



UNIT-3

Managing the Media

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ How to develop strong relationships with reporters and journalists

Unit 3

Managing the Media

Building Rapport with Reporters

Reporters are your ally and offer you access to the media, and so you want to work well with them. There are several things that you can do to both engage reporters and to make sure that they are able to get your information into circulation.

Be Approachable

Gone are the days when a journalist had 72 hours to pull together a story. We live in an instantaneous news environment and if they call you for a quote for a story that is being published in 30 minutes, they will simply report that you were “unavailable to answer our call.” Instead, and especially if there is something going on that puts your company in the news, make yourself available.

Create Stellar Media Kits

Give journalists the information they need to understand issues before they even ask for it. (See Session Four for information on creating your media kits.)

Be Newsworthy

Invite reporters into your place of business when you have something interesting and notable to share with them. Don't waste their time with the usual. Try to look at things from their point of view: what captures news interest in your region, who and what are the compelling topics and generate the most response to a particular news story?

Be Professionally Distant yet Likeable

If you have one journalist that you rely on give them exclusive access, that can help build your image. However, you can also be perceived as stand offish or unavailable to all the other media sources out there. Think long and hard about how you want to be perceived. We don't recommend that you become best friends with one journalist; instead, aim for some professional distance and develop relationships with lots of journalists.

Become a Good Speaker

If you are not used to speaking with reporters, you need to practice. Consider joining an organization like Toastmasters and hone your speaking skills to a professional level.

Answering Tough Questions

Whether you are faced with an exciting new product release, an announcement about a charity fundraiser you are involved in, or you are managing a crisis, someone is going to ask you some hard questions. They can come at you at any time. You've probably seen examples of this when a company spokesperson is making an announcement about one thing, and a reporter starts asking questions about a different topic, and practically derails the session.

When it comes to answering tough questions, we have some tips for you that will help you stay calm, and to answer the questions professionally and easily. Since these types of questions are much easier to answer in isolation (as in this course), we strongly recommend that you practice the technique several times before you get into the public eye.

When asked a tough question, here is your strategy.

Pause.

Resist the temptation to jump right in and say something because you can never ever take it back. Take a few moments to make sure you understand the question and collect your thoughts on the matter.

Restate the question.

If you think there could be a misunderstanding, or you need a little bit more time, restate the question and then ask if you have it right. You can restate it word for word, or take a wordy question and make it shorter: "Joel, if I understand your question, you are asking..."

Return the question.

Sometimes a question is inappropriate for the time. While avoiding it may hamper your relationship with the journalist who asks, sometimes this needs to be managed this way in order to stop a press conference or news interview from getting off track. You can politely say, "Joel, that question is not part of what we are discussing here today. Why don't we meet in an hour, and I can discuss it with you then." You can also say, "What would you do if you were in my position," which might deflect the spotlight from you long enough to collect your thoughts.

Resist the urge to fake it.

If you are asked a question about something to which you lack information, be honest and admit that you need more information to answer that question, and then demonstrate your high level of integrity by following up with an answer when you have the information.

Answer the question honestly.

People appreciate when you show your human side and do not try to hide behind the corporation. If you make a mistake, admit it. If you do something really stupid, admit it and add an apology as well as some kind of reparation if possible.

Don't ever, ever lie.

You will damage your credibility and may never get it back.

Use a coach.

If you are going to be in the media a lot (like politicians, sports coaches, athletes, and big companies with environmental or people issues, for example), get yourself a coach. A coach can help you prepare for and field tough questions, making them much easier.

Observe others.

Watch interviews and learn from them. See what politicians, CEOs, and regular people do to manage all questions, from the easy to the tough.

Practice, practice, practice.

There is no substitution or shortcut for it.

Speaking in Sound Bites

If you start thinking about news reports, whether on television or a YouTube video, you'll probably have come across the sound bite. A sound bite is an easily shared, highly quotable piece of information that can be run repeatedly before the news story itself actually airs. This might be your press release conveyed through a clearly spoken 20 seconds, or an idea, or a newsworthy tantalizing element of a project. Journalists love sound bites, because they need all those areas of otherwise dead time filled during their news program. If you can wrap up what you do in a sound bite, you'll endear yourself to journalists everywhere.

