

**Meth**  
***An addiction prevention project by Headlines Theatre***  
Final Report – Publicity  
By Jen Cressey  
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## **Overview**

Because *Meth* toured across BC, my job as publicist took on new challenges and duties. It was an exciting time to be with Headlines, supporting the work's travel into far-flung communities and new audiences. The pace of work necessarily sped up, but never felt unmanageable, because we were able to prioritize tasks in a way that allowed us to focus our attention where and when it was needed.

The local production necessarily received less of our attention than usual, but did not suffer. I believe this is for two reasons: one, experience brings efficiency, and two, stakeholders and the public wanted this project to succeed. In comparison, on *Here and Now*, we had two publicists working to generate almost complete saturation, but Outreach Coordinator Dafne Blanco, with incredible, sustained effort, rounded up only a handful of group bookings. On *Meth*, I was working on publicity alone, and with slightly less depth than usual, as my time was also being spent on tour support. The coverage was decent, but not great. However, again with less available time, Dafne arranged plentiful group bookings, repeat customers, and one woman who came to the show at least four times, bringing groups with her to each show.

Overall, I was pleased with the media coverage of *Meth*, in spite of some disappointments. There was a lack of reviews, but preview attention was very strong. Television contacts were interested in the project, but our media call conflicted with a snowstorm. Ridiculous as it seems, the snow was the most important story of the day. We had a smattering of radio attention, but nothing like the last year's sweep. And yet, audiences came out, and told us that they had learned about the project "everywhere". So the mission was accomplished, as always with some lessons.

## **General Notes**

### **Early Schedule**

Mentioning the wind-up on a project struck me as a good thing to do. As publicist, my main task is to liaise with the grassroots and mainstream media, but there are other, quite time-consuming, jobs that take place at the beginning of a contract, and therefore important in planning time management.

- Sponsor logos. There were 22 sponsors for *Meth*, which meant tracking down 22 logos for inclusion on print materials. Ideally, they were to be EPS files, in both colour and black and white. Our main funding contacts were not always aware of how to find these files, which led to a serious amount of sleuthing. I don't expect to eliminate the need to do this, logos are changing all the time,

and it is necessary to get clear guidelines for how they are to be used. However, it would be helpful if, once funding is confirmed, we could ask for the contact information for whoever has the logo. The publicist could then follow up.

- Database. One of the first tasks on a new project is to go through the database and touch base with contacts to make sure they are current. This is a good opportunity to connect with editors and producers, and give them a verbal pitch on the project.
- Specialized advice. To research the topic under investigation, and search out potential interview subjects, it's a good idea to speak with experts. Starting out with Meth, it was very useful to talk to Michelle La Flamme, Rose Charlie, and Dr. Gabor Mate. All three gave interesting and detailed perspectives, all were important in understanding and shaping the message for the project.

## **Suppliers**

It was an especially good year for suppliers. Good enough to recommend using them again in the future.

- Benwell Atkins – posters and postcards – High quality work, and the best price I could find. Their turnaround was about par.
- Quality Printing – programs – Good quality, good price, quick turnaround, and a neighbourhood business.
- Commercial Framing – Dry-mounting posters. He gave a good quote, and delivered the order in 24 hours. Also a neighbourhood business.
- Western Imperial Magnetics – DVD reproduction – Very cheap, and a quick turnaround.

## **Staff Writers, Freelancers, and Me**

Citing lack of staff, six different publications requested articles to be submitted. This is a new development in my experience, and a trend I expect to continue. While writing the articles took time, it benefits the company to be in control of our message and information. Also, I was able to adapt one of the articles rather than re-write each time a request came in.

As newsrooms shift more to freelance submissions and away from assigning staff journalists to stories, I spent some time trying to track down freelance writers. It was not a simple task, but with some searching, I tracked down a couple of new contacts. Neither yielded results, but each gamely pitched to their editors. I will endeavor to make more contacts in the freelancing world. Other Headlines staff should also keep their eyes open for potential contacts.

