

## **Making the most out of your media encounter**

When dealing with the media it is important that you or your organization's spokesperson be familiar with and understand how to work successfully with the news media.

It is unwise to think that you can avoid the media to guard yourself from a negative experience, or to feel a journalist is "out to get you." In fact, working with the media can prove to be an opportunity for you or your organization. This is your chance to get your messages out. And, it might as well be you who controls your messages.

There are times, be they legal or personal, when it is inappropriate for you to discuss an issue with the media. It is important that you do not fall into the trap of saying "no comment". This implies that you are hiding something from the public and can lead to speculation, giving the reporter room to editorialize.

Take the time to explain why you are unable to speak to them. If you do not know the answers to their questions, say so and assure them that once you get the information you will pass it on to them. Or, refer them to someone who is better suited to comment on the issue.

Another trap people often find themselves in is using the expression, "this is off the record". Remember, it is the job of a journalist to tell the story, therefore there is no such thing as "off the record". If you make this assumption, you may find yourself in trouble because a journalist may in turn pass information on to another reporter, who will then deal with the story.

There are plenty of resources available to you if you wish to be better prepared to deal with the media. The internet offers online assistance and there are shelves of books covering media relations topics. Quiet often, companies choose to hire public relations specialists to provide media training and consultative services. Indepth media training will give you confidence and put your mind an ease so you are able to deliver your message in a manner that works best for you.

Always remember the news media are in the business of reporting the news. They are not in business of giving you free time to advertise your organizations point-of-view. They want relative, factual, truthful, timely information that is accurate.

Prior to an interview, we always advise clients to develop key messages. These messages should be relevant to the story and may also include facts about your organization you would like communicated to the public. Often, we prepare briefing statements and a list of possible questions and answers so clients can rehearse their messages prior to participating in an interview.

There are tips that you can follow to assure you maximize the opportunity of being interviewed by the media. For example, within the first few sentences of an interview answer who, what, when, where and how. State your most important facts in a positive and constructive manner. And, never get into a situation with a reporter where you lose your temper or get emotional. Remember the reporter has the last word.

Deal with just the facts. Never speculate while in an interview and only give information that you are certain of. Keep in mind, the media are deadline driven, so it is important to respond to media inquiries as quickly as possible. Feel free to ask what is their deadline and prior to the interview ask the journalist what he/she plans to talk about. This will prove to be useful when you are gathering information so you are better prepared for an interview.

Overall do not lose site of what you are trying to achieve when participating an interview. Go in there with a set objective and key messages. And most importantly, do not feel intimidated. If you have the right attitude and view the interview as an opportunity, you can make the most of your media encounter.