



Top 10 Tips for Media Interviews

Julia Kendrick shares her effective interview techniques that can maximise your business

Media interviews are the Holy Grail for your PR efforts. You have the time and attention of a journalist who wants to hear your opinions, which is a huge opportunity to raise your profile and get your messages out. However, many practitioners regard interviews with a sense of dread – fearing they will be misquoted, ‘tripped up’ by difficult questions or come out of the process in worse shape than they went in. Whilst this is a possibility, it is much less common than you’d think and with some simple preparation, you can mitigate this risk. This article will guide you through my top 10 tips to get the best possible result for your business and increase your chances of being interviewed again.

1 Do Your Homework

Much of the ‘fear factor’ around media interviews revolves around fear of the unknown: what questions will they ask?

What if I don’t know the answer? What if my mind goes blank? To tackle this, make plenty of time to prepare for your interview and practise your techniques. Whether it’s a two-minute telephone interview or an hour-long TV slot, your preparation efforts should be the same. Bear in mind, journalists also want the best possible results and will welcome your efforts to prepare ahead of time. Make sure you find out:

- **What do they want to talk to you about?** Get as much detail as possible on what they’re looking for and what information they already have.
- **What questions do they plan to ask you?** Ask for these on an email so you have a written record and can plan out your responses.
- **Are they speaking to anyone else?** If so, research their backgrounds and anticipate what their angles/points of view might be.
- **What is the broader context for the interview?** It’s always essential to know the broader context within which your opinion is being framed.

- **What format will the interview take and how long will it be?** You need to adapt your preparation and delivery techniques for print versus broadcast interviews, and knowing the interview length helps you to hone your messages.

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Know Your Audience

As with all PR and communications, it is vital to understand your audience and make your responses relevant to them. Is your interview for a trade journal? A radio show? A glossy magazine? Make sure you adapt your style and messages, keeping your points relevant and tailored to the audiences’ needs and expectations. This approach gives you the framework to prepare your responses and map out additional questions or situations that may also come up – minimising the chances of you being ‘caught out’. As the old saying goes, ‘forewarned is fore-armed’!

3

Hone Your Messages – The Power of 3x3

First thing’s first: you shouldn’t do an interview just to answer a journalists’ questions – it’s also about getting your own messages across. In order to do this successfully, you need to be crystal clear on what your key messages are. A key message is the most important point you want your audience to know now, and remember later. The most effective method for getting key messages to stick in the audience’s mind is to keep them short, relevant and REPEATED. The more you try to cram into your interview, the less likely people will remember anything at all – so stick to no more than three key messages, and aim to repeat each one three times (irrespective of the interview length). This is known as the power of 3x3 – it is much more effective for audience retention than rushing out five to 10 individual messages which only get mentioned once and are likely to be forgotten instantly.

Your key messages should be described in brief and powerful sentences which set out your position on the issue at hand. Keep them short, relevant to the audience and jargon-free:

- They should tell the audience something they don’t already know.
- It’s good to include a key fact or figure that underpins or supports your position.
- Include an action that you are doing, or an action that you want your audience to do e.g. ‘speak to your doctor,’ ‘visit this website’ or ‘sign this petition.’

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Bridging Technique

Naturally, you have to weave the key messages into your interview answers – which can be tricky if the journalist asks a negative question or one that is unhelpful to your own agenda. This is where bridging technique comes in – using a variety of ‘bridging phrases’ to move the conversation on and then introduce or restate your key messages.

Be warned – this does not mean you should ignore a journalist’s question and just keep making your points regardless! Answer the question – yes or no – and then quickly bridge to steer the conversation back to the points you want to make. Examples of bridging phrases include:

- What’s important to understand here is that...
- The key issue is...
- Let me tell you the facts...
- What really matters to [insert audience] is...
- What we do know is...



- What I can tell you is...
- What my patients tell me is that...
- From my own experience, I can say...

Then follow with one of your three key messages, to keep your power of 3x3 going.

5

Keep Calm

During your interview, try to relax. Be confident in yourself and your expertise – this is why you are being interviewed in the first place. Breathe deeply and take your time to answer to the questions – this also helps avoid ‘umming and aahing’. Be aware of your tone – if discussing a contentious issue, or receiving ‘negative’ questions, make sure you respond with a calm, considered approach. Try not to ramble on once you’ve answered the question – you will likely get off topic and dilute your message. Silence or, as it is commonly known, ‘dead air’ is the cue for the journalist to ask more questions.

