

Working Effectively with the Media

When organizations first come to us, they often express frustration at having been unable to get media coverage or aren't sure how to proceed when the media calls. Our quick "media help sheet" is a guide for improving your chances at getting coverage for your company.

What the news media wants

First of all, understand that media coverage is not like advertising. In advertising, your organization basically controls the message that goes out to the public. With media coverage, the relationship is different. The media is not here to serve any one particular individual or organization, but is here to report information and news. The media is looking for and is interested in newsworthy information. This news could be unique, news about a new product, or a human-interest story. If you are working with a celebrity, include that angle. The story should be relevant and have an impact on people.

Sending that press release

1. Before you send that press release, make sure that you have all the information you'll need. This includes knowing everything you need to know about your company and its industry, and of course, the product or service that you are calling about. Be able to give the reporter accurate, detailed background information up front.
2. Before you contact the reporter, be familiar with the types of articles that they write and their style, to make sure that you are pursuing the correct contact person. Also be cognizant that some prefer to receive a phone call, others email or a fax, while others do not want to receive a particular mode of communication.
3. If you contact a reporter, be mindful that they may be on a deadline and may not have time to speak with you.
4. Know what your key points are and make sure you can state these succinctly and in a focused manner. Have an idea beforehand as to the objective of your conversation. Keep your interview thoughts connected to your objectives, and don't wander off into tangents.
5. Make sure that you are reachable. If a reporter decides to use your press release, nothing kills a story faster than being unavailable. If you can't speak to a reporter immediately, find out when you can call them back. They may be on a deadline so you will need to respond accordingly.

Ethical Rules of the Road

Whether you are speaking with the media to pitch a story or you are in the middle of a news crisis, there are behaviors which can undermine your efforts that should be avoided. These include:

- ❑ **No “jargon.”** Unless you are a technical product or service speaking to a journalist who handles technical products or services and whose audience are people who would understand you, don’t use jargon. Make your message understandable to all appropriate audiences.
- ❑ **Lying**
- ❑ **Attacking or criticizing other people, organizations or competitors.**
- ❑ **Never go “Off the record”** This can set off red flags to a reporter that there are problems at your organization. It can also be an annoyance to reporters.
- ❑ **Never say, “No Comment.”** Respond with accuracy, care and professionalism. If you do not know the answer, be honest and say that you do not. You may also offer related information to convey that something is being done to get that information or to better understand a situation.

Above all, remember that whatever you are trying to accomplish by gaining media coverage should also be consistent with your marketing messaging objectives. Inconsistent messaging can send confusing messages to your consumer and other stakeholder audiences. Consistent, clear messaging can rise above the increasingly cluttered media landscape and help to position your product, service and/or brand in a manner that is strategic, meaningful and purposeful. If you need professional help in these areas, Cultural Marketing Communications and Urban Reach Public Relations is available to work with you.

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