



Communications in a Crisis

Reputation Protection

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McGUIREWOODS
CONSULTING
Public Affairs Solutions



Today you will learn

- Understanding the Media – what they want
- Controlling the Message – what you want
- 3 Critical Message Delivery Techniques
- Dealing with a social media crisis
- The essential Do's – these will make you
- The essential Don'ts – these will break you



Justice Department Freezes Funding for National Child Advocates Nonprofit Amid Questions Over Money Management

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UNDERSTANDING THE MEDIA

Reasons why a reporter is calling

- The reporter knows something
- The reporter was told by editor to call
- The reporter knows nothing – but needs a story
- The best reason – the reporter is returning your call. Establish relationships.

AXIOS Richmond



VIRGINIA MERCURY

A Crisis Is Rarely Expected And Can Come in Many Forms

- **Labor/Employee Incident**
- **Consumer Complaints – Investigations**
- **Leadership/Ownership Scandal**
- **Natural Disaster/Fire/Workplace Violence or Accident**

Investigate, Assess, Determine Actions

COMMUNICATE

- **Learn the facts – Don't Assume Anything**
- **It's better to say a little and be accurate than too much and get it wrong**
- **Acknowledging is not admitting**
- **Apologizing is not accepting liability**
- **Monitor feedback and follow-up**

CONTROLLING THE MESSAGE



- **BE PREPARED**
- Have key messages
- Have talking points
- Draft mock questions
- Conduct practice interviews
- Repeat your key messages

Developing Key Messages

- Usually three, never more than five
- Should address the main issue and the most important thing you want remembered
- Should highlight your brand
- Always positive
- Should be versatile so they can be used to answer any and every question

Developing Talking Points

- Anticipate issues that will be addressed, questions that will be asked.
- Get feedback and input from key decision makers within your organization. Getting several perspectives will refine your message.
- Should be two to three pages – not a binder.
- Define areas you want addressed that may not be on the reporter's radar screen – proactive opportunities.

SPACE X VIDEO HERE

Never go in COLD

- Take control quickly
- **Transition** to your message
- **Highlight** the positives
- **Repeat, repeat, repeat**
- Practice, practice, practice



Own the first question – have a game plan

- This is YOUR interview, an opportunity to tell YOUR story, not just answer questions
- Football teams know the first 5 offensive plays in every game before they leave the locker room – know your first move to set the tone – no matter what the question
- Be positive and confident – you are being interviewed because you have something to say



#1 Tool of the Trade - Transition

YOU CAN:

- A. Answer the question and **transition** to your message
- B. Transition** to your message and then answer the question
- C. Ignore the question and **transition** to your message

Transition Techniques

- Yes, but what is important to remember is...
- I think what your viewers, listeners, readers would like to know is...
- The reality of the situation is...
- Our mission at CASA is...
- At the end of the day what really matters is...
- If I can add another point...
- If you can not answer a question, explain and respond, “What I can tell you is...” For example: “I can not tell you that because of employee privacy, but I can tell you our policy regarding terminations is...”

Example: Why was the Virginia CASA Director Terminated?

(Message: We provide trained volunteers to speak for abused and neglected children in court proceedings.)

1. Unfortunately, we cannot discuss details around personnel issues. This action will not impact our mission to provide trained volunteers to speak for abused and neglected children in court proceedings.
2. Our mission is to provide trained volunteers to speak for abused and neglected children in court proceedings. Unfortunately, we cannot discuss details around personnel issues.
3. Our mission is to provide trained volunteers to speak for abused and neglected children in court proceedings.

#2 Tool of the Trade - Highlighting

YOU SHOULD:

- Take every opportunity to **highlight** your key messages
- **Highlight** successes with specific examples
- Share your mission and core values by **highlighting** how you live the brand

Highlighting Techniques

- Let me give you an example...
- I think what really illustrates this issue...
- What is critical to the children and families we serve...
- We have found tremendous success by...
- Let me emphasize...
- I want to make it perfectly clear...

