

FREE



GUIDE 2019

**How to deal
with the
media...**

How to deal with the media...and to get the best result when you do



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

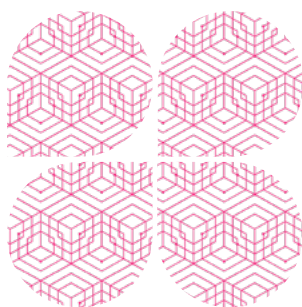
Cathy Hayward is managing director of Magenta Associates, and a communications specialist with more than 18 years' experience in a range of journalistic, publishing and marketing roles. She founded Magenta in 2011 after a journalistic career spanning a number of different titles including *FM World*, the award-winning magazine for the British Institute of Facilities Management, *Marketing Week*, *Financial Management*, *Soccer Analyst*, *Supply Management*, *Unions Today*, *People Management* and *Director*. She holds a Masters degree in journalism, as well as the Chartered Institute of Public Relations' post-graduate diploma in PR.

Introduction

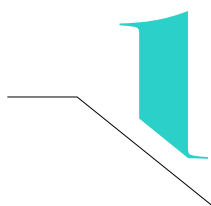
Anyone who listens to the Today programme or watches Newsnight, and has heard respected and articulate business leaders and politicians being grilled by the likes of John Humphrys or Jeremy Paxman, could be forgiven for feeling uneasy about being interviewed by a journalist. Successful media interviews, and positive media coverage, are not a matter of luck. Good preparation can make the difference between a confident, informed and articulate media performance, which presents your company in the best light, makes a good impression on the journalist and results in some sparkling copy or air-time – or a hesitant, tentative and ill-informed approach where the journalist fails to get the material they need and coverage is either negative or non-existent.

If you're going to spend time and money marketing your organisation, it will pay dividends to prepare in advance what you plan to say and how you deal with the press – especially in a crisis.





This short guide takes you through the process.



Choose your media channel and sell the idea

There are a number of reasons why the media might want to talk to your organisation. They may be after a response following a crisis; they may want your expert opinion on a topical issue; or they may be following up on a story where your business has some involvement. There are also occasions when you might want to talk to the press: when you have made a key acquisition or won a piece of new business; when you have a new CEO or senior staff member and want to introduce them to your stakeholders; when you have launched a new division, product or service; when there has been a crisis in which your organisation was involved and you want to put your side of the story; when you want to respond to a topical issue; or just to raise the profile of your organisation and be seen as a thought-leader in your area.

If it is your organisation approaching the media, you need to decide on your target publications. What magazines and newspapers does your target audience read? It might be industry titles (see page x), business magazine or it might be the regional or national press, print and broadcast or a mixture of all these. Compile a short list and then make an initial approach to sell your idea.

When deciding whether to take up an offer of an interview, or to publish a piece of news, a journalist will always be thinking ‘what will my audience be interested in?’ You must think along the same lines and find out as much as possible about the audience in advance of the initial approach, and any resulting interview, so you can tailor your approach and interview responses accordingly.

Rather than being wary of journalists, you should see them as willing partners in the business of communication – your aim is to get your message across and journalist’s aim is to find out what you know, and encourage you to explain it. There is a common interest.





Be prepared

The worst thing you can do with a media interview is to try to wing it, particularly if you're not used to being interviewed by journalists. The outcome could be a disaster for you and the business. Preparation is key to a successful media experience. You need to sound like an expert, so you must be able to answer basic questions about what your organisation does: its main products or services; its key clients; locations; employee numbers; financial data; and plans for the future. Make sure these figures are up-to-date (and agreed by the board) before the interview so you're not giving inaccurate information. In the heat of the moment, it can be easy to forget. Write it down or ask your marketing or PR team to create a briefing note for you.

It can also be useful to have a factsheet about your company for journalists, or even video inserts to offer to broadcast journalists.



Decide what you want to say... and what you don't

The art of good communication is to be able to convey the right message, in the right way, at the right time, to the right audience. The essence of your message can always be distilled down to a core message and your task, as the media spokesman, is to ensure that the quotes that are used in the article are the same as your core message. The core message may be simple – that you've bought x company as part of your expansion plans, or that you've won a contract to supply x business. But sometimes, for example in a general media interview, it may be less obvious.

