



14 Tips for Dealing with the Media

1. **Do Your Homework** – Before your interview, learn what you can about the reporter and the stories he or she does. Is it a “friendly reporter” or someone who does hard-nosed investigative stories? What does the reporter know about your profession and the issues you face? A quick Google search of the reporter’s name and/or a review of a publication’s website can yield useful background. You may also contact Association Vision at 703-402-9713 or arickard@associationvision.com to access its resource information on the background of most reporters across the nation.
2. **Know the Audience** – What audience does the publication or broadcast media reach? Your profession? The public? A business audience? Knowing the audience will influence the answers you provide.
3. **Understand the Context** – Make sure you know the context in which your remarks will be reported. Will the reporter also interview someone else with an opposing viewpoint? Is it a short news story or a longer feature? If it is a broadcast story, is the interview taped or live? These and other factors will determine both the content and depth of your answers.
4. **Interviews Are Not PR Opportunities** – This may seem counterintuitive, but remember that the reporter is doing a story that meets the needs of readers or viewers, not your public relations needs. Inform, don’t promote. If you give the reporter what he or she needs, you and your organization will be presented in a positive light.
5. **Develop Core Messages** – It’s critical to develop up to three core messages you want to communicate during the interview. If you don’t, you are at the mercy of the reporter and whatever questions they ask, and you may not be happy with the comments the reporter chooses to use.
6. **Don’t Talk Too Much** – Only a few of your comments (maybe only one!) will appear in a typical news story. Once you have delivered your core messages, don’t ramble on with additional points. You may find that these other points make it into the story, at the expense of your messages. This also helps the reporter by giving them less material to wade through.
7. **Skip the Jargon and Acronyms** – It’s easy to fall into the habit of using industry jargon and acronyms. Make a point to avoid these whenever possible. If you do need to use a term that the average person might not understand, make sure you explain it.

8. **Don't Lose Your Cool** – No matter what happens, remain calm, cool, and collected. If you get flustered, you are sure to forget your core messages and may say the wrong thing. In a broadcast interview, you will lose all credibility with viewers or listeners. Worse, your reaction may lead the reporter to believe there is more to the story and could cause them to become more aggressive.
9. **Be Proactive if Necessary** – If the interview is about to end and you haven't delivered a key message, bring it up. Or "bridge" to your message from whatever question the reporter asks.
10. **You Are Never Off the Record** – No matter what a reporter says, you are NEVER off the record. Don't fall into this trap. Never say anything you wouldn't want to see on the front page of your local newspaper.
11. **The Reporter is Not Your Friend** – This doesn't mean you shouldn't be friendly, only that every interview is a professional encounter, not a social one. Don't let the reporter's friendly demeanor lull you into a false sense of security, which could cause you to say something you might not want to see in print. (Remember the earlier point about never being off the record!)
12. **Respect Deadlines and Follow Up** – Reporters live and die by deadlines, and you can earn their respect and build a relationship by adhering to them and following up with any promised information in a timely manner. Also, make sure you return all phone calls and e-mails promptly.
13. **Don't Ask to See the Story** – Reporters want to protect their independence. Showing a story to a source before it runs violates this, so don't ask! By asking, you show yourself to be naïve about how the media operates, and it won't help your relationship with the reporter. However, you should offer to provide any additional information the reporter may need and offer to check key facts before publication if the reporter wants to do that. But make it the reporter's choice – not yours. Some reporters may offer to show you the story, at which point you should conduct a quick review and change only factual inaccuracies. But remember that seeing the story in advance is an exception to the rule.
14. **Evaluate the Results** – After the interview is over and the story appears, critique your performance. Was it a positive story? Did the story contain your key messages? Did you fall into any "traps"? What could you have done differently to improve the story? Any lessons you can take away from the story will help you next time!

Need more advice or customized media training? Contact Association Vision President Al Rickard at 703-402-9713 or arickard@associationvision.com or visit www.associationvision.com.