

Strategic StoryTelling's

value in

Media Training



Pinnacle Communications Group

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Media relations is a component of public relations focused on building, maintaining, and leveraging relationships with journalists and media outlets to develop and manage your personal and institutional brand. Incorporating strategic storytelling into your interview training prepares you to **make every interaction an opportunity.**

The principles of strategic storytelling in media training prepare you to communicate clearly, confidently, and authentically, not just about the topic at hand, but to always be ready to connect the conversation to your broader narrative. Media training helps complete the circle of your strategic storytelling journey by preparing you to speak about your organization with the same confidence and themes you use in your writing and actions. It's the ribbon on the package.

Your narrative is the sum of the stories you tell about your organization. Strategic storytelling, by design, is the purposeful identification and alignment of stories around your organization's objectives. The narrative is the overarching theme that ties all your stories together - it is defined by the stories you tell and defines your storytelling. In many ways, the narrative is your organizational mission and values.

Media relations is an intertwined spectrum of activities - from basic relationship building to announcements, conversations, and crisis management - where it readies you to bridge the most difficult conversation to the positivity of your narrative, the motivations and values that shape your decision making.

This handbook focuses on strategies for communicating concisely, handling challenging questions, and projecting a positive and professional image.

As is the case in any aspect of strategic storytelling, **honesty, transparency, and proactivity** are essential across the spectrum of media relations.

Honesty In media relations is crucial for building trust and maintaining a positive reputation. It requires being truthful and ethical in all communications with the media and the public. This approach fosters long-term credibility and stronger relationships.

Transparency Means being open and clear when communicating. It fosters trust and credibility. It involves disclosing information, strategically, even when potentially unfavorable. Presume reporters will discover all aspects of an event. If they find out from you, it is significantly easier to manage the narrative.

Proactivity and transparency can go hand in hand. Being transparent often requires being proactive. Proactive strategies seek out opportunities to engage with the media rather than simply reacting to news or crises. It involves building relationships with journalists, crafting compelling narratives, and proactively pitching media outlets to tell your story. This approach helps establish a consistent message, enhances thought leadership, and builds long-term relationships that are leverageable in good times and bad.

HTP is most significant when managing crisis. It is critical for building trust, controlling rumors, and maintaining or restoring credibility. The truth will come out. It always does. Ensuring the facts, no matter how damaging they may seem, come from you and not a third party is *the* foundational point of issues management. Being accurate and timely ensures stakeholders feel informed and view you as the reliable source of information. Ultimately, it will help to rebuild relationships and foster resilience.

While ensuring you are the source of relevant facts, it is important to be careful not to use those facts to assign blame. **Present facts without commentary.** Present all the information so that your audience has the requisite evidence to make the correct choice - whether the blame lies in your lap or someone else's.

3 Things to think about when framing your thoughts

Prepare

- Identify 2-3 key points you want to be your core message.
- Develop concise ways to express them.

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- Think about the interview topic and how your area of expertise provides solutions or improves lives.
 - Consider concise, impactful answers.

Practice

Anticipate

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- Are there any possible negatives related to this topic?
 - Be prepared to talk about it positively.
 - Be ready to confidently acknowledge differing views and articulately define the good.



Q and A

Before beginning your media engagement journey, work with your team to create a key message document. Consider likely questions and the points you want to convey. Combine the two to formulate answers that are easy to understand, memorable, and actionable.

- Prioritize Your Talking Points
- Keep Your Language Simple
- Make Your Message Meaningful

It's not a script. You don't have to memorize it. This is the foundation for all your interviews. It's a living document that grows with each experience. Creating it and familiarizing yourself with it will keep your message concise and clear.

Flagging

Flagging is a way to communicate your priorities by listing them straightforwardly. It lays out a roadmap for an interview, signaling to the reporter (and ultimately, the audience) key points that are important and should be noted or remembered.

Flagging serves as a means to establish and maintain control of your interview. You are planting follow-up seeds with the interviewer by suggesting the direction of the next questions. Your priorities are often your *why*.

Examples

*“What we are doing is bettering lives. We’re accomplishing this by **a**, **b**, and **c**.”*

A, b, and c become natural next questions for the interviewer. Because you have highlighted these points as priorities, a reporter is naturally inclined to seek greater detail. This focuses the interview on your key messages and allows you to speak in greater detail in areas with which you are prepared.

Flagging helps ensure your key messages are not lost in the noise of an interview and increases the chances of them being accurately conveyed. It also helps manage expectations and guides the audience to focus on what you want them to understand.





Concise

For **television, radio, or podcasts**, try your best to condense your answers to **30-40 seconds**. This helps you maintain focus on the most impactful elements of your message.

Print and **online** journalists allow for greater detail, but still keep your answers to **two minutes** or less.

In all cases, allow the reporter to decide if he/she want more detail.

Confidence

You are an expert in the field in which you are speaking. Speak declaratively; your knowledge matters. Avoid terms like *I think* or *I believe*. This is unnecessary language that weakens your standing. Say what you know and say it with passion.

Common Sense

Be human and natural when you speak. Don't overthink. Avoid non-answers. It is okay to acknowledge that not every opinion agrees with you, or even that some facts may not support your objective. Positioning your solution as the only solution can damage credibility. Use your knowledge and expertise to show your solution is the best solution.



Always on the Record

There is no such thing as *off-the-record*. Always presume that everything you say and do will be in the story.

Journalists, particularly in less formal mediums like podcasting, may start your interview with an “off-the-record” conversation to establish a casual atmosphere. Similarly, they may ask for additional “off-the-record” details after the interview is complete.

Don’t be afraid if they want to go off-the-record. Ninety percent of the time, they legitimately only want to talk. Just always keep your mind *on* the record and speak accordingly.



Positive

Always speak positively. Even in the most difficult situations, it is possible to speak positively. Convey solutions that your expertise or research offers to the situation being discussed.

Purpose

Let your knowledge and expertise speak for itself. There's no need to directly plug your work, unless asked. The expertise you're showcasing will promote your brand.

Posture

How you say it can be just as important as what you say. Body language, eye contact, facial expressions, and tone of voice all impact how a message is received.

Bridging

Bridging is a technique where you redirect a challenging or off-topic question back to your narrative. You acknowledge the question, then smoothly transition to a more favorable line of questioning. This technique helps maintain control of the interview.

1. Acknowledge the question positively. You don't have to repeat the question; simply acknowledge it.
2. Employ a transitional phrase that positions your knowledge and expertise as a meaningful, stronger perspective.
3. Illustrate the value of your knowledge with a return to your key messages.

Transitional Phrases

1. *"Our data illustrates that..."*
2. *"I've heard that opinion, our expertise shows..."*
3. *"My experience is..."*
4. *"The experience of our team is..."*

Always be positive. Never degrade another opinion - everyone is entitled to one. A bridge positions your expertise as the more viable path.





Facts

Know all the facts, good and bad. If you don't have the answer, don't panic, be sure you are prepared to concede that fact in a way that illustrates forthright confidence. You'll get the information someone needs. Nothing damages credibility more than fumbling for an answer or giving out bad information.

Formulation

It's okay to gather your thoughts. You don't have to provide an instantaneous answer to a question. Taking a few seconds to formulate your answer is helpful in many ways. It ensures you speak more clearly. Our natural tendency is to avoid silence. Feeling you have to talk right away can lead to fumbling and rambling, which damages credibility. Those few seconds of thinking show the interviewer that you are taking the question seriously and want to provide the best answer possible.

You can't do it every time. But if you need to, it's okay.



Notes

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