

Obligatory PR Toolkit

PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOLKIT

Confidential and Proprietary

Prepared by Covalent Logic

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WHAT IS COVALENT LOGIC?

Our name comes from the strongest and most-stable chemical bond, combined with forethought and rationality of logic, we create a new philosophy of marketing that reflects our style and values. Covalent Logic exists when strategic marketing, business process and creative design share elements of consistent thought.

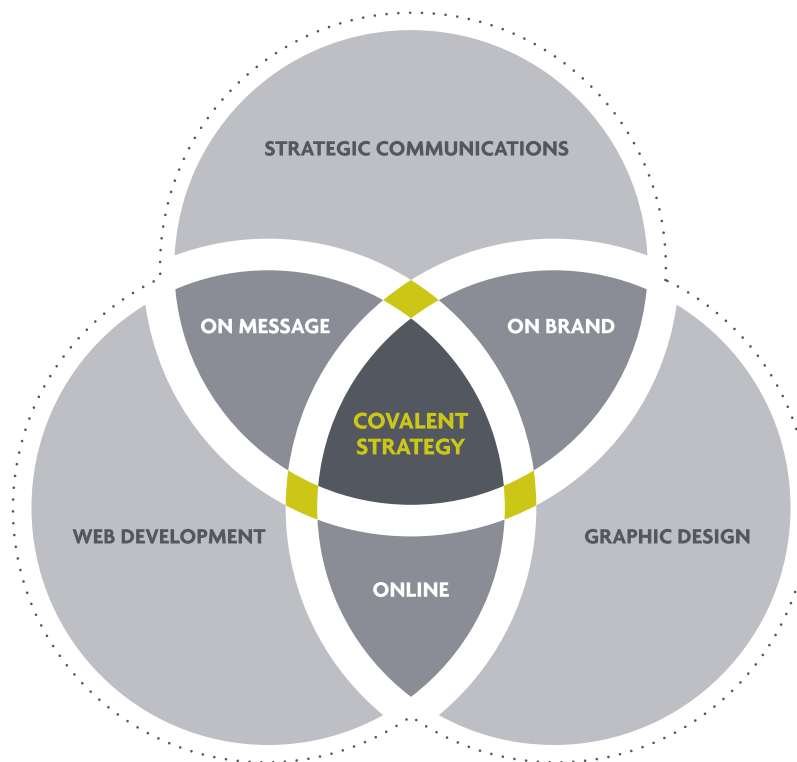
COVALENT LOGIC IS A STRONG, STABLE BOND BETWEEN:

Business goals and artistic design.

Solid programming and creative expression.

Our clients and our team.

How are we different from other agencies? Simply put, we don't "Save As." We come up with **unique solutions** with our clients to help solve their problems, design exceptional campaigns with partners to further the reach of their messages and strategize with our associates about the best way to tell a story.



ABOUT THE COMPANY

Covalent Logic is an award-winning communications agency focused on the intersection of graphic design, web development and corporate communications. Founded more than 13 years ago in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the agency brings dynamic strategies to life through solid creative and technical execution. Led by Stafford Wood, Covalent has more than two dozen team members including experts in public relations, corporate communications, graphic design, digital strategy, government relations, website development, crisis communications, email marketing, content creation and copywriting.

Our team has extensive experience in all aspects of strategic messaging and brand development. Our team has planned and executed internal communications and public relations campaigns with Fortune 5 companies (not a typo), global media relations efforts for Fortune 500 companies and transformational branding campaigns for small business (one had 5 employees before CL and has 100 five years later). Our clients include multi-national corporations, higher education, healthcare, industrial, petrochemical, construction, lawyers and governmental organizations. Our particular specialty is change management, focused on mergers, acquisitions, restructuring and innovation.

Brand Positioning Statement

A brand position represents the essence of a company and, as such, should guide all internal and external communications. If successful, it accomplishes several objectives: it is desirable (by customers), distinctive (from the competition), deliverable (by the company) and durable over time. A brand positioning statement guides all internal communications and external marketing messages.

Audience Profiles

Defining 3-5 specific audiences based on demographic, characteristics, motivations and aversions helps to characterize your messaging to focus on the audience for any given piece. Typically, we describe internal audiences (investors, employees and leaders) as well as external audiences (direct and indirect customers, vendors/subcontractors, and strategic partners). Giving each a label and description helps everyone define who they are writing future documents for.

Core Values

At the heart of any company culture, core values are the shared metrics of successful effort in an organization. While a company has specific financial motivations, Core Values determine who is a “good fit” and what makes someone “one of us.”

Mission/Vision

Simply put, the company’s mission is its purpose and the unique difference it hopes to create in the world. It’s the definition of why you exist. The vision is leadership’s communicable process for how to create that impact.

Brand Promise & Pillars

Speaking to all of its audiences over the long term, the promise is what everyone who encounters the company can expect to receive from the relationship with the company. This messaging is developed to aide in the explanation of who the company is and what benefits come from working with the company. If developed properly, managed and communicated effectively, your brand promise serves the process of achieving its goals and objectives by guiding all strategic communications going forward.

The pillars show the foundation of the things the company does to support, protect and activate that promise. Everything we say, everything we do and everything we offer is a direct expression of the foundational actions that hold up the promise.

Tagline

More than a headline for an advertisement, the tagline is a succinct distillation in one to eight words that communicates the company’s brand position to a variety of audiences.

Brand Voice

The style of writing and speaking is a customized strategic tool that helps express the brand and communicate in a consistent, compelling way. A defined brand voice helps you to be heard, recognized and easily remembered. It animates the brand through words, bringing a company’s culture and personality to life and building an emotional connection with all audiences. The voice can be used to speak directly to a specific audience, highlight a distinct benefit or find a company’s unique angle.

Messaging Platform

A messaging platform is a foundation for consistently communicating the brand promise in a way that connects authentically with the audience profiles. The messaging examples in this platform can be used verbatim or as a starting point for future messages. By repeatedly emphasizing the same themes with fresh language, audiences come to understand what the brand stands for.

Publicity & Management

HIGH LEVEL PLANNING: 4-6 MONTHS AHEAD OF EVENT

- Establish event goals and objectives
- Select date
- Identify venue and negotiate details
- Get cost estimates and create a budget
- Establish roles and responsibilities
- Create and launch publicity plan, name and brand the event
- Identify and confirm speakers/entertainers
- Identify and contact sponsors/partners

3-4 MONTHS AHEAD OF EVENT

- Speaker/entertainer liaison: finalize presentation/speech topics, get bio information, photo, travel and accommodation arrangements
- Have contracts signed if appropriate, etc.
- Set up/enable online registration
- Venue/logistics planning: investigate need for any special permits, licenses, insurance, etc.
- Determine and arrange all details re: menu, A/V equipment, registration set-up, parking, signage, etc.
- Develop draft program
- Create draft event script (MC, speaker introductions, thanks, closing, etc.)
- Develop publicity pieces (newsletter articles and/or ads, radio spots, print blog posts articles for submission to other publications and/or ads, etc.)
- Request logos from corporate sponsors for online and printed materials
- Develop and produce invitations, programs, posters, tickets, etc.
- Develop media list and prepare news release, media advisory, backgrounder and all media kit materials (speaker info, photos, etc.)
- Create event page on your website

- Enable/create email event notifications
- Create a Facebook event page
- Develop a promo video and post on YouTube and your Facebook page
- Register your event on online event calendars (225, *The Advocate*, *Country Roads*)
- Determine VIPs, create invitations and a tracking document (spreadsheet)

1 MONTH PRIOR TO EVENT

- Send reminders to contact list re: registration/participation
- Presenters/speakers: confirm travel/accommodation details
- Request copy of speeches and/or presentations
- Release press announcements about keynote speakers, celebrities, VIPs attending, honorees, etc.
- Post your initial event news release on your website and circulate to all partners, affiliated organizations, etc.
- Ensure back-up plans are developed for any situation (weather, cancellations)

10 DAYS AHEAD

- Finalize event script, make print and online copies of any speeches, videos, presentations, etc.
- Brief all staff about their event duties and timelines
- Provide final registration numbers to suppliers
- Final registration check, name badges and registration list
- Determine photo op and interview opportunities with any presenters, VIPs, etc. and confirm details with interviewee and media

1 DAY AHEAD

- Confirm media attending
- Ensure all signage is in place
- Ensure registration and media tables are prepared and stocked with necessary items (blank name badges, paper, pens, tape, stapler, etc.)
- Ensure all promo items, gifts, plaques, trophies, etc. are on-site

EVENT DAY

- Ensure you have copies of all instructions, directions, phone numbers, keys and guest lists with you

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING EVENT

- Financial status: gather all receipts, documentation and update budget
- Send thank-you notes and acknowledgement letters to: sponsors, speakers and the media reminding the recipients of the event's success and how they contributed (dollars raised, awareness—number of participants, etc.)
- Conduct a post-event survey to learn what people enjoyed about your event and where you have room to improve
- Reach out to event participants—thank them for participating and promote your ongoing programs and how they can support you throughout the year by joining, volunteering or making a sustaining donation

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Pitching

RELEVANT

A good media pitch reflects the interests of the medium and the individual journalist you are contacting. Read the recent items written by the contributors you target to understand their perspective. Targeting the right person increases your chances of making a successful pitch.

NEWSWORTHY

Your story must be newsworthy because you are competing for limited space or broadcasting time with many other pitches. A strong local angle can help your pitch to local media.