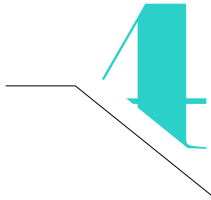
You can work out your core message by writing a list of points that you want to get across, and then remove the less important issues until you only have one point. Keep the message simple. Don't use jargon or industry-specific terms but do try to use visual images and unusual facts to make the message come alive. For example "we clean over 15,000 windows every month which is equivalent to cleaning every window in the Empire State building more than twice" is more interesting than saying: "We clean windows for a number of large organisations". Or rather than saying "we are experts in waste management", you could say: "We empty 7,500 bins every day which is enough to fill two football pitches."

Repeat your message throughout the interview to ensure the journalist understands, but don't sound like a robot as Ed Miliband famously did when being interviewed by a Sky journalist:

▶ <http://youtu.be/PZtVm8wtyFI>

As important as what you say, is what you don't say. Every person and organisation will have no-go areas. Don't be tempted to stray into these areas (see Respond carefully to difficult questions), especially by a clever interviewer who leaves gaps for you to fill. Don't be afraid of the occasional silence.



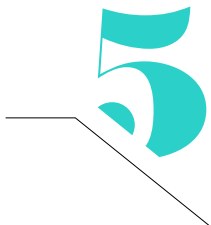


Speak clearly and slowly

Talking to a journalist can feel a bit like a job interview. It can be nerve-racking and there's an inclination to speak quickly and breathe more shallowly – which can make you sound breathless and difficult to understand. A few deep breaths before and during the interview can make you feel, and sound, more in control. Obviously how you speak to a print journalist is not as important as if you were on TV or radio, but it is still essential to make a good impression.

Deliver your core message with confidence and clarity and make an effort to slow down when you say it. Some journalists will write shorthand or record interviews, but others will be scribbling away in longhand trying to get down everything you say. The slower you speak, the more likely they are to understand your core message.

Pausing at the end of sentences, or individual points, is one of the most effective ways to get your message across well. It helps you to gather your thoughts and helps the journalist to understand and digest what you have said. The journalist is listening to what you're saying, writing it down, while thinking of what to ask you next. They will welcome someone who pauses regularly. Practise pausing by silently counting to five at the end of each sentence. It might seem like a long time to you, but it makes you sound more coherent and the journalist will welcome the opportunity to catch up with their notes.



Don't fidget but maintain eye contact

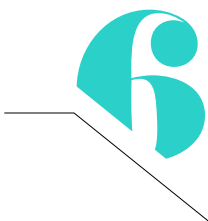
How we talk makes up just a third of the message the listener receives – our body language is responsible for the majority of the impression we create. This means how you act in a press interview can have a major effect on the message the journalist (and in the case of TV or video interviews – the audience) receives. Someone who sits defensively or fidgets constantly will portray a very negative impression of their organisation. For example, if you are leaning back in your chair, arms folded and looking down your nose at the interviewer it is quite obvious how you feel. But if you are leaning forward, hands clasped together in front of you, listening intently, you create a completely different image.

Whatever the question asked, your posture should indicate polite attention. This is especially important if the journalist is asking difficult or controversial questions. Just as you should not react verbally, you should not portray non-verbal conflict either such as by folding your arms, crossing your legs, turning away or sighing.

Try to avoid fidgeting on your seat, or fiddling with jewellery. Natural hand gestures are fine, but avoid pointing, which looks rude, or making a chopping motion with one hand into the other, which looks aggressive. Take a tip out of some politicians' books and create a steeple with your hands – with the fingers pointing upwards, fingertips together and palms apart. A general rule, and one which is especially true if you are being filmed, is to keep your hand gestures within the frame formed by your upper body, otherwise they may disappear outside any video picture.

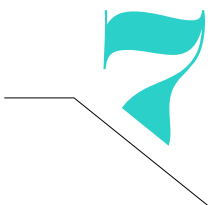
Maintain eye contact with your interviewer without staring them out. If this feels awkward, focus on their nose, or the space between their eyes. And don't forget to give the journalist your full attention and switch off your mobile. There is nothing more distracting and rude than a phone beeping (especially if the interview is being recorded) or someone checking emails.





Dress appropriately

Keep your joke ties and socks for Christmas and don't be tempted to wear fussy or unusual patterns which look odd on film and in photographs. Many organisations in the facilities management sector have branded corporate wear, such as fleeces and shirts, and these can be a good option for an interview with a journalist as they reinforce your company credentials. Alternatively consider smart/ casual wear such as smart trousers with an open-necked shirt. The most important thing is to feel relaxed and comfortable in what you're wearing.



