

Tips for Marketing

Working with the Media Tips and Techniques

Key Messages

In preparing for any media interview, presentation, speech, or meeting it is essential to have key messages. Key messages become your agenda for the interview, i.e. what you want to say. They also serve as headlines that will lead you into appropriate detail. If there is one thing you must remember before any presentation is to prepare key messages and to have those ready prior to the meeting.

Key messages are:

- Our principle communications objectives
- Four to six essential points of information we want the audience to remember.
- Simple statements that are worth repeating.
- Focused, brief statements that lead to appropriate detail.
- Our “agenda” for that media or other interviewer interaction.
- Pivot points that will allow you to turn negative questions into positive statements.
- Regularly updated to be the most current information and most appropriate to this audience.

Media Interviews

Certain techniques during the interview help to maintain your agenda and convey your key messages.

- Consider any media interview an opportunity to advance the goals and activities of your organization and mention its name several times.
- Remember that the radio, television or Internet Webcast interview occurs at two levels: 1) the conversation you are having with the reporter and 2) the messages you are delivering to listeners or viewers. The most important is the program the audience with whom you most want to communicate. So, aim your key messages at the people watching or listening.
- Keep your responses brief and to the point for radio; television and Internet Webcasts, making your most important points first. Start longer answers with a key message, then fill in the details. Avoid technical jargon because it freezes out much of the audience and can alienate them.
- Use brief anecdotes and examples more than weighty statistics to carry your key messages. Real-life experiences give real life to your interview.
- Don't be evasive. Don't decline to answer a question unless you explain why you can't respond. Audiences believe that interviewees who use "no comment" have something to hide — unless a good reason is stated for not commenting. Use phrases such as "It's premature to comment at this time, but as soon as we have more information we'll share it." Sincerity and

candor are two of the most valuable tools you have at hand to help ensure a positive interview.

- Remember that radio, television and Internet interviewers often develop a regular following and that you are not known to the audience. Avoid alienating the interviewer. Be friendly, address the interviewer by his or her first name, but don't "fake" familiarity.
- Minimize use of such phrases as "I think" and "I believe" at the beginning of sentences. They damage credibility. Your personal opinion is not important, whereas the position of your association is paramount. It would be proper to say, "At ASHA we are convinced that..." or "Based on the findings of our researchers, it is clear that..."
- Develop the art of the turn-around by using one or more of your key messages to respond positively and congenially to a negative or hostile question. Use phrases such as "There are many sides to this issue, but the important thing to remember is..." to lead to a key message.
- Remain confident, calm and friendly. Reporters and the larger audience are more likely to be persuaded by someone they like than by spokespersons who appear argumentative, which translates as defensive.
- Feel comfortable restating the question to your advantage, saying something such as "If I understand what you're asking..."

What is the Media Looking for?

Why is that on the news?

Journalists are trained to recognize news based on a set of relatively standard "news values." Once they have spotted the news, they also are trained to gather the news following the "Five W" outline.

News Values

What makes something worthwhile enough that others want to know it or important enough that they need to know it? The old adage in the news business is, "If it bleeds it leads." What that essentially boils down to is that stories involving death or destruction have a high news value. The second tier tends to be stories involving money, kids, animals and, more recently, senior citizens.

Here are some basic news values that journalists consider when deciding what will be that day's top stories:

Impact — because people want to know how something is going to affect them. Some people just have an insatiable curiosity but most don't care unless it affects them in some way. Reporters have to get past the "who cares" sentiment, especially in this day and age of competing news sources and an information glut. Reporters are taught not to write, "a 2-percent increase in water bills," but rather "110 more per month on the average water bill." A tornado story will probably

start by talking about the number of people injured or killed, but it also will get quickly to the fact that power is out or roads are blocked because generally more people are impacted by destruction than by death.

Conflict — because if everything was great, we wouldn't need the news! Most news stories exist because of some form of conflict. If the teachers go back to school on time and start teaching kids, you'll see the seasonal fluff pieces talking about the school year starting again. But if the teachers strike and kids can't go back to school, then you've got a real news story. The extent of the conflict, either in size or duration, will determine whether it's an item to lead with.

Prominence — because the main character or characters being well-known can make an everyday occurrence newsworthy. People are arrested every day for drunk driving, but when it's the mayor's son, that's newsworthy.

Timeliness — because old news isn't news anymore. Reporters will do event-anniversary stories, but if it's something recent, you need a new angle to grab their attention.

Proximity — because something small happening locally can be a bigger story than something big happening in another town. Reporters are taught to localize a story, digging up why it matters to their readers. Something happening in the local community will matter more because it has local impact, not just impact.

Magnitude — because sometimes the impact is so great, everyone cares no matter where they live. Large natural disasters, something devastating like the World Trade Center attacks or a lottery winner pocketing hundreds of millions of dollars are magnitude stories.

Oddity — because something unusual makes a story likely to be talked about. The most routine things can become news when there is something unusual about it. Babies are born every day. But they become news when they are 14 pounds or when they are the first baby of the New Year. Oddity also includes firsts or the first in a while. For example, when the state of Texas executed Karla Faye Tucker in 1998, it was huge headlines, even in Texas, where they execute people more than in any other state. Tucker was the first female criminal executed in Texas in 135 years and was only the second woman executed in the United States since 1976 when the death penalty was reinstated.

Emotional impact — because sharing heart-rending or heart-warming stories helps news outlets connect with their readers or viewers. If something will affect people emotionally, especially something involving kids or animals, that alone can make it newsworthy.

The Five Ws

The five Ws are: Who, What, Where, When and Why. When a reporter calls looking for information on a story, they are calling to find out at least one of the five Ws that they believe you can help them with.

The five Ws are the basic building block of every news story. Reporters and editors want to gather as many of these and have as much detail on each one as is possible before running with a

story. The basic questions being asked will include "Who is involved," "What happened," "Where did it happen," "When did it happen," and "Why did it happen." Each news medium has its own characteristics that create a range of opportunities for you as a spokesperson.

Newspapers

Daily newspapers provide a variety of opportunities and challenges. General news coverage is directed by the city editor or managing editor. Often there is a "lifestyle" editor in charge of features about trends and consumer interests. Business section coverage often is directed by a business editor. The editorial page editor is responsible for editorials and chairs the editorial board, which determines the position the newspaper will take on any given issue.

Both local daily and weekly newspapers follow national industry stories. These stories often inspire reporters to question local companies on possible local community angles or impact. This is an opportunity for you to talk about issues that generate positive exposure for your company and provide local readers with the news about its activities.

Weekly and bi-weekly newspapers typically are strong voices in their hometowns. These newspapers are interested in local events, issues and people. They typically welcome consumer-friendly news and community support activities.

Television

The average home has a television set in use for nearly seven hours each day and a majority of Americans use television as their major source of information and entertainment. Although there is great variation between larger and smaller markets, a TV station might broadcast up to five newscasts per day: early morning, mid-day, 4:30, 5, or 6 p.m., and 10 or 11 p.m. The morning and mid-day newscasts primarily feature news of the previous day and overnight disasters, while the evening ones focus on breaking items and national/international stories. Often the early p.m. newscast is characterized by a more relaxed, local flavor.

TV stations also follow national/regional news stories. The local angle and the fresh approach are important to your TV news. Stories are usually brief, often no longer than 30 seconds, except in cases of great controversy or disaster. Many TV reporters are pressed for time and eager to condense a big and detailed story into a very small nugget. They seek *well informed and well-spoken interviewees* to help with their stories.

You can use this opportunity to your company's advantage by providing information as appropriate.

Radio

On radio stations that broadcast local news the information is faster, but often less complete, than on any other medium. Stories often range from 15 to 30 seconds in length and may be repeated several times in a day. Many stories aired during morning drive-time are taken from the morning newspapers, either directly or by way of a wire service.

Radio news staffs usually do their interviews by telephone, but occasionally conduct them in person. They are seeking conversational, interesting and purposeful interviews, especially with a few well-phrased points.

Internet

Why does online media matter? More than 60 percent of Internet users changed their opinion of a brand based on information found online (Pew Research Study). There are millions of blogs and that number increases daily. A new blog is estimated to launch approximately every second. More importantly, 70 percent of journalists say they use blogs for finding story ideas (Nielsen/NetRatings).

Additionally, almost every print publication or broadcast station has a Web site these days. That means your story can be instantly sent to hundreds of additional sources. Any number of audiences may see your story within hours of talking with a reporter, so we must be ready with key messages for incoming inquiries.

One way you we prepare for a story to be distributed so widely is to have our Web site link and any other online information handy for the reporter. Also, Internet publications change very quickly, so we make sure we track your online hits right away, through an online service.

Media Deadlines

Each medium has its own deadlines for receiving information in time to include it in the next edition or broadcast. When in contact with a reporter, find out the deadline for his or her story and meet that deadline. Failure to call back by the appointed time could result in a story running without your company's important input, or an impression that the company has something to hide. Worse, the reporter could present the story from your competitor's point of view if he or she can reach them but cannot get in touch with you.

In today's online world speed and accuracy is crucial. Consistency of message and pre-approved key messages are essential for such speed. Updating Web site content regularly also will help get a consistent message out there in a timely manner.