While you are preparing for a news conference, writing a news release or planning for your company web release (your own YouTube video, for example), try to incorporate a real sound bite. A sound bite can be what makes you stand out among your competition because you've said something that breaks through the noise pollution and caught their attention!

Your sound bite needs to follow the SIM model:

- Short
- Intriguing
- Memorable

You have to be able to deliver your sound bite in 15 seconds if the media is going to be able to use it. That's 15 quick seconds, and not 18 or 20. You'll use your sound bite to catch people's attention. Think of it like the sales person's elevator pitch, or your verbal business card. The beauty of a sound bite is that it forces you to get really clear on your message.

Start with a message that is 30 seconds or less, that you really can deliver in an elevator or at a networking meeting. Then get it down to 15 seconds so that you can fit it into any kind of media profile. It needs to include:

- Who you are (or your company)
- What you do (try to position it in a way that helps you stand out from your competition)
- How you do it differently than anyone else

Here are some examples:

- I'm Joel Mitcham from MoneyServe, where I free people from financial stresses. I can do the same for you. We're celebrating the launch of our freedom savers program where you can make more money in less time and support local charities.
- I am an image consultant and coach and I teach people to work on being rich from the inside out, because once the inside is in alignment the outside follows suit.
- I used to weigh an extra hundred pounds, and I have kept it off for four years. I can help you get your body into the shape you want it to be without working as hard as I had to.
- We're launching a program to help people get control of their mess at home or in the business place with absolutely zero stress.
- We're an oil exploration company who has just put finishing touches on a camp for kids with a gift for science and math.
- I'm Louise Marchello from Insights Incorporated, and we find places for people to live no matter what stage of their life they are at: first place, bigger space, downsizing, grandkids moving in, or retirement living. We do it all over the country!

Test Your Knowledge

Getting Creative

Let's work on your sound bite. You can create one that is pertinent to you personally, or to a product or service that your company offers.

Options When You Have “No Comment”

There will be times when you are not ready or able to provide the media with information. This can happen when you are waiting for the leadership team to work through a crisis and come up with an action plan, when you are required to react to rumors but not yet ready, or when the media gets wind of something you are unprepared to talk about.

You may have seen politicians, sports figures, and actors try to say “no comment” to a journalist. Sometimes a journalist will respect the “no comment” comment, and other times they will push for something more. When you are compelled to say “no comment” and are being ignored, we have some suggestions for getting yourself the time you need to research, react, and reply.

Be Honest

If you do not have the information that you need, don’t try to bluff your way past the press. It only strains the relationship between you and the media. That relationship needs to be built on trust, and that comes from being truthful.

Be Thoughtful

In a crisis especially, emotions run high. Resist the urge to be angry, defensive, or to vent. This is not the time to say, “I’d like my life back,” which BP’s Tony Hayward did following the BP disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. Think before you speak.

Ask

Instead of pushing a reporter away, simply ask them for help as you collect the information that you need. If you get a call about an incident you have not even heard of yet, and if you’ve developed a good working relationship with your media contact, they will cut you some slack and give you some time if they have it available. Keep in mind though, that time frames are short and you won’t have much time as you gather your information and your thoughts, and craft your response.

The phrase “no comment” is not a phrase you should ever utter to the media, because you will leave them with no options except to find answers elsewhere. If you are the public relations contact for your organization, you’ll simply have to focus on the commitment to develop relationships, rather than trying to ignore the media.

The Press Release

Before You Start

There is a process to follow when it comes to creating a press release that catches people's attention. If you don't follow the process it is still possible to get noticed, but also possible it won't or that you will leave out an important detail.

