

How to Ace the Media Interview



The media interview is one of the most effective publicity tools you can use. Interviews can:

- Help announce a new product or service
- Get you more attention from the media and other audiences
- Add a personal touch to news
- Provide a slant or angle to the story
- And much more.

In short, media interviews can be incredibly effective in promoting your company or organization.

That's the good news. The bad news is that media interviews can be challenging. So it's important to practice before doing any interviews. Here are some proven techniques.

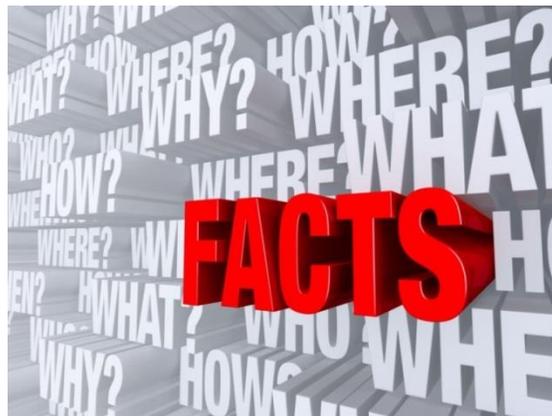
Do This Before the Interview...



- **Clarify your goals.** What do you want from the interview? Most interviews have at least two goals: to communicate a message and to develop a relationship with the interviewer. Having your goal clearly in mind will help you make the most of the interview.
- **Know your “takeaway” messages,** the two or three basic points you want people to know about your organization, product or service. These should be short and simple, and focus on your competitive advantages. Write these messages down so you can easily refer to them.
- Develop at least three ways of stating each message so that you can repeat them without sounding repetitious.
- If possible, **identify a personal experience** that supports the messages. This will add interest and emotion to the interview.
- Again, if possible, **collect some data** to illustrate your key points. Interviewers love statistics and surveys. Give them data from reputable sources, and you’ll be seen as a valuable resource.
- Make your message memorable by creating **“sound bites,”** solid, memorable sentences or phrases. Even better, find ways to paint word pictures (e.g., “the size of four football fields” or “enough boxes to circle the world three times”).

- **Get information about the interview.** Find out:
 - The name and title of the interviewer
 - The publication, program or online outlet
 - The focus or “angle” of the article and interview
 - The types of questions that might be asked
 - The deadline
 - The approximate publication or broadcast date
- **Research the interviewer.** Search online for recent articles. Pay special attention to articles concerning your industry or company. If appropriate, refer to these articles during the interview. (You’ll impress the interviewer in the process.)
- If time permits, **research general articles on the interview topic.** Part of the reason for doing interviews is to start or enhance a relationship with the interviewers, so that they see you as a source of information. Interviewers are more likely to stay in touch with you if you give them valuable information.
- Next, **determine the basic questions** you think the interviewer might ask. Outline your answers in writing. Include stories and examples. Do not memorize your answers. You will come across stilted.
- **Do a mock interview** with someone who acts as the interviewer and asks you those questions.

Do This During the Interview...



During the practice, and in the interview itself, follow these guidelines:

- **Always respond to the questions.** However, you don't have to answer them. (Many politicians have refined this technique to an art form.)
- **Think of the interview as a conversation** with an important customer or prospect. Call the interviewer by name. Relax as much as possible.
- **Take control of the interview.** You are the expert and every question is an excuse to make your points.

However, don't force your answers. Remember that the interviewer has a story angle in mind. Don't try to send the interviewer off in a totally different direction.

- **Listen to the question.** Make sure you understand it. If not, ask for clarification. Take your time. Think about the answer before you speak.
- **Pause before answering.** This shows you are listening and thoughtfully answering questions.
- **Present your answers in terms of end-users' wants and needs.** As much as possible, incorporate your basic messages into your answers. Use stories, data and industry trends to illustrate and substantiate your points. Refer the interviewer to any third-party data that backs up your opinions.
- **Make your main points early** in the interview and restate them several times during the interview. Use transitional or bridging statements such as:
 - "Let me just add that..."
 - "Yes, and..."
 - "Another thing to remember is..."
 - "In addition to that..."
 - "And that's why we say that..."
 - "While that may be true, our real focus is on..."
 - "The critical issue here is..."

