

BEAM ME UP: CONDUCTING SATELLITE MEDIA TOURS

By Karen Friedman

Beam me up Scottie! Star Trek, it's not, but thanks to modern technology, a satellite media tour (SMT) is the quickest way for your spokesperson to be in two places at once.

As he or she sits in the comfort of a studio chair, reporters from news shows can conduct a series of satellite interviews, which are taped or aired live and fed to stations around the country for use in a variety of news stories. Each interview lasts approximately three to four minutes so depending on your topic and budget; it's possible for you to be interviewed by nearly two-dozen stations in a three-hour time period.

Many companies use SMT's to publicize a new product. For example, Boiron, the world leader in homeopathic medicine launched a tour to publicize Oscillococcinum, a flu-fighting product. The SMT generated 39 broadcast stories in over three dozen cities.

"We did send press releases which generated print coverage," said Laurie Leas, public relations associate at Boiron. "But the live satellite interview saved so much time and money. We didn't have to travel and we were able to focus our message in front of a large television audience."

Message is key. At Boiron for example, we first examined the company's objectives and then made sure their message was clearly defined. We practiced on camera by helping the spokesperson respond to many different questions. Not only is it crucial for a spokesperson to stay on point, but that person must remain upbeat and enthusiastic, making every interview appear as if it was the first.

"Satellite media tours make it easier both for the client and the media." says Errin Cecil Smith, President of SirenNote, a Philadelphia area media relations and marketing consulting firm. "We can get our news out to a larger and more targeted audience without leaving the studio, and the media doesn't need to send a crew or incur additional expenses. It's another benefit of new technology, giving us a tremendously powerful and cost-effective tool."

Smith urges spokespeople to thoroughly prepare and advises working with a media trainer prior to any satellite interview. She says a good trainer will pick up on body language, help you connect with an audience you can't see or hear and make sure your spokesperson stays on track.

It is also important to understand what the reporter is after. As a television reporter, this author conducted dozens of satellite media interviews. Most often, I was looking for a sound bite to fit into a story that I had already written. For example, while covering a story about the effects of chemotherapy on cancer patients, I relied on a satellite interview with a nutritionist who suggested food selections that may cut down on nausea. Her interview ran approximately four minutes, but I used about twenty seconds.

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If you're considering an SMT, first ask yourself why? News outlets are flooded with hundreds of stories transmitted through daily satellite feeds. They will not look at most of these interviews, but instead will rely on a computer print out to see what is on the feed. If a particular interview ties into a local story, the reporter covering that story might use a clip from the satellite interview in their story. Very rarely will that interview be aired in full.

Why would I conduct a satellite media tour?

If you have important information to share, but don't have several weeks to travel around the country doing interviews, an SMT allows you to be interviewed by dozens of reporters in just a few short hours.

What should I do first?

What you do BEFORE the interview will determine how well you do DURING the interview. Know what you want to say and prioritize the key points you want to make during the interview. You must be clear and concise, yet drive the point home by giving examples others can understand.

Can I provide the questions?

You can provide suggested questions, but the reporter is free to ask whatever comes to mind. You are fair game and it is their job to ask the questions, not yours. Practicing in advance will help you anticipate questions and make key points.

What should I wear?

Solid colors tend to work best. Clothing that is tailored is most flattering on television because it has clean lines. Stay away from big bows, loud patterns, dangling earrings or anything that would distract a viewer from what you're saying. White shirts are okay underneath a jacket or vest, but do not wear all white.

How do I prevent looking washed out?

Both men and women should wear makeup. For women, blush and lipstick is most important. For men, a lightweight skin colored base evens out the skin tone and masks that five o'clock shadow. Face powder is a must for any television appearance.

How do I increase my chances of getting airtime?

It's helpful to connect your company or product to current trends.

How do I set up a tour?

Many companies offer satellite tours. You need to shop around. Once you identify the company that's right for you, they should be able to book stations in key markets, arrange for studio and satellite time, coordinate any pre-produced video that will accompany the transmission, issue a media alert to notify producers and make follow up calls to the stations.

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How will I know if my interview aired?

The SMT company should provide you with daily updated reports. These reports will tell you what station aired your interview during what time period. The reports can be faxed to you or found on line.

How many interviews should I conduct during one tour?

The number of scheduled interviews depends on your spokesperson. It is essential for that person to appear fresh and enthusiastic when conducting back-to-back interviews. They must continually deliver a clear focused message. If the interview is live, there is no editing.

How much does it cost?

The cost of a tour depends on how many markets you want to reach and how much satellite time you buy. On the average, SMT's range from \$6000 to \$11,000.

The challenge of being a company spokesperson is difficult under any circumstance. But, with message preparation and on camera practice, you will increase your chances of delivering a strong memorable message with comfort and confidence.

Karen Friedman brings 20 years of on-air television experience to media and communications training and consulting. Her Philadelphia area company, **Karen Friedman Enterprises** prepares people to take advantage of media interviews, presentations and public appearances. She can be reached at: 610-292-9780 or through her website at <http://www.karenfriedman.com>.