## **Aiming Higher**

In an effort to increase Headlines' media profile at a national level, I contacted people at the Toronto offices for *Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, and glossy magazines *MacLean's*, *Chatelaine* and *Canadian Living*. I got a nibble from *Chatelaine*, they were considering covering the project as a health issue, but the

conversation did not bear fruit. Everyone contacted was sent hard-copy packages, including DVDs of *Pressure Zone* and *Here and Now*. Many, many attempts were made to reach editors at their desks, to no avail. I can only recommend continued effort.

I came very close to securing an article in *This Magazine*, which also has national distribution. I tracked down one of their freelancers, Meribeth Dean, via *CBC Radio*, and then pitched the story to her. She was interested, and we made plans to set something in motion after she returned from a scheduled holiday. Unfortunately, the story fell off of her desk amidst a sudden decision to relocate from Vancouver to Toronto. The editors at *This Magazine* also received packages. Due to the social justice slant of the publications, a story on Headlines is a perfect fit. So: continued effort as well.

## **The Vancouver Production**

### **A hurdle securing editorial coverage**

Many media outlets that have consistently featured Headlines' work rebuffed my pitches this time around. It was disheartening, as my techniques were the same as always, or improved. Then, as pre-production unfolded, I learned that the BC government was running a massive anti-meth campaign. It included conferences, forums, blanket advertising in TV, radio, and print. It benefited us to a degree, as there was unexpected awareness about the issue. But the campaign was a few steps ahead of me, and rolled out as I was making calls. Some journalists and shows were completely saturated with the topic by the time I came knocking. Had I been aware of the Province's plans, it may have been possible to piggyback or collaborate in order to benefit from a concurrent initiative. The lesson here is to be more vigilant for possible competitors/ allies in the early stages of the publicity campaign.

### **Networks begin at home**

There was a pleasant reminder of the effectiveness of reaching out to those closest to the project, as in the flurry of logistical concerns; the importance of these contacts can be overlooked. For example, the web-cast Webmaster Chris Bouris is very active in many community networks. We connected on opening night, and he had connections neither Dafne nor myself had tapped. I was able to set him up with email materials the next day, and his assistance resulted in inclusion in several mass emails through Jim Edmunson's networks, which reached dozens of people across B.C.

In the future, I will ask colleagues and associates about their networks early in the process, ideally at the first production meeting.

### **Coverage vs. Attendance**

As I have more experience with Headlines in particular and publicity in general, I observe recurring situations and outcomes. With *Meth*, it was again shown that media coverage, far from being a driving force of a campaign, is a piece of a much larger puzzle. Yes, media coverage creates awareness about projects and issues. It

adds to a buzz, which a publicist will always strive for, creating the impression that attending an event is imperative. But the most effective way to reach audiences is via word of mouth. People respond most strongly when hearing about a project from a friend, colleague, or family member who speaks enthusiastically about it. This kind of PR is irreplaceable. A media campaign supports word of mouth, not the other way around.

In this way, outreach compliments, and is integral to, publicity. Headlines has always acknowledged this, and I worked with Headlines' Outreach Coordinator Dafne Blanco to ensure grassroots publicity happened. We were very pleased with how effective the grassroots campaign was. As always, the newsletter was effective in informing our supporters about the project, every step of the way. And when opening night neared and we cast our nets wider, those people were instrumental in spreading the word.

The real discovery on this project was how little media coverage correlated with attendance. On opening weekend, Meth had a strong presence in every major print outlet. The sweep was a first during my tenure. However, after the exciting full house on opening night, we experienced a drop in attendance. This is typical of opening week, and the splash of media coverage made no difference.

On the other hand, during the second week coverage was scant. I was only able to secure one review, and there were few stories following up on the previews of the week before. Nonetheless, we were at or beyond capacity for every show that week.

However, there was an apparent conundrum: many people in the audience had never been to a Headlines show before. Where were these people coming from, if not on the basis of publicity? Had the opening week publicity taken time to sink in and gain momentum, coupled with the grassroots campaign? I think so.

## **Balancing Tour Support and the Local Production**

A significant amount of preproduction time was occupied by tour support. Simply put, there was more to do than usual, and it was necessary to balance tour planning with the needs of the local production. It was a challenge, and I think we did a good job.

Several factors worked in our favour:

- The aforementioned provincial awareness campaign activated task forces who in turn acted as linchpins in some communities.
- The problem of meth addiction is particularly onerous, in a way that has touched families from all walks of life. People who know addicts are at a loss as to what to do, and eager to find solutions. *Meth* offered an innovative option.
- Knowledge of Headlines appears to be consistently growing. This is natural for a company with a 26-year history. It is also attributable to recent initiatives that have galvanized support, including the database maintenance mail-out campaign in 2004, the brochure developed by Dafne Blanco, and especially visible campaigns for *Practicing Democracy* and *Here and Now*, which kept the company in the public eye consistently over a two-year period.

Once the Vancouver run wrapped, we turned our complete focus to tour support.

## **Tour Support – Publicity and Outreach**

### **Overview**

There were two tasks. The first was fluid, involving regular check-ins with community organizers to share information and trouble-shoot. There were varying degrees of experience in each of the communities. Some people were highly accomplished in event planning, promotion and execution, while others were doing it for the first time. This meant tracking people's needs and maintaining contact as necessary.

The second task flowed from the first: while in contact with the organizers, we spent a lot of time chasing down very specific information that was necessary to fulfill the project's needs and purpose. For example, a shared tour postcard included venue and contact information for all of the tour stops. Which meant that venues had to be secured, contracts signed, and phone numbers for public inquiries designated. Obtaining that info often required repeated calls, and we were working on a tight print deadline in order to get the cards out to the first communities. This is one task that was executed amidst many, many others.

Dafne Blanco and I worked together on tour support, using a document we developed, *Eight Weeks to Performance*, as a guideline. Dafne headed our team, as she had been working with the organizers from the first cold calls on. I quickly jumped in, and focused my attention on publicity concerns while also getting up to speed on whatever logistical information I needed to know.

For the most part, tour planning and support was our priority until six weeks before the Vancouver performances. We still did daily work on the local project, but that work was sidelined anytime the phone rang with a call from a tour sponsor. And that call would likely be 40 minutes in duration. By focusing on the tour early on, we were able to lay a solid groundwork and properly prepare everyone for his or her publicity and outreach campaigns. With the tour planning up and running, we could return our full attention to the Vancouver show, and then come back to check in with the communities once the local run was on its feet.

### **Talking to 28 Communities**

Communications with the different community organizers was, for the most part, very positive and productive. After our first round of introductory calls, I estimate that three out of four organizers were mentally prepared and enthusiastic about the work to come, and had the personnel to get it done. The other 25% were flagged, as they seemed likely to have problems that would require trouble-shooting. Some examples of issues we noticed; lack of resources (especially personnel), committee infighting, and lack of receptiveness to the necessity of outreach and publicity.

It must also be said that in some cases our approach to the schedule didn't correlate to the much smaller amount of time required in very small communities. Dafne and

I constantly acknowledged that this might be the case, but it was still nerve-racking. Without work being done well in advance, it was difficult to assess whether it was going to be effective.

In the end, strong committees were behind the most successful shows. Those committees were comprised of a cross section of the local community, with representatives from the First Nations, and stakeholders in addictions services. In many cases, schools and the RCMP were also involved. The committee was then able to access resources (venue, volunteers, advertising, etc) through the many organizations that were at the table. They also brought out a diverse audience, which resulted in a complex event.

Feedback from Vanderhoof organizer, Lisa Streigler:

My own thoughts are that the advertising worked, because there was a mix of people in the audience. Also, the face to face invitations given at community meetings (like the community health advisory group, the sexual assault response meetings, the VAWIR meetings etc) that I went to resulted in some of those people coming. So all the things that you said to me about face - to - face I put into action and it worked.

Also, this gets easier the more I do it. I feel more confident being able to get people out to events like this, as long as I have the financial resources to support the advertising etc. So, it's not just the money to bring you guys in, it's the money to bring people out to the show that's needed, as well.

So: thanks for the publicity documents, Jen. I found them useful, although I didn't use all of them. Thanks Jen and Dafne, for being available on the phone the week before our event.

## **Tour Publicity**

For the most part, local organizers were responsible for generating their own publicity, with my support. This made sense for a number of reasons. They would know best how to appeal to their audience, and would benefit most from the legacy any publicity would generate in terms of attention for their organization and the topic.

I also filled in the gaps when necessary, calling journalists who had distribution or broadcast areas that spanned more than one town. In general, this approach worked, and almost all of the communities had thorough coverage.

## **Conclusion**

A multi-pronged approach remains the most effective method of generating publicity for Headlines' work, and there must be a strong emphasis on grassroots publicity and supporting word of mouth. To achieve this, activation of Headlines supporters is the best place to start, tapping into their networks and contacts. As well, the large database of Headlines supporters represents a vast amount of

knowledge, and it is beneficial to connect with people as early in the process as possible. Usually, friends of the company will have valuable advice, and an interest in seeing projects succeed.

Media coverage is another important facet of publicity, and should always be vigorously pursued. While the results may vary from project to project, maintaining contact with journalists, editors and producers is integral to continued success. These relationships span projects, and have a cumulative effect.

Street presence of the project’s image and information continues to have effect. For the first time in my experience, we received reservations called in from the street, where a person was reading our phone number off of a poster.

When people phoned in to make reservations, we asked them how they heard about the show. While we were not able to get information from everyone who attended, I think they represent a strong sample group. The responses were:

|   |     |       |
|---|-----|-------|
| Many ways, “Everywhere!”.....             | 49  | = 8%  |
| Word of mouth.....                        | 50  | = 8%  |
| (Including forwarded emails)              |     |       |
| Poster or flyer.....                      | 65  | = 11% |
| Media.....                                | 92  | = 15% |
| Friend of Headlines.....                  | 171 | = 28% |
| (Including invitations, friends of staff) |     |       |
| Outreach.....                             | 182 | = 30% |
| (Including group bookings)                |     |       |

### **Media Log – Vancouver**

#### **Print**

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| Nov    | Common Ground, Jen Cressey article with photo<br>Native Journal, Jen Cressey article with photo  |
| Nov 23 | Westender preview article by Michael White   |
| Nov 29 | The Province, article Stuart Derdeyn, with photo on front of section<br>Courier article by Kerry McGrath, interview with David and Kayla,<br>with photo<br>Vancouver Sun, Karen Gram article |
| Nov 30 | Georgia Straight, Charlie Smith article with photo (mentioned on<br>cover), Arts Note, Straight Choices<br>Vancouver Sun, Calendar pick with photo<br>Westender, critic’s pick               |
| Dec 1  | Langara Voice, interview with Jen<br>Globe and Mail, 7 Days mention by Adriana Barton  |
| Dec 7  | Straight review by Kathleen Oliver   |

Dec Windspeaker, Laura Stevens interview with Betsy, Kayla, David and Jen, with photo  
Columbia Journal, Jen Cressey article with photo  
Alternatives Journal, Jen Cressey article with photo

Jan First Nations Drum, Lloyd Dolha article/ interview with Sophie and Cody  
Say magazine, Gerald Auger article/ interview with Kayla, with photo

Mar Redwire Magazine, Taylor Omelak article

### **Radio**

Nov 22 Co-op When the Spirit Whispers, Gunarjee O'Sullivan interview with David

Nov 24 CKNW Nightline with Michael Smyth interview with David

Nov 27 CBC BC Almanac, Mark Forsythe interview with David and Jordan

Dec 6 CBC Arts Report with Paul Grant, provincial and national

Dec 11 Co-op Redeye interview with Marion Robinson, also podcast on rabble.ca

Jan 6 NXNW profile by Sheryl Mackay, with tape from Paul Grant, also posted on website

### **Television**

Shaw The Pitch on Urban Rush  
30-second promo spots in all time slots played throughout run

