

EFFECTIVE MEDIA RELATIONS

By Ron MacInnes

President

While the tools of communication have changed dramatically over the past four decades, one thing remains: the power of the media to influence - or create - public opinion. New technology has not only extended the “reach” of news organizations, it has enhanced the immediacy of their coverage.

The new tools of communication have increased the pressure on journalists to provide not only immediate coverage but also instant analysis. At the same time, the world is awash in more and more complex issues and developments that defy easy explanation. The result is that far from advancing understanding, today’s media often contribute to the white noise of raw information, information that is often provided by special interest groups, who are media savvy, and come with their own agendas.

The result can be inaccurate, one-sided news coverage.. That means you have to work hard to combat the inaccuracies and biases that often creep into today’s news stories. You have to understand the media, start building working relationships with the press and formulate credible responses to the issues of the day. Once you do, you can join the numerous companies across North America which are benefiting from positive coverage – coverage that can help your company sell products or services, attract good employees and build a more positive image.

The challenge is to increase your odds of generating “good” press. The solution is MacInnes Communications Group media training, which will help you to understand how the media work and how your views can be presented for maximum results.

To help you get started, here’s a Primer on Media Relations

1. Many of the tips for more effective investor relations presentations apply to media relations (dress conservatively for interviews, don’t be afraid to say you don’t know the answer, speak deliberately and from the diaphragm). Remember: you spend time rehearsing a speech before 100 people. You should spend just as much time practicing for an interview with major newspaper, many of which have audiences in the hundreds of thousands.
2. Reporters want you to be quotable. This means no long-winded answers. Try to use “colorful” language to illustrate points -- metaphors and analogies are good. Consider the audience of the publication or TV/radio station. Frame the message in terms they will understand. The nature of the publication will also give you clues as to what questions the

reporter may ask. For example, Sixty Minutes will ask different questions than your local business magazine.

3. Develop key messages you want to deliver during the interview. Memorize them and introduce them when you are asked open-ended questions such as "Tell me about your company?"
4. There is no such thing as "off the record." Expect that whatever you say to a reporter will be quoted. Even a trusted "friend" in the media will be tempted to report something you said in confidence if the information is "juicy."
5. "No comment" is **not** a good way to defend a position. The words are a red flag to a journalist that you must be hiding something that's true. It's better to say "I can't comment on that right now" and state why if possible.
6. Be careful not to attack the reporter's credibility, especially in a broadcast interview. The audience often "associates" with the journalist and will feel hostile toward anyone who challenges the interviewer.

Also consider that you may have to work with this reporter on a long-term basis and it's best to maintain a good relationship. By the same token, carefully weigh the advantages and disadvantages of asking for a retraction. Quite often, a retraction only serves to reinforce the wrong information in the minds of readers and your request may offend the reporter.

7. The best way to develop a good relationship with a reporter is to return calls promptly. Reporters work on very strict deadlines and they dislike having to wait for information.
8. Before you agree to a reporter's request for an interview, try to find out what he/she wants in advance. Tell the reporter up-front that you wonder if there is any information you should prepare, any stats etc, and promise to call back as soon as possible. Use the intervening time to prepare. Telephone interviews afford you the opportunity to use crib sheets.
9. In a broadcast interview, be careful of your physical reactions to questions. For example, your natural reaction might be to nod as the reporter asks a question to signal that you've understood what he's asking. But the consequences of this body language could be quite damaging to you if you're nodding yes during a question that paints you in a bad light. During a TV interview, always sit up straight but try crossing your legs to appear more at ease.
10. Don't let anyone put words in your mouth. Correct an inaccurate paraphrase.

11. Many reporters you will deal with are on "general assignment" meaning they do not have a regular beat. It's a good idea that you take time to help the journalist understand the issue or industry he or she is covering. The final product will be more accurate.
12. Flippant remarks almost always get printed.
13. Some interviewers like to ask multi-part questions. Answer only the part of the question you want to -- ignore the questions you don't want to answer. The reporter may forget to do the follow-up.

28 SPRINGWOOD CRESCENT, MARKHAM, ONTARIO L3R 3Z9
TEL: 905.479.6333 FAX: 905.479.8506
WWW.MACCOMGROUP.COM

MAC COM

MacInnes Communications Group Inc.