Before you start to write, ask yourself:

- Is your topic newsworthy? Some people think everything they do is newsworthy, or that everything outside of the usual routine is newsworthy. Make sure you look at your news from the perspective of the media and the public. If it's not newsworthy, it may be time to rethink what you are up to!
- Can you write the release in a way that it answers all the questions that it raises? That will help cut down on questions after you release it, and also prevents turning off the journalist reading it who may really not have time to call you.
- Will this release help to meet some part of the organization's strategic plan, and move it forward?
- Have you checked every piece of information in the release? All facts, data, dates, links, references must be accurate.

Once you are in a position to answer "yes" to all the questions above, you are ready to create the first draft of your press release, and not a moment before.

Test Your Knowledge

Other Options

How could you handle a situation when some of the answers are "no" and your organization wants you to proceed with a release?

The Basics

Style

If you are just getting started in writing press releases, it is a good idea to go through an archive and see what the company has been releasing lately. These could be on their website or you may have to dig a little further, but finding them is worth it to get a sense of tone and style they used. Then look at the results from those press releases, and whether they garnered the responses that were desired.

Drafting

Start outlining your press release, and working on the order that best expresses your news and ideas. Organize your writing to start with the most important elements first, so that if an editor has to cut the size down, nothing essential is deleted. And, don't include anything that is not important or you will put a dint in your credibility as you waste a reader's time.

Hard or Soft

Are most releases you are responsible for hard releases or soft? A hard release includes topics like new product releases, surveys, product releases, and staff appointments. A soft release, also called a feature release, can include updates of ongoing projects, trends, or human interest stories.

Dates

Dates (there are two dates included: the first is the date the press release is issued, and the second is the date it is to be released.). Be careful. Don't actually send the release outside of your organization until you are ready for public release. Until then it remains an internal document only.

Contact

If you write the release, you should be the contact person most of the time. However, sometimes you need to direct inquiries to the spokesperson for a particular project, issue, or department. Include the name, e-mail, and contact number. If this release pertains to an emergency it is likely that an inquiry could come outside of regular business hours and you will need to include a cell phone number, too.

Catchy Headline

This is the first chance for you to differentiate yourself. Keep the headline short, valuable, and make it compelling so people read what is underneath it. While an editor who publishes your release will change your headline to match their publication or website, your job is to catch the editor's attention. If you are using e-mail (and you likely will) to submit a press release, your headline becomes your subject line.

Paper

If you are using paper, make sure you use your official company letterhead, which also includes your address and a look at your brand. Use a one-inch margin on paper copies, and a standard font such as Times New Roman or Courier in size 11 or 12.

Design

Any public relations firm you use will have a design they follow for press releases. You can also set up a template, and if you see one you like, it doesn't hurt to adapt one. Developing a template you can reuse is a great way to save yourself some time, but also creates a consistent look to your readers. Use consistent styles, and if your company has a style guide use it. Otherwise, use a media reference guide like *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*.

The Q & A List (Question and Answers)

If you can see that your press release will lead to some questions but don't answer them within the release itself, you can attach a sheet of answers to help people out. This is a great way to help out members of your own executive that might have to field questions because you can give them a bit of background that is too wordy for the release.

Photos

Pictures are an excellent way to enhance your story. Each publication will have its own rules about submitting photos so that they can be reproduced properly. Always make sure that your pictures are of excellent, professional quality, and that they complement your story. Include a caption and the correct spelling for everyone who is in the picture, and you must be sure to cite sources and copyright information. If you have a good picture, your story will get more exposure than if it is a text-only story.

Give it a Shot

In order to get good at writing a press release, you've got to get some practice! Complete the press release form below for an upcoming product, staff appointment, or some other event.

Press Release Form

The Basics

Issue Date: _____

Release Date: _____

Catchy Headline: _____

Contact Person Information

Name: _____

Contact number: _____

E-mail address: _____

Test Your Knowledge

The Body

Write your text. Use compelling, concise language, and be sure to cover the 5 W's (who, what, why, where, when) and how as appropriate. Limit yourself to two pages maximum. Start with the most

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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Final Points

Q & A required? Yes/No
Photo attached? Yes/No
Approvals received? Yes/No

Further Reading: