

Law Enforcement and Modern Media

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LAW ENFORCEMENT AND MODERN MEDIA

Abstract

This paper explores the evolving relationship between law enforcement and various types of modern media. Law enforcement personnel tasked with dealing with media representatives need strategies that are viable for successfully managing these relationships. While these relationships may have become strained over recent years, they are still necessary. This paper will examine changes in the way people get their information and how this impacts law enforcement and modern media while providing insight into strategies that law enforcement leaders can implement to improve their interactions with media organizations and their communities.

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There is little doubt that both law enforcement agencies and individual officers can benefit from fostering better relationships with the communities they police. Law enforcement administrators are always seeking new methods to improve these relations. Over the last several decades police agencies and their governing bodies have implemented community oriented policing policies, school resource officer programs, less-lethal force options, body camera systems and even state-wide mandated racial profiling training programs. At their core, all of these are efforts to improve community relations.

Image is Everything

(Murakami, 2014) wrote, “Image is everything. You don’t spare any expense to create the right image.” (p. 154) Many law enforcement administrators are concerned that negative images of law enforcement presented to the public through media may have eroded the public’s support of law enforcement. They also feel that in most cases the portrayal of the profession is unfair and based on inaccurate information. They fear that the damage may be irreparable. This is quite disconcerting given that it is widely accepted that in modern times most information about the world in which we live is usually received through some form of media. Law enforcement leaders must understand the true relationships between law enforcement and modern forms of media in order to be better prepared to choose media strategies that will ultimately result in more positive relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

Actual Impact vs. Perceived Impact

Public confidence in law enforcement in the United States generally remains higher than many officers would expect. According to Gallup, during the year 2018 in the United States,

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54% of the population had a “great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in the police. Believe it or not, that’s only down about 3% from the overall average since 1993. The numbers on this topic have been fairly consistent and ranged from a high of 64% in 2004 to the two years that tied for the low, 2015 and 1993 each at 52%. (Gallup, 2018-1993)

What might have been responsible for the lows? To see what influenced people’s confidence in the police in 1993, we should look at 1991 and 1992. On March 3, 1991, officers from the California Highway Patrol stopped Rodney King on a traffic stop. Officers from the Los Angeles Police Department eventually took over the stop and a neighborhood resident went outside and filmed four white officers repeatedly beating and kicking King, who was African-American. Many of the blows were delivered while King lay on the ground. The footage was given to a local TV station and outrage spread across the globe as the images were broadcast repeatedly. Four of the officers were subsequently charged criminally in the incident. (Associated Press, 2017)

Then, in late April 1992 a jury acquitted the officers of almost all charges and 1992 became the year of the Rodney King riots in Los Angeles. South Los Angeles erupted into the burning and looting of stores and attacks by some residents on non-black passers-by in the wake of the verdicts. After three days of around the clock media coverage of the riots a visibly shaken Rodney King went in front of the cameras and asked America, “Can we all get along?” (Associated Press, 2017).

A Perfect Storm

It would not be hard to argue that the Rodney King incident and the subsequent media coverage were unparalleled in damaging the reputation of American law enforcement during that period in our history. That is unless you also look at Waco, Texas, in 1993, and the siege of the

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Branch Davidian compound. (History.com - Editors, 2018). As devastating as the Rodney King incident was for America and American law enforcement, it was followed by the longest shoot-out in American law enforcement history, much of which was broadcast live on national television.

Agents from the Federal Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) had arrived at the Branch Davidian compound, which was led by David Koresh, and attempted to execute arrest and search warrants stemming from the alleged illegal stockpiling of weapons inside. Gunfire broke out and the stand-off that followed lasted fifty-one days. It culminated in fire, leaving seventy-five people, including women and children, dead as federal agents assaulted the compound.

