

# What to Say When the Media Calls

By Carolyn Moncel

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If the media were to call you today for an interview, would you know what to do or say? That question was posed during a recent conference on small-business ownership and micro enterprise creation, which was held here in Paris. I watched the reactions around the room, and it occurred to me that for most small-business owners, the only thing more frightening than conducting a follow-up phone call with a reporter is having that same reporter actually interview them.

There is only one way to overcome the fear. You have to simply adopt and apply an old U.S. Army recruitment slogan, "Be Prepared." Don't get caught without an answer the next time the media calls. Follow these quick tips for success:

Ask the reporter to describe the subject and story angle for the interview.

Establish the medium for the interview (i.e. live or taped television, print, radio, etc.)

Discover when (date and time) and where (by phone, e-mail or in person) the interview will take place. Also try to determine if the reporter will need additional information from you, as well as the story's deadline.

Research the reporter's past articles so that you'll be comfortable with the story's tone.

Create talking points. These are brief positive statements about you and your company that you will want to be included in the story.

Anticipate the types of questions that that reporter might ask, and prepare truthful answers for them.

Assume that everything you say to a reporter - jokingly or otherwise, will be used in the story. Always be aware of what is being stated, and if an awkward silence develops, don't feel obligated to keep talking if you have no more to say on the subject matter.

Avoid speculation or hypothetical situations. It could lead to being misquoted. You are the expert so stick to what you know.

Admit when you don't know the answer to a question. However, make it your top priority to find the answers and deliver them to the reporter immediately. It is also fine to take a moment to think before answering a question.

Avoid using technical terms or jargon. You must be able to explain your ideas simply and concisely.

Take notes and don't be afraid to ask the reporters questions as well.

Make yourself available by phone or e-mail in case the reporter has additional questions or wants to do a final fact check before completing the story. This will help give clarification to something you've said or give an opportunity to fix something if you've misspoken.

Thank the reporter for selecting you for the interview.

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