

# Business PR:

**How well prepared are your management to talk to the media?**



## Introduction

**As part of any PR activity dealing with the media can either be an occupational hazard or a key responsibility of senior management of B2B and technology companies these days - depending on how you view the media's attitude towards your company or industry.**

Like it or loath it, the fact is that if your organization wishing to embark on a PR program various C-level management will at some stage have to front the media.

How prepared are your management to talk to media and, what is their attitude to the role of being a spokesperson?

Here we look at some of the attitudes that prevail in many organisations:

## media facilitation

### 1. “I expect my PR manager or our PR agency to handle all media. That’s not my job”.

Wrong. The PR manager or PR agency is responsible for managing the function, establishing the relationships, creating the opportunity, releasing news and information on an ongoing basis and for being the media contact point.

Their prime role is as media **facilitator**. But media want - and expect - to talk to the senior executives on significant issues.

In fact part of the skill of the PR people is to know when to best use the CEO, CFO or Marketing Director to deliver comment and commentary on the important issues.

## message delivery

**2. “I do presentations all the time. I’m good at it and I can communicate one-to-one with anyone. I don’t need to have any training to talk to the media”.**

Wrong. Talking to the media requires a completely different skill-set. It’s all about the delivery of simple messages.

It requires an ability to craft and deliver these messages during an interview.

It also requires knowing how to steer and control the interview and how to handle the tough questions.

Media interviews are not necessarily about simply answering the questions as they are put forward - they are about how to get your message across, at times despite the specific question.

Most senior management do not possess these skills, and their interview performance suffers accordingly.



## misrepresentation

**3. “No matter what I say, reporters will misquote me and not accurately portray what I want to get across”.**

Wrong. Sure, if you are dealing with ‘tabloid’ media there is a risk of that. But most organisations are dealing with financial, business, technical or trade media who normally have no motivation to twist an interview.

There are hundreds of interviews done every day without problems.

Executives who have a fear or misrepresentation need to undertake media training which will not only teach them how to deal with media, along with a grounding on how the different branches of media cover news and issues.

## corporate speak

**4. “My PR people have put me in front of the media on several occasions, but I’ve not been impressed with the standard of the media and their understanding of our business. And I haven’t got the coverage I expected. I’ve got more important things to do”.**

Perhaps. Obviously journalists can’t know everything about your business or your industry.

If they did, they wouldn’t need to talk with you. Before you place your spokesperson in front of a journalist, you should ask the journalist a few questions about what *they* are wanting from the interview and ask if they would like a company fact sheet or the spokesperson’s biography as background information before the interview.

Another key reason for failed or disappointing interviews is the use of jargon or ‘corporate speak’.

Spokespeople need to be reminded that words like ‘enhance’ or phrases such as ‘moving forward’ may sound smart, but in reality lack substance - and the journalist is looking to provide the reader with substance.

## flexibility

**5. "I'll do media because I know I have to as part of the PR effort. But I want it to fit into my schedule - and I want it booked in my diary well in advance. And I want you to know if anything more important comes up I will have to cancel".**

Wrong. Because journalists are constantly under pressure to produce fresh copy, they deal in hourly, daily or weekly time-frames. They also often want answers to questions on issues that often arise out-of-the-blue. And if they can't speak to you they will interview one of your competitors.

So your spokespeople have to be more flexible and be more available. And if you cancel it's possible that the story will go ahead regardless, either without inclusion of your organisation or, worse still, with inclusion of your organisation, but from the journalist's perspective - right or wrong.

## conclusions

### **So if these are some of the attitudes that prevail in your organisation how do you change them?**

Educate your senior executives to see media engagement as an important corporate function is an integral part of the PR function that will help achieve corporate and marketing objectives - not just 'getting publicity'.

Pick an executive from another organisation (preferably a competitor) and track their media exposure and show how, over time it is building his/her profile and communicating positive messages about their organisation, products or services.

Undertake a competitive analysis of media coverage within your industry and demonstrate how other companies are being seen as leaders on issues and trends that are important to your customers.

Bring in external media trainers or a PR agency to help develop key media messages. Often the inclusion of external parties can help management see the importance of addressing media engagement in a professional manner.



## resources

**From PR Influences - Australia's most comprehensive PR reference source - written and produced by Network Communications.**

Network Communications has experience handling and providing media relations support for a diverse range of Australian B2B and technology companies.

It also provides media training services ranging from individual spokesperson training, to group media training and message development sessions.

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