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Working With the Media on Complex Issues

While the clutter continues at record speed with blogs on every imaginable topic, and entities that actually inform their audiences from a specific agenda or political platform, traditional media's sole responsibility is still to report the news objectively and accurately. As a story is often only as strong as its sources, communication between entrepreneurs or key executives and the media can mean the difference between calm and chaos.



Making connections with the media can help your business succeed, even in times of chaos.

Media firestorms relating to business missteps, industry-specific economic trends or convoluted legislation are particularly common because information is often not explained prior to - or admitted after - a complex issue has already become problematic. Therefore, it's essential for executives charged with communication of such issues to provide the media with compelling and accurate information that speaks to the level of the audience's understanding, whether they are readers, listeners or viewers. Be it the state of an industry, a company-whose business practices may be in question or response to pending or recently passed legislation being an informative resource is the key to communicating effectively with the media which can be incredibly rewarding, not to mention good for business. Here are a few suggestions to guide you when interacting with the media on complex issues:

Be Proactive

Before a media inquiry even arises, be proactive and "pitch" the media most relevant to your organization's client demographics on your specific expertise and the topic areas about which you are most fluent. Your pitch package should include a brief history of your firm, your bio, clips of any previous media coverage you received or articles you have written, and a case study or two that demonstrates how you've taken a challenging issue and resolved it through unpacking the complexity. Proactively pitching the media in this way identifies you as a key resource to journalists, editors and bloggers so that they initially look to you as they develop stories or look for topics about which to create content.

Be Prepared

When a hot public topic arises, be ready with your media brief. This is a one-page document that can be quickly transmitted to the media and translated to the public by the media. The document should offer a layman's explanation of the complexity at hand, as well as clear tips on "how to..." or "what to do if..." The brief serves as a door opener for media to follow up with you for a more in-depth perspective on the issue. And unless the matter is one that merits a position, try never to take one.

If the public conversation has to do with your organization heading for crisis, then a crisis communications plan is more appropriate. Depending on the potential impact of the crisis, you may want to seek the counsel of a public relations firm that specializes in crisis communications. At a minimum, prepare and practice your media statements in advance of interviews and press inquiries. Remember, everything is on the record.

Be Clear and Accurate

In addition to offering clear, concise and consistent content to the media which it can readily circulate to their audience, entrepreneurs and executives must ensure the integrity and accuracy of the information they are providing. Fact check multiple times before releasing any statements or briefs, even if you're certain everything is correct.

Remember, too, that the media is probably not an expert in the topic being explored, and it is relying on you to provide coherent and linear explanations around a difficult-to-absorb topic. Being direct and to the point gives the media exactly what it needs in a quote or sound bite. Simplicity fosters competent reporting and all-around improved understanding.

Be Friends with the Media

After you've gone on the record, be sure to monitor the stories as they develop. You may be called by additional media outlets to give a statement or further discuss the situation. It's also a good practice to proactively offer further clarity or insight through a quick email or voice mail message. Keeping your composure throughout your media interactions shows you are comfortable under pressure and confident in tackling even the most difficult issues - all of which can prove invaluable to your business.

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