

Preparing for a radio or television interview

If you get a call to contribute to either a radio or television interview you should use the same checks you would do if you were invited to give a press interview these include knowledge of the subject, knowledge of the company line and permission to speak on this subject. Often there is a temptation, because it is the radio or television to give an interview without as much preparation (the power of the media) but it can come across very obviously if this is the case, so it should be avoided.

You should ensure that you know what the television or radio station is and what the programme is that you will be contributing to; there are major differences between a serious national or regional news programme and a feature on a radio station's 'drive-time' show.

The second thing to be aware of is the requirement for the piece. As you would with a press interview, you need to know what the story is that they want you to cover and what your contribution will be (for example, a five minute interview or a short sound bite quote). You need to also know the details of the interview, where will it take place and when.

Before the interview, you should prepare a series of sound bites. These are short, self-contained quotes that can be used as part of a longer interview or could be edited down if there was a change in requirements and a shorter piece is required. For example, here are some famous sound bites:

"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." — Franklin D. Roosevelt

"I feel the hand of history upon our shoulders" — Tony Blair

They are short, sharp and powerful lines that convey the main message you are delivering. You should be ready to use at least one in any interview; however, they should be delivered somewhat naturally. As with a presentation, the public will recognise if you are too well rehearsed.

Powerful Interview Techniques

The first and most important thing to ensure for any interview is that you are prepared to get what you want to say across during the interview. Again, you should prepare in the same way you would for a press interview using a list or mind map to give you the major points you wish to cover. Of course you may well not be able to use this, particularly on television where reading from a script should be reserved for official statements that are intended to be delivered formally as such.

To start you should carry out your preparation and highlight the two or three major messages (this may be some of the statistical information you have prepared), the central message for the story (your sound bite) and a web address where people can find out more information. You need to keep these two or three items fresh in your mind and be ready to put them across.

When giving an interview you need to look to speak in short punchy sentences. This has the advantage of allowing the interviewer to ask questions (and keep the interview moving on) and also allows for edit-points.

Using Edit Points

In many cases when you are giving an interview it will be being recorded and will be edited before transmission. The editing allows the journalist to add information around the interview, remove errors and ensure the interview is the right amount of time for the slot available. For editing, you should remember two things when being asked questions:

- **Where possible, reiterate the question** – If the question was ‘What is the issue with teenage obesity?’ rather than answering ‘it is a major issue and one we are dealing with...’ try ‘teenage obesity is a major issue...’ The second answer allows the interviewer to edit out the question and your answer becomes a stand-alone quote, and therefore much more usable.
- **Use short sentences with following pauses** – Resist the temptation to keep talking for a long time. To give a perfect response, pause briefly before you start talking, give a short response and then pause at the end. In this way the journalist can easily edit the piece as the pauses give edit-points, clear air which can be cut to and from.

In this way you will be more likely to have your interview used and also reused. For example, a long interview for the lunchtime news can be easily edited for the evening bulletin.

How to speak on radio

Do you know how you sound on the radio? It is quite simple to find out how you sound even if you have not been interviewed on radio before by using a Dictaphone or tape recorder and recording yourself going through an interview as if it was real.

The question you have to ask is how do you think you sound, now that you have heard yourself? Review the recording and ask some questions:

- **What is your tonal quality?** – Do you have a monotone (flat) voice or do you have some inflection? You should try to aim to have a good vocal range as this will be more interesting for the listener.
- **Do you sound interested in the subject?** – If you sound bored, your audience will (literally) switch off. Again, a lot of this comes down to the tone of your voice.
- **Do you sound believable?** – Would you believe what you are saying? You should not be too rehearsed or defensive, be open and approachable when answering questions and try to give positive responses.
- **Do you sound nervous?** – Similar to a good presentation, some nerves are good but being too nervous will ruin your style. Use the relaxation techniques we discussed earlier in the book and try to imagine that this is a conversation only between you and the host.
- **Do you swear or use religious references?** – Review your interview and look out for unexpected swear words (whereas a rare ‘bloody’ may be acceptable, it should be avoided) and also avoid religious references (of the ‘Oh my God!’ or ‘Christ that was a disaster...’ style). You run the risk of upsetting parts of the audience and will be remembered for the wrong reasons.

If you maintain an upbeat vocal style you will retain the interest of the listener more easily and you will come across as being someone that they are more likely to believe in and be more engaged with.

Why not contact Event-A-Tainment for comprehensive media training or for a professional spokesperson to act on your behalf. Visit: <http://www.event-a-tainment.co.uk/spokespeople.html>

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