

MEDIA REFERENCE GUIDE

When You receive a call from the news media follow these guidelines:

ASK QUESTIONS AND TAKE NOTES.

Be sure you understand:

1. WHO is calling and her/his phone number
2. WHAT publication or broadcast station the caller represents
3. WHY the reported wants to interview *you*
4. WHAT INFORMATION is being requested (statistics, background, personal opinion, organizational policy, reaction to an event or disclosure)
5. WHAT is the reason for doing the story
6. WHO ELSE is being contacted for information (associates, competitors)
7. WHEN AND WHERE the interview would be held
8. HOW LONG the interview would take
9. The DEADLINE
10. The probable TIME or DATE of publication or broadcast

DO NOT ANSWER IMMEDIATELY IF YOU ARE NOT WELL PREPARED.

A timely answer is important but you do not have to answer on the spot. Tell the caller you are busy at the moment but will call back by a certain time. Or you may want to schedule a person-to-person interview.

ESTABLISH ANY GROUND RULES IN ADVANCE,

such as length of interview, whether you will be filmed or photographed, topics you cannot address. Assume everything you say will be on the record.

ANTICIPATE DIFFICULT QUESTIONS.

What are your answers to them?

PREPARE ONE TO THREE KEY MESSAGES.

Make them as positive as possible.

REHEARSE IF TIME PERMITS.

Have someone ask you sample questions.

ANSWER TRUTHFULLY.

Do not mislead with an answer. Be accurate.

ANSWER CLEARLY AND CONCISELY.

State the important facts first. Have statistics, examples, comparisons or other back-up information available for follow-up questions.

IF YOU DO NOT KNOW THE ANSWER TO A QUESTION, ADMIT IT.

If appropriate, say you will check on it and call back.

At the end, **ENCOURAGE THE REPORTED TO CALL BACK** if any clarification is needed.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR AN INTERVIEW WITH MEDIA

In news media interviews, as in other aspects of life, people who are prepared get better results than people who are not prepared. **Preparation is the key to a good interview.** Even if you must respond quickly to accommodate an imminent deadline you should take a few minutes to prepare before answering questions.

1. Determine the communication objective. Identify 1 to 3 priority messages and state each in a simple, declarative sentence.
2. Learn as much as you can about the reporter and the publication or station. Is the reporter knowledgeable about your business or activity? How does the publication or station usually present news of this type?
3. Identify possible interview topics and gather relevant background materials.
4. Draft the most difficult or objectionable questions that could be asked. Prepare the answers to those questions (in 25-100 words).
5. Draft questions you would like to have asked. Prepare the answers to those questions (in 25-100 words). Make sure you use a simple, declarative sentence for closure - no more than 14 words.
6. Rehearse your interview. There's no substitute for trying your responses out loud and in front of someone else. A rehearsal will allow you to refine your answers and anticipate any stumbling blocks.
7. Do not attempt to memorize answers or read answers from a crib sheet. Using a sheet of statistics or other key facts is acceptable.
8. Monitor and evaluate the results of the interview. Identify what you could have done better.

PREPARING FOR A BROADCAST INTERVIEW

Television and radio interviews can be an extremely effective way to tell your story. Broadcast interviews are different from print interviews in a number of ways. It is important to practice your responses and to have a clear understanding of the broadcast interview process - whether live or taped.

- Obtain information about the interview when you are approached with a request. Ask the producer, host or reporter the general thrust of the interview, its purpose, and the deadline. If in doubt about proceeding with the interview, consult a media relations professional before you agree to the interview.
- Watch or listen to the show or newscast several times before your appearance, if time allows, to observe how the host interviews people.
- Determine your objectives for the interview and prepare examples, personal experiences or anecdotes that will illustrate your points.
- Prepare some short (12 to 15 second) statements or responses that will make your point and be quotable.
- Do *not* attempt to memorize facts and recite them. The use of a few 3-by-5 cards is acceptable if they are confined to specific facts or statistics.
- When you arrive at the studio, or upon the news crew's arrival at your office, reconfirm the thrust and purpose of the interview. Do *not* ask that questions be submitted in advance.
- Allow time to talk with the host or reporter before the formal interview, but be aware that this "informal" discussion also constitutes an interview. If you will be on television, take time to comb your hair, apply or adjust makeup or remove distracting jewelry.
- Don't worry about the microphone and camera. The studio crew is responsible for checking them.

NEWS MEDIA INTERVIEWS – A Perspective

The media provide important channels of communication. But unfortunately, some people view news media interviews as a threat – to their organization or to their careers.

