



[Features](#) [Columns](#) [Newsletter](#) [Gallery](#) [NewsWire](#) [Resources](#) [DiscTV](#) [Search](#) [Home](#) [SuperStore](#)

Disc Golf Resources

[Tournament Publicity Guide](#) > [Resources](#) > [Home](#)

resources

▶ [Disc Golf Terms](#)

▶ [Course Proposal Template](#)

▶ [PDGA Information](#)
[Tournament Schedule](#)

[Divisions FAQ](#)

[Points FAQ](#)

[Ratings FAQ](#)

[Demographics](#)

[Points Leaders](#)

[Cash Leaders](#)

[Pro Champions](#)

▶ [Tournament Tips](#)

▶ [Tournament Publicity Guide](#)

▶ [Environmental Issues](#)

▶ [Disc Golf Links](#)

Tournament Publicity Guide

By Brian Sullivan / DiscLife.com
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This guide explains in detail how you can put together and execute a comprehensive, winning publicity strategy for your tournament, and will spark new ideas on how to reach an even greater audience.

1. [Introduction](#)
2. [Player Publicity](#)
 - [Letting Players Know](#)
 - [Getting Players Back](#)
 - [The Gallery](#)
3. [Sponsor Publicity](#)
4. [Spectator Publicity](#)
 - [Tandem Events](#)
 - [Premiums](#)
 - [Planning for a Turnout](#)
5. [Media Publicity](#)
 - [The Press Release](#)
 - [Radio: A Unique Disc Golf Media Partner](#)
 - [The Media and Charities](#)
 - [After the Tournament](#)
6. [Ideas To Get More Media Coverage](#)
 - [Charities and Non-Profits](#)
 - [Angles and Pre-Existing Events](#)
7. [Sample Press Release](#)



Introduction

Effective publicity goes far beyond convincing the local newspaper or TV station to run a story about your event. You have a number of target audiences -- or publics -- to reach, and each has a different set of needs and goals of their own. By understanding each of these different audiences, you take a big step toward a successful publicity effort.

Your publicity goals can include generating:

- more players
- more spectators
- more sponsorship dollars
- more media coverage
- more exposure of the game to non-players

Your target audiences include:

- Players
- Sponsors
- Non-playing spectators
- Media

We'll take a look at each audience individually.

Up to [Table of Contents](#)

Player Publicity

Letting Players Know

Your first publicity priority is to make sure players know about your tournament. If players aren't attending your event, why should spectators, sponsors or the media care? For established and well-run tournaments, word of mouth and PDGA information dissemination may be all you need. However, if your event is new, unsanctioned, or has struggled in the past, then you have some work to do.

Options for effectively and inexpensively publicizing your event to players include the following:

Fliers

A simple 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of paper announcing your tournament. This is an easy and inexpensive way to spread the word. Post locally and send copies to neighboring clubs at least one month in advance. Since these are normally posted outdoors, laminate each sheet to protect it from the ravages of weather.

Direct Mail and Newsletters

You should be gathering player contact information at each tournament, including names, street and e-mail addresses, and phone numbers. This information can then be used to send invitations to players you know are highly likely to return, since they've already attended at least one of your events.

Internet



The demographic breakdowns of disc golfers and Internet users are very closely matched, so don't miss this opportunity to easily reach a large number of players. A club Web site, e-mail user groups, newsgroups (rec.sport.disc) and the PDGA DISCUSSION forum (www.pdga.com) are just a few of the ways to make the Internet work for you.

Magazines

Disc Golf World News and Disc Golf Journal reach several thousand die hard golfers each, and running an advertisement in either will get the attention of the most dedicated players. Try contacting each to see if they are interested in running a spotlight piece on your event. If your event is sanctioned by the PDGA, each magazine will also list your event for free on the PDGA calendar, and often will print tournament results and a brief summary of the highlights.

Word of Mouth

When it's positive, word of mouth is the best kind of publicity for getting players to your event, and the most difficult to generate. We'll talk more about keeping players happy in the next section.

Getting Players Back

Of all your target audiences, it is the players whose satisfaction should be your greatest concern. Dissatisfied players won't return, and your publicity efforts with other audiences will suffer as a consequence.

KEY POINT:

Good publicity begins with a good tournament which caters to player satisfaction.

What brings players out for a tournament:

- Better payouts
- Quality of operations
- Tier strength and level of competition
- Course and course condition
- Location
- Amenities
- Little extras, which are those special touches that help to make your event unique and memorable. A keg of the local microbrew, a cool memento in the player's package, limo rides for the leader groups, etc.

If you can put a solid check mark next to each of these categories, you can stop worrying about getting players back to your event next year. Being short more than one or two may indicate room for improvement.

The Gallery

How do you attract a gallery? Before you go working up a sweat looking too far away, remember to look in front of you.

KEY POINT:

The greatest publicity pitfall for many TDs is failing to turn the field of players into a gallery.

For spectators, the most exciting part of any tournament is a showcase of the best players going head to head for all the marbles in a final battle of skill and

determination. Since disc golfers are already passionate about the game, they represent your greatest audience potential.

How to turn your players into a gallery:

Time Management

Your showdown might include the world's best golfers, but few players will stick around to watch if it begins Sunday evening at 7pm. At a late hour, many players will be tired and facing a long drive home. To keep them in the audience, set your timetable to begin the showdown as early as possible, and stick to your timetable.

Promotion

How many tournaments have we been to where a showdown has occurred without the other players even knowing about it? Even if it's a tie-breaking playoff, you're not seizing your promotional potential if other players are oblivious to the fact. Remind players of any potential showdown at the player's meeting. Keep a bullhorn handy after the final round, along with a bit of showmanship. "Attention players and spectators: We have a three-way tie among the Open players, and a sudden death playoff will begin in exactly ten minutes on hole one. Don't miss this exciting conclusion which pits last year's champion, (player one) against (players two and three). This showdown promises to feature some of the weekend's best golf!"

Viewing Ease

How can you make it easier for spectators to watch? Pick your course's best vantage point and try to organize the payoff around it, so that spectators don't have to walk much... or at all.

Once you've assembled a gallery, take advantage of it! Be sure to get lots photos and video of players, showing the gallery in the background. Documenting this most exciting part of the tournament gives you additional promotional ammunition to present to future sponsors and members of the media.

Up to [Table of Contents](#)

Sponsor Publicity

Strong event publicity not only helps you to keep existing sponsors, it helps to bring in new ones. If a business owner repeatedly sees or hears news items about your event, you have increased his or her awareness of the game. By the time you knock on their door, the response could very well be "yes, I've heard of the Disc Golf Open, come on in!"

Sponsors are a different breed from players, with an entirely different set of goals. The primary reason for their potential involvement in your event is to create impressions on consumers who are more demographically likely to act on those impressions and purchase the sponsor's products or services.

KEY POINT:

Sponsors are expecting you to deliver an audience of potential customers.

To successfully gain and keep sponsors, you must demonstrate to them that you have their goals in mind.

When approaching potential sponsors, begin by considering who their target customer is in relation to who you can deliver. The majority of disc golfers tend to be males between the ages of 18 and 49, with a median age in the vicinity of 30. Ask yourself: "Does this business want to reach adult males?" If the answer is yes, you may have a prime candidate for sponsorship.

Ways to provide publicity for sponsors:

- Logo/mention in all tournament advertising and publicity efforts
- Banner space
- Logo on t-shirts and disc stamps
- Heartfelt mentions at all player meetings (words are free: use them generously)
- Player premiums
- Product samples at event
- Hole sponsorships

How can you increase publicity for sponsors beyond event players and spectators?
By getting them free coverage in the media.

Try to come up with strategies that will place your sponsor's logo in front of media cameras. Possibilities include:

- Final nine "Quiet Please" signage
- T-shirts and hats on caddies or officials
- Banners next to tee pads on playoff holes
- Logos on basket nameplates

Anywhere you think a media camera is likely to be pointing is a good place for increasing sponsor exposure.

If you publish a club newsletter, make sure all your present and past sponsors receive a copy. This not only keeps them up to date, you never know when they'll post it in their businesses, exposing information about your club to their customers.

Up to [Table of Contents](#)

Spectator Publicity

Tandem Events

You're hoping that your media publicity will help to draw in a crowd, but there's much more you can do to ensure that this happens. Since most people are not yet familiar with disc golf and are not apt to attend an event which they don't understand, it helps to "hook" them in with something they do understand. The best way to accomplish this is through a tandem event.

KEY POINT:

Tandem events are the best way to bring non-disc golfers to your tournament.

Nothing draws a crowd more effectively than a crowd. Tandem events are activities which compliment your tournament and create more of a carnival atmosphere, bringing additional spectators who otherwise might not attend.

Sponsor tie-ins are the best kind of tandem event, benefiting each party and further cementing the tournament/sponsor relationship. Securing "Tabasco Sauce" as a sponsor opens the door to a chili cook-off. A strong partnership with a radio station can lead to a free concert by an up-and-coming band.

Maybe there's softball or soccer tournament in the park you can schedule with. The

tandem possibilities are endless. When generating ideas, start with activities that would be fun and appropriate to hold near your course.

To be successful in partnering with tandem events, pre-planning and coordination well in advance is essential. Just as your tournament can take months to plan, promote and execute, so does a tandem event. Your main concern with a tandem event is to make sure someone else is responsible for managing it, allowing you to concentrate on running the best disc golf tournament on the planet.

Do-it-yourself tandem events are also an option. Scheduling one or two beginner clinics during general tournament play is a good example. You not only expose new players to the excitement of disc golf, you're also giving non-playing staff members something to do other than hang out during tournament play. The downside of do-it-yourself tandems is that they tend to create less of an impact, since you are lacking another organization's public appeal, publicity efforts and resources.

Premiums

The concept of the doorprize has been around for hundreds of years: giving people some free stuff just for showing up.

Premiums can be effective in bringing additional spectators if they:

1. Have some intrinsic value or allure, and
2. Are heavily promoted

Non-players won't make a special trip to your event on the promise of a free mini disc (they don't even know what that is), nor will they show up for a free steak dinner if they don't know about it. But, if they've heard a couple dozen radio mentions talking about free ballcaps and a chance to win the radio station's \$10,000 jackpot, you've got a highly effective spectator premium.

You are undoubtedly working on a limited budget, and chances are you've already poured any additional funding into the player payouts. This leaves sponsors to foot the bill for spectator premiums. Often these premiums are sponsor product samples, used to increase consumer awareness while creating added incentive for visitors to attend: discs, food items, clothing, coupons, etc.

Planning for a Turnout

Once you've worked to bring spectators to your event, make sure you're ready to receive them.

Chances are good that most spectators will arrive once play has already started, and they may be less than impressed to find one guy sitting at Tournament Central with his feet kicked up on a table and a margarita in his hand. If you want to be taken seriously, you have to look and act the part.

Points to consider:

- Signage. Nothing says "hey, there's an event going on here!" like a big, fat banner. A reusable, generic sign with your club logo and the words "Disc Golf Tournament Today" works great.
- Course maps. Make sure your visitors know where to find the best viewing areas.
- Code of conduct. Hand out a list of points letting spectators know how to safely enjoy their visit without distracting the players or disturbing the flow of play.
- Rules and a league invitation. A brief explanation of disc golf rules and concepts is an excellent addition to your visitor's packet, along with information

on how to join your local league.

- Treat them as honored guests. You've worked hard to invite them, now make them feel welcome. Thank them for coming out, and ask if they have any questions you can answer. If you're busy, at least acknowledge their presence with a smile and tell them you'll be with them shortly. VIP treatment for guests can really pay off, because you never know when Joe or Jane Spectator will turn out to be a reporter or next year's sponsor!

Up to [Table of Contents](#)

Media Publicity

Media publicity can also be called "free advertising," and everyone likes that. The only downside to publicity vs. advertising is a lack of complete control over what and how the information is conveyed. Quite often this problem manifests itself in how the game is presented. Reporters seem fond of using the word "wacky" when describing disc golf, at a time when we are concentrating great efforts on mainstreaming the game as a valid, exciting and highly-accessible recreational sport.

Despite this common frustration, (almost) any publicity is good publicity. A story about your "wacky" disc golf tournament is better than none at all.

KEY POINT:

Your media publicity efforts will be more successful when presenting a unique story angle.

An angle from the media's perspective is that quality in a story which creates general appeal for their audience. Appealing stories can bring larger audiences while preserving existing ones, which in turn boosts profits. Your angle could be an appearance by Ken Climo or some other celebrity, a charity tie-in, a tandem event, or special circumstances (such as an Ice Bowl). When you lack a stronger angle, focus on the growing popularity and uniqueness of disc golf.

Check the phone book to begin your media target search. Options include:

- Television and radio stations
- Daily, weekly and trade newspapers
- News, business, entertainment, tourism and specialty publications
- Locally-focused Web sites

Don't forget any college media, they're usually eager to help.

Once you've chosen the outlets to approach, call each one and ask for the name, title and fax number for the person most appropriate to be receiving your information. Be careful not to always get the sports desk: it may better serve your goals to get the attention of a color commentator, features editor or other human interest journalist, depending on the medium.

The Press Release

For greater effectiveness, follow these general guidelines:

- Send by mail or fax at least two weeks in advance, six weeks for magazines.
- Use club stationery if you have it, order some if you do not.
- Keep it short. Two pages maximum, one page is best.
- Keep it simple. Begin with the basics: who, what, when, where and why. The

first paragraph should clearly state your best angle.

- Easy on the hype. You're dealing with the kings and queens of hype, and they can spot over-inflated adjectives a mile away. Using lines like "Sunday! Sunday! Sunday! Super-charged disc golfers in the most intense, heart-pounding sporting event of the year!" will land your press release in the trash lickety-split.
- Describe the game. Assume that the reporter doesn't know what disc golf is, and spend a paragraph or three explaining the game and why it is becoming so popular in your area and around the world.
- Use a visual. Including a photograph or graphic will give the reporter an instant visual reference.
- Address your target reporter or editor by name. As a group, members of the media tend to have somewhat larger egos than mainstream society. They like to see and hear their names often. Indulge them. Make sure you have the name, title and spelling correct.

Once your press release has been sent, wait a day and follow it up with a phone call. If you are unable to initially reach your target journalist, keep calling until you do. To use a fishing analogy, think of your press release as the bait, and the follow-up phone call as the hook. One without the other may not catch many fish, but together they make an effective combination.

[Click here](#) to view a sample press release.

Radio: A Unique Disc Golf Media Partner

Radio can be one of your strongest publicity allies, and should be vigorously pursued. Why? You each stand to benefit from the other. It's a win-win combination.

Radio is a highly-competitive medium which depends on delivering a specific demographic audience to advertisers in order to pay the bills. As discussed earlier, disc golf offers an audience dominated by 18-49 year old males, which just happens to be a very desirable demographic group for advertisers. Radio also lacks a visual presence, so they make a priority out of attending demographically-compatible events in order to be seen by their audience.

Ask yourself, "which local radio stations appeal to disc golfers?" Chances are your answer will include an alternative, mainstream and/or classic rock station. Shoot a call to the most popular station's promotions director and explain your tournament, focusing on the demographics you have to offer and what a "cool, up-and-coming sport this is," then suggest that the station become the "exclusive radio sponsor" of your event. Radio stations love to be the exclusive anything. You deliver a key demographic group to the station, they deliver pre-publicity and day-of promotion.

Things to ask for:

- A "promo announcement schedule," or in other words, free plugs. A promotional mention generally runs 10 to 30 seconds, and can be live or pre-recorded.
- A live remote broadcast on Sunday, or whichever day you hope to build the biggest gallery and can offer the greatest excitement.
- Giveaways (spectator premiums): tapes, CDs, t-shirts and other station paraphernalia.

What you should offer them:

- Level one sponsor status, with a mention in all your advertising and publicity

efforts, along with any other benefits you're offering to your primary sponsors.

- Banner placement at event (station-provided).
- Plenty of thanks. Want them back next year? Send the decision maker a gift certificate or special plaque after the tournament as a way of saying thanks. A little gift goes a long way.

Be sure to bounce tandem event ideas off the radio folks. They may have a client who would love to get involved. And remember to work well in advance!

The Media and Charities

Broadcast television and radio stations operate on public airwaves, and the Federal Communications Commission mandates that to maintain their operating licenses, these entities must strive to "serve the public interest." In the past, this goal was generally accomplished by running public service announcements ("This is your brain on drugs..."). Today the trend is toward working with charities.

Charity work serves the public good while creating warm, fuzzy feelings with the broadcaster's audience, whereas public service announcements are generally considered by the audience as "just another commercial."

Therefore, broadcasters are often looking for ways to tie-in with charities.

KEY POINT:

By partnering with a charity, you significantly increase your publicity potential while helping others in your community.

A charity can help your publicity efforts in a number of ways:

- Adds credibility to your event.
- Adds a new angle to your event's newsworthiness.
- Your promotional impact is increased significantly, if not doubled (as long as the charity is also working to publicize the event).
- Creates a terrific opportunity to stage a charity-run tandem event.

For an excellent photo opportunity, try to arrange to have some of the charity's recipients play in your tournament, and if so, make sure the media knows about it.

After the Tournament

It's important for you as a Tournament Director to announce your event results as quickly as possible, otherwise you could miss additional publicity opportunities.

Most daily newspapers will publish your results as "box scores." Call ahead of time and request information on their submission guidelines, because newspapers won't generally publish box scores that are more than a day or two old.

Send a copy of your results, along with a brief summary of highlights, to each your of sponsors regardless of whether or not they attended the event. A copy of this information should also be sent to the disc golf magazines and posted at www.pdga.com and in the rec.sport.disc newsgroup.

Up to [Table of Contents](#)

Ideas To Get More Media Coverage

Generate new partnerships, sponsorships and more media coverage:

Charities and Non-Profits

- Charity events - food drives and fundraisers to benefit foodbanks, shelters, health organizations and other local charities.
- Ace Race - Sponsors donate \$XX to charity for every ace in the tournament.
- Putting (Hunger) In Its Place - Individual players find sponsors to pay \$XX for every putt made within XX attempts. Money raised goes to charity, winning players receive prizes provided by sponsors.
- School fundraisers - Plant some baskets and buy some discs for the local kids.

Angles and Pre-Existing Events

- Celebrity appearance - Invite a local TV color commentator to participate. This succeeds more often for charity events. Think big too: maybe your second cousin is Michael Jordan's neighbor...
- Special awards for Juniors - Looks great on the front page of the sports section.
- Ice Bowl - An annual, worldwide winter disc golfing event.
- World's Biggest Disc Golf Weekend - An annual, worldwide disc golfing event.
- Other sports tournaments.
- Golf Wars - As a pre-publicity event, invite some local ball golfers (preferably celebrities) to go head-to-head against your top disc golf pros. Set up baskets on a local ball golf course, or better yet, plant ball golf flags and holes on your course, then step back and watch as the local media trucks roll in! Another variation pits the players against each other first in ball golf, then in disc golf.

Up to [Table of Contents](#)

[Click Here](#) to view a sample press release.



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AD INFO



resources

- ▶ [Disc Golf Terms](#)
- ▶ [Course Proposal Template](#)
- ▶ [PDGA Information](#)
- ▶ [Tournament Schedule](#)
- ▶ [Divisions FAQ](#)
- ▶ [Points FAQ](#)
- ▶ [Ratings FAQ](#)
- ▶ [Demographics](#)
- ▶ [Points Leaders](#)
- ▶ [Cash Leaders](#)
- ▶ [Pro Champions](#)
- ▶ [Tournament Tips](#)
- ▶ [Tournament Publicity Guide](#)
- ▶ [Environmental Issues](#)
- ▶ [Disc Golf Links](#)



Features Columns Newsletter Gallery NewsWire Resources DiscTV Search Home SuperStore

Disc Golf Resources

[Sample Press Release](#) > [Tournament Publicity Guide](#) > [Resources](#) > [Home](#)

Sample Press Release: Tournament Publicity

This press release can serve as a template for you publicity needs, and represents a generic release with no unique angle.

For greater effectiveness, remember these guidelines:

- Send by mail or fax at least two weeks in advance. Avoid sending via email alone, this method of transition will prove to be least effective in reaching your publicity goals.
- Use club stationery if possible
- Keep it short. Two pages maximum, one page is best.
- Keep it simple. Begin with the basics: who, what, when, where and why. The first paragraph should clearly state your best angle.
- Easy on the hype.
- Describe the game.
- Use a visual reference.
- Address your target reporter or editor by name. Make sure you have the name, title and spelling correct.

[DATE]
Contact: [TD AND PHONE NUMBER]

For Immediate Release:

[YOUR CITY] Disc Golfers Host [TOURNAMENT NAME]

The [LEAGUE NAME] disc golf league announces the area's biggest disc golfing tournament of the year, the [TOURNAMENT NAME], [DATE] at [LOCATION]. Some of [YOUR STATE'S] top professional disc golf competitors are expected to be among the field of [NUMBER] players, including [CITY]'s [SHOWCASE PLAYER].

[GOOD QUOTE FROM TD HERE].



Players in this year's tournament will be competing for more than [TOTAL PAYOUT VALUE] in cash and prizes, and [TD] expects a full field of competitors again this year. "The explosive growth of this game is incredible," said [TD]. "We hosted only 20 players six years ago, and every year since then the number of players has increased dramatically. We finally had to limit the field to ensure a timely finish."

The game's popularity growth has also been evident in every day use of the [PARK NAME] facilities, which caters to an estimated average of [INSERT NUMBER] players per day.

The tournament format includes two rounds of 24 holes for both professional and amateur divisions on Saturday, one round of 24 holes on Sunday, and a final nine-hole shootout for the top players in each division, which should begin at approximately 2pm on Sunday. The public is welcome and encouraged to come watch the action. Park entry is free.

Pro or amateur disc golfers who are interested in participating in this year's [TOURNAMENT NAME] should contact [TD] at [PHONE NUMBER].

What is disc golf?

Disc golf is a very visual game and an excellent human interest story opportunity.

The sport is similar to traditional "ball" golf, except players use specially made plastic flying discs ("frisbees") instead of balls and clubs, and throw them at an above-ground target instead of a hole in the ground. There are different types of discs used for different purposes, much like ball golfers use different clubs.

The object of the game is to throw a golf disc into the target, usually a steel basket over which chains hang, in the fewest number of throws. The player begins by 'driving' from a designated tee area and continues toward the target, throwing each consecutive shot from the spot where the previous throw has landed. Finally, a successful 'putt' sends the disc into the target. The most satisfying sound a disc golfer can hear is the 'ching!' of a disc crashing the chains before dropping into the basket.

According to the Professional Disc Golf Association, three to five million people have played disc golf on nearly 900 disc golf courses worldwide.

Disc golf offers many of the same pleasures as ball golf: fresh air in a beautiful landscape, the camaraderie of friends, and the challenge and excitement of harnessing personal skill and speed to send an object toward a target. And perhaps best of all, disc golf is inexpensive. The only equipment you need is a flying disc, which retail between \$7 and \$12, and most disc golf courses are located in municipal parks, which admit players for free or charge a minimal fee for daily or yearly access.

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