

"The power of the press." That phrase holds strong meaning, especially when it comes to what that power can do for a business. See what a PR executive has to say about how you can learn to foster that all-important relationship with the media.

# Dealing with the Media

During my career dealing with the media, I've seen publicity generate hundreds of millions of dollars worth of sales for companies, enhance their exposure and credibility in the eyes of the public, and prove to be a very valuable and cost effective marketing vehicle. The secret to this success wasn't due to the number of news releases the company was sending out or how persistent they were with a reporter. Instead, it was due to their ability to understand how the media operates.

Below are some basic, and not so basic, things to consider when dealing with the press.

## A Different Animal

Working with the media is far different from working within the corporate world.

The same formalities and protocol typically aren't in place. If, for instance, a reporter calls at the last minute to cancel an interview, it's not due to a lack of professionalism. It's likely because they had to turn their attention to a "bigger" breaking news story and had to make their own executive decision about which story to cover. Most journalists will also take a very blunt approach with the people they're interviewing. Some company CEOs and presidents probably are not accustomed to being dealt with so directly and could be offended. Other differences between the world of journalism and the corporate world include the following:

- While there are definitely deadlines, there aren't necessarily set schedules.
- Plans can change at a moment's notice.
- Stories can change.

- The reporter decides what's news, not the company.
- You need them more than they need you.
- You should be willing to adjust to the journalist's schedule.

These are sometimes difficult concepts to grasp for some businesspeople who are accustomed to a corporate structure. But when they do understand it, the results can be very worthwhile.

## Spin it

Not every company, project, or product is newsworthy. That is, unless it's made newsworthy. There are many ways to take a subject and put a "spin" on it that makes it both interesting and newsworthy to the press. One effective technique is to tie it into a recent trend. For example, one urban development company was smart to react to an article in *Newsweek* regarding the trend of seniors moving into the city. The company, knowing that many of its buyers were

older couples who had given up regular tee times in the suburbs for a chance to live downtown, gave a reporter a call. Within days, the developer and the property were being featured in the local news.

Another effective technique is to be proactive. Too many people sit back and hope that the media will be in touch with them. But with the right approach, there's no reason not to call a reporter. For example, affordable housing continues to be a hot topic in many parts of the country. In Colorado, an affordable housing developer wanted to share the message that the prospering for-profit residential market was hurting affordable housing (due, in part, to rising real estate values). By being proactive, and backing up their statements with facts, the affordable housing developer was given the opportunity to share this important message with the public.

### Stop Everything!

If a reporter calls, take it. If a company wants to establish a good working relationship with the press, it's important its representatives show the media that they're accessible and willing to answer questions. Many times, the opportunity to build this relationship will happen late in the afternoon, when a reporter is on deadline and needs information to complete his or her story. For the reporter, *tomorrow won't do*.

For example, let's say an airline CEO refuses to break from a meeting for five minutes to take a reporter's deadline call and answer a few questions about holiday travel. He decides he can handle it in the morning. The following morning, the same CEO is steaming because he sees that his chief competition was quoted extensively in a front page article about how airlines — and specifically his competition — are meeting the needs of travelers during the holidays (guess which airlines' phones are ringing off the hook that day). And that's only the beginning of the first CEO's problems: given the fact the "competition" was willing to break from her 5:00 meeting for a few minutes to talk to the reporter, she will likely become the reporter's first option for future stories. An opportunity lost.

### When it's Out of Your Hands

Executives who are accustomed to reviewing and approving all company documents may be inclined to ask to see an article before it appears in print. As Tony Soprano would say "fahgetaboutit" — because it's not going to happen. For most reporters, requesting to see their story before it's

JUST A FEW YEARS AGO, behind downtown Denver's Union Station train station, there was an undeveloped parcel of land that remained overlooked by real estate developers. Train tracks, trash, and a handful of transients were some of the reasons the property didn't draw much attention. But a company with a vision — East West Partners, known primarily for their outstanding work in mountain towns such as Vail and Beaver Creek, — decided to purchase the land and transform it into a high-end residential and retail community named Riverfront Park (due to its proximity to the Cherry Creek and South Platte Rivers in Denver).

There were a number of challenges associated with the development, including helping people understand the value of its location, changing the area's image, familiarizing people with East West Partner's quality work and, obviously, generating sales. Working with the press, and generating stories about the area and the company, became a key way to address these challenges.

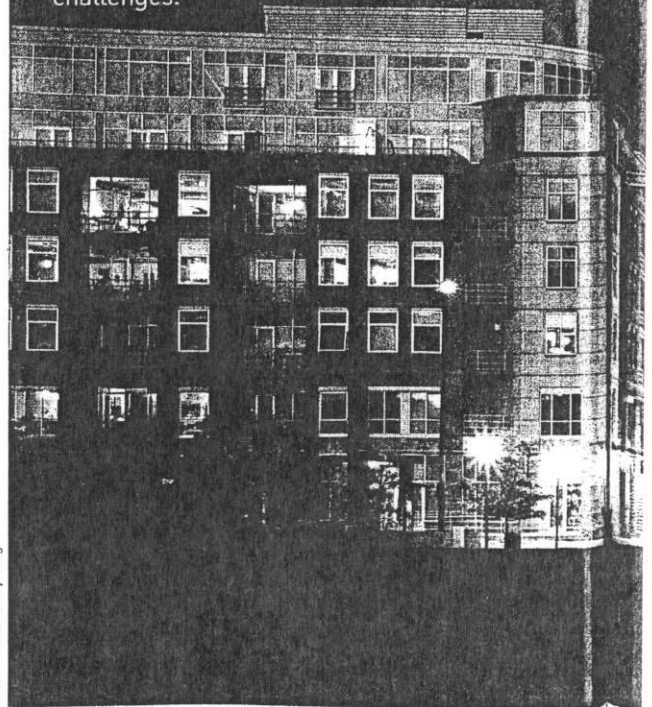


Photo Credit: Cheryl Unger