



10 Tactics for Getting Your Name in the News

by Linda Pophal

www.stratcommunications.com

Are you anxious to generate media coverage for yourself or your business? Or, do you cringe when the phone rings and “the media” is on the other line? Do you view media representatives as adversaries? Do you wonder if you’re getting the maximum amount of value from your interaction with the media?

Regardless of which of these categories your media experiences fall into, there are a number of things that you can do to ensure that you: 1) get coverage when you want it, and 2) minimize the potential negative impacts of coverage you **don’t** want.

Media coverage can be a powerful (and inexpensive) way to get the word out about your products, your services and your organization if you know how to do it “right.” Following are “10 Tactics for Getting Your Name in the News”:

1) Develop solid relationships long before you “need” them.

You don’t want your first interaction with the media to be when you’re not prepared, or when the coverage may not show you in your best light. If you’ve developed a solid relationship with the media outlets that represent your target audience(s), you’ll be in a much better position to respond to requests that may not show you, or your organization, in the best light. There will be a relationship of trust established that will serve you well.

Establishing a solid relationship means being available when the media call. It means responding promptly and respecting media deadlines. It means being forthright and honest. If you develop a reputation for being someone the media can rely on to be truthful and helpful, you will be more likely to generate the coverage you want, when you want it – and more likely to be perceived credibly during sensitive situations.

2) Know the media that’s likely to target you and the media that you’d like to target.

Be proactive in your dealings with the media. Develop a list of the media where you’d like to receive coverage as well as a list of media that are likely to be interested in you and your products, services and events. Local media outlets are likely to be your best bets. Make sure you know who the local editors are. But, depending on your objectives, you may be interested

in reaching out to regional or national media, or to specific trade publications or targeted TV or radio outlets. Your list will depend on your objectives and the audience you wish to reach.

If the list is very large, you'll want to do some prioritization. You might want to develop a tiered list of these media outlets, with the top tier representing places most likely to cover your activities – or places you most wish to be covered. Then learn as much as you can about each of these media outlets, the type of information covered, the tone, the reporters, etc. The more you know, the better you'll be able to target your own pitches to meet their needs and the more comfortable you'll be in responding to their inquiries.

3) **Anticipate issues and be prepared.**

If a national report comes out that stresses the value of professional coaching services, and you're a professional coach, this is a story you can use to help promote your own services. Be prepared and alert to opportunities to tie to both local and national news. Think creatively and look for connections that may not be immediately obvious.

4) **Create and focus on key messages.**

You should have both general key messages about your business that you use for every interview and specific key messages that you develop for each media interaction.

Your general messages should focus on the messages that you want the media – and, ultimately, your target audience, to know about you. By developing and focusing on two to three key messages that you'd like to communicate, you can be sure to include these messages in each of the interviews you do and each of the pitches you make.

What messages do you want the readers or viewers of your media coverage to take away about you? Those are the points that you should stress. Regardless of the issue you're responding to, your goal is to attempt to somehow include your key messages in your response. Very often, at the end of the interview, the reporter will say something like: "Do you have anything else to add?" or "Are there any additional points you would like to make?" That's your opportunity to say: "Yes. I'd just like to emphasize that..."

Your specific key messages should focus on the issue or question that you've been presented with. Never go into an interview situation "cold." Always know **exactly** what you want to say.

5) **Be a "broken record."**

While you can never anticipate with 100 percent accuracy what questions a reporter is going to ask you, you do know with 100 percent certainty what **your** key messages are. You should refer to those key messages again and again throughout the interview. Don't be afraid to be repetitive. Keep in mind that interviews are made up of "sound bites" and you can never know which comments the reporter will decide to use. If you make the same key points again in again, albeit in slightly different ways, you can be more confident that **your** messages will reach the audience.

6) Choose spokespeople that represent you well.

The best person to offer for any media interview is the person with the most knowledge or expertise with the topic being covered. When companies put their public relations staff “out front,” the worst case is that it can look as though the company is “hiding” behind the corporate spokesperson, the best is that the audience is kept one step away from the person with the real story to tell.

What does that mean for you? It may mean that you are not always the best “go-to” source and that, perhaps, another employee in your organization – sometimes even a customer or vendor! – might be a better representative.

7) Maintain “control.”

Don’t be intimidated by the media. They need you and your cooperation as much as you need their unbiased and professional handling of whatever issue it is that you’re being interviewed about.

So, while you should be aware of media deadlines and attempt to honor them whenever possible, never feel pressured to respond to a media inquiry. Always take the time to make sure that you’ve gathered the background information and facts that you need, that you’ve developed your key messages (the points you want to come out in the resulting story), and that you’ve selected the right spokesperson and briefed him/her adequately.

You should feel free to take control of the setting as well. Choose a location that reflects favorably on you and your organization.

8) Take advantage of live interviews.

Most spokespeople dread the live interview, never realizing that the live interview is their best opportunity to ensure that the points they want to make are made – and received by the audience. When doing a live interview, what you say is received **verbatim** by the television or radio audience and that provides you with total control. Take advantage of that control by maintaining focus on your key messages. If you study seasoned spokespeople, you’ll see that they can respond to just about any reporter’s question by “looping back” to one of their own messages with such statements as: “I don’t have any information about **that**, but what I **can** tell you is (insert key message),” or “We haven’t found that to be true, **but** (key message). **BUT** – don’t go too far afield – make sure you’re responding to the reporter’s questions and staying on target or you’ll risk being called on for future interviews.

The bottom line here - Learn to love the live interview. It’s every spokesperson’s best media opportunity.

9) Focus on the real audience (the readers, listeners or viewers – not the reporter!).

Make the reporter’s job “easy.” Provide background information and additional materials, especially if your message is complex and you’re concerned about the reporter “getting it right.” The added benefit of providing background information, though, is that reporters are

busy people and if you've provided good information, that's well prepared and not too "self-promotional," it's likely to be used.

10) Know when to let a story die a natural death.

When a negative story hits the news, especially when you feel some information has been left out or misstated, it can be very tempting to strike back by writing a letter to the editor or running a paid ad with "your side of the story." This is rarely a good strategy, though.

Even the most scandalous stories will fade away if left unfueled by additional coverage. When you respond, you invite further response. The end result may only be to drag the story out over several days or weeks, reaching far more people and generating far more interest than the initial story might have generated.

Sometimes it's just best to "take it on the chin" and move on.

Some additional "do's and don'ts."

- Don't offer information "off the record." There is no such thing. Everything you say or do is "on the record" and fair game for a reporter to use.
- Don't say "no comment." You should always be able to offer some sort of comment, even if it's something as generic as "we can't really offer an opinion about that..." or "we haven't had an opportunity to review that study..."
- Don't ask if you can "review" the article or hear the specific "sound bite" that will be used or view the TV segment before it's aired. That marks you as an amateur. But do feel free to say something like: "Please let me know if you have any additional questions once you start developing this piece, or if there are any facts you'd like to check."
- Do contact the reporter if an error is made. You have every right to follow up with a reporter if incorrect information has been used. Be polite and non-accusatory. But make sure you know the distinction between facts and perspectives.
- Finally, understand that the media can't report "your story" if you're not willing to talk. Companies frequently refuse to share information with the media then later lament that the media "got it wrong" or "didn't tell the whole story."

[Strategic Communications, LLC](#), works with clients to generate media coverage on a local and national basis – and to work effectively with the media inquiries in sensitive and crisis situations. Strategic Communications and its clients have been covered in publications such as *USA Today*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Newsday*, *AdWeek* – and many more.

For a list of services and pricing for PR services, contact:

Linda Pophal
Strategic Communications, LLC
linda@stratcommunications.com
715-723-2395