- **Or use the PEP formula** (sometimes called the speech formula):
 - Make your point.
 - Give an example or other explanation.
 - Rephrase your point.
- **Outline your answers.** (e.g., “I’d like to make three points.”)
- **“Flag” your main points.** (e.g., “The most important thing to remember is...”)
- **Make it easy for people to understand your message.** Answer briefly, using short words and simple sentences. Avoid jargon. Illustrate your points with examples and stories.
- **Be honest.**
- **If you don’t know the answer, say so.** If appropriate, offer to research the matter and get back to the interviewer.
- **Take the high ground.** Always respond positively. Turn negative questions or comments into positive statements.
- **Be concise.** The typical newspaper quote is fewer than 20 words and the average sound bite on TV or radio is less than eight seconds. So make your answers short. A good rule of thumb is answer the question in one sentence and elaborate on it in one or two more sentences.
- **Think “headline”** and consider if your answer could be a headline or the lead for the story.

Don't Do This During the Interview...



- **Don't ramble.** Interviewers often pause between asking question to encourage you to keep talking. Once you've answered the question, stop talking until the next one. Silence is often golden.
- **Do not discuss hypothetical situations.** State your message instead. "I can't respond to hypothetical situations. However, I believe that..." and give your main points.
- **Do not argue, interrupt or lose your temper.**
- **Don't tell the interviewers more than they want or need to know.** It's easy to get "lost in the weeds" and go into unnecessary detail.
- **Don't talk "off the record" or "just for background."** You are never truly "off the record." Period. Even reputable journalists can use "off-the-record" comments as unattributed statements.
- **Don't make casual remarks.** Assume everything you say will be quoted directly.
- **Avoid saying "no comment."** Studies show that people assume you're hiding something if you say those words.
- **Do not disparage the competition** or blame anyone for anything.
- **Don't ask to review the story.** You will look unprofessional.

Do This at the End of the Interview...



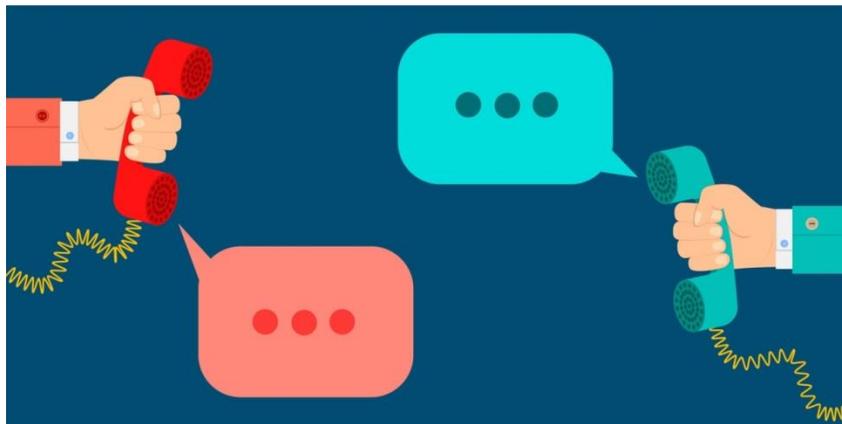
- If you have not covered all your main points, **ask if you can discuss those topics.**
- If you think something you said may be misunderstood, **go over the material again.**
- In any event, **summarize your major points.**
- **Invite the interviewer to call you** for more information or a clarification. Remember your goal goes beyond the single interview. You want to develop a relationship with the interviewer so that you're seen as an ongoing resource.
- Also remember that **the interview is not over until it's over**, until you've hung up the phone or left the building. Many people have made casual comments after an interview, comments that eclipsed their message and become stories in their own right.

