



WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH THE MEDIA

*A Media Training Guide for
Money Managers*

Presented by

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PREFACE

Becoming a media spokesman or spokeswoman can be an effective means of building visibility and credibility for your abilities as a money manager. And there is a ready market for your opinions. America thrives on its appetite for news -- broadcast news, printed news, Internet blogs, and more. Investing is getting more coverage than ever before, not just by the daily newspapers and broadcast media but also through weekly newspapers, monthly magazines, Internet publications and blogs. Hundreds of publications devote themselves to narrowly targeted audiences, answering the demand for information that's current and relevant to specific interests.

This mushrooming of the media has led to excellent opportunities for businesses and organizations to get their stories told to the general public. But media visibility comes with its own share of hazards. What the media builds up, it can also tear down with ruthless efficiency. The purpose of this publication is to help you understand the mindset of many reporters and work more effectively with the media in getting your story out to the audiences you want to reach.

You have to understand what makes journalists tick. Their motivations are very different from yours. Years ago, I worked as a reporter for a daily newspaper. The managing editor was a delightful man, full of whimsical humor and often the last to turn out the lights at the end of a news day. But I will never forget his reaction to a police radio announcement of an apartment fire -- "Quick, get over there. With luck there's a baby in it."

With the exception of trade publications dedicated to providing information in support of an industry, bad news is good news in the news media. Bad news is how journalists win awards and recognition. Your goal in reaching out to the media is to see that you never become the great bad news story.



Linda B. Ferentchak

WHY PUBLIC RELATIONS WORKS

Understanding why public relations works starts with understanding exactly what public relations is. One of the best definitions I've read came from Lee Solters of Solters/Roskin/Friedman, whose famous clients included Frank Sinatra.

“When the circus comes to town and you paint a sign about it, that’s advertising! Put the sign on the back of an elephant and march him through town, that’s promotion! If the elephant walks through the mayor’s flower bed, that’s publicity! And if you can get the mayor to laugh or comment about it—that’s public relations!”

Public relations works because it gives your news third party credibility and visibility that can't be bought. In our over-communicated world, people filter the messages they receive based on the source. Everyone knows an ad says only what the advertiser wants the public to hear. News on the other hand is different.

Regardless of whether it is true or not, news is considered objective. The reporter has already made a knowledgeable judgment as to the truth of the information. Credibility is bestowed upon the information.

“All I know, is just what I read in the papers, and that’s an alibi for my ignorance .” Will Rogers

Because a news story is more likely to be read and believed, its value in building familiarity often exceeds other forms of communication.

Award winning marketer Harry Beckwith, founder of Beckwith Advertising and Marketing,¹ summarizes the challenge of service marketing by ex-

plaining that people buy the familiar – not the best, but the name they know. Becoming a familiar name makes it easier to sell your services.

To understand better the relationship of advertising and public relations, I highly recommend the book [The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR](#), by Al Ries and Laura Ries.

Understanding the Journalist

If you are going to use public relations to your advantage, you need to understand the reporter's mindset.

Every competent journalist is well aware that people and businesses want to use the reporter's credibility to build the individual's or business' visibility and credibility. That knowledge tends to create cynicism in the better reporters and a greater sense of self-importance in more susceptible individuals. At the same time, the journalists need the news and information individuals and businesses provide.

In a survey of business journalists throughout the U.S., Dean Rotbart, editor of *The Journalist and Financial Reporting*, developed the following profile of the business reporter:

- Business journalists tend to be Democrats, socially and politically liberal and have a major distrust of business executives. Most are serious people with a strong belief in their role to shape and change attitudes and create actions.
- More than half of the journalists surveyed find few business executives they can admire and three-fourths believe senior managers would

¹ [Selling the Invisible: A Field Guide to Modern Marketing](#), Harry Beckwith, Warner Books, © 1997.

NEWS VALUE DEPENDS ON THE MEDIA

willingly lie to the press if they thought they could get away with it.

- According to Rotbart, their number one priority is themselves, motivated either by money, public recognition or ego gratification.
- Second on the priority scale are their bosses.
- Third are the reporter's sources. Every good reporter has a core group of valued sources, whom the reporters use in a variety of ways to help shape their opinions, keep them on track and focused.
- Fourth are their peers. News judgment is often based not on how to serve the reader, but on how to beat the competition.

