

CATALYST



Business Strategy | Marketing Communications

June 2009

How to Ace a Media Interview

We recently watched an aftermarket industry leader botch an interview with a local TV station. Afterwards, we spoke with the person and asked them how prepared they were for the questions asked by the reporter. We were surprised when he stated that his company did not provide any training to its executives and middle level managers.

We started to ask other industry leaders and discovered that almost none had formal training on the interview process. While we were surprised to learn this, we were also concerned that management likely assumes that key people can handle the pressure to extemporaneously answer questions with confidence and authenticity.

Bottom line? All managers should have a short course in media communications training to prepare for the inevitable interview that will occur, either under unexpected and possibly stressful circumstances, or for the occasional sound bite that is carefully crafted for community goodwill. Ideally, there should be a gameplan to position someone in your company as the official spokesperson for your industry for local or regional news - continued exposure to the media is the best way to learn how to ace the process.

The media interview (print or digital) is either dreaded or embraced depending in large part on the experience and/or training of the person involved. Often, the result is shaped by how often a manager has been exposed to interviews and public speaking over the course of their career.

Without the benefit of either a paid professional representing the company, top managers often neglect public communications training, and find out too late that a short course on media communications can pay huge dividends during an interview. Instead, busy managers are often forced into an interview without the benefit of being forewarned or prepared, and those few moments in the spotlight can be excruciatingly painful on a personal and professional basis.

Here are some basic precepts on How to Ace a Media Interview that will help your company prepare for an on-air interview.

Preliminary Preparation

- Identify official primary spokesperson, along with a hierarchy of other company representatives
- Develop media sound bite (#1 message you want people to know)
- Have a preliminary phone call with interviewer - Determine the purpose, audience, location, lighting, length, etc.
- Confirm pronunciation of the interviewer's name, time to meet, location of interview, etc.
- Memorize station call letters (such as KLaw or the website address), their affiliate (such as ABC or MSN) and name of the producer
- Ask to meet 10 - 15 minutes prior to start of interview

The Interview

- Preliminary - introduce interviewer to management
- Offer brief tour - do not assume that the interviewer understands your business, products and services
- Hand over your business card and ensure the information on it is correct (title, email address and phone)
- Be confident and relaxed
- Shake hands
- Smile
- Open body posture (not closed and forbidding)
- Ask where the interviewer would like you to look and look there (at the camera, in their eyes, at the building, etc.)

Messaging

- Make sure your message is not lost
- Deliver your primary sound bite early in the interview
- Make sure the public hears how they benefit from your company
- Be authentic -- answer truthfully
- Be sincere
- Listen thoughtfully to each question before answering
- Take your time to respond
- Consider the audience in how you answer
- Feel comfortable in saying you do not know the answer if need be
- Say less, not more

End of the Interview

- Confirm when the interview will be broadcast or go online
- Determine how to get the video clip (download or DVD)
- Offer to be available in person or by phone for follow-up questions
- Provide company media kit with bios, company history, FAQ's and Editorial Contact Sheet
- Say THANK YOU, no matter how confronting or challenging the interview was.
- Ask if they want any other information

These are just a few tips of how to manage interviews with the media. For more information about Media Interviews, [click here](#) and download our brand new whitepaper, "Relax and Enjoy the Spotlight - Make the Most of Your Live Interview."