United States Attorney General Janet Reno had approved the plan by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to conduct an assault on the compound starting with tear gas. Reno reportedly had reservations about the plan and had concerns that the children inside might be used as human shields if such an assault took place. It has since been claimed that she was assured by the FBI that children were being sexually abused and that babies had been beaten inside the compound. On April 19, 1993, the assault commenced. After six hours of televised tear gas, fires broke out in three separate locations in the compound as America and the world watched from their homes in horror. (Childress, 2018)

After the heartbreaking end to the siege, even many of the most ardent supporters of law enforcement had questions about the decision making, tactics and actions in Waco. Many wondered whether the assault at the end of the siege, if not the entire mission from the beginning, had to happen the way that it did. Did the government and law enforcement over-step their bounds?

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It's hard to tell how much of an impact the one-two punch of Rodney King and Waco had as far as the Gallup statistics go because 1993 was the first year this data was collected. But, considering those incidents it's no surprise that time period would represent one of the low points for public confidence in law enforcement.

A New Low

In 2015 public confidence in law enforcement dipped to another low and again we should examine what had been going on leading up to the low. On February 26, 2012, George Zimmerman, who was a neighborhood watch captain and not a police officer, was involved in an incident with Trayvon Martin, an African-American teenager, in Sanford, Florida. Zimmerman called 911 and reported Martin as a "suspicious person." He was instructed to stay in his SUV and not approach Martin. Zimmerman then ignored those instructions and approached Martin. The two then got into an altercation during which Zimmerman shot and killed Martin, who was unarmed. Zimmerman sustained injuries to his head during the altercation and claimed the killing was self-defense. (CNN, 2019)

Zimmerman was later charged with second degree murder, but was acquitted by a jury on July 13, 2013. In February, 2015, the United States Justice Department ultimately announced that there would be no federal civil-rights charges filed against Zimmerman. (CNN, 2019) According to their website, the group Black Lives Matter was formed in response "to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer, George Zimmerman." The group also states that, "In 2014, Mike Brown was murdered by Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson." On their website they write about their response to this incident "- in support of the brave and courageous community of Ferguson and St. Louis as they were being brutalized by law enforcement,

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criticized by media, tear gassed, and pepper sprayed night after night.” (Black Lives Matter, 2019)

Police Officer Darren Wilson, who was white, told authorities he stopped Michael Brown, who was African-American, in August, 2014, as he was walking with his friend, Dorian Johnson, because they were blocking traffic. There has been much contention over the two minutes that followed, but it resulted in Wilson shooting and killing Brown, who was unarmed. The hashtag “#Ferguson” was used on Twitter 11.6 million times between the incident on August 9, 2014, and August 25, 2014. It was retweeted another 1.9 million times during the same timeframe. CNN credited this incident with transforming the Black Lives Matter group into a “movement.” (CNN, 2016)

According to a report from NPR: “After sitting through hours of testimony and reading through thousands of pages of documents, a grand jury decided that there was not enough probable cause to indict police officer Darren Wilson in the shooting death of Michael Brown, an unarmed 18-year old.” (Calamur, 2014) The report goes on to say that Prosecuting Attorney Robert McCulloch stated in a televised address that, “after weighing the evidence, the grand jury decided that Wilson acted within the limits of lethal-force law.”

The Justice Department closed its investigation into the matter by declining to charge Darren Wilson criminally in the killing of Michael Brown. CNN quoted a Justice Department report on the matter as having said, “There is no evidence upon which prosecutors can rely to disprove Wilson’s stated subjective belief that he feared for his safety.” (Bruer, 2015)

Aftermath

With the maelstrom of media coverage of similar police incidents that followed, especially those which involved the killings of unarmed African-Americans by white police

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officers, it's not surprising that 2015 would have been a low point for public confidence in law enforcement. What may be surprising is the fact that while these were the low points, and many officers still feel that the profession itself may not recover, the public in general just doesn't see it that way. By 2017, a mere three years out from the Ferguson incident, public confidence in law enforcement was back to its pre-Ferguson level of 57%. Similarly, back in 1995, only three years out from the Rodney King riots and two years after the Waco siege, public confidence was back up to 58%. (Gallup, 2018-1993)

As a side note, public confidence of either "a great deal" or "quite a lot" in television news from 1993 through 2018 averaged only 29%. Using the same measure and time frame, public confidence in newspapers averaged only 28%. Public confidence in television news and newspapers over the last ten years, however, has dipped to averages of only 22% and 24% respectively. (Gallup, 2018-1993)

So, despite the concerns of many law enforcement leaders and officers, the public still believes in them, and perhaps not so coincidentally, the public doesn't seem to really believe much in the traditional forms of mass media.

