

What to Do When Media Professionals Contact You

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With all the press releases and media activity your Instant Income system will produce—it's likely that sooner or later, you'll receive a call from a reporter. When you do, don't panic.

It's a good thing. In fact, media interest can provide a tremendous opportunity to your business—if you know how to talk to them and handle media interviews. And a good interview, done well and reported well, can generate countless candidates for your certification or licensing program.

Many times, reporters need an expert for a story they're writing. Or perhaps your business becomes involved in a controversy, is the victim of a crime or disaster, or plays major role in an important development in your business niche. Whatever the reason a reporter might call you, you can use the opportunity to tell your story to your audience—and have a positive impact on your business.

Here's a checklist of things to keep in mind when talking to the media:

1. When a reporter calls, take a moment to determine exactly why the reporter is calling—and what story they're really trying to tell.

Find out exactly who is calling, the media outlet they represent, and why that person wants to talk to you. If the interview request is unsolicited and you feel a bit uneasy about why they're calling you, ask politely what the reporter's deadline is and if you can get back to him or her shortly.

That way you can double-check your facts. Most reporters don't mind being called back, because they don't want to report erroneous facts any more than you want to be responsible for being the source of erroneous facts.

2. Always treat media representative courteously and with respect.

99.9% of the time, reporters are not calling to write a negative exposé about your company. And being featured in the media can be great for business. So be engaging and interesting, and stay focused on the *true purpose of the interview*.

Unless it's a deadline emergency, agree on the time the interview will take place. Will it be over the phone or in person? If in person, where will you meet? If over the phone, which of you will be calling the other? Also try to determine the length of the interview and the topics for discussion.

If your schedule changes and you cannot do the interview after all (or at the appointed time), be sure to notify the reporter immediately. Breaking an appointment at the last minute won't exactly inspire the reporter to say wonderful things about you or your business. But if you're honest with the reporter about why you must cancel or reschedule the interview well in advance of the appointment time, at least they'll appreciate that you haven't wasted their time for an interview that's not going to take place.

3. Know your topic and your industry. Then test your knowledge.

Know how to state your message clearly and concisely, and be able to support it through facts and figures, anecdotes, expert opinions, and examples. Have a friend or family member ask you questions about your area of expertise (like a reporter would) and then—in 30 seconds or less—give them a concise answer.

This forces you to create “sound bites” that can be replicated in print.

Check with your family member to be certain they understood what you meant. If the person helping you practice doesn’t understand, neither will the reporter. Practice, practice, practice.

4. Stay focused.

You must be prepared for that time (and there will be many) when a reporter or an editor will call you. In order to do that, you must also learn something about the various types of media who might call you—print, radio, television and Internet outlets. Don’t rely solely on what you read in these pages. Educate yourself by knowing about the major media outlets in your industry and in the business community at large.

When you’re being interviewed, give the journalist your undivided attention. Keep interruptions—such as cell phones and co-workers, children and other disruptions—to a minimum. The last thing you want to do is appear unprofessional, scattered and out-of-control.

Make sure not to give *too much information*—or the reporter may become overwhelmed and miss the important points of your message. Think short, simple sound bites.

Additionally, if you are uncomfortable with any question, try to avoid saying “no comment.” Only with rare exceptions—and only if you have built a long-term close relationship with the reporter—will your comments actually be kept off the record. If you truly cannot respond to a difficult question, state a reason that you cannot respond, such as, “The agreement is currently being reviewed by legal counsel, so I’m not certain of its status.”

Many news outlets have begun reporting such news anyway, buffering the statement with the reason a source cannot comment to a question, such as, *Jackson Road Furniture may merge with Downing Street Decor by August 1. According to an officer of the company familiar with the negotiations, who spoke on condition of anonymity because legal counsel has not reviewed the merger agreement, more than 75 Downing employees could be laid off...*

If you must decline to answer a question, make sure your reason for doing so is plausible—as the reason itself may show up in print. A straight “no comment” answer will almost always suggest to readers that you or your company are hiding something.

5. Stay in control.

There are some journalists who will try to create controversy. Think about it. Have you ever seen a totally one-sided news story? Rarely. That's because reporters usually try to get someone on the other side of the issue to dispute the first person's position.

You may be asked to comment on "the other side" of the story, which may not be a popular viewpoint. If this happens, try to bridge a negative point with a positive one such as commenting that, *While Mr. Smith favors sanctions on independent machine-tool shops, the truth is that these trained professionals have been responsible for some 16,000 life-enhancing product patents in the last year alone—and employ more than 684,000 hardworking Americans with families. His sanctions would cripple these businesses and the good work they are doing.*

6. Work hard to make certain reporters understand and use your message correctly.

If you've done interviews where you didn't like the ultimate story that showed up in print, it may have happened because the reporter missed the main points of your message.

The single best way to insure your primary message doesn't get lost on its way to print is to develop a publicity and media strategy that's 100% in line with your business's central message. Work hard during these interviews to incorporate three critical elements:

- Your *Superior Customer Benefit* (see *Section One: Prospecting* for details)
- The solutions you provide to common problems, challenges or aspirations of the reader
- Your free downloadable giveaway at your website's squeeze page

Incorporating these three elements into any interview is a critical component to an effective free publicity program. Your interview comments should coincide with the messages you convey through all other marketing channels.

When you know with conviction why your company exists, what its strengths are, how it serves the public and what distinguishes you from others in your niche, that message will come through loud and clear in all you do—including in any media interviews that come your way.

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