### **Email/ Web**

- Rabble.ca
- City of Vancouver
- Onlymagazine.ca
- craigslist.org
- Vancouverplays.com
- Web counterparts of print publications
- Libby Davies' email list
- SPARC BC
- Alliance for Arts
- GVPTA
- RedWay BC – web site and email list
- Lyle Jones' list (700 social workers and criminal justice workers province wide)

- Jim Edmunson's list (school aboriginal support staff, VPs and secretaries in Lower Mainland, and school counselors across BC)

## **Display Ads**

- Cineplex Media (slide projection at Fifth Avenue and Park cinemas)
- Common Ground
- Courier
- Straight
- Only Magazine
- Program ads at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre and Performance Works
- Raven's Eye Magazine
- Westender

## **Sponsorship**

- CBC Radio One and Two – inclusion in community events broadcasts, online listing
- Co-op Radio – 30 second promotional spot played at least 30 times
- Westender – 40% discount on advertising
- Raven's Eye – 50% discount on advertising

## **Miscellaneous**

- Buy and Sell listing (Nov 14 – Dec 5)
- GVPTA Theatre Guide
- Mention in two issues of the Carnegie Newsletter
- St. James church bulletin

## **Media Log – Tour**

*Please note: I have had to rely on community sponsors to supply me with much of this information, supplementing it with my own notes and web research wherever possible. It is only a fraction of the media coverage received.*

### **Chilliwack**

Chilliwack Progress – Jennifer Fienberg article, interview with David

Chilliwack Times – Kristyl Clark article, interview with Kayla

### **Mission**

The Post – Margaret Jetelina article, interview with Jen and Betsy

### **Abbotsford**

Friday Magazine – inclusion in Seven Days calendar with photo

Abbotsford Times – Christina Toth article

### **Kelowna**

Kelowna Capital News- John McDonald article

Daily Courier

CKOV FM

CHBC TV – Chris Sobon interview with cast  
Ktunaxa Nation – Janice Alpine article, interview with Kayla  
Crossroads newsletter

### **Grand Forks**

Grand Forks Gazette – Jason Harshenin article, interview with Kayla, with follow-up article the following week

### **Trail**

Trail Daily Times – Kate Skye article, Ray Masleck article, interview with David, Grapevine listing  
Kootenay Western Star – Willa Condy article  
Trail Rossland News  
The Weekender – Preview article, Kate Skye article  
Fruitvale community calendar  
Shaw TV – interview with organizers, banner ad

### **Creston**

Creston Valley Advance – Brian Lawrence article

### **Cranbrook**

Kootenay News Advertiser – Kirsten Renner, two articles  
Daily Townsman – Barry Colter article  
CKEK FM  
Shaw TV  
Radio ads on two stations

### **Invermere**

Columbia Valley Pioneer - Article

### **Kamloops**

Kamloops This Week – Mickelle Sasakamoose article, interview with David and cast member  
Kamloops Daily News – Mike Youds article, interview with David  
Kamloops Daily News – Jane Powell review

### **Ashcroft**

Ashcroft/ Cache Creek Journal – ads

### **Williams Lake**

Williams Lake Tribune – Ken MacInnis article

### **Prince George**

Prince George Citizen – Christine Skorepa article, interview with Cody and Kayla  
CBC Radio – interview with Kayla

### **Fort St. James**

Caledonia Courier – Allan Wishart article

### **Vanderhoof**

Omineca Express Bugle - Allan Wishart article  
WOLF Radio interview and PSAs

**Terrace**

Terrace Standard – Dustin Quezada, two articles  
CFNR – Lynn Trebasket, preview and follow-up interviews with David and Betsy

**Gitanmaax**

Kispiox Radio – Darryl Rhine preview

**Port Hardy**

North Island Gazette – two articles

**Cumberland**

Echo – Marcel Tetrault article  
Comox Valley Record – Article

**Port Alberni**

Port Alberni Times – Shayne Morrow three articles  
Ha-Shilth-Sa - Article, interview with Herb Varley

**Tofino**

Westcoaster – Article, interview with David and cast member

**Maple Ridge**

Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadow Times – Article