

PRACTICAL BUSINESS TIPS FOR MEETING THE MEDIA

By Karen Friedman

You have fifteen seconds to tell your story. That equals about 45 words. When was the last time you explained a complicated business proposal in 45 words? You can't remember? That's because your last business presentation lasted a lot longer than fifteen seconds.

Now consider explaining the same proposal to a group of neighbors standing around at a backyard barbecue. Would you give them the background, facts, figures, statistics and analysis that you included in your presentation? If you did, would it really mean anything to them?

Learning to maximize your fifteen-second opportunity in a radio or television interview is critical when you need to get your message out. If you don't, the audience will likely tune out. To do this, it's helpful to think of an interview as an inverted pyramid. Instead of trying to deliver as much information as possible before you conclude, begin with your single most important point, then back it up with information that means something to that audience. For example: "Three-million people visit our web site every day making us the single most popular site for teens on the Internet. Young people are sharing information about jobs, colleges, education, and current events like never before."

The key is knowing what you want to say before you say it. When you've decided what your message is, rehearse it over and over again out-loud.

WHAT YOU SAY

Determine your message in advance and make sure that message means something to the reader, viewer or listener. You are talking to the reporter, but speaking to the audience. Put yourself in their shoes: If you were the audience, what would you want to know?

EXAMPLES EXPLAIN

Giving simple examples or analogies help explain complex issues. A breast cancer survivor said 350,000 women in our area would be diagnosed with breast cancer this year. She compared it to filling a sports arena three times.

AVOID DATA

Use as few numbers as possible. Statistical data, numerical examples and scientific equations sound complicated. Instead of saying H₂O, say water. Instead of saying, "998,000 people will be affected ", try "nearly one-million people." Rather than discussing legislative bill number 997564; try " a bill that would put all Americans back to work."

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STAY POSITIVE

Do not repeat negative words or questions. Your job is to make your point. While it is necessary to correct misinformation, do so quickly without getting angry or defensive and then move on to YOUR message.

TALK TO THE REPORTER IN ADVANCE

Spend a few moments with the reporter before the interview begins. Give them an overview of the story and guide them toward the key elements. Reporters often ask leading questions because they are fishing for information. Help them understand the story so they can explain it in a simple concise manner. Always remember that you are the expert. That is why you are being interviewed.

YOUR AGENDA IS NOT THEIR AGENDA

Although you have a prepared message, the reporter may ask questions that are not on your agenda. Do not ignore the questions or respond with no comment. Instead, briefly address the question, then bridge to your point of view. Regardless of the reporter's agenda, don't ever step outside the boundaries of your position.

Interviews involve sharing information and persuading an audience to see things from your point of view. If your company is frequently in the public eye or associated with controversial issues, professional interview training is recommended. Just as it would not be fair to expect a reporter to manage your business without proper training, it is not wise to expect a spokesperson to be media savvy without training.

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