Smile, You’re Live!

Appearing as a guest on a television or radio show can be a breeze—if you prepare.

By Gene Rose

You’ve been asked to be a guest on a television or radio program. The keys to success in communicating your message lie in your ability to prepare for and deliver it. By following a few simple interview do’s and don’ts, you can effectively deliver your message to the masses, often for free, through the use of the broadcast medium.

Before the interview, your preparation should focus on two key areas: background information on the media program and your message.

GATHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION
Know that your audience is the key to any effective presentation. Your participation in a television or radio interview should be an interactive presentation. First, learn about the reporter or interviewer and the format of the program.

◆ Is the topic of discussion within their expertise?
◆ Is the interviewer known for “attacking” guests, or is he amicable toward the people he has on? The format of the show may influence how you plan to deliver your message.
◆ Is the show “live” or is it prerecorded?

Live interviews may require more time to adequately prepare your message. Taped interviews are a bit more forgiving—you can stop and start over, a luxury you don’t have when you are live.

◆ Will the show be accepting phone-in calls from the general public?
◆ What are the demographics of the show’s audience?
◆ What is the topic of the interview, and why was it chosen?

DECIDE YOUR MESSAGE
As the saying goes, think before you speak. Decide in advance what key points you want to convey. Designate a few of your most persuasive examples to support the goal of your message. If it makes you feel more comfortable, outline these points on index cards and take them with you to the studio. Practice your “soundbites” before the interview. Arrive early so you can meet the interviewer before the show starts.

DELIVER THE MESSAGE
Fleishman-Hillard, a leading communications consulting firm, offers the following tips for delivering an effective interview:

1. Don’t over-answer. Short answers are better than long.
2. If you are unsure of an answer to a question, “bridge” to a related point you want to make. Or offer to assist the reporter in finding an answer.
4. Correct false charges or incorrect facts given by a reporter.
5. Frame your responses in a positive way.
7. Be likable.
8. Keep your cool. Ten seconds of losing your temper will last longer in the public’s mind than an hour of insightful comments.
10. Be yourself!

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TELEPHONE TIPS
If your interview is conducted via the telephone, you have the luxury of preparation time. If the deadline allows, ask the reporter if you can call him or her back. Additionally, you possess the ability to use your notes freely, which will allow you to remember any key message points or visual pictures. Still act as if you are in an interview, however, by following the previous interview tips.

Be aware of the tone of your voice and ask for feedback to ensure that the interviewer has accurately received your message.

TELEVISION INTERVIEWS
Preparing for a television interview requires a visual side that radio and telephone interviews don’t have. Here are a few tips:

1. Talk to the interviewer, not the camera.
2. Keep a pleasant expression and, when appropriate, smile.
3. Don’t wear gaudy jewelry, overdone makeup or patterned clothes. Wear bright, solid colors. They look best on camera.
4. Speak and gesture as you normally would. Don’t yell into the microphone.
5. Sit erect, but not completely straight. Lean slightly forward in the chair.
6. Hold your “interview attitude” until the camera is off.
7. What you say is just as important as how you say it. Face the microphones and lights. Say what you want to say, and say it confidently.

Using television and radio can be a very effective way to get your name and message out there. By preparing a little beforehand, you can rest assured the exposure will be positive.

POINTS TO REMEMBER BEFORE THE INTERVIEW:
• Gather background information on the interviewer and the program’s format and topic.
• Prepare key message points and examples.
• Practice delivering your message.

DURING THE INTERVIEW:
• Be positive and friendly.
• Share your message confidently.
• Keep your cool.
• Dress appropriately.
• Maintain your “interview attitude” from the start of the interview until the camera is off.

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