News media interviews don't have to be threatening. They are, in fact, positive opportunities.

Understanding the media's needs, careful planning and advance preparation can minimize your potential for negative results and maximize your potential for positive results from a media interview.

The news media interview is a method for communicating a message about your organization or yourself – the message that you want to deliver. It's your chance to relate your key messages and organizational policies or priorities to an interested audience. That audience may include:

- employees
- stockholders
- members
- customers and prospects
- opinion leaders
- general public
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You cannot **control** the outcome of a news interview – but you can **influence** the outcome by knowing what to do and what not to do.

Media decision makers, such as editors, news directors, and reporters, decide:

- what news to cover
- Whether or not to use the information you provide
- How much information they will use
- How prominently your information will be aired or displayed.

These four factors apply for all forms of media: newspapers, radio, television newscasts, or trade journals.

If you have prepared thoroughly, the interview and resulting print or broadcast report should help you get your messages across to your audience. As you prepare and plan for your interview, remember that media publicity is different from advertising. Advertising is paid for. Publicity is not. Advertising is controlled by the sponsor – publicity is controlled by the media.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Understanding, preparation, and practice can enable you to become a skillful and credible spokesperson to the news media.

- Understand how news media people think - how the various types of news media choose what to report, how information is gathered, and how they prepare for an interview with you.
- Prepare thoroughly for the news media interview so you can improve your influence over the outcome of the interview.
- Identify specific interviewing techniques and guidelines to help you avoid unnecessary mistakes - and respond confidently and clearly in the interview.

THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT REPORTERS, EDITORS AND BROADCASTERS

Most journalists are competent, conscientious professionals who want to present a fair and accurate report, reflecting all sides of an issue. A few aren't and relations with them require special care.

Some of the following points may conflict with your perception or your experience. Generalizations are always risky, but these points reflect the attitudes and experience of most news organizations as seen from an insider's perspective.

WHAT MAKES NEWS

- What makes the news one day may get minor attention or even be omitted on another day. Judgments about what to report and placement or prominence of that report depend on many variables.
- Who cares? Would anyone not as close to the situation as you are find this interesting or significant? Why?
- Stories that aren't visual will get limited attention or be ignored by TV news.
- Whether you like it or not, media people have the power to decide what's news. You won't block a story unless you prove that the premise is wrong.
- When reporters dig up bad news, the issue generally gets more attention and visibility than when you or your organization disclose the information voluntarily.

Although there is no formula by which anyone can predict newsworthiness, the following criteria are generally accepted as influential in news decisions:

Conflict: Conflict and resolution are basic to good drama - and to news interest.

Human Interest: Situations that are tragic, humorous, mysterious, and/or personalized in some way have broad appeal.

Prominence: Events involving well-known people or organizations are more newsworthy than comparable situations involving those who are not prominent.

Proximity: People are usually more interested in events or issues that are close to where they live or work.

Impact: Developments that affect a large number of people have high priority.

Timeliness: People are most interested in information that is new and current.

Surprise: Departures from the norm make news.

Pictures/Sounds: Television news requires visuals. Sounds are important to both TV and radio. Where unusual, emotional or startling pictures or sounds are available, broadcast organizations will be more interested.

WORKING WITH THE NEWS MEDIA

- Media people generally aren't for you or against you. They are looking for interesting and informative topics that *fit the format* of the publication or program.
- Reporters quickly distrust people who blatantly promote themselves, their product or their service. They also distrust people who appear arrogant or self-important. Your relationship will be most effective if you are professional, courteous and direct.
- Reporters are the people you see. Editors and news directors decide:
 - ⇒ What is printed or aired
 - ⇒ How much space or time will be used for the report
 - ⇒ What the headline will say
 - ⇒ What photographs, videotapes or audiotapes will be used
- The most successful news reporters, editors and broadcast journalists accept nothing at face value. According to newsroom legend, veteran editors admonish young reporters with these words: "You say your mother loves you? Check it out!"
- Many reporters, particularly in broadcast journalism, are generalists who have little or no background on stories they are assigned to cover. Help them understand the situation by providing background materials before or during the interview.
- The reporter needs a concise, clear statement of your key messages. Space and time are limited.
- Good reporters demand facts, support and documentation for your claims or statements.
- Mentioning that you are an advertiser, or friend of the owner or publisher almost certainly will be interpreted as a misguided attempt at intimidation.
- Most errors are caused by sloppiness, not by malice.
- If you're accessible and respond quickly, the reporter will usually do the story and to on to something else. If you don't talk, chances are others will talk for you and about you - and you won't like the results.