

Quiz: Pop

The Art of Being Interviewed

1.

Do you know how to promote your company, agency or cause no matter what questions a reporter asks you?

2.

Do you know why it's important to have a good media strategy, even if you don't deal with the media on a regular basis?

3.

Do you know when it's appropriate to turn down an interview and when it's a major mistake?



By Chryssa I. Zizos

10 Rules for Working with the Media

Be prepared

Know what's newsworthy and say it first (and often).

Use concise, everyday language, not internal jargon.

Respect deadlines.

1. 2. 3. If you knew the answers to the questions on page 12, you'll also know that good interviews don't just happen. Hundreds of people are interviewed every day by newspapers, radio and television stations, and online media outlets. And in today's media-driven marketplace, a company's success can depend on the ability of its executives to articulate consistent and targeted messages to all audiences — including the press.

If you left your answers blank, not to worry. The key is to realize that the news media, when approached correctly, can be used to your advantage. Developing that ability requires the right training, discipline and attitude. News coverage is one of the most cost effective and quickest ways to reach thousands or even millions. According to the Pew Research Center, the credibility of an effective appearance on the nightly news has as much as four times the credibility as even the most effective advertisement.

In order to work effectively with the media, remember these points about the media:

- No matter your opinion of the media, good journalists won't go away.
- A reporter's job is not to please you. It is simply to gather information they believe is in the public interest.
- Your job is to build a mutually beneficial relationship with a reporter through credibility.
- Almost every media inquiry is an opportunity for you, if you know how to take advantage of it.
- Be sensitive and respect the reporter's deadline.
- Understand what the reporter wants and is interested in while delivering the message that is important to you.

THE MEDIA CAN HELP YOU

When the media sees you as a consistent and credible source of information, your company has the opportunity to rise above its competitors and become recognized as an industry thought-leader. If you can establish a working relationship, the reporter will regard you as an expert and will likely return to you for help on future stories.

THE POWER OF THE MEDIA

The news media can make or break you, your product, event or business venture. Still many people simply aren't prepared to handle the media. Their biggest fear — being misquoted. Keep in mind that while the majority of reporters are fair, a reporter's job isn't to please us. It's to gather all information they feel is important for the public to know and to get the story right.

Granted, there is a small percentage of reporters that won't let the facts get in the way of a good story, but don't let them foster your fearful attitude toward all reporters. That would result in a defensive attitude during the interview process that ultimately translates negatively on screen or in print.

CHRYSSA I. ZIZOS IS THE FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF LIVE WIRE MEDIA RELATIONS, LLC, A PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRM SPECIALIZING IN HELPING COMPANIES, ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS COMMUNICATE THEIR KEY MESSAGES THROUGH MEDIA. FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL 703-519-1600, EXT. 101, OR VISIT WWW.LIVEWIREDC.COM.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Don't be caught off guard if you receive an unexpected phone call from a journalist digging for information. Keep these guidelines close at hand to shine light on the media inquiry process.

1. Give yourself time to think about it

Rather than speaking off the cuff, scheduling the conversation for a later time is a perfectly acceptable response to an impromptu media inquiry. Use the extra time to formulate your answers and define the messages you and your company want to convey. Simply defaulting to the 'no comment' response not only communicates the perception of guilt, but also surrenders the opportunity to share your side of the story. However, be mindful of the reporter's deadlines and respond within the appropriate timeframe.

2. Have something to say

If there are controversial issues in your area of expertise, define your stance and don't be afraid to express it — assuming you can justify it, your viewpoint is probably as valid as anyone else's. A well-reasoned opinion is more likely to provide an interesting angle for the journalist to report. An organization that is too timid to comment most likely won't be called on for comment on a future issue.

3. Make it interesting and relevant

Use concrete rather than abstract examples that convey the reality of the points you are trying to make. Sources who substantiate their arguments with facts and stress the aspects likely to interest the journalist's readership are typically viewed as more authoritative.

4. Dress for success

Avoid clothing with close-checked or herringbone patterns — cameras cannot always cope with the intricacy of such patterns, giving viewers an uncomfortable effect. The same rule applies to closely-striped shirts in sharply contrasting colors. Men should also avoid very dark suits, particularly in combination with white shirts which can drain color from the face. Instead opt for more flattering pastels. Women should strive for a simplistic look to appear smart and authoritative — bold patterned scarves and loud jewelry can detract attention from what you are actually saying. For jackets and suits, stick to fairly neutral colors — avoid deep, saturated reds.

5. Mind your language

Conversation peppered with abbreviations, technical terms and other jargon may exclude industry outsiders from the conversation. Imagine instead that you are engaged in a conversation with someone who is perfectly intelligent, but who simply doesn't know anything about the subject at hand.

Be in control, keep on track and know when to stop talking.

Be pleasant, but be on guard.

If you don't know an answer, say so. Never speculate, guess or make up answers.

Never speak "off-the-record."

Don't speak for, or about, your competition.

Never misrepresent your services or your institution.