Respond carefully to difficult questions

Preparation is, as ever, the key to handling difficult questions. It is impossible to anticipate every question you might be asked but if you have planned properly, then nothing will catch you out. Ensure your PR or marketing support has done research into the publication and the journalist to help you to anticipate what they may ask. Ask colleagues to ask you the most difficult, or awkward, question they can invent. Once you have answers to some anticipated FAQs and some difficult questions, practise your answers both in terms of content and style but don't learn the response parrot-fashion or you will sound false. If you are asked a question where you don't know the answer, explain that you don't have that information but that you will find out and get back to the journalist after the interview. Staying calm is important. There is no such thing as a stupid question from a journalist and you must demonstrate respect to your interviewer, even if you suspect they have a bias against your organisation or point of view. Never be sarcastic, always smile and thank the interviewer for making the point, even if you are seething with indignation.

Listen carefully to what the interviewer has to say and don't interrupt or answer the question you thought the journalist was going to ask. That makes you look impatient and rude. Take your time, fully understand what the questioner is asking before you start to reply. There is nothing wrong with taking a few seconds to consider the question. You could fill the gap by saying 'good question' or interesting point' to give yourself some more time, but it is more important to give a full, considered response than a quick, partial one. A good tip is to answer the question you prefer. A journalist may include several points, effectively asking several different questions in one go. Consider for a moment and then answer the easiest one. Deliver a detailed response and then say "now remind me of the other points you made." Chances are they won't remember and if they do, you will have bought yourself some time.

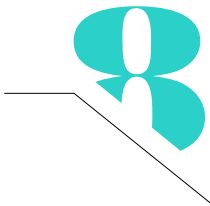
Another technique, which politicians frequently use, is to answer a different question from the one asked. Although this is not good practice, it can be very useful when faced with difficult questions that you'd rather not answer and is better than saying 'no comment'. For example, if a cheeky journalist was to ask something like "how do you justify driving around in a swish sports car when most of your staff are on the minimum wage" you could respond along the lines of: "Good question. You're right that the many of our cleaning operatives are paid the minimum wage or just above. The key to motivating people at this level is to ensure they feel part of a team, they are well-trained to do the job, are paid on time and are thanked for their efforts. We are very successful at retaining our cleaning staff and have some of the highest retention rates in the industry. This demonstrates that people enjoy working for us as we value our people."



Another effective technique of dealing with antagonistic questions is to remove hostility from the question. If a journalist asks you a difficult question, using strong language, you could say: "Let me understand what you're asking." Then repeat the question but rephrase it using less aggressive words. For example, imagine the question was: 'You clearly don't care what's happening to your people and are just looking after number one.' You would rephrase it along the lines of: 'Thank you for your point. Let me see if I understand your question. You suspect that we don't care about our people. Can I take this opportunity to explain how and why we feel that our people are essential to our business.'

Sometimes there will be issues that you don't want to talk about. Rather than say 'no comment', which is quite irritating to a journalist, use an avoidance tactic: you can admit ignorance, but offer to find out (and make sure you do), you can say that the matter is either confidential or related to court proceedings and therefore you can't comment, The best one is to offer half an answer, or an answer to a related topic. If in doubt remember politician Michael Howard who managed to avoid answering journalist Jeremy Paxman's question 14 times:

▶ <http://youtu.be/Uwlsd8RAoqI>



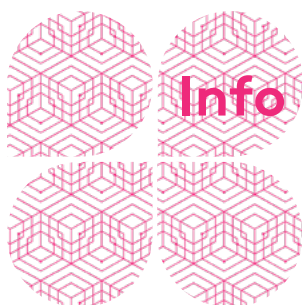
Responding to the media in a crisis

Sorry is often the hardest word to say, but it's also the most powerful. People think that by saying sorry they are admitting legal liability. Lawyers will tell you never to apologise, but the power of the S word to diffuse a situation is huge. You can say that you're very sorry that this has happened, and that you will look into the reasons why it has happened and report back as soon as possible – that is not admitting liability. If someone is hurt, or worst-case, someone dies, you must be seen to say sorry at the first opportunity.

If something bad does happen to an organisation, you will be in a state of shock as much as anyone else. Say for example, as happened in a recent case, an adult with learning difficulties drank some of your cleaning fluid which was in an incorrectly-marked container, and later died. This is a tragedy of epic proportions. The media will be camped on your doorstep wanting a statement. The key things to bear in mind are: to say sorry, to be human about it (someone has died, your organisation could be to blame, you may well be upset about this, and that's good to show) and finally be there. Richard Branson is a great model to follow. When something goes wrong, such as the recent Virgin train crash, he turns up at the scene as soon as humanely possible (cutting short a family holiday in that case). If the worst happens, the CEO of an organisation must be there to apologise and be seen to be there. (There's nothing worse than a disaster at home and pictures of the CEO lounging on a beach somewhere). By acting quickly you stop any worse rumours circulating and you also stop your organisation itself being the story. If you've apologised and promised to investigate what caused the disaster/ death etc, nobody can slate you. Saying something to the press immediately, is better than staging a well-organised press conference two days later by which time the press will have had two days to write what they want about your business in the absence of any response from you.

Don't be lured into blaming anyone. Remember the Costa Concordia when the ship owner quickly blamed the captain? Although he was something of a figure of ridicule because he 'fell' into a lifeboat, this quickly backfired on the ship owners. Never be lured into blaming anyone or speculating about the cause of the disaster – explain the next steps and actions you plan to take – usually some form of investigation and promise to report back to the media as soon as you possibly can. If the crisis was handled well, then offer the media an interview after the event about the issues and how you plan to change processes or whatever it is. You can make good PR out of a crisis.





Key publications

FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

Facilities Management Journal

www.fmj.co.uk

PUBLISHER: KPM Media

FREQUENCY: Monthly with regular e-newsletters

EDITOR: Charlie Kortens

FM World

www.fm-world.co.uk

PUBLISHER: Redactive Media Group on behalf of the British Institute of Facilities Management

FREQUENCY: Fortnightly with daily e-newsletter

EDITOR: Martin Read

i-FM.net

www.eurofm.org/events/eurofm-awards

PUBLISHER: Enigma

FREQUENCY: Daily e-newsletter with comprehensive website

EDITOR: Elliot Chase

P&FM

www.pfmmonthenet

PUBLISHER: IML Group

FREQUENCY: Monthly with regular e-newsletters

EDITOR: David Strydom

Tomorrow's FM

www.tomorrowsofm.com

PUBLISHER: Opus Business Media

FREQUENCY: Digital monthly

EDITOR: Tim Wood

REAL ESTATE AND CONSTRUCTION

Building

www.building.co.uk

PUBLISHER: United Business Media

FREQUENCY: Weekly with complete digital offering

EDITOR: Sarah Richardson

Construction News

www.cnplus.co.uk

PUBLISHER: Emap

FREQUENCY: Weekly with complete digital offering

EDITOR: Rebecca Evans

Estates Gazette

www.estatesgazette.com

PUBLISHER: Reed Business Information

FREQUENCY: Weekly with complete digital offering

EDITOR: Damian Wild

Modus

www.rics.org/uk/knowledge/journals/modus

PUBLISHER: Sunday Publishing on behalf of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors

FREQUENCY: Monthly

EDITOR: Oliver Parsons

Property Week

www.propertyweek.com

PUBLISHER: United Business Media

FREQUENCY: Weekly with complete digital offering

ACTING EDITOR: Mike Phillips

SERVICE SPECIFIC

European Cleaning Journal

www.europecleaningjournal.com

PUBLISHER: Criterion Publishing

FREQUENCY: Six times a year with complete digital offering

EDITOR: Michelle Marshall

Cleaning Matters

www.cleaning-matters.co.uk

PUBLISHER: Progressive Media

FREQUENCY: Six times a year with digital offering

EDITOR: Catherine Christie

Professional Security

www.professionalsecurity.co.uk

PUBLISHER: Wavesight

FREQUENCY: Monthly with complete digital offering

EDITOR: Mark Rowe

Caterer and Hotelkeeper

www.caterersearch.com/Home

PUBLISHER: The Travel Weekly Group

FREQUENCY: Weekly with complete digital offering

EDITOR: James Stagg

Cost Sector Catering

www.costsectorcatering.co.uk

PUBLISHER: Progressive Media Group

FREQUENCY: Monthly with complete digital offering

EDITOR: David Foad

Risk UK

www.risk-uk.com

PUBLISHER: Pro-Activ Publications

FREQUENCY: Monthly with digital offering

EDITOR: Andy Clutton

City Security magazine

www.citysecuritymagazine.com

PUBLISHER: Progressive Media Group

FREQUENCY: Quarterly with digital offering

EDITOR: Eugene O'Mahony





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