



How to Shine in the Media Spotlight Without Getting Burned: Interview Tips for Every CEO & Spokesperson



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Congratulations! You have finally received interview requests based on your public relations efforts and you're ready for your close-up ... or are you? While getting the media to pay attention to you is half the battle in any public relations strategy, it's also important to be prepared for the all-important interview. What can you say? What can't you say? And how do you say it? With preparation and planning, you can ace your interview, and shine in the media spotlight without getting burned.

Preparation or

“How to Polish the Shine Without Too Much Grease”

Preparation is key. Never, never wing an interview, even if you've spent the past month practicing countless answers in the mirror, in rush hour traffic, and in front of Fido as your captive audience.

The first step in preparing for an interview is to develop talking points that get your messages across in a succinct, understandable manner. Develop these points with your public relations and marketing team and write them out in advance. Make sure you use active verbs and colorful words to “paint a picture” that you want your company or campaign to be associated with. Also practice these talking points in a relaxed, conversational manner, so that you don't sound over-rehearsed.

It's also important to prepare the reporter with clear, concise information on your company and your objectives before the actual questioning takes place. Do not assume that the reporter knows what your company does, or how the acronym is pronounced, or even how to pronounce your name. Often times the reporter will be grateful for this information, as it makes their own lives a little bit easier. If you feed back to the reporter about what you'd like to discuss first, the interview will be off to a smoother start, and you'll know what to expect from the outset.

And keep in mind, all conversations with reporters should be considered “on the record” so any information provided as background can and most likely will end up as part of the story.

Avoid Industry Terminology or “How to Reflect the Shine Without Dulling the Sheen”

Sure, you and everyone in your company know the meaning of “convertible debt,” but don't expect the reporter, or the audience, to be as knowledgeable. A key to successful media interviews is to avoid jargon and speak in terms understandable to the audience. Many times, the reporter will not call out their lack of knowledge for fear of looking not “in the know.” This lack of understanding is then passed on to the audience, who will oftentimes tune out “business-speak.” If it's difficult to get around the industry buzzwords that you may use unconsciously in an interview, offer up a quick aside simply by qualifying your statements, “by that I mean...”.

And there's nothing wrong with providing a list of key industry terms and definitions to a reporter. They'll be grateful for the information.

Mention Your Company Name or “How to Bask in the Shine”

This may be an obvious point, but one that is surprisingly forgotten in the moment of interview. While the goal of the interview is to deliver your key messages in a succinct, understandable manner, it's also crucial to mention your company name. The viewers, listeners and readers of the interview may not remember your name, but they will remember your company name or product brand if you associate it with your key messages. While you don't want every other word to be your company name, start some sentences with, “At ABC company, we ...”. Remember also that most interviews are not published or broadcast in their entirety, and reporters can pare down your quotes to a few words. Chances of getting your company name in the interview (and pronounced correctly, to boot) increase if you mention it and relate it to your key messages.

Doing the Interview or “How to Enjoy the Shine Without Getting Burned”

Now that you're prepared for the interview, remember, again, this one tip before you sit in the “hot seat”: everything you say is on the record. Right at the beginning, establish your credentials with the reporter, make sure they know how to pronounce your name and the company name, and discuss your key messages with them. Chatting informally with the reporter before the interview breaks the ice and builds rapport but should still be considered part of the interview.

Maintain eye contact with the reporter throughout the course of the interview. If there are others being interviewed with you, look at each of them, too. Avoid natural stalling mechanisms to answering questions such as looking up or side to side or down at your lap before answering a question. While these may not be noticed in everyday life, it is very noticeable in a broadcast interview.

More than likely, a reporter will conclude the interview by asking you if there is anything else you'd like to add. Take advantage of that offer to recap your important points and remind them of your phone number and website.

Photography is always welcome as part of a print story. If a photographer is not assigned to the story, offer to send the reporter some photos that would illustrate the story.

At the end of the day, the goal of an interview is that you've reached your target audience. This can be achieved if you prepare for the interview, remember your key messages, avoid industry jargon, repeat your company name, and remain comfortable and in control throughout the interview.

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