Police Paranoia?

Next, one could ask whether there really is an effort by the news media to push the type of negative stories featuring law enforcement that one might expect to damage the reputation of law enforcement in general. In his March 16, 2018, article titled, "Police are still killing black people. Why isn't it news anymore?" in the Washington Post, Wesley Lowery writes, "Police violence – beatings, Taserings, killings – and criminal justice reform more broadly were arguably the leading domestic news storyline during the final two years of the Obama administration." (Lowery, 2018)

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The title of Lowery's article alone would turn heads among law enforcement officers. His writing seems to make the point that even members of the news media acknowledge that they have certainly taken a high level of interest in these types of stories over the last several years.

It may be interesting to point out that in the same article the Washington Post describes Lowery's credentials as not just a reporter but rather as, "...a national correspondent covering law enforcement, justice and their intersection with politics and policy for The Washington Post. He previously covered Congress and national politics. In 2015, he was a lead reporter on the "Fatal Force" project awarded the Pulitzer Prize and George Polk Award." (Lowery, 2018)

Lowery seems to express frustration in his article that the coverage, "...dominated headlines, inspired nationwide protests and brought on a pro-law-enforcement backlash that helped elect President Trump." In the article he seems to blame the media coverage of President Trump for overshadowing the negative coverage of law enforcement. He complains that a video, "...which just 18 months ago would have spurred columns, debates, cable news panels and sustained protests – is no longer breaking through." (Lowery, 2018)

Two years prior to Lowery's "Police are still killing black people. Why isn't it news anymore?" article, in the cover letter attached to the series of Washington Post articles submitted for the 2016 Pulitzer Prize in National Reporting, we find something else interesting. Martin Barron writes, "Meanwhile, Post reporters produced more than a dozen deeply reported stories that defied conventional wisdom about police shootings. Very few of those killed were unarmed black men, for example, though unarmed black men died at a rate seven times greater than unarmed whites. The dead were overwhelmingly white men with guns, who had attacked or threatened people. While police were being vilified in the public debate, The Post found that

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many acted heroically.” (Baron, 2016) Baron is the executive editor of The Washington Post and newsrooms under his leadership, including the one in which Wesley Lowery worked, have won fourteen Pulitzer Prizes. (The Washington Post, n.d.)

Baron’s cover letter seemed to acknowledge that the “conventional wisdom” in 2016 was that law enforcement in the United States killed more unarmed African-American men than anyone else and that those shootings were unjustified. It also acknowledged that this was not true, and that law enforcement was being nonetheless “vilified in the public debate.” He did call attention to a disparity in the rates of killings by police of unarmed African-Americans versus unarmed whites, and focused attention on inadequate reporting of law enforcement related shootings in the United States, thus raising the issue of accountability of law enforcement officers, or lack thereof. (Baron, 2016)

Accountability

Giving credit where it is due, the accountability of law enforcement for any unjust action is something that every law enforcement leader should take very seriously. If the Washington Post series helped reform the process, improve accountability and improved reporting, then they should certainly be applauded for it. It is true that there are unjust killings by law enforcement officers. It is true that there are police officers who are racists or who exhibit racist attitudes. None of those things should be tolerated and when applicable, criminal charges should be not only pursued but demanded by law enforcement leaders.

Law enforcement leaders must realize that although the numbers clearly reflect the public’s ongoing high confidence, that could change. Leaders must not just seek to hold members of the profession accountable when they are caught in a highly publicized misuse of police power or when they demonstrate racist actions or attitudes. Agency administrators must

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work harder to recruit and retain quality professional employees and must work diligently to weed out those that don't measure up to the high standards most of us would like to think our profession upholds. Absent such measures, no media strategies are likely to suffice.

