes reporters get an unearned “bad rap” – they’re just professionals trying to do a job and are usually sincerely interested in their community, too. That said, enjoy your discussions and work with them. This also helps develop a rapport that can pay dividends in positive news coverage!

Approved content for use

While the Smart911 Community Marketing Team will be able to provide you with the template for a press release for your initial launch- below is approved content that you can use in additional media opportunities

Description of Smart911

Smart911 allows citizens to create a Safety Profile at www.smart911.com for their household that includes any information they want 9-1-1 and response teams to have in the event of an emergency. When a citizen makes an emergency call, their Safety Profile is automatically displayed to the 9-1-1 call taker, allowing them to send the right response teams to the right location with the right information. With Smart911, emergency responders can be aware of many details they would not have known previously: fire crews can arrive at a house fire knowing how many people live in the home and the location of bedrooms, EMS can be advised of allergies or specific medical conditions, and police can have the photo of a missing child in seconds rather than minutes or hours.

Background on Smart911/Rave Mobile Safety

Introduced over four years ago by Framingham-based Rave Mobile Safety, the trusted software partner for [campus and public safety](#), Smart911 has been adopted in 33 states and more than 450 municipalities. It has been credited with positively impacting emergency situations across the U.S., including a missing child case in Arkansas, and saving lives, such as a heart attack victim in Nashville.

Call to Action

Residents are encouraged to create their Safety Profile with Smart911 today to have their information immediately available to 9-1-1. Smart911 data is private and secure, is only used for emergency responses and available to the 9-1-1 system in the event of an emergency call.

Questions and Answers

Q1: What is Smart911?

A1: Smart911 is a tool that allows residents to provide information to public safety whenever a 911 call is placed. Residents can sign up today, input as much or as little information as they are comfortable sharing in an emergency.

Q2: Where is this information stored?

A2: The information you put into your Safety Profile is only visible for a limited amount of time, and only when you make a 911 call from a recognized phone. When you are not dialing 911, this information is stored in secure databases, and no one has access to it except for the person that created the Profile.

Q3: How much does it cost a citizen to sign up for Smart911?

A3: Smart911 is provided at no cost to residents. There is no cost to join, and residents are never charged for using the service. The state of Michigan has invested in this technology to ensure that all of our residents are able to take advantage of this great program.

Q4: I live in one county, but work in another. How will Smart911 help me?

A4: One of the great things about Smart911 is that it is a national service, which means that your Safety Profile travels with you wherever you go. Whether you are in Michigan, or one of the more than 3,000 communities that support Smart911 across the country, your Safety Profile will be there to deliver critical information to 9-1-1.

Q5: How much is the county paying for this service?

A5: A number of communities in Michigan have been using Smart911 to protect residents for a number of years. Because emergencies know no boundaries and can happen anywhere, the state opted to provide a uniform rollout of the Smart911 service at no cost to local jurisdictions. The Lieutenant Governor, members of the Legislature, Michigan State Police and others worked to provide funding for all communities to deploy Smart911 in the coming year.

Q6: What number do I dial to use Smart911 in an emergency?

A6: Smart911 is an additional data platform that integrates with the current 9-1-1 system. Residents should continue to dial 9-1-1 in an emergency. The difference is that with a Smart911 Safety Profile, public safety will have access to critical information about you and your loved ones when you do dial 9-1-1.

Q7: Do I need to make a separate Safety Profile for each of my family members?

A7: Smart911 Safety Profiles typically contain all members of a household within a single Profile. Families can include parents, children, and even pets that live in the household in a single Safety Profile. From that point on, a 9-1-1 call from any recognized phone number will automatically present the entire family's Safety Profile.

Q8: What if English is not my primary language?

A8: You can create a Safety Profile in multiple languages and specify your primary language. When your profile displays at the 9-1-1 center, it will be translated back into English. If an interpreter is required, the 9-1-1 Call Taker will be able to see which language you designated as your primary language.

Q9: Once I have signed up do I need to do anything else?

A9: The more up-to-date your information is, the better. Smart911 prompts users to verify their information every six months. However, you should update your profile anytime there is any change to your information.