BRIEF

A media pitch must be brief. It is not a press release and only gives the outline details of a news story or feature article. Explain why the item will be of interest to the audience and provide brief highlights of the content. Let the journalist know the length of the story and indicate whether you will supply the content or whether the journalist will need to arrange an interview. Offer to send additional information if the journalist wishes to proceed with the story.

STRUCTURED

Your pitch should cover the key points of the story from a journalist's perspective—who, what, where, when, why and how. This provides the framework for the journalist to assess the potential of the story. Highlight any factors that affect the timing of the story.

TIMELY

Journalists work on tight deadlines. Contact your target media to find out their deadlines. If your story is tied to a specific date, make sure you give journalists time to consider your pitch and put together a story by that date.

Press Releases

Press releases are not feature articles. They are not informal pitches. They are formal, official announcements regarding something new or significant about you and/or your business.

THE FIVE ELEMENTS ARE:

1. **Contact information.**
Including email and cell phone number. Responding to reporters immediately is essential in getting good coverage.
2. **A short, catchy headline.**
If your headline is not good, your email won't be opened and your release will not be covered. The most common and effective headline styles: use data, answer an assumed question or apply alliteration. Never use all caps.
3. **Clear summary of details in the first paragraph.**
What's the story? Why should I care? Why now? Avoid "echo headlines" where your headline, sub-head and first sentence all say the same thing.
4. **Relevant narrative including quotes from two people making news.**
Press releases, unlike pitch emails, should be thorough. Include all of the information so the reporter can determine if it's worth digging deeper into. Links to websites with even more information are good to include.
5. **Consistent and comprehensive boilerplate.**
The boilerplate is usually the last paragraph that defines who the news is coming from.

Press Release Template

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Name

Phone

Email

HEADLINE GOES HERE

Subhead goes here centered

BATON ROUGE, La.—January 1, 2018—Press Release starts here.

#

What Happens Before an Interview

The time before an interview or media opportunity is essential to your success in the interview. The more information you have about the reporter's story and the more you've prepared to answer questions, the better you will do. You want to walk into an interview with confidence, able to speak about the subject and aware of any potential pitfalls so you can avoid them. The time before an interview can set the tone for the entire story. Prepare well and you'll reap the rewards when it airs. Wing it and you might find yourself stumbling through your answers.

USE YOUR RESOURCES

If you work at an organization that has public relations staff members or a corporate communications team, use it to your advantage. Your communications team wants to assist you in your preparation because your success in a media interview means they were successful as communicators. Ask questions and schedule time for them to prepare with you to make sure that your message is in line with the company's. Let them research for you and handle logistics with a reporter.

TIP: If a reporter contacts you directly, it is fine to refer him or her to your designated corporate communications team. Simply say—"Let me connect you with our media relations team to get that set up." This takes the pressure off of you to deal with reporters directly. Most members of the media respect that you have to work within your corporate structure to set up an interview. (And if a reporter doesn't respect that, it could be a sign of a story that's trickier than you realize.)

KNOW YOUR INTERVIEWER

Maybe you're being interviewed by a reporter you watch on the news every night. But maybe you're working with a reporter from another market who you've literally never heard of. Either way, you'd be smart to avail yourself of the world's greatest research tool—Google. Check out the reporter's social media pages to see what he or she has been writing about or what kind of tone they take on issues. Search their outlet's website for stories about issues similar to what you're speaking about. A basic bit of research can give you insight into what messages might resonate with a reporter and what might fall flat. This is especially important if you think there is the potential for difficult or confrontational questions.

TIP: Use social media to figure out if a reporter covers a dedicated issue or if he or she is focused only on breaking or "daily" news. A generalist is likely going to ask less-challenging questions than a specialist. However, a generalist will need more education on the background of your topic, and will be likely to spend less time understanding the nuances of a situation.



BE CLEAR ON LOGISTICS

Will you be interviewed on camera or are you speaking to a print journalist? Is your interview live or taped? Is the location inside or outside? Will you be seated or standing? While it may be difficult to know every facet of every interview before it happens, the more you know going in, the better you will feel. Showing up for an interview and not realizing a photographer is taking your picture can throw you off of your game. Additionally, knowing about the logistics of an interview can offer clues about a reporter's intent or plans for his or her piece. For example, a reporter who schedules a photo shoot is writing a longer piece that likely focuses on you or your company, whereas one who simply wants your headshot is likely just quoting you as part of a larger story. Don't be afraid to ask logistical questions. They may change how you dress or prepare, and they also give you an opportunity to find out more about the planned coverage in advance of the interview.

NEGOTIATE IN YOUR BEST INTEREST

Don't be afraid to request certain conditions that might be more favorable to you or your brand. For example, in a live radio interview, you can specify that you will not have to answer questions directly from callers. For a controversial topic, your organization might not do an interview at all, opting instead to send a written statement.

