

Working with the Media ... A Few Tips

Whether your strategy is to attract media or your organization is already getting media attention, understanding how the media works is a valuable tool.

When you know how they work, what they need, when they need it and why, you can maximize your opportunity to share important information about your business.

Here are few things to remember.

- **Be Responsive:** Members of the media are usually on tight deadlines. More than likely, they know little about the subject on which they are conducting an interview. They need almost immediate access to information or they will move on. An important opportunity could be lost.
- **Be Organized:** Select a media contact person within your organization and post their phone and email address on your Web site. Have a protocol at your workplace for how to handle calls from the media and be sure your employees understand it. Your media contact person should be committed to answering calls immediately or responding within 15 minutes, even after business hours.
- **Be Prepared:** If you are soliciting the media's interest and a reporter bites, be ready to make your points in a clear and compelling way. Gather helpful information in advance. A fact sheet or background narrative, photos, charts or statistics can help make your

point. Write down two to four key messages. Practice delivering them as if you were being interviewed by having someone role-play as a reporter.

- **Be Smart:** Ask a few of your own questions before you agree to an interview. It's appropriate to ask what the story will be about, who else the reporter plans to interview and if there is specific information you will be asked to provide. If you are not the right person for the interview, make the connection. If you are the right person, take some time to prepare. You can ask to schedule the interview for a later time, even if it's just 15 minutes later, then prepare as described earlier.



- **Be An Active Participant:** Interviews are a two-way street. Reporters want you to say certain things and you have your own things you want to say. Sometimes those objectives clash, but you can remain in control of the situation. Have your key messages and be able to state each one at least two different ways.

- **Be a "Bridger":** Always answer the reporter's questions, but you don't always have to answer the question as it was asked. You can handle awkward questions by bridging back to one of your key messages. There is an art to bridging that usually requires training and practice.
- **Nothing is "Off the Record":** Don't fall for it. Nothing in an interview is ever "off the record" or "on background." Expect that anything you say will be printed or aired. So, if you don't want it printed or aired, don't say it.

A proactive, comprehensive media training session facilitated by an expert for key personnel is a good communications practice. If something important is about to happen at your organization, consider adding "issue specific" media training to your strategic communication plan for that event.

In most cases, media representatives are not "out to get" business folks. While they are trained skeptics, they're also working on nearly impossible deadlines for a boss who is likely more demanding than any one for whom you have ever worked.

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