

7 Elements of a Media Relations Policy

By Rebecca Hart, APR

It's no secret that reporters are always looking for good sources. And by providing helpful and timely information, your company can become a trusted and valuable media source, which can help you get your story told. But those relationships with the media don't just come by happenstance. They need to be nurtured and managed.

One of the key elements of any company's public relations plan should be a media relations policy to document who is empowered and authorized to respond to the media, what that person should say and what kinds of information can or can't be released.

Here are seven elements of a good media relations policy:

- A list, by name and position, of those in the company who are authorized to respond to media inquiries. For people not authorized to talk to the media, state clearly to whom they should direct media inquiries and emphasize the importance of these requests for information.
- Media training for spokespeople, followed by brush-up sessions as necessary. Make sure no one from your organization says "no comment."
- A library of standard key messages and other important information about the company. Make sure spokespeople stick to their area of expertise. If information isn't available within your company, try to help the reporter find an outside source.
- Ensure that all spokespeople know what information is a matter of public record. If a reporter asks about it, even if it's sensitive information, you must share it. If you don't, you'll lose credibility and the reporter will develop other sources for information.
- Ensure that all spokespeople know if there's litigation pending. Attorneys usually ban communication with the media about a pending case because anything that's been said publicly is admissible in court. In this case, it's advisable to work with your attorney to prepare a polite statement that says you'll be happy to address the case when it's out of litigation.
- Instruct all spokespeople to record or take notes during any media interview, whenever possible. Also be sure the person who is interviewed sends a memo about the interview to a designated executive as soon as possible. Someone in your organization needs to be on top of all stories in progress.
- Be realistic about coverage. Expect a few minor errors or omissions, but if the story completely misrepresents your company, write a polite letter that requests a correction. Unless the correction is critical, don't call or question the reporter's professionalism. And never go over the reporter's head to complain unless you want to burn that bridge forever.

Rebecca Hart, APR helps businesses establish credibility and increase awareness to build competitive advantage by developing strategic marketing communications plans, then finding the most effective way to implement them. To supplement her customized strategic planning services, she has also developed self-study materials to help small business owners promote their businesses. For more information, visit www.simplyPR.com or contact her at theprpro@mediaone.net.



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