This isn't a court or Congress. You're not being subpoenaed. Participation is voluntary and you can set reasonable terms to accommodate your needs and schedule, especially if the media outlet is asking you for an interview, as opposed to you pitching them on one.

***TIP:** Reporters may fact-check a story with you, but it is extremely rare for a reporter to share his or her story with you in advance for review—so don't ask. It makes you look nervous and it puts them on edge immediately.*

DEVELOP KEY POINTS

In a perfect world, you would have an infinite amount of time to thoroughly explain everything you're talking about, the reporter would include everything you say and all of the viewers would be riveted by your every word. Unfortunately, that's not how most interviews work out. Most of the time, a reporter has limited time to explain a complex issue while highlighting differing views, sometimes to create a higher sense of tension than the situation actually merits. Much of what you say will be cut down into short snippets ("sound bites") that help move the story forward. Having a key objective for the interview and a series of short points increases the likelihood that your most important message will be included in the final story. Repeating these points, slightly rephrased, seeds your message throughout the story.



TIP: It's ideal to have three main points for a short interview.

BRAINSTORM POSSIBLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Based on what you know about the reporter's story and the issue at hand, develop the basic questions that you think someone learning about the topic would ask. For example, if you're launching a new product, the reporter is likely going to ask you what the product does. If your company is changing a policy that affects the public, the reporter is going to want to know why.

NOTES

List these questions out and come up with answers so you can respond confidently.

TIP: Most people don't think you can ask the reporter for his or her questions in advance, but you can, subtly. Phrase that request this way—"Can you let me know what you'd like me to speak about—I want to make sure I'm prepared with information to answer your questions." Good reporters want to interview prepared subjects.

Putting Together Strong Key Messages

Sources with a great deal of knowledge or a strong perspective on a topic can be an asset to their organizations and to the reporters who cover them. However, a wealth of information does not a good interview make. Pulling the best points from a person's vast knowledge base to develop speaking points not only helps you get your message across, it makes you more quotable.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Before you pick your priority messages for an interview, consider who will ultimately read or see the reporter's final product. Are you being interviewed for the evening news or are you speaking with a trade publication? Understanding who you are speaking to and how much base knowledge they have about your topic helps you determine what to say. Always assume your audience knows far less about the topic than you.

PRIORITIZE YOUR POINTS

You have a small window to insert your key points into an interview, so going in with an idea of the most critical messages you have is a good idea. Remember: in most interview scenarios, you are one of several sources and your involvement in a story could be brief. Use your time wisely to ensure quality sound bites and quotes.

SIMPLIFY COMPLEX TOPICS

Take some time to work through complicated ideas or concepts and distill them to their essence when you're preparing. Do this by starting with the major point your audience needs to understand and work back from that, removing detail along the way. You can talk about complex ideas in an interview, but if you don't simplify or narrow your message, your brilliant insights might never end up in the final product.

ALWAYS HAVE A 'GO-TO' MESSAGE

You may alter your key message to fit an audience or occasion, but you should always have a general base point that you can use to sum up your perspective. Carrying this with you from interview to interview not only makes it easier to prepare, it also makes you sound consistent and honest.

USE BRAND-FRIENDLY LANGUAGE

Think about your company's overall mission and message. How can you align your major points with these sentiments? Many organizations have key phrases or ideas that guide their work. Referencing these in your key messaging points helps advance your company's message.

PRACTICE

Can you actually say your message aloud? Read it to yourself a few times to make sure. Sometimes sentences that seem perfect on the page come across poorly when spoken aloud. Make sure you can deliver the points you've written and that you won't trip over clumsy terms or unnatural-sounding phrases.

WORDS TO AVOID

Work to keep these things out of your messaging and interviews to ensure the audience hears your message:

■ JARGON

Every industry or organization has a set of words that make sense to those involved, but might not mean anything to an outsider. Look for ways to avoid these terms by simplifying or explaining them (i.e. "covered lives" vs "members").

■ ACRONYMS

Unless an acronym is generally understood or can be substituted as a name for a well-known entity or object, avoid using it. Either state the full name or find a descriptive word (i.e. "Federal regulators" vs "U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services").

■ LOADED TERMS

Stay away from words or phrases that could illicit strong negative emotions unrelated to your message or brand. Think about the best way to phrase tricky concepts before your interview (i.e. Affordable Care Act vs. Obamacare).

Off the Record vs. On Background

You've probably heard the term "off the record" when it comes to reporters and you may be familiar with the term "on background." But what do these phrases really mean? Let's look at the Associated Press guide, which is considered by many to be the standard for reporting and writing news articles. From the AP's News Values:

ON THE RECORD

The information can be used with no caveats, quoting the source by name.

OFF THE RECