



Responding to media requests in today's fast paced world: Tips and tricks for small businesses

Today's fast paced world of social media and online news media has changed the face of journalism.

With stories being posted on social media pages and websites at lightning fast speeds, breaking news becomes old news almost as fast as the story is published.

This can be stressful for small business owners and volunteer groups who cannot afford the cost of hiring a public relations expert, particularly if you know the reporter on the other end is going to be asking difficult questions. Other times the reporter may not be asking difficult questions but is trying to get the story published first. (With the ability to post stories to the Internet quickly many media publications are focused on being the first to publish a story).

With all of that in mind, take a deep breath, and read these tips for managing requests for comments and interviews from the media:

Respond as soon as reasonably possible. Responding quickly allows you an opportunity to gather information about what the reporter is looking for. Depending on the type of story you may even be able to set up an interview for later in the day or on a subsequent day, giving you time to prepare for any possible questions the reporter may ask. While it's highly unlikely a reporter will just hand over their list of questions, you can ask a reporter what information they're looking for from you, then plan to gather the information and call the reporter back.

Have a communications plan in place. A communications plan is a living document and should be comprised of 3 areas: 1. Internal Communications. 2. Public Communications. 3. Media Communications. While your business may not be able to afford to hire a communications professional, it may be well worth the money to hire a professional communications consultant who can help you set up the framework for a living communications document.

Decide who responds to the media. Some businesses are comfortable with multiple employees speaking with the media, while others prefer to have a select group of employees (or in some cases only one) person who speaks to the media.

There are pros and cons to both methods. Allowing a number of employees to respond to requests for media interviews means you're less likely to miss out on being included in a story. On the other hand, having too many employees who are able to speak with the media can lead to trouble particularly if it's a controversial issue or one the employee isn't well-versed in.

Ask what the reporter's deadline is. Deadline is journalism speak for when a story is due. With few exceptions reporters have no ability to move the deadline which is set by editors (and in the case of printed publications, by the printing schedule). If you want to be included in the story you'll have to respond to the reporter prior to their deadline.

It's free advertising for your business. Many online publications contain URL links to websites of businesses included in the stories they publish. While you cannot control what is written in the story, chances are you'll gain a bit of website traffic (which will hopefully lead to new customers).

Follow up if you weren't able to meet the reporter's deadline. Sometimes it happens. You've been in a meeting all morning and you come back to the office to find several messages from a reporter. Even if the story has already been published it's worth connecting with the reporter. In some cases it may be possible for the reporter to update the story to include your comments. If too much time has passed you can ask the reporter if they're planning to write any follow-up stories. If neither case is possible, you can use the connection to create a relationship with the reporter.

Does your small business have a communications plan in place? Melissa Jameson Writing & Communications helps small businesses, not for profits,



and entrepreneurs create comprehensive communications plans. For more information visit melissajameson.org or follow on Facebook @mjamesoncomm.