Social Media

Social media is an emerging and tremendously important component of modern media. Roy (2016) said when differentiating between social and traditional media that social media is more versatile, immediate and maximizes the audience reached. (Roy, 2016) Likewise, (Chrysalis Communications, n.d.) writes that, "Social media offers a level of flexibility that traditional media does not afford. For example, once an article in a newspaper is published, it cannot be taken back. The most that can be done is to publish a retraction in a subsequent issue. Social media allows for editing of content to suit any situation. In our fast-paced world, it's easy to see how this can be advantageous." (Chrysalis Communications, n.d.)

They also discuss how traditional marketing tends to focus on "finding and converting new prospects" but doesn't really pay much attention to retaining those "customers." They say that social media has flipped that concept and through interaction with an already retained audience actually uses them to "find and convert" others through word-of-mouth. Basically, social media turns your fans and followers into "brand ambassadors" that spread your message. As an example, they contrast a television commercial campaign that basically hopes to catch someone's attention and convince them to buy a product or service, versus a Facebook campaign which also catches potential customers' attention but then through interactivity encourages them to basically become representatives of the business and in turn sell the business' message and products to their friends. (Chrysalis Communications, n.d.)

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Even though these writers are discussing social media versus traditional media from the perspective of a business selling products and building their own brand, there are still lessons here for law enforcement leaders. Although we are not selling products, are we not building our own brands? We should be.

Why Do We Need Media?

Think about the reasons law enforcement wants to use any form of media to reach the public in the first place. Law enforcement typically wants to promote a positive image to build their community's confidence and support, to seek information from the public when other avenues may be ineffective and to warn and inform the public of situations in which public knowledge is necessary for public safety.

Law enforcement has engaged traditional media for decades, if not centuries, to promote a positive image through releases of information about arrests, community projects, heroic deeds or anything else that it feels might help connect with their community in a positive way. Think about Norman Rockwell's painting, "The Runaway." You know it instantly when you see it. A little boy in a yellow shirt and blue jeans with his possessions wrapped in a red cloth and tied to a stick on the floor under his stool as he sits at the counter of a diner. He's looking up and to his left at Massachusetts State Trooper Richard J. Clemens, who is in full uniform leaning over and looking right back at him. That painting appeared on the cover of the Saturday Evening Post on September 20, 1958. Rockwell had lived a few doors down from the Trooper at the time and asked him to pose for the cover along with a young boy from the local elementary school. Trooper Clemens agreed and reported that his supervisors were, "...very pleased a Massachusetts State Trooper had been chosen for a magazine cover." (Woodward, 2009)

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I'm sure they were. That image was so powerful that it soon hung in countless diners and police stations across the country. It still hangs in many to this day. Scales (2014) said that instead of evoking anxiety as one might expect of a depiction of a runaway child, Rockwell's painting, "...radiates comfort and safety in the form of a triangle of protection surrounding the boy. To the left is the fatherly state-police officer, at the top is the counterman, and to the right is an empty coffee cup, suggesting another good Samaritan had been sitting there not long ago. Perhaps the anonymous diner made the initial call to police and then stayed with the boy until the officer's arrival. The complete narrative depicts a cocoon-like community taking shifts to watch over a child in trouble." (Scales, 2014)

He goes on to write that the painting represented, "...an idyllic version of small-town America. In his sweet, safe universe, no child is ever in danger and no task is more pressing for an officer of the law than to spend a morning with a young runaway." (Scales, 2014) Idyllic though it may be, for many officers it can be difficult to really look at that image without getting a little misty-eyed at what "the job" is really about. There is an understanding there, and an acknowledgement, that we are the good guys. That is something that the vast majority of those working in law enforcement want desperately to be. There is also an image of a community that can and does trust its law enforcers. A community that feels comfortable taking an active role in keeping things the way they should be by getting involved and working with the police.