6

Watch Your Body Language

We all know the importance of body language and how much non-verbal communication is delivered unconsciously. Regardless of the interview format – TV, radio, face-to-face or telephone – be aware of your body posture, hand movements and facial expressions. You need to portray confidence and authority – so sit comfortably, but keep movement to a minimum; jiggling hands or feet look nervous and are distracting. Hand gestures can help you make a point but don’t overdo it – if you tend to ‘talk with your hands’ try keeping them folded in your lap. Plant yourself firmly – sitting up straight, shoulders back, head up – definitely no slouching! Some of my clients prefer to stand up on telephone interviews – it makes them feel more confident and helps them focus, so do what works for you in this scenario.

7

What Not To Wear

This mainly relates to TV interviews where camera optics play a part – but it is also useful for face-to-face interviews. Try to avoid:

- Uncomfortable clothes – you need to feel confident and smartly turned out.
- Fussy patterns or small prints e.g. dog tooth, geometric shapes – these play havoc with the TV cameras. Instead, wear bright singular colours that ‘pop’ or complementary colour tones.
- Black or white – it drains colour from your face.
- Bulky or excessive jewellery/accessories as this will be distracting.
- Anything too short (skirts or trouser legs) – you may be sat on a low sofa or seat and nobody needs to see the flashy statement socks you got for Christmas!
- Hair hanging over your face – it will distract you, and the viewers.

8

Make It Your Comfort Zone

Being comfortable in yourself and your surroundings will help boost your confidence and make for a successful interview experience. To help establish your comfort zone:

- Bring a change of clothing in case of any last-minute accidents.
- Get to the studio early to familiarise yourself with the set and calm your nerves.
- Don’t forget time needed for hair and makeup on set (even the men).

- Don’t be afraid to ask silly questions – like where the toilets are.
- Make sure you have a glass of water on hand just in case.

9

Common Pitfalls and How to Manage Them

This point could fill another whole article! Some key ‘watch-outs’ to consider are:

- Repeating negative language: journalists may try to put words in your mouth for example, asking, “Is this a disaster?” Counter by saying, “No I don’t agree”, “that isn’t accurate” or “that is untrue” – don’t repeat the word disaster, even to disagree.
- Don’t get drawn into speculation: respond with a factual overview: “Let me give you the facts...”
- No such thing as ‘off the record’: remember that cameras and microphones stay on. Don’t do a Gordon Brown and say something indiscreet as soon as your interview ends, maintain your concentration and composure throughout.

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Be Honest, Credible And Trustworthy

To me, this is the most important point of all. Lying (whether intentional or not) is the quickest way to destroy your reputation and be blacklisted by the press. No journalist will risk their professional integrity if they can’t rely on you. If you make a mistake or speak an untruth, correct it quickly and clearly. It is better to backtrack now and remain firm than be found out later. Another part of being honest and credible is not offering an answer to something you don’t know – just bridge to what you DO know. Saying ‘no comment’ is never an option – it just fuels speculation and allows someone else to decide what the story is.

Conclusion

You should now have a good understanding of the basics of media interview preparation and feel more confident about tapping into this approach to boosting your media profile and business opportunities. I would encourage clients doing more regular interview work to invest in good media training from an experienced professional – this is a skill you can develop and grow constantly which can deliver huge value to your business. Good luck!



Expert Opinion

Nicola Hill, veteran journalist and managing director of media training agency NC Media Ltd, says: “Preparation and practice are the most important factors for successful media interviews. A media interview is not the same as a presentation, nor is it a consultation or a conversation – remember to listen carefully to the questions posed, and use those questions to inform the audience and share your expertise. My clients all have refresher media training on a regular basis to hone their interview skills and prepare themselves for media opportunities.”



Julia Kendrick has more than 11 years’ experience within the PR industry. She recently founded Kendrick PR Consulting: a bespoke strategic consultancy service specialising in medical aesthetics and healthcare PR.

A previous winner of the Communiqué Young Achiever Award, Kendrick’s ethos is to deliver excellence for clients with impactful campaigns and high-calibre results.

Julia Kendrick will present on PR for business growth and profile-building for increased revenue at the Aesthetics Conference and Exhibition 2016.

Visit www.aestheticsconference.com/programme to find out more.