

Be Heard

How can your organization ensure that its message is heard by your audiences through media interviews?

Unlike advertising, organizational communication and social media, you cannot control messages presented by mainstream media. This paper will help you understand some of the dynamics that shape media decisions and what your organization can do to ensure that its message is conveyed correctly and in context by journalists.

Be Prepared

Chuck couldn't believe it. As director of public relations for a regional accounting firm, he was thrilled when one of the biggest newspapers in one of his firm's biggest markets had asked for an interview for a story about a conflict brewing over tax policy. The firm had an in-house expert on just this topic, and Chuck quickly arranged the interview.

Now, with the paper's website glowing on his computer screen, Chuck felt a cold knot forming in his gut as he scanned the comments attributed to his firm's tax manager: "Well, you only have to worry about this regulation if you're planning to park your income overseas. It's nothing that would be picked up by a routine audit."

Competing firms quoted in the story sounded authoritative; Chuck's guy sounded like a clown. Chuck startled at a soft "ping," and glanced at his incoming emails: One from a partner asking how the hell the firm had been put in that context in the story and another from the hapless tax manager claiming he'd been misquoted. This could not be happening.

Be Media Savvy

"Hey, buddy, what's wrong? You look like you were just hit by a truck," said Larry.

"Actually, I think I was," moaned Ed. "I thought this trade show was all about being on that panel about commodity trends, but I just got ambushed by a reporter from that trade journal. I wasn't sure what to say to him, so I tossed out a couple comments about our competitors' booths. I thought I could follow up later when I'd collected my thoughts. But that jerk just sent out a tweet quoting me! Or, I should say, misquoting me."

"That can't be good," said Larry. "Well, maybe nobody will notice. It's just a trade journal."

Ed's phone bleated and he scanned its tiny screen.

"Somebody noticed, all right," he said. "Reuters. Now they want to know if I'm referring to some rumor about our Western division being spun off. This is not good at all."

The Why of Who

When a reporter calls, it is already too late for media training. "Forewarned is forearmed" is never more true than it is for dealing with media inquiries. Who, then, should be prepared? Your organization needs to consider two key factors as it decides who should receive the investment of media training:

- Authority
- Strategic positioning

Authority

Audiences want reassurance that the sources quoted in stories know what they are talking about.

Journalists, of course, want to construct stories with qualified, credible sources to meet their own journalistic standards and to communicate to readers that the story is valid.

Within your organization are people who are experts at *what they do* and *what they know*. Sometimes, what they do and what they know are the same thing. For example, a bond analyst is an expert on bond market trends; it's what she does. A doctor is an expert on his specialty, be that psychiatry or pediatrics. A professor is an expert in the topics she teaches.

For many others, expertise is grounded in both what they do and what they know. For example, a regional manager for an international bank is an expert in lending trends – what she does – and in the economy of the region – what she knows through the bank's operations and by talking with customers.

If your company makes diapers, you have experts on what you do – engineering new materials – and what you know – infant health. If you are a certified financial planner, you are an expert on what you do – retirement planning and family finance – and in what you know -- running a small business.

If you run a soup kitchen, you are an expert on what you do -- nonprofit operations, food supply trends, and volunteer management -- and what you know -- the effect of the local economy on your clients. If you are on an association board, you are an expert in what you do – your professional experience that landed you on the board – and in what you know – industry trends you pick up on quickly because you are immersed in association leadership.

Both types of expertise qualify these staffers as credible sources who can carry your organization's

Identifying Stealth Messengers

"I want results. We're not showing up in stories the way I think we should," said Patrick, partner at a national financial advisory firm. "I sure hope you've got a couple tricks up your sleeve, or I can't promise that I can protect your budget."

"I've got some new ideas to get us into some of these publications," replied Carol, the firm's communication director.

The trouble was she wasn't quite sure what to do. How could she make her firm stand out from all the others that all offered journalists a chorus line of experts?

message to the public through media interviews.

The public is quick to identify who it believes. Edelman, the public relations agency, assembles an annual "Trust Barometer" that parses what media sources are deemed most believable by the news-consuming public.

Here is an excerpt from the 2011 Edelman Trust Barometer that illustrates the most credible sources:

If you heard information about a company from one of these people, how credible would that information be?