Example: CASA's mission is to provide trained volunteers to speak for abused and neglected children in court proceedings.

1. There are nearly 1400 CASA advocates in Virginia, and we serve approximately 3500 children annually.
2. CASA recruits, trains and supervises our competent volunteers who are appointed by judges to serve children in specific cases.
3. For many of the children we serve, their CASA volunteer will be the one constant adult presence in their lives.

#3 Tool of the Trade - Repetition

- A. If you say the same thing 50 times the reporter is forced to stick to your message – if you say 50 different things the reporter can go in 50 different directions
- B. When in doubt – repeat the game plan. Reporters will create silence hoping you ramble. Reporters will make statements hoping to elicit a response. Don't be duped.
- C. Effective communicators say what happened before, what's happening now, and what is happening next. It is a way of hammering home what you want remembered. Repeat, repeat, repeat.

Example Questions:

- Why do children need their own advocates? Can't the court protect them?
- Why are tax dollars being spent on this program through the Department of Criminal Justice Services?
- Is the foster care system equipped to handle all these children?

Answer every time – “CASA promotes safe, permanent homes for all abused and neglected children.”

CHEESE RECALL VIDEO HERE

Meeting Expectations

The Public

- **Transparency** – CASA has a relationship with the community. They expect you to interact with them.
- **Honesty** – Most downfalls are not from the initial crisis, but how the crisis is handled. Highlight proactive measures being taken.
- **Humility** – Quick recognition of the situation and a sincere apology go a long way.
- **Responsibility** – Actions taken to resolve the problem and prevent a crisis from happening again are paramount.

Meeting Expectations

The Media

- **Accessibility** – You must return phone calls promptly.
- **Acknowledgement** – Recognition you are aware of the situation and are taking some action to respond.
- **Accuracy** – It is better to say very little that is true than a lot and be wrong.

Meeting Expectations

Partners – Customers, Employees, Vendors

- **Timeliness** – Your team members, volunteers and supporters should not learn about your crisis on the evening news or in the morning paper.
- **Frequency** – Update what actions are being taken; your colleagues will be asked by friends and neighbors what is happening. Word of mouth is still the oldest form of communication.
- **Security** – Focus on stability.

What Happens Without a Plan Video



Smart Brevity Is In – The Rise of Online News Services



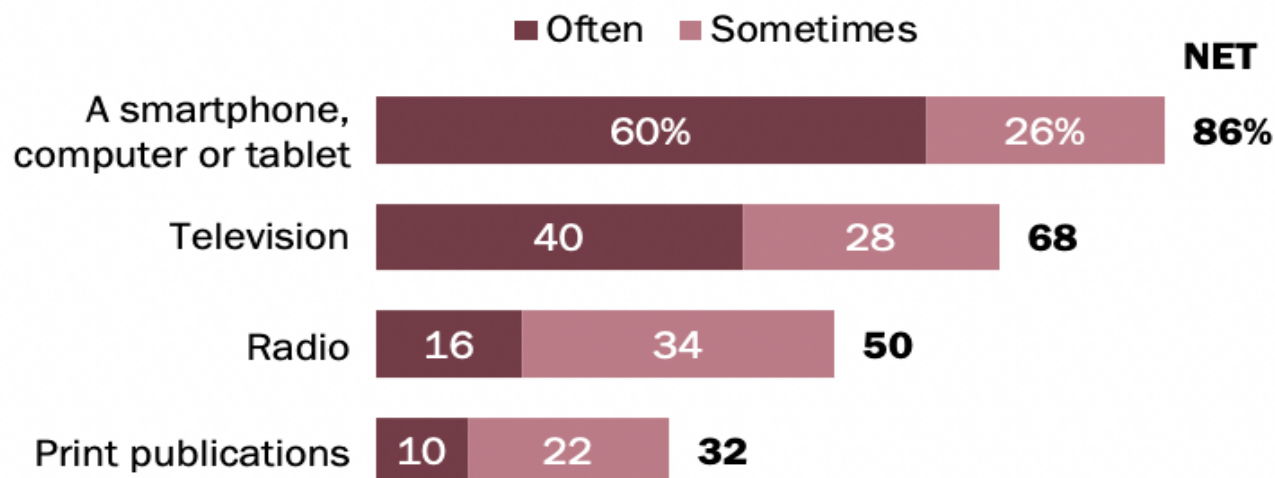
Pew Research Center

More than eight-in-ten Americans get news from digital devices

The transition of news from print, television and radio to digital spaces has caused huge disruptions in the traditional news industry, especially the print news industry. It is also reflected in the ways individual Americans say they are getting their news.

Large majority of Americans get news on digital devices

% of U.S. adults who get news ____ from ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



You can't understand November's Election — or America itself — without reckoning with how our media attention has shattered into a bunch of misshapen pieces.

- Think of it as the shards of glass phenomenon. Not long ago, we all saw news and information through a few common windows — TV, newspapers, cable. Now we find it in scattered chunks that match our age, habits, politics and passions.

Why it matters: Traditional media, at least as a center of dominant power, is dead. Social media, as its replacement for news in the internet era, is declining in dominance.



What comes next: America is splintering into more than a dozen news bubbles based on ideology, wealth, jobs, age and location.

- This means where you get your news, the voices you trust, and even the topics and cultural figures you follow could be wholly different from the person sitting next to you.
- So instead of Red America and Blue America, we'll have a dozen or more Americas — and realities. This will make understanding public opinion, and finding common agreement, even more complex and elusive.

Disclaimer: No, this doesn't mean The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal or CNN are dead. It just means their influence will wane with most people in the other bubbles. Nor does it mean Facebook and Twitter will lose relevance. They simply will be influential in tighter bubbles.



The 12 Powerful News Bubbles

- **The Musk-eteers**
- **Instagrammers**
- **TikTok Kids**
- **New-Age Grandmas**
- **MAGA Mind Melders**
- **Liberal Warriors**
- **Elite Power-Consumers**
- **The Financiers**
- **Niche-ers**
- **Emerging Majority**
- **Passive-ists**

CBS TOXIC WATER VIDEO HERE



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Message from National CASA/GAL Leadership on OJJDP Funding



The National CASA/GAL Association is behind the normal timeline of getting the National CASA/GAL proposal and budget approved by OJJDP for this year. This is only a delay and should not be misinterpreted to mean National CASA/GAL is in any danger of not receiving the funding, which is Congressionally authorized and appropriated.

10 Essential DO's

1. Be positive – negative, nasty and edgy make headlines but are not YOUR message.
2. Be direct, firm and authoritative.
3. Be consistent. Stick to the script.
4. Take responsibility. Take ownership of the issues.
5. Be constructive. Talk about action steps that are being taken.

10 Essential DO's - Continued

6. Every word counts. Speak in short, complete sentences. Keep it simple. Use everyday language.
7. Use good examples. Relevance.
8. Correct inaccurate information with positive accurate statements.
9. Stop talking when you are finished with what you have to say. Silence is okay. It is the reporter's job to fill space, not yours.
10. Repeat yourself. Key messages should be heard over and over.

10 Essential DON'Ts

1. Lie. Ever. It will come back to haunt you. Be honest and sincere. If you can not answer a question – don't, but give a good reason.
2. Say “No comment” or hide from a camera. You will look guilty of something.
3. Speak for or blame others. Speak for yourself.
4. Speculate. Say only what you know.
5. Let your guard down. Choose your words carefully.

10 Essential DON'Ts Continued

6. Use jargon. Stay away from industry acronyms.
7. Answer hypothetical questions. Return to key messages, “What I can tell you is...”
8. Answer a question you do not understand. Ask the reporter to rephrase the question.
9. Be afraid to say “I will need to get back to you on that.”
10. Go alone. Have a PR professional with you.

QUESTIONS

