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PR in Action: The Media Interview Request

by Cyrus Mavalwala

Your phone rings. It's a reporter requesting an interview about your company or about an industry issue, such as the recent BetonSports saga.

You've already answered the phone, but must you continue with the interview? What's the smartest move you can make? This article highlights the best course of action to take when a reporter calls.

Establishing an enterprise-wide media interview protocol is important to ensure the same process is followed by all employees every time a journalist calls. This way your corporate message will always be clear and consistent.

The Power of PR

The power of [public relations](#), and specifically media relations, lies in this discipline's unique ability to build third-party credibility. Whereas advertising is what you say about yourself, PR is what others say about you, or your organization. Do you buy your favorite newspaper or magazine for the ads? And if you read an ad, do you view it through a different set of lenses than reading an article from a regular columnist? This is why you should take interview requests seriously.

I digress, but the fact is that positive media coverage for your organization must be at the heart of your marketing mix--and this is especially true for the historically secretive I-gaming corporate world. Positive media coverage plays a critical role in building credibility with an unknown brand, repairing a damaged brand, and/or supporting an existing brand.

The media interview is an opportunity to create a win-win situation for both the journalist and the company spokesperson. The journalist wants the news scoop so he/she can write an insightful article and the company spokesperson wants to improve the company's name recognition with the audience. Keeping these two objectives in mind, the following three steps will help bring the sought after outcomes and foster a stronger relationship between journalist and company.

Step 1: Secure the Facts

The first thing to do when any reporter calls is to view the conversation as a request for an interview, not the interview itself, so keep it short and to the point. Although always on deadline, journalists will understand that you cannot immediately participate in the interview--but their requests must bounce to the top of your priority list.

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Last week's poll:

How should operators address the recent legal hazards experienced by BetonSports with regards to informing their clientele?

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Determine the five Ws: who, what, where, when and why. Obtain the reporter's full name, the name of his/her media outlet (newspaper, magazine, television or radio station, Web site, etc.) and his/her phone and e-mail. Ask him/her to explain the story assignment, what he/she wants to discuss and with whom he/she would like to speak. He/she may have phoned you because it was the only contact number accessible. Are you the only interview or is he/she speaking with other companies? Perhaps most importantly, request his/her interview deadline and work to his/her schedule -- whether it is 30 minutes or three days.

Reassure the journalist that you, or the appropriate spokesperson, will quickly return his/her call to set up the interview. Living up to your promise of a prompt return call with the correct spokesperson is a smart first step in building a positive, trusting, long-term relationship with this journalist.

Step 2: Decode the Info

If you have a public relations agency or internal PR person, call them and provide the information collected, and they should immediately spin into action. If not, speak with your head of marketing and/or CEO, determine the best next steps and quickly update the journalist.

Two questions must be immediately addressed:

1. Is the topic of the interview something your company should speak about? Although it's usually in your best interest to talk, news is often based on conflict since in today's society no one is interested in banal, mundane routine. Speaking even on a thorny issue may position you as a forward-thinking industry authority.
2. If you want to enter into a public debate, who is the best corporate spokesperson to address this issue or topic? Is this individual media-trained so he/she can properly handle even the most difficult questions?

Step 3: Preparation Wins the Jackpot

Since you only have one chance to make a good first impression with a journalist, prepare, prepare and prepare some more.

Research the specific journalist to determine what kind of stories he/she has written. Familiarize yourself with the specific media outlet and the audience that they target; a journalist may be thought of as the conduit to a broader audience of readers/viewers/listeners.

The vast majority of interview questions are predictable, so do your homework, anticipate the toughest questions and rehearse the most appropriate answers. Keep in mind that the reporter is trying to tell a story to his/her audience; frame your answers so they are easily understood by this downstream audience, and be aware of the concerns/issues the audience may have.

Review or develop three key speaking points or messages that you want to deliver, in addition to answering the journalist's questions.

How do you handle yourself during the actual interview? Good question! That's a topic for a future article, but if you need some immediate assistance don't hesitate to contact me at cyrus@advantiscomm.com.



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About the Author

Cyrus Mavalwala has more than a decade of B2B and B2C PR experience and is the president of [Advantis Communications Inc.](#) For years, I-gaming and technology clients have been reaping the benefits of [Advantis' all senior team](#), where associates each have 10 to 25 years PR experience. Advantis has been managing the PR for the Global Interactive I-Gaming Summit & Expo for the past four years and [Cyrus' presentation on PR from GIGSE '06 can be viewed here](#). Advantis Communications Inc. drives results with PR programs that communicate the right messages to media, customers and employees. Contact Cyrus at cyrus@advantiscomm.com or visit www.advantiscomm.com.

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