Rotbart's results indicate the readers are a business journalist's fifth priority, while the companies themselves -- the principals in the piece -- are last.

WHAT IS NEWS?

The criteria for news, according to James Stewart, former page one editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, are broad appeal, compelling color and conflict: *"...elements that lift the story out of the ordinary [and] pit colorful or bizarre people against each other. We show how their conflict affects business fortunes. We learn about human nature and how people interact."*

News can be any legitimate information of interest to the general public or a special interest group served by the particular media. Whatever you and your organization do could be newsworthy at some point. And it could help or hurt you. Media professionals do not necessarily "have it in" for business or for your particular organization. However, a negative story will prompt stronger media reaction than a positive one. The reason is "*conflict*."

The news media has the legitimate right to cover both the good and the bad. Understanding this principle may eliminate what you might consider to be the "personal" aspect of news coverage. Reporters do their job. A good public relations approach is to assist them as best we can, in good times and bad.

Remember that exclusivity is critical to many journalists, as is the ability to break the story. "Scoops" are important to both national and regional media. Which is one reason many companies feel they do not fairly have a chance to respond to a reporter's query. Often when reporters have a good story, they will wait to call the company until the last day or hour before a deadline in the event their call prompts the company to issue a press release.

Examples of what the media consider news include:

- Reports about prominent people, places and things
- Reports on events of proximity
- Astonishing and consequential events
- Actions with universal appeal or interest
- Life and death
- Turmoil and controversy
- Success or failure
- Statistics or trends expected to have broad impact.

More mundane, but also of interest to local and some industry publications are:

- Promotions or new employees
- New office openings or open houses
- Seminars
- Speeches made by executives, financial consultants or managers
- Timely research on investing, particularly re-

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL MEDIA RELATIONS

- ports on local companies
- Comments and local insights on major business news events
- Local service projects and employee participation in civic organizations
- Service anniversaries, retirements.

KNOW YOUR MEDIA

Whether or not something is considered “news” depends on the journalist and the beat that individual covers. Before you pitch a story to a reporter or editor you need to know whether or not the publication uses that type of article and who is most likely to cover the subject. The key people in different media tend to be:

- Local newspapers and internet publications -- section editors and business reporters
- Trade publications and newsletters -- editors
- Television stations -- news editors, consumer reporters, editorialists, public affairs directors
- Radio stations -- news editors, talk show hosts, public affairs directors
- Cable stations -- program directors

There are a number of on-line media databases that allow you to target media and reporters by location, editorial focus, beat and type of materials used, such as personnel announcements. We subscribe to Bacon’s Media Source database for information on media and journalists, allowing us to build personalized media lists for clients.

Although most public relations efforts begin with a news release, your real goal should be to obtain an interview with the reporter. The best stories are those that run under the reporter’s byline. You want to be included in the article as an expert source. That requires developing a good relation-

ship with the reporter.

Good media relationships are built on providing reporters with information that helps make them successful, and being accessible, prompt, candid and thorough with journalists.

Few reporters are well versed in investment strategies, making it important to take the time to help educate them. Reporters who are knowledgeable about an industry, company or issue are less likely to misinterpret facts or miss developing trends. In difficult times, the knowledgeable reporter will better understand the complex issues and be able to report on them intelligently.

GIVING INTERVIEWS

A media interview is an opportunity to be heard, to get your point across, make a favorable impression and have impact. But effectively accomplishing these objectives means being well prepared and understanding interview dynamics.

INTERVIEW DON'TS

DON'T say anything you would not like to see in print. The definition of “off the record” varies considerably from one journalist to another. Always refrain from making any comments about your business, other managers and firms or the competition that are confidential, of a personal nature or in bad taste that you do not want to see in print or broadcast.

DON'T ask to see a story before it is printed. Most journalists will consider that an infringement on the freedom of the press and interference in

their job. If a reporter needs to check facts, he or she will call.

DON'T lie. It is always better to say nothing than to deliberately mislead a reporter. Remember, the media always has the last word.

