

Guidelines for Media Interviews

Media interviews represent positive opportunities to reach out to the public and explain the positive effects you are having on your local community. For this reason it is normally in your best interest to speak openly with journalists whenever possible.

Before answering a question, ensure you clearly understand the question. If necessary, repeat the question to the reporter to ensure you understand it.

Be polite and friendly. If you are unable to respond to a question, tell the reporter why and offer to refer him/her to your communications office.

If you do not know the answer to a question or cannot respond, explain why and volunteer to get back to the reporter as soon as possible (within 24 hours).

Reporters like to know the background and details of the issue they discuss with you, but avoid acronyms and jargon – use plain language.

Every comment you make to a reporter is on the record. Ensure that everything you say is absolutely accurate.

Before your interview, ask . . .

What is the subject of the interview?

Are you the right person to do this interview?

Who else is being interviewed and what do you know about their positions on the issue?

Do you have enough time to prepare for the interview?

Will the information you use during this interview still be current at the time of broadcast or publication?

What subjects can you discuss and which must you avoid?
(and explain why).

Who will the interviewer be, and what is his/her style?

Where will the interview take place? In your office? In the
studio? (Be careful of your background)

How long will the interview be?

What are the probable questions you may be asked?

Do you have easy access to the information you will need to
develop the answers to these probable questions?

When you've decided to participate

Decide what your master, overarching message will be.

Develop several 20 to 30 second "sound bites" to support
your position.

Use any question to provide your "sound bite."

When answering questions

Answer directly concisely and truthfully.

If you don't know the answer, say so and offer to call back
with the requested information.

Get all the information possible relating to the subject;

Always be ready to tell your positive stories;

Establish the groundrules for the interview;

Evaluate the composition of your audience;

Anticipate the questions and answer them in writing;

Prepare your messages;

Practice and rehearse your interview – several times if necessary;

Pay attention to how you are dressed;

Arrive early;

Use make-up if it is offered;

Use your hands naturally when you speak;

Hold yourself properly, whether you are standing or sitting;

When you are with a reporter, assume that you are being recorded and that everything you say is “on the record.”

Bridge to your message;

Smile only when appropriate;

Show enthusiasm for your organization and subject;

Speak of your personal experiences;

Speak in terms that are easily understood;

Speak directly to the interviewer;

Be honest and truthful.

Do not speculate.

Do not provide “off the record” comments.

Do not say, “No comment.”

Don’t smile when it is inappropriate;

Don’t make nervous gestures;

Don’t roll your eyes or look skyward during your interview;

Don’t say anything that you don’t want to see on page one;

Don't use acronyms or technical terms;
Don't say "no comment;"
Don't get into discussions;
Don't allow the interviewer to put words in your mouth;
Don't reply with one-word answers – such as, yes or no;
Don't assume that certain questions will not be asked;
Don't assume that the journalist is familiar or unfamiliar with the issue.

Final words

When you agree to an interview, work with your colleagues to discover all the questions that the journalist may ask you, then research and prepare the answers. Then work with your public affairs specialist to do at least one "dress rehearsal," including how you intend to dress for the interview. The have your public affairs colleague work with you to ensure that your interview will be effective and flawless. Rehearsal is an essential component of your preparation.

Being positive, pleasant and patient with a journalist may not guarantee you media coverage, but being rude, evasive and abrupt will, but certainly not to your advantage.

TJD Communications Consultants Inc.

Timothy J. Dunne, CD, MA, APR
Phone: +1 902 461-1842
Mobile: +1 902 483-9097
Fax: +1 902 461-0709
tdunne@duncom.ca