

TOP TIPS FOR SPEAKING TO JOURNALISTS

Here are the top tips compiled by CEOs of companies from around the world who've learnt the hard way!

Follow their advice and you can't go wrong when it comes to having fruitful, engaging and mutually beneficial interactions with the media.

LEAVE THE "UMS" AT HOME

"Using "filler words" – ah, um, like, so – will hurt your credibility as an expert in your field. Try to become more aware of the situations in which you use these filler words, and try to replace them with pauses. So many people are uncomfortable with pauses, but used correctly, they make you sound more confident and credible." - *Justin Beck, CoFounder and CEO, PerBlue*

STAY ON MESSAGE

"To avoid being nervous or providing a bad quote, be sure to create bullets of your talking points and the story you want to tell. "Winging it" leaves far too much room for error. If you don't have a good answer for a question, don't feel compelled to answer it." - *Antonio Neves, Founder, THINQACTION*

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

"Know your business and industry inside and out. Come up with prepared responses for likely questions. Practice saying them so they don't sound robotic. Pretty soon you'll realise most journalists ask the same things, and you won't be nervous anymore." - *Wade Foster, Cofounder, Zapier*

AVOID SARCASM

"Until you are comfortable talking "on the record," it's best to avoid sarcasm. You may think the journalist understood what you "really" meant, only to be horrified by what a jerk you sound like when the story comes out. Keep it straightforward until you get a feel for what journalists pick up on, ensuring you can get your meaning across." - *Matt Peters, CoFounder & Creative Director, Pandemic Labs*



BE DISCIPLINED

“Remember that the journalist is after a story, not telling your narrative the way you think it should be communicated. Be judicious and thoughtful in how you answer questions, and be wary of how things you say might be taken out of context. Stick to your key points, and remember that it’s better to keep your mouth shut and be thought a fool than to open it and remove all doubt.” - *Erik Severinghaus, Founder & CEO, Simple Relevance*

ADMIT YOUR STAGE FRIGHT

“Most of the time, journalists want an interview to go well – they want great quotes and information for the pieces they’re working on. If they know you’re nervous, they can make things a little easier to ensure they’ll get what they need. You can’t always use this approach – if you’re being interviewed about something the journalist thinks has gone wrong, it won’t fly – but it usually helps.” - *Thursday Bram, Consultant, Hyper Modern Consulting*

GENUINELY LIKE THEM

“It’s Psych 101, but if you like someone, they’ll probably like you back. Obviously, this is easier said than done (it depends on the journalist), but if you go in expecting a battle, it’ll be tough to win the journalist over.” - *Derek Flanzraich, CEO and Founder, Greatist*

KNOW YOUR NUMBERS!

“The media loves stats and numbers, so know your industry statistics and trends. However, journalists many times are strapped for time and may have not have done the homework. So if you start off with some strong numbers to support your position, this will reinforce your stance as an industry expert, as well as be impressive and set the tone for the conversation.” - *Marcos Cordero, Chief Gradsaver, GradSave, LLC*

SPEAK IN SOUND BITES

“It is easy to stray from your messaging goals when a journalist gets you chatting. A common mistake is to water down great news with other updates. Try to loop conversations back to messaging goals whenever possible so your feature doesn’t become a back story in your own article. You can think of speaking in sound bites: everything printable should still fit your message, even out of context.” - *John Harthorne, Founder and CEO, MassChallenge*



PRACTICE YOUR SPEAKING SKILLS

“The more you practice speaking in front of others, the more comfortable you’ll be when it comes time to speak to journalists or other important groups. I highly recommend joining a local Toastmasters club to improve your speaking skills.” - *Allie Siarto, CoFounder, Director of Insights, Loudpixel*

TALK TO SOMEONE

“The biggest trouble inexperienced interviewees tend to have is that they try to answer questions from a journalist as if they are talking to “everyone.” The outcome tends to dilute their answers and leave them sounding insecure, unsure or uncertain. Instead, imagine talking to one reader (even a past version of yourself) who wants to learn about what you have to say.” - *Dave Ursillo, Founder & CEO, The Literati Writers*

UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY’RE AFTER (IT’S NOT YOU)

“A journalist is not interviewing you to catch you in a “gotcha” moment – he wants to write a story about a topic on which you have expertise that his readership will find interesting. The better the quotes and information he gets from you, the better his story will be.” - *Peter Minton, Founder & President, Minton Law Group, P.C.*

BE DIRECT

“Be prepared, prepared, prepared. Know the topics that the interview is going to cover like the back of your hand. Be truthful, professional, direct, interesting and have something meaningful to say. If you accomplish that, you’ll be amazed at the benefits of PR. Being recognised as a leader in your field by the media can easily impact the amount of incoming leads you generate.” - *Jamail Larkins, President & CEO, Ascension Air*