DON'T guess. If you don't know the answer, tell the reporter you don't have that information but will get back to him/her promptly with it. And then do so.

DON'T get into an argument with the reporter. Present your facts, put negative information in perspective, but call the conversation to a halt before it turns into an argument.

BE PREPARED

Good interview preparation begins with a clear evaluation of the reporter's view of your business and industry and an view of how you want it to be perceived. For example, market timing is considered by many reporters to be illegal and abusive of long-term investors. If your firm has been known as a market timer, you need to have a strategy for re-positioning what you do in the reporter's mind.

Even when an interview has not been requested or scheduled, be aware of how events, developments and issues relate to your public relations goals.

General preparation includes:

- Do your homework. Know your material. Brainstorm possible attacks. Research company materials and position papers.
- Get some answers down pat, so if you have to use them, you will feel comfortable.
- Develop anecdotes, personal experiences, and stories to illustrate your key points. Remember

that stories often work better than facts in helping people understand concepts.

- Put numbers in perspective. Explain the impact of returns on a retirement account balance, rather than simply using percentages.
- Remember, the interviewer is not your primary audience. Viewers and readers should be your focal point. It doesn't matter if the interviewer understands what you are saying if the audience doesn't.
- Assume that everything you say is "for the record."

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

You have basic rights as an interview subject, which you can assert as part of your agreement to be interviewed:

- You have the right to be treated courteously. The questions can be tough, but the reporter's demeanor should not be abusive.
- You can determine the time and location, and you can determine the length of time available to the reporter.
- You can ask in advance for topics to be covered, but not specific questions.
- You are not under subpoena. You can set your own pace for answering questions, and give yourself time to think before speaking. You can break off an impromptu interview after a "reasonable" amount of time, after all the important questions have been answered. You may challenge questionable facts and assumptions that may be "loaded" into the reporter's questions.
- You can be human, use everyday language, an-

HANDLING THE INTERVIEWER'S QUESTIONS

- ecdotes, illustrations, statistics and examples.
 - In a studio environment, you have the right not to be hurried to your place or to tolerate discourtesy by the studio crew or host.
 - You have the right to have the time to get some of your points across in the interview, and not be expected to only answer questions.
 - You have the right to ignore "editorial comments" or asides by reporters or panelists.
 - You can have a public relations person or other company representative present.
 - You have the right to make your own audio or videotape of the interview, or to be able to obtain a complete tape from the broadcaster.
4. Big words, complex sentences and lengthy answers have no place in most interviews. **BE BRIEF.** Use simple, but strong sentences. Use nouns and verbs, rather than adjectives.
 5. **Be relaxed and natural.** Smile -- it's disarming. Be warm and open, never condescending.
 6. **Look for opportunities**, such as at the end of an interview, when you might be asked "Do you have anything to add?" or when the interviewer is looking at his notes, to say "One thing we haven't touched on. . ."
 7. **Listen carefully.** This is perhaps the most important point, that you must understand the question before answering it.

WIN THE INTERVIEW

You are not at the reporter's mercy. You should win every interview by making sure your major points are effectively heard. You have prepared by doing your homework, setting objectives, gaining a common ground with the individual. Now all you have to do is execute your game plan. During an interview, you should consider the following:

1. **Never lie.** Always tell the truth. A lie will always come back to haunt you, and irrevocably damage your credibility. Once you start down that road, you can never turn back.
2. **Control -- direct -- focus the interview.** Make your point.
3. **Don't assume everything you say will be aired or reported.** So, be candid, and be brief.

ANSWERING QUESTIONS

Some answers are better than others. Here are some tips for framing good responses:

1. Take time to think about what you want to get on the record.
2. Your responses should average about 30 to 45 seconds each, especially for television and radio interviews. Even in a print interview, they should not exceed two minutes.
3. Answer all questions on a positive note. Be upbeat.
4. If you need to "buy time" to properly frame a response, you can ask the reporter to repeat the question.
5. Answer only a specific part of a troublesome general question. Conversely, if the question is hostile and quite specific, frame your answer in

relation to the general aspect of the question.