70%	Academic/expert
64%	Technical expert in company
53%	Financial/industry expert
50%	CEO
47%	Nongovernmental organization (i.e., nonprofit)
43%	Government official
43%	Person like yourself
34%	Regular employee

Source: 2011 Edelman Trust Barometer

Despite the meteoric rise of social media, the two least credible sources on the Edelman Trust Barometer are regular folks. This means that your company's experts are an invaluable source for cultivating and maintaining credibility with the public. You can mine this asset – your experts – to carry your message to your audiences.

Strategic Positioning

Strategic use of carefully chosen and prepared spokespeople can help you gain or regain credibility with important audiences.

Industry

Some industries face major credibility gaps with the public. The energy industry, for instance, is often

kept on the defensive by environmental activist groups. Thanks to ongoing economic and political turmoil, U.S. consumers simply don't believe much of anything banks say. The 2011 Edelman Trust Barometer found that trust in U.S. banks dropped a jolting 46 points in 2010. To date, banks' messages are being carried primarily by corporate spokespeople and seemingly out-of-touch white male chief executives.

When the very images of entrenched power continue to dominate the discussion about their maligned industry, the public understandably perceives that energy companies or banks are deaf to consumer and customer concerns. That undermines the public's trust in those companies even more and the cycle continues.

Strategic use of unexpected spokespeople breaks this cycle. When your organization's message is carried by someone who goes "against type," or, who is not whom the public or journalists expect to represent the organization, that person will have a much stronger chance of capturing their attention long enough to make your organization's point.

Demographic

That men represent 93% of senior executives at American corporations is not news. It's also not news that women are now half the American workforce. The gender leadership gap is starting to fray the credibility that American companies have with American women.

Women, who control or influence 80% of all consumer spending and hold half of all management and professional positions, are increasingly intent on channeling money to companies that treat employees well and whose people policies are consistent and transparent – traditionally perceived to be "female values."

This dynamic was explored in the Edelman Trust Barometer:

How important are these factors to corporate reputation?

- 69% High quality products or services
- 65% Transparent and honest business practices
- 65% Company I can trust
- 63% Treats employees well

Source: 2011 Edelman Trust Barometer

Meanwhile, journalists are increasingly aware of the imbalance of women and minority sources in their own reporting. The 2010 Global Media Monitoring

Project, which covered major media in 108 countries, found that only 24% of all people in the news are women. Here's how that breaks down for various types of sources:

<u>Women as a % of sources</u>	<u>Topic</u>
16%	Business/law
17%	Government employee
34%	Activist/nonprofit
31%	Education/health

Source: *Who Makes the News, 2010*

An American advocacy group, Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting, released in 2010 an analysis of sources appearing on Newshour, the flagship news program of the Public Broadcasting Corporation.

<u>Newshour sources</u>	<u>Demographic</u>	<u>U.S. Population</u>
67%	White Male	32%
16%	White Female	33%
13%	Nonwhite male	17%
4%	Nonwhite female	18%

Source: www.fair.org

This analysis evoked a discussion by PBS staffers, played out in public via blog, about how PBS needs to find and use a much broader scope of sources. Discussions in the same vein are common at Poynter.org, the journalism news site. For example, in November 2010, the editor of Fast Company magazine lamented the lack of women in technology and defended the magazine's efforts to seek them out.

Andy Alexander, ombudsman for the Washington Post, noted in January 2011 that letters to the editor written by men outnumber those written by women three to one. He and editorial page editor Fred Hiatt agree that they are "on the lookout for good letters from women."

The takeaway for your organization: Women and minorities can carry your message where others cannot. Reporters and editors are neither gender blind nor color blind. They are actively seeking women and minorities to quote and, even better, to photograph. When they publish a photo of a woman or minority source, they communicate that source's gender or race without having to state it in the story.

Of course, this is a bonanza for that source's organization, because being in a photo nearly guarantees a substantive presence in the story.

"Silicon Valley and the tech community are not as diverse as they should be," said Fast Company Editor Robert Safian. "And not enough attention has been paid to people who are diverse and worthy of attention."

The Next Steps

Your organization has an array of experts – traditional and unexpected – who can carry your message to key audiences through media stories. Women, minorities and other untraditional sources are ideal quarterbacks to carry your message past mainstream media gatekeepers. These steps can help you frame your plan.

Ownership:

Who or what department in the organization has ownership of media messages? If ownership is shared, distributed or decentralized, make sure you know who has ownership of what types of messaging. That will help you identify who has responsibility for cultivating spokespeople. What are your media policies and guidelines? How are they communicated internally? How are managers and employees encouraged to buy into the organization's communication goals so they suggest good stories when they see them?

Inventory Expertise:

What expertise is inherent in your organization -- i.e., what expertise stems from what you do? What expertise is latent in your organization -- i.e., what expertise stems from what you know?

Audiences:

What audiences do you want to reach? Who has the most credibility with those audiences? It is critical to identify spokespeople whose credibility and presence aligns with your organization's values and image. Do your designated spokespeople reinforce -- or contradict -- the right impression of your organization?

Cross-reference your list of experts against key audiences to detect the best fits. What "soft" factors can blend with professional credentials to amplify credibility? For example, a materials engineer might be an expert in diaper materials and, therefore, qualified to comment about diaper absorbency for a

parenting magazine. However, a diaper brand manager who has two sets of twins might be a better source if he can personally vouch for the volume that the diapers can contain.

Pipeline:

Who needs media training for immediate opportunities? How will you identify future candidates so you are always preparing new spokespeople for emerging audiences? Candidates might be found among staffers who are:

- rising leaders in association or chapter activities or committees
- leading or slated to lead regions
- on the partnership track
- developing a deep expertise in a newsworthy content category such as retirement planning, education reform or labor relations
- positioned with a compelling personal story that conveys your organizational message

Those who are already positioned as experts include:

- association board members
- association executive directors
- firm partners and principals
- regional managers
- division or business unit leaders
- C-level leaders
- staffers presenting at conferences

Prepare:

Equip current and emerging experts with media training so they are ready when the right media opportunities occur. Be on the lookout for low-risk opportunities for initial interviews, such as internal blogs and publications, smaller markets, and friendly trade publications.

Take our quiz! Please see next page.

Take our quiz!

How to Choose a Media Trainer

Media training is a specialty within strategic communication. This quick quiz will help you size up the qualifications of media trainers.

1. The trainers are:

- a) public relations lifers
- b) former journalists
- c) editors of the company magazine
- d) certified trainers with extensive media experience

2. The session will include:

- a) memorization drills so the trainees know what to say
- b) review of the questions most likely to be asked
- c) war stories from the trainer's glory days as a news correspondent
- d) techniques that equip trainees to respond confidently to any question

3. The most important thing for participants to understand about the media is:

- a) you can't trust any reporter
- b) you can always review the story before it goes to press
- c) what their news priorities are
- d) if you can guess their bias, you can game your answers accordingly

4. The best kind of practice in a media training session is:

- a) several short interviews with a working journalists – in a confidential setting, of course
- b) if the participants understand the principles, they don't need to practice
- c) Q & A's with organization public relations staffers
- d) participants should interview each other

5. Cutting edge media technology is a must for media training because:

- a) you have to know how you look on camera
- b) it's not – media training is about gaining skills and confidence regardless of the medium
- c) everything ends up on YouTube or Facebook these days
- d) it's the only way the communications department can get budget for more toys

6. Crisis communication training is necessary:

- a) once you've mastered media training 101
- b) only for executives
- c) it's not – that's what public relations people are for
- d) for credible spokespeople for each line of business, region or brand

7. There's no crying in media skills training. True or false?

- a) False. It's all about tough love.
- b) True. Professional, experienced trainers critique with class.

8. The sign of a successfully completed media training workshop is that participants leave saying:

- a) I need a drink.
- b) I'll never read or hear a news report the same way again.
- c) Our public relations staffers deserve a raise.
- d) I'm sure I can handle the next media call that comes my way.

Scoring

The best option for each question:

1 d; 2 d; 3 c; 4 a; 5 b; 6 d; 7 b; 8 d (or c!)

About

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A business journalist since 1981, **Joanne Y. Cleaver** has profiled executives, covered industry trends, and managed major research projects for national publications including the Chicago Tribune, Crain's Chicago Business, MoneyWatch.com, Crain's New York Business, Inc., Working Woman, Working Mother, Entrepreneur, the American Society of Women Accountants, and numerous others. From 2004 to 2008, she was a deputy business editor with the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. She taught graduate-level newswriting for two years at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, and has led workshops in creative nonfiction and blogging.

Cleaver has conducted media training workshops for executives at Tribune Digital, law firm partners, CPA firm partners, startup founders and nonprofit executives.

As president of Wilson-Taylor Associates, Inc., Cleaver has designed and managed major research-driven strategic communications projects for business associations including Women in Cable Telecommunications, the American Society of Women Accountants, the American Women's Society of CPAs, and others. She has authored seven books: three on family travel, three on small-business growth and, most recently, *The Career Lattice* (McGraw Professional, 2012).

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