Media Hounds

In the past and still today, it is common practice for law enforcement agencies to allow if not encourage their officers to cooperate with traditional media when they are doing positive stories about law enforcement. Stories about School Resource Officers interacting with kids, a trooper that buys a basketball goal for some teenagers in a low-income neighborhood, an officer

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helping an older couple fix a flat tire and other similar stories sometimes draw resentment from other officers. They may feel that they're stuck doing the serious "real" police work while the "glory seekers" are busying chasing the television cameras. I've been guilty of feeling that way myself on occasion, but many times we shouldn't. Stories like that do resonate with the citizens we serve and that's not always bad thing.

However, there sometimes is a catch. Luckily, it's a catch that social media may present us with an opportunity to bypass. It's not uncommon for officers or even law enforcement leaders who work closely with traditional media representatives to get into situations where they feel that they owe the reporter information in exchange for the positive stories. The officer may be tempted to become the dreaded "unnamed source close to the investigation" who gives away information that he knows should not be released, sometimes even without a trade-off for positive stories. This can particularly be the case if the officer/law enforcement leader happens to be a little too self-serving and the "positive" stories aren't just about the agency but instead tend to be about that individual officer.

Social media can help in this area of concern because law enforcement, just like any other entity today, now can connect and communicate directly with their community without the involvement of traditional media. If the agency has a decent social media presence and regularly makes their own posts, the agency's posts may have a broader circulation than traditional media does in their area.

Changing Times

It's not a secret that traditional media, particularly newspapers, are suffering with dwindling circulation as they try to compete with online sources of information and entertainment that are soaking up the attention of audiences. As their market dries up, agencies

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have the opportunity to access more of that market directly. This means that these traditional outlets may need law enforcement much more than law enforcement needs them.

For example, several years ago we had a case where a young woman had been reported missing. In reality she was in her late teens or early twenties and had chosen a rough lifestyle which was leading her away from concerned family members. They'd lost contact with her and were worried about her and so naturally reported her as missing. The investigator had obtained a photograph of her which coincidentally was a few years old and therefore made her appear younger and perhaps a little more "sweet and innocent" than a more current photo might have done. Still, we published the photo along with her information and the post went somewhat viral.

Many shares and comments later it had become the widest reaching post we'd ever had on our page, and it did so in an incredibly short time. She was eventually located, and she was fine, but it gave me the opportunity to have an enlightening conversation with a local media representative about the case. This reporter worked for an aspiring online news source which had already become a serious competitor to our local traditional news outlets. She was excited to tell me that they had shared our post "to help get the word out" and had over 18,000 views on it. At that same moment in time, we'd had over 200,000 views.

Joining the Team

This recalls the point made by (Chrysalis Communications, n.d.) that with social media your fans and followers are becoming "brand ambassadors" for your entity. For law enforcement, not only does this help spread whatever message you are trying to circulate at the time, but it also attracts more long-term followers. This in turn helps more members of your community feel involved and identify positively with your agency because they now have a

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personal vested interest in it, regardless of whether it was only in the form of having clicked “like” or “share.” They feel like they are helping because they actually are. This can go a very long way toward the type of community relationship that is a large part of the point of this type of communication for law enforcement in the first place, and it does it without anyone at your agency owing favors to any reporters that may later be looking to extract information that shouldn’t be released.

Agency Seeks Assistance

One type of story lends itself very well to both social and traditional media. This is the type of story in which your agency has some piece of information or even surveillance footage and is seeking more information to resolve the case. These can be effective through traditional media, although the limitations are usually that the local outlets may be too slow in publication to help much, and state-wide media may have too wide of an audience and will ultimately create more work for investigators without any real benefit by producing false unrelated leads that still have to be followed up on.

However, with social media, when a post includes a decent surveillance photograph of an unknown suspect, it is not at all uncommon to have the person identified through a social media tip within the first five minutes of publication. It’s not all that uncommon for the tip to come from a close family member. This is an extremely valuable tool, and it has the collateral benefit of being the type of post that gets heavily shared, liked and commented on, which in turn gains more followers and therefore expands your agency’s pool of brand ambassadors even further.

