



**Best Practices in Media & Storytelling**

The only reason we work with the media  
is to further our goals:

Everything comes from  
and returns to  
**CAMPAIGN STRATEGY**

(this can be easy to forget in the heat of the moment)

So, what are the goals of your campaign?

And who can make them happen?  
(Who's your decision maker?)

Who influences that person?

What do they care about?

What do they read/watch/listen to/follow?

Okay, so now we know what we want to do (goal);

We know who can do it (decision maker);

We know who influences them;

We have a sense of what they care about (values);

And what outlets might influence them.



Now we can talk messaging.

(But we're still not ready to pick up the phone.)

# Get 80% of the way there:

- Keep it simple;
- Skip (most of) the facts;
- Tell a story that makes me feel – engage my senses, give me a hero, and a villain;
- Don't tell me why it matters to you – tell me why it matters to me based on MY values;
- Ask questions.

# The ABC's of Interactive Messaging

(Taken from Media Alliance, Celia Alario)

**1. ACKNOWLEDGE** the question

**2. BRIDGE:** Bring the focus back to your key messages when responding to questions, by building a 'bridge' from the question asked back to your key points.

Question: "Aren't your tactics a bit too extreme?"

Answer: "We're here to put an end to the extreme \_\_\_ by \_\_\_ {your points}"

**3. COMMUNICATE:** Say what you came to say

Now, let's assume we have:

- A solid message grounded in your strategy & THEIR values
- The best person to deliver that message
- A list of media that your audience cares about
- A dream headline and outlet(s)

Now, it's time to  
pick up the phone or  
poke at the keyboard.

(This is the part where we get into the Top 13 Ways to get great media coverage over the long haul.)

If you want press coverage,  
reporters need to be a core audience  
from the beginning.

They decide whether your story will make the news.

And so the first thing you need to think about is their values.



#1

Reporters live and die by their  
deadlines.

Call early enough to give them a chance to cover  
your story, ask them if it's a good time to talk,  
ask them what form of communication they prefer,  
blah blah blah.

Don't peddle stuff you don't believe  
in.

If you don't think it's a front-page story,  
don't try to sell it as one.

#2

Know your reporters;  
know what they cover.

(Follow them on twitter, google them before you call.)

# #3

Remember that you're an expert on your issue – and even the smartest reporter is likely not.

So, no acronyms, no racing through a complicated subject, start from way back and zoom in.

*We ask reporters to do a strange thing: become temporary experts and teachers about issues that they usually aren't involved in.*

# #3

Reporters need to sell their story ideas to their editors.

Their editors are thinking about their readers/listeners/viewers.

So you need to offer story ideas that would be interesting to them.

*If it bleeds, it leads.*

*If it's on fire, run it higher.*

# Standards hooks

- Conflict
- Controversy
- Contradictions (strange bedfellows)
- New
- Scandal
- Urgency
- Human interest
- Exemplary of a trend
- Local angle

#4

Offer a tapas platter



#5

Keep it simple.

Tell a story that has heroes, villains,  
and engages the senses.

Don't read a prepared statement.  
Do know your main messages  
and stick to them.

#6

## Skip the facts

(Facts are in a document you can email as an attachment, not in a pitch unless they're new or controversial, or totally astounding.)

## #7

Don't make the (easy) mistake of assuming that if someone knew everything you did about an issue, they'd agree with you.

#8

Find the right spokesperson  
for the job.

(AKA, your ego is not your amigo.)

#9

Be honest and credible.

And do all the work to back that up.

AFTER you get a reporter's interest, provide all the supporting documents in the most organized fashion possible – from formatting to file name.

# #10

## Become a trusted source.

If a reporter knows they won't have to wait five minutes for you to finish your schpeal before shutting you down, knows you'll be honest if you're not the right person, knows you're on the pulse of an issue, you're on your way.

#11

**No dirty work is too dirty.**

From travel agent to concierge to matchmaker to fact finder, it's all part of making it as easy as possible for a reporter to cover your work.



#12

Ask questions.

What about your work is most interesting?  
Can you send updates every now and then?

#13

Be prepared to surf the backlash.

Get some coffee & plan to work it.

# More on the backlash:

- Think through what questions you can expect to be asked, especially the ‘harsh’ or ‘bad’ questions you can anticipate, prepare for the ‘worst’
- Think about what ‘the opposition’ will say
- Get out ahead & have messages prepped.
- Use your ABCs – acknowledge the question, bridge to your main points and communicate them.

# So, now you're on the phone with a reporter. What next?

Ask the reporter a series of questions before they ask you any:

- Find out what kind of a story the outlet is doing (how long, what angle, etc)
- What topics will be discussed in the interview?
- Who else is being interviewed?
- What's the interview format?
- When will it air?
- Where will it appear (and can you leverage that for more)?
- Can you call them back if you're not in the right mental/physical space?

- When preparing to answer: Stop, Breathe, Relax, Think, Speak.
- When answering: Listen, Respond, Expand (ONLY if necessary), STOP.
- It is ok to ask the reporter to repeat the question
- It is not your job to answer the reporter's questions; it is your job to deliver your message
- Don't try to explain everything; stay on your key messages
- Remember that you set the pace and tone of the interview
- You can often determine the time, place and length of an interview

- Remember you have something important to say.  
Remember that this is YOUR interview, the reporter needs you for the story
- Slow down
- Ditch the 'umms'
- Watch for the upswing
- It is not a conversation, but use a conversational tone
- Speak genuinely, credibly, confidently
- Find the emotions that fit the situation and use them • Add personal inflection
- Speak at a normal volume, stress key points by raising your intensity level and pitch, NOT your voice

- There is no such thing as ‘off the record’ and no such thing as ‘off camera’ remarks
- Avoid ‘No Comment’
- It is ok not to know the answer, but refer them to someone who does, and then tell them what you want them to know (your talking points!)
- Don’t try to explain everything, use your sound bites and stay on message! Don't be thrown off by the question; "discipline" the message
- Turn the questions back on the messages
- Don’t answer the question, respond by speaking your talking points

# TV Fashion Tips:

(From Media Alliance)

- Choose colors that don't distract, but NOT black or white (blue is your friend)
- No patterns, plaids, floral, checks, stripes or dots (if you must, larger patterns wear better, but solids are best!)
- Small lapel pins are ok (think ribbons and American flag pins) but no big buttons or slogans on t-shirts that won't show up (remember the shot is a tight one!)
- Keep hair brushed away from your face
- Take off your glasses (they create a glare)
- Wear make-up if they offer it and consider having some of your own (powder your face and forehead!)
- Prepare for bright lights, they are very hot!!!