Do This After the Interview...

- **Send a short message** thanking the interviewer for his or her time and offering to answer follow-up questions if needed.

- If you promised more information, **provide it** as soon as possible. If you cannot get the information, let the interviewer know.
- If the interviewer contacts you, **answer any questions** or clarify any matter.
- **Make sure the interviewers are on your media list** to get announcements from your company.

Do This for Telephone Interviews...



Most interviews today are done by phone. This is a blessing and a curse. Telephone interviews are certainly more convenient than in-person ones. However, you don't have the advantage of seeing the interviewer's body language. Here are some tips.

- **Never interview "cold."** Do not do an interview on the spot. Take at least a little time to prepare. If the interviewer is on a tight deadline, give yourself at least 30 minutes to research the person, gather your thoughts and review your messages. (The exception to this is if the reporter is following up from a previous interview.)
- **Have your messages and supporting facts** available for reference.
- **Stand and smile.** The interviewer will sense your enthusiasm and friendliness.
- **Call the interviewer by name.**

- Unless you're screen sharing, **do not look at your computer.** Close your Internet browser and email.
- **Imagine you are talking to a live audience.**
- **Master the technology.** If you'll be doing screen-sharing, practice in advance so that you are familiar with the process.

Do This for Video Interviews...



Many interviewers videotape their interviews, even in public places such as trade shows. The goal, of course, is to add interest to the print and online report. Videotaped interviews are trickier than interviews for print. Here are some additional tips for handling them.

Before any broadcast interview:

- **Sing.** It will help loosen up your vocal chords.
- **Have good-quality food,** preferably some protein and complex carbohydrates.
- **Stay hydrated.** Drink plenty of water. Avoid caffeinated drinks and alcohol, both of which might make you hyper and dehydrate you.

If you're being interviewed on television:

- **Talk with the interviewers beforehand.** Confirm how much time you will have and what they want to cover.
- Think of ways to **increase the visual appeal** of your interview. Props? Demonstrations?
- **Speak directly to the interviewer** unless you're directed to do otherwise. Call him or her by name.
- **Do not talk over the interviewer.**
- **"Under act."** TV is the opposite of theatre. It will capture small expressions and movements.

Do This After You See the Results of the Interview...

- If the resulting article contains significant inaccuracies, **point them out** (gently). Ask for corrections online if the mistakes are significant.
- On the flip side, if the articles or reports accurately portray your messages, **compliment the interviewers** on a job well done. (Do not "thank" them. That implies they wrote the report as a favor to you.)

Summary

The bottom line: In media interviews, as in so many skills, practice might not make perfect. However, practice can certainly improve the odds that your interview will convey your messages.

If you follow these tips, your interviews will help spread the word about your business or organization. If you will be doing lots of interviews, get formal media-interview training. The investment is well worth it.

Most of this article is based on my own experience in training clients for interviews. Some material came from the following sources:

- AALEP, Media Interviews Tips and Techniques, Christian
- AAUW, How to Do Media Interviews, Amy Becker

- Change Conversations, [10 Tips for Media Interview Preparation](#), Kate Paine
- Forbes, [8 Tips to Rock Your Media Interview](#), Parul Agrawal
- Glean Info, [10 Tips to Prepare Executives for Media Interviews](#), William Comcowich
- PR Daily, [10 Tips to Help You Ace the Media Interview](#), Lucy Siegel
- PR News, [6 Tips for Giving a Great Media Interview](#), Seth Arnestein

©2010-2020 Communications Plus. All rights reserved.

About the Author



Kay Paumier works with B2B companies to get the word out and get the sales leads in through content marketing, public relations and other marketing services. She has a long track record of increasing awareness of companies, products and services. Her clients praise her ability to grasp the big picture, deal with the details, and do everything in between. More information is available at www.communicationsplus.net/about.