

Don't Be Your Own Worst Enemy

As an avid reader of our local newspapers I have been shocked and a little appalled as of late to the number of times I have seen "could not be reached for comment" or "didn't return our calls" in reference to marketing or public relations professionals communicating with journalists. Seriously? Do you not have a way to be reached so that you can get back to a journalist in a timely fashion? I guess at the very least I was thinking that perhaps someone responsible for an organization's public relations should be accessible to the media. It's part of your job for crying out loud – and a very important part at that. I just can't imagine any reason to be your own worst enemy when it comes to protecting your organization or clients.

Now, I am fully aware that some journalists might call 10 minutes before their story is due or ask evasive questions that will cause you to slip up and say something that you shouldn't. However, handling this type of situation is part of what PR people do. Certainly, I know that sometimes you do call them back and they still print those statements. However, when they print that every time they write a story about a particular organization it does make me question that excuse.

I have no doubt that I am going to get a few nasty emails and phone calls from long-time friends who have fallen victim to this recently, but here's the truth whether you like it or not. If a journalist calls and you can't give a statement for whatever reason you should at least give them the courtesy of a phone call or email back. At the very minimum you simply tell them that you don't have all of the information yet (or new information as the case may be), but you will call as soon as you do. Get their contact information, ask what their deadline is and follow through. With technology as it is today no public relations practitioner should be without a cell phone, texting and/or mobile email service. Your office should have a "life-line" to you if you are not physically present . . . failing to communicate back with a journalist is inexcusable.

I will also go on record as saying that I understand that you might be in a situation where your lawyer has told you not to say anything. However, I would submit that perhaps you should consult a public relations strategist that knows how to work with your legal team to prepare statements that are suitable for press and will not come back to bite you in a court of law. If you neglect to take this proactive approach then you could be "brought to trial" in the court of public opinion – which let's face it . . . could be equally as bad.

To help stem this recent tide of failing to communicate, our new Administrator of Creative Affairs, Megan Prawdzik, developed the following list of do's and don'ts as it pertains to media relations. Here are a few that she thought might be helpful:

- DO introduce yourself to different media editors, journalists and freelancers by sending a quick email.
- DO send out press releases two weeks before a special event, then conduct follow-up.
- DO tailor your pitch to the needs of each media outlet.
- DO ensure that you or your designated spokesperson will be available for interview on a moments notice.
- DON'T ever tell the media what you would like from them. By learning what THEY want, you can eventually get what YOU want.
- DON'T send out a press release with general or vague statements.
- DON'T be surprised if you are misquoted. We are all humans here, and this happens. React calmly and resolve the situation in a timely manner.
- DON'T EVER fail to return a journalists phone call or email. It's your job.

These are just basic media relations tactics that will help you survive or prevent a storm of media attention that could create massive problems for your organization. In fact, Insight is well known and respected for our media relations training and practice. If you ever find yourself needing assistance with the media, please do not hesitate to contact us at 850.712.0538 or sabrina@insightfulconcepts.com.



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