

How to Handle the News Media

Tami Gerke and Kristie Benson
AGL Resources media team
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rebecca wallace

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Key messages

- Craft 3-4 relevant points that tell **your story**.
- Use **sound-bite** consistency.
- Speak in **simple**, spoken ideas - not long, complicated sentences.
- Use active, **positive** verbs.
- Employ the the 3 C's: **Clear, Concise, Consistent**
- From key messages, boil down further to your “**elevator pitch**” – a 15-second description of you or your organization.



Interview preparation

- **First step** in preparing for an interview: collect all the facts.
- **Follow the rules of Journalism**; who, what, when, where, why and how. Find out who else the reporter has interviewed, or plans to.
- Contact relevant **subject-matter experts** to determine facts and background related to reporter's inquiry to respond.



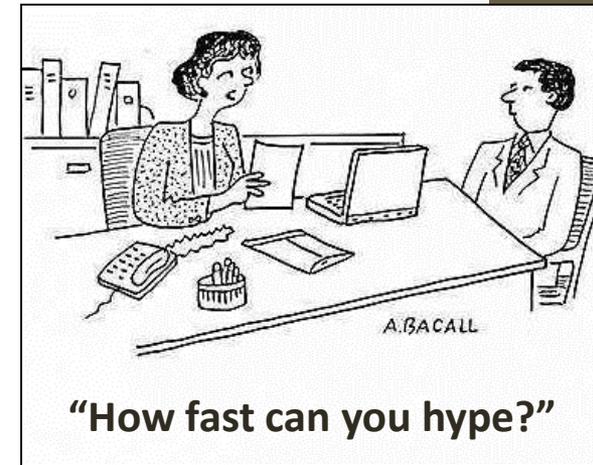
Interview preparation

- Engage appropriate company departments such as legal, safety, etc.
- Engage or notify relevant external parties; share messaging, if possible.
- **Keep it short.**
- Don't use acronyms or industry speak.
- Insert your key messages as much as possible.



Preparing your responses

- **Stick to the facts.**
 - Prepare your responses in writing prior to the interview (but don't read from during the interview).
 - Limit key messages to *three* topics.
 - Do not provide confidential, proprietary or personnel-related information.
- **Be succinct.**
 - Think in terms of headlines.
- **Practice, practice, practice!**



"How fast can you hype?"

Ways to answer reporter's questions

*“There’s no such thing as stupid questions ...
just stupid answers.”*



Ways to answer reporter's questions

- Respond (don't react!)
 - Use short, direct answer based on talking points.
- Refer
 - “I'm not the best person to answer that question...”
- Rephrase
 - “What you're asking is...” or “The real issue is...”
- Redirecting and Bridging Techniques



Redirecting

- Answers a question, but not necessarily the one asked.
- Redirect to shift the subject to one of your key messages.



Redirecting Example

- Q: You shut down a plant in a small town in the Midwest. What are you doing to get those people new jobs?
- A: That's a great question. The truth is, we had to make some tough decisions last year, which is how we were able to exceed our numbers this quarter. We expect to turn in another strong performance this quarter.



Bridging

- Because a reporter asks a question does not obligate you to answer it.
- **Bridging** allows you to **redirect the question** to a subject or key message that you want to discuss.
 - “...what’s important to know...”
 - “...and what’s really important is...”
 - “...what we’re really talking about here is...”
 - “...and you should also know that...”



Bridging Example

- Q: You shut down a plant in a small town in the Midwest. What are you doing to get those people new jobs?
- A: Our H.R. department has career training and transition placement for all of those workers. Many have found new jobs already. What I'm most excited about is the 1,000 new jobs we're bringing to our new plant in that other city this year(?).



Off-the-record vs. background

- **Off-the-record material:** can be used against you.
- Involves information that is “not for public consumption.”
- Journalists can use "off the record" information to uncover related facts, or to find other sources that are willing to speak on the record.



Off-the-record vs. background

- Often used in investigative reporting.
- Can involve proprietary or legal issues.
- **Background** is factual information that provides context to a story.



Pitching a story

- What is the **news peg**? Why is your story relevant? Don't waste a reporter's time.
- **Know your reporters.** Don't call a health reporter about a story on jobs.
- **Build a relationship** with your reporters. Meet for coffee. Drop by the newsroom with food (donuts, cookies, etc.). It's harder say no to someone when you have met them face-to-face.



Pitching a story

- Determine best methods of **reaching the reporter**; phone, e-mail, text, Facebook, blog, etc.
- **Never** pitch a story during a deadline. Mid-morning is the best time.
- **Provide small news tips** when you aren't actively pitching a story to continue to build that relationship.
- **Never** burn your reporter. Don't pitch a story you don't really have.



Responding during a crisis

- **Respond quickly** – be the first to tell your story.
- Be truthful, even if it hurts.
- **Do not speculate** or respond to hypothetical questions.
 - “I will find out and get back to you.”
 - “I don’t know.”
- Emphasize the positive but **be honest about negative**, factual information.



Responding during a crisis

- **Provide updates** as new information becomes available.
- Show empathy.
- Tell your story again.



Acing the interview

DOs

- Stick to your talking points and key messages.
- Keep messages simple/short
Be conversational but do not lose sight of your agenda.
- Correct inaccuracies.
- Remain cool under fire.
- Appear comfortable and confident – smile genuinely unless situation is serious.
- Use bridging techniques to redirect questions back to your key messages.



Acing the interview

DON'Ts

- Do not say “no comment.”
- Do not use jargon or acronyms.
- Do not speculate or guess.
- Do not respond to hypothetical examples or comment on rumors.
- Do not repeat inflammatory or negative words in a reporter’s question.
- Do not over-answer.
- Do not assume that anything is “off the record.”
- Do not use profanity.



Questions?