6. Always stay calm, courteous and cooperative.
7. Don't hesitate to provide specific background or history if this is required to answer the question, but don't start your answer with this information -- give the conclusion first as it may be the only thing that makes the air.
8. If you don't know, say so. Then promise to follow up on the question, so you can provide the reporter with the information he requested.
9. Edit mentally, and never say anything you don't want to hear played back later.
10. Don't repeat negative examples or words used by the interviewer. "Polluter?" "Who, me?" It only reinforces the negative in the audience's mind. Come back with a positive response.
11. Once you've given your answer, never ask, "Does that answer your question?" If the interviewer says "No", you'll be on the spot.
12. If a question is unfair, too personal, confusing, etc., don't hesitate to tell the reporter.
13. If you're interrupted, wait your turn and proceed with your answer. Challenge efforts to put words in your mouth. When presented with a laundry list of questions, or a machine gun approach, identify the questions as you start to answer them.
14. Don't play verbal ping-pong with the reporter. Broaden your answer to make your point. Put your main point or conclusion first, followed by your supporting points.

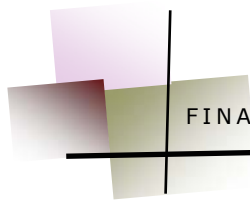
DEFUSING HOSTILE QUESTIONS

The reporter has the luxury of editing out his hostile question, leaving you in the eyes or minds of the reader as being a hostile witness. Never allow this to happen.

There are ways to evade a hostile question while still being responsive. Above all, don't be inflexible. Roll with the punches. Never get into a brawl with an unpleasant interviewer.

Remember these points:

1. Don't be argumentative or appear to be uncooperative.
2. Avoid patronizing remarks such as "That's a very good question." Don't refer to the interviewer as "Sir. "
3. Don't be afraid to use humor to defuse the uncooperative interviewer. But be careful -- humor can come over as sarcasm.
4. Unless you are absolutely sure of the facts, don't challenge statistics, etc., used by the interviewer. Remember, he's prepared too, and if he's right and you're wrong, you might be embarrassed. "I'm not familiar with that study" is much more meaningful than "Where'd you get that?"
5. Don't take it personally and react to the interviewer. Think of the image you want to project as a person.



QUESTIONS ARE THE REPORTER'S TOOLS

A reporter's job is asking questions and getting responses that break through the interviewee's prepared marks. They are looking for the spontaneous, the controversial. Listen to television interviews and you will soon pick up different styles and techniques used by the reporter or program host.

Learn to recognize the basic types of hostile questions, and answer them as follows:

TYPE OF QUESTION:	BEST ANSWER:
Loaded Preface	Object, give best answer
Personal opinion	Say no, give corporate
Iffy	Restate it
Inconsistent	Admit change
A or B	Don't pick
Absent third party	Don't buy it
Don't you think?	Disagree
Cheap shots	Object, show emotion
Guilt by association	Disassociate or generalize
Ranking	Don't have to rank
Irrelevancy	Bridge to objectives

TRIPPING UP THE INTERVIEWEE

Questions designed to break through an interviewee's preparation fall into several familiar patterns:

Multiple-part question -- Pick up where you feel most comfortable, don't hesitate to ask for a repeat of the question if you forget other elements, and know how you want to answer them.

A-B loaded -- The double negative dilemma . . . "Are you still paying fund managers for access to time their funds? When did you stop using market timing? After it was declared illegal?" Don't repeat or deny negatives, but bridge to a positive response.

Speed up or ping pong technique, when the reporter asks another question before you've completed your answer -- Continue to answer the first question, and if necessary, ask the interviewer to give you the time to answer. If the interviewer still persists, then he'll look rude to the audience.

Stall -- After the interviewer asks a question, and you've answered it, the interviewer lets a silence develop without a follow-up question. The typical interviewee, uncomfortable with the silence and feeling more is expected, often elaborates further on his answer, slipping into territory he did not intend to discuss. Instead, ask if the interviewer has another question, or go back to your main points, until the interviewer catches up. Take the offensive.

Chorus line -- the "one, two, three, kick", used by Phil Donahue and other experienced interviewers. It's three positive questions, requiring positive answers, before a negative, very tough question is asked.

Example:

"How have your investment programs performed compared to the national indices? What do you see as the benefits of short-term trading? Have your clients been pleased with these results? But don't you feel guilty over the fact that short-term trading in the fund families hurts the returns of long-term investors who depend on their savings for their retirement?" Beware: anytime you hear a series of positive questions, you are being set up.

Loaded questions -- the phony statistic based question, and the faulty logic question. When you are asked a question that uses some type of statistic that you know to be false or inaccurate, question it. Ask for the source, or the document. But remain courteous, and say you don't believe that information is correct. Faulty logic questions (by missing just a few of the good days of the market your returns will fall considerably below a buy-and-hold position) can be rebutted simply by pointing out the facts, and your audience may accept them. Don't be insulting, and stay in good humor.

Even news oriented, serious reporters will probe during the interview to make sure everyone understands what you said, and to give you a chance to answer beyond your first response. You should not be offended by probing, but expect it. However, some interviewers will probe until you say what they want you to say. When you sense this, repeat your answer, and bridge your objectives.

Key reporter phrases:

Clarification: "Exactly what do you mean?"

Justification: When you say that, what are you as-

suming?" or "What is your reasoning on that?"

Refocus: "If that's so, what about ...?" or "How would you relate that to this?"

Prompt: "If you say this, then you mean this, right?" or "Here's one answer to that . . ."

BRIDGING TO THE POSITIVES

Bridging is the technique of moving from a negative subject to a positive subject. It allows you to diffuse a hostile question, change the focus, and move to a topic or response you choose. Bridging requires experience and practice. You may be at ease with this technique in everyday life, through negotiating or legal argument, but it is a learned response and takes practice.

The basic premise of bridging: if asked an unpleasant question, listen to it carefully, and construct an answer that will swing the topic away from the original question.

Practice bridging by doing this: sit down with a list of things about your organization that make you uncomfortable and vulnerable. Then prepare a list of positive messages your organization presents.

Match the bad to the good to give you the basic framework for "bridging," moving the subject from the negative to the positive.

You can reinforce your use of bridging by adopting phrases that allow you to lead into a subject you want to emphasize. Phrases such as:

"Let's remember that . . ."

"Let's not lose sight of that fact that . . ."

"It's helpful to know . . ."

"Before we get off this topic, let me just remind you . . ."

"Let's not forget . . ."

THE REPORTER IS NOT YOUR FRIEND

The best journalists are charming, articulate and likeable people. By making you trust and like them, they are well aware that you will be more apt to speak honestly and provide them with far more story than you might intend.

Regardless how much you might like and respect the reporter as an individual, you must remember that the media is never your friend. View it rather as a vigilante, quick to try to expose any wrong you might commit, but sparse on apologies.

If you talk regularly with reporters, you will be misquoted. Sensational comments will be taken out of context and you will be made to sound like a fool periodically. Ranting and raving, demanding retractions, and banning a reporter from the list of people you will return calls to is counterproductive. You have to shrug off the negative and continue forward with the knowledge that the public's retention is faulty at best.

Harry Beckwith in his book Selling the Invisible, points out that it is better to be known badly than not be known at all due to a human trait called attribute forgetting.

"Let's say you hear something negative about a company. As time passes, you tend to forget that negative information—you forget the attributes and remember only the company name. Then,

asked which company you have a better opinion of—the first company or another company that you have never heard of—you choose the familiar company, even though everything you heard about that company was negative. Familiarity wields that much power.

Familiarity breeds business. Spread your word however you can."



About the Author:

Linda Ferentchak has worked in public relations and marketing since 1979 and has an extensive background in financial and investment subjects. She holds a MBA degree with a marketing concentration from Colorado State University, as well as a BA in technical journalism/public relations, with minors in business and political science.

Her professional experience includes production of numerous newsletters, web sites and marketing materials for registered investment advisors; investor relations communications for publicly traded companies, and public relations and marketing support for a national investment advisor association. Linda is a member of the National Investor Relations Institute and the Public Relations Society of America, through which she holds the APR accreditation. Her work has received numerous awards including the National Investor Relations Institute's Golden Summit Awards, the Public Relations Society of America Gold Quill and Gold Pick awards, and the American Marketing Association's Gold Peak awards.



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