Controlling the Message

Another advantage of social media is that you can directly release news about your agency to your community with the content and format you choose. You don’t run the risk of

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writing a carefully worded news release and sending it out only to find it later published with necessary information left out or inaccurate information added erroneously or even nefariously. Instead, the public gets the information directly from you.

Most news outlets are in a hurry to get information published. If you craft your news releases in a journalistic style that is going to somewhat conform to what news editors are looking for anyway, they are more likely to publish it either verbatim as you supplied it, or with only minor changes. This is even truer if they know you already have, or soon will publish the same information directly to public on your own site. They don't want to get called out for a mistake or misrepresentation if the public has access to the same information from the direct source and can see the inconsistencies.

Journalism 101

The first main point to remember for journalistic style is that the important information goes first. This is called the "Inverted Pyramid." Readers often only read the first paragraph, so you want that paragraph to summarize the story well enough so that if someone only read it, they'd have a good understanding of who, what, when, where, why and how something happened. Important details are filled in next and then finally other background information. You also need to use short concise sentences to quickly convey the desired information. If this is done, you are well on your way to a style that will look very familiar to reporters and editors. (Eastern Washington University, 2018)

You shouldn't throw a lot of information in the release without attributing it to a source. The source may very well be your chief executive, public information officer or even whoever is writing the release, but their name needs to be there in print. For example, "Chief John Doe

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said...” and “According to Hometown P.D. spokesman Jane Doe...” are things that need to be there for almost every sentence in the release.

You need to cover the story well enough that the public can understand what happened and provide enough information that a reader isn't left sitting there with a lot of unanswered questions in their mind. That is part of being concise. If you don't, then you can expect a lot of calls from reporters seeking more information and clarification, and if you publish directly expect a lot of comments from followers asking the same types of things.

Social Media Pitfalls

If you are managing a social media page for your agency you need to have strict rules about the types of comments that are not allowed and have consequences which include removal of comments and banning of users for violations. Those rules need to be posted on the page, and you need to follow and enforce those rules closely. The Internet is full of people that are looking to stir controversy on pages whether they have any actual interest in the matter or not. Many of those will get caught and banned early if your site doesn't permit obscene or abusive language, violent or threatening language or comments that are off-topic. The off-topic rule is important because those types of people seem to have a lot of trouble staying on-topic. They will often climb up on a different soapbox to rant about some other issue that is not what the original post was about. Therefore, they will have broken a rule which you had already warned them about through the posting of the rules. They can now be banned from posting comments at all which means, guess who isn't around anymore to stir controversy?

A word of caution is in order here. You can't ban someone or delete comments just because you don't like or agree with the comment. That can open you up to some First Amendment issues. You also need to have a process with which someone who was banned can

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be heard and have a chance to get the action reversed. This can be as simple as once requested, someone needs to review the request and if it appears that the request is sincere, and the person isn't just looking to maliciously stir controversy or violate rules then the ban should be removed. People make mistakes, especially on the Internet, and a lack of due process isn't a good thing.

You need to have several competent staff members that understand your social media strategies to work as a team on posting information and moderating comments on your site. This helps shrink the time it takes to catch rule-breaking comments or issues and gives your agency the ability to publish time sensitive information even when primary site administrators may be indisposed.

When you know at the onset that a particular post is the type that is likely to attract an inordinate amount of rule-breaking comments, you may want to explore options other than posting it on your site. Remember traditional media would love to publish that story. If it's something that needs to be released, let them do it for you and then the comments are on their site and on their time instead of yours and the public still gets informed.

Traditional Media

Yes, it's still a good idea to work with traditional media, because as the adage goes, "you don't want to pick a fight with someone who buys ink by the barrel." Even though you may have a large social media reach into your audience, so does traditional media. They also share stories with each other, so if a story is big enough it may even move across markets and draw even more attention.

Generally speaking, it's not a lot of fun to have television satellite trucks parked across the street from your office. They usually aren't there to report on what an awesome job your agency is doing. So, keep in mind that law enforcement must still be active in "getting in front

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of” negative stories. Bad things happen and the public deserves to know. They’re going to know anyway so mitigate what you can and get it out there and get it over with. Nothing feeds a news cycle like a cover-up, so you don’t want to make a bad thing worse by either trying to cover it up, or even by looking like your trying to cover it up.

Critical Incidents

We all know that critical incidents are very fluid and information that you possess early is usually wrong. Therefore, you must be very guarded with what you say and what information you release during the early stages of any high profile or major incident. It may help to clarify that the information isn’t rock solid and that it is subject to change. For example, saying something like, “We only have preliminary information at this time and as the investigation proceeds we will know more but for now we believe this is what happened...” can help curtail an onslaught of negativity later when the information does change.

It also helps to give traditional media representatives information on when and where to expect press conferences and updates. If you keep updates coming often it encourages them to wait where you tell them so that they don’t miss your update. Otherwise, they will likely be out wandering the area around the scene of the incident trying to find information or going around looking for a “community spokesperson” to speak on camera about something that they probably know very little about. Both of those are things we’d usually prefer they didn’t do, so give them enough information, often enough, that they can do their job of informing the public.

Timing

You can hold some releases exclusively for your local media, or even just delay release on your own page until they’ve had the release for a few hours. This gives them the chance to publish first, which is usually a big thing for them. You can also work with them on release

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dates or times that are more advantageous for them on stories that aren't time critical. They may have days or times that they would prefer to get releases so that they fit into their internal deadline schedules. When you work with them on these types of things it isn't unreasonable, and it helps build a better relationship. Without selling your soul and becoming their "unnamed source".

Freedom of Information

Law enforcement must have staff on-hand that are well versed in Freedom of Information Act issues. There are many things that must be released when requested. There are some things that don't have to be released, some things that don't have to be released for a few days, some things that must be released immediately, and there are a few things that cannot be released at all. We must know the difference. Traditional media, private citizens and sometimes even attorneys will submit requests for information pursuant to these laws and naturally there can be consequences for not following the law.

Conclusion

If one positive image of law enforcement like Rockwell's "The Runaway" can resonate with so many for as long as it has, why shouldn't law enforcement leaders use whatever forms of media they can to counteract negative portrayals that many in traditional media have been so quick to put into circulation? They should, and they had better for the sake of the profession and future of our society. We should remember that it just doesn't accomplish much to lament that idyllic scenes like "The Runaway" aren't always the case. It can however, be of tremendous benefit, especially to young officers, to see inspiration in those idyllic images and then aspire to those ideals.

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I remember an instructor once telling us that if we had to arrest someone, there was no point in trying to make them happy about it because we can't, and we don't owe anyone that. But instead, he said to always remember that we do owe it to them to try to make them understand why we had to do what we did. I can see some of that in "The Runaway." It's in the officer's face. He's not angry. He's not laughing or joking, though he may be a little amused. But you can see that no matter what, that little boy is going home where he belongs, and the officer has probably just broken that news to him. The kid may not like it, but it will happen. You can also see that if the officer played his cards right when delivering that message, not only will the kid probably not run away anymore, but some day he just might be sitting on the other stool wearing a blue uniform with a shield or a star on his chest, because that's how that works.

The images we project have consequences. Whether those images are through media in the form of official press releases, social media posts or if they are citizen videos of officers crossing lines they shouldn't. There are consequences, both positive and negative.

Any officer that is worth his salt who has been around more than ten years has probably had someone come up to him that he had to "deal with" in the past. I, like many, have been fortunate enough to have it happen several times. Usually I don't even remember the original incident at all. At worst, the person might give me a little bit of a hard time about some aspect of the encounter they still think wasn't quite fair. Sometimes they mention some kind of "lesson learned" they took from the incident. Often, they volunteer that I ended up either not writing them a ticket, or maybe I just made them go home. There were some that thanked me for whatever I had done because it was, "the kick in the pants" they needed at the time. The best though, are the ones who are now wearing blue uniforms with shields or stars on their chest, who

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can remember with a laugh a time when they were the kid in the yellow shirt, and I was lucky enough to be standing in for Trooper Clemens, secretly praying I wouldn't let him down.

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