



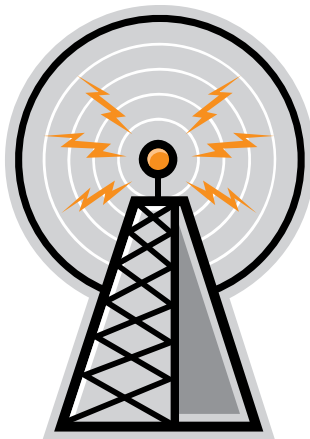
Building a Media Relationship

The Media

The key to success with the media is providing information in a timely fashion and in a simple format that the reporter and the public can easily understand.

Media coverage can increase the public's awareness of your organization, lead to a better understanding of your mission and ultimately result in more public support for your work. The media is a tool to get your message out to the audiences that are important to you — the general public, business, government officials and other city officials.

Good or bad, if the story is “hot” in your community, the media will report it. If they can't locate the designated spokesperson, they will report the story without you — and without your point of view.



Remember, you know more about the topic than the reporter and, sometimes, you are the only one who has the information. Don't miss the opportunity to tell your story.

Making a Connection

Work with the media to get your message across. Make statements that show you care about the community you serve, understand the concerns of citizens and are interested in increasing the safety of the built environment.

If you develop a relationship with the media during noncrisis times, you will have contacts in place when an emergency occurs. Use the following ideas to assist you in building this relationship:

- 1 Identify the reporter assigned to your city, county, real estate or even business section of your local paper. Volunteer to be a resource on building code-related topics.
- 2 Use the following events to build on:
 - ↖ Building Safety Week (second week of May).
 - ↖ Seminars and training events.
 - ↖ Staff changes or recognition of personnel.
 - ↖ Presentations to civic groups.
- 3 Submit brief articles or news releases to your local paper containing information on subjects such as the importance of building codes, porch and pool safety, energy conservation, holiday safety, etc.

When you deal with the Media, Remember...

Deadlines

Reporters work on deadlines. If you can't respond right away, find out the reporter's deadline and establish a time to call back. You don't want to be referred to as "Did not return our calls" or "Had no comment."



Say something like "I need to look up some information and I'll get right back to you." Then follow through and get right back to them, ahead of time if you can.

Facts

Most reporters are generalists with limited time for research, but they are professionals who want to be accurate. Help them by providing background information tailored to the topic at hand.



Have a fact sheet prepared with some background information.

Concise Information

Reporters don't have a lot of time for the interview itself. Be prepared to present your information quickly and succinctly.



Have three key points written out.

The Phone Interview

Most interviews and inquiries will be over the phone. Assume you are being taped or notes are being taken. Hear those keys clicking? That reporter is typing as fast as he or she can to get your words down and meet a deadline.

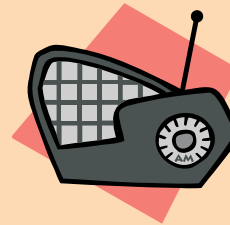


- ☞ Use your fact sheet.
- ☞ Write out key messages.
- ☞ Speak clearly and succinctly.
- ☞ Take notes of questions asked and your response.

Radio

Reporters often just want to tape a few quotes, which they usually take over the phone. They will use the most colorful or provocative quotes. Keep your fact sheet close at hand.

- ☞ Be prepared to give background information.
- ☞ Speak as clearly and as personably as possible.
- ☞ Speak in your usual conversational voice.
- ☞ Send a copy of your fact sheet to the reporter.
- ☞ Speak in concise "sound-bite" phrases.



Newspaper

This interview typically is brief and also occurs over the phone. If there is a "big" story, there may be a longer interview. The reporter will be prepared and you should be too.

- ☞ Keep your fact sheet near you and refer to it, then fax it on to the reporter.
- ☞ Be prepared with a suggestion for a photograph or a photograph of yourself (a mug shot) to be used in the story.



In a Crisis

A crisis is a situation that generates a significant amount of interest among your community, customers, employees and the news media.

- Assemble a team** Immediately contact those who need to know about the crisis and develop a system for keeping them up to speed. Identify a location where the crisis team can gather and disseminate information.
- Designate a spokesperson** Make sure the spokesperson is credible, informed, accessible, in a position of authority and trained in media interview techniques.
- Be available and informed** Tell your staff how to direct incoming calls and how to disseminate information. Let reporters know when and how you will issue updates. Distribute a news release that contains statistics and background information.
- Key messages** Develop two or three key messages. Make your key points clear and concise as early in the interview as possible, even if you are not asked. Clear messages build credibility, and credibility is essential to help ease a crisis.
- Be truthful and keep language positive** Whether the news is good or bad, be the first to tell it. Release only the information you can verify. Don't exaggerate information. Be positive. Say "We expect our efforts to succeed" rather than "We're not expecting our efforts to fail."
- Set limits** Explain time constraints, particularly during an emergency, by saying something like, "The building officials are needed to supervise, investigate or consult with persons involved in the situation." Then be specific about when and how you will interact with the media.

Television

The reporter or the assignment editor will call you to set up a convenient interview time. The reporter may want to spend time on the phone with you for background information. In a television sound bite, you have 10-20 seconds to make your point.



- ⚡ Talk directly to the reporter. Television is a very intimate medium and you are really in a one-on-one situation.
- ⚡ Don't keep a handout near you. When a television audience sees you reading prepared answers, it can be interpreted as meaning that you're working from a script.
- ⚡ Speak in concise "sound-bite" phrases.



Cutaways: After the television interview, the reporter will usually ask you to pose for cutaways. These camera shots, taken from different angles, are used to edit an interview into a smooth segment for use on air. Usually cutaways are shot with the sound off, but always assume the microphone is on.



- ⚡ During the casual conversation, be careful that you don't conflict with anything you said earlier. Avoid shaking your head indicating yes or no or using other body language that can be misinterpreted.

Tips for Talking to the Media

1. Any opportunity for media coverage is a good opportunity.
2. Treat reporters and editors with professional courtesy. Respond to reporters promptly and completely. Always be polite. Don't tell them how to handle a story. **Don't argue with the reporter and don't play favorites.**
3. Have a good story, reduced to three strong key messages. Stress how these issues affect our daily life.
4. Be forthcoming and honest. If you don't know the answer to a question, admit it, then try to find out the answer and get back to the reporter.
5. Act human. Speak in your usual conversational voice. Remain calm and relaxed.
6. Speak in short, concise sentences and try not to use jargon. After you answer the question, be quiet and wait for the next question. In other words, don't speak simply to fill the silence.
7. Remember, nothing is "off the record."
8. Give basic background information. Have this in the form of a fact sheet.
9. Listen carefully to questions, especially the first one, which usually sets the tone for the interview. If you don't understand the question, ask for clarification.
10. Be positive about yourself and others. Avoid negative comments about anyone or any organization.

DO

Ask the general topic and if any specific statistics are required beforehand.

Go over information at least one more time for clarification before ending your conversation.

Consider minor errors harmless errors. Call a reporter and politely request a correction if an important mistake is made.

DON'T

Ask the reporter to submit a list of questions prior to the interview.

Ask the reporter to see his or her work before it's printed or broadcast.

Correct every detail. Most of the time, reporters get the basic message of the story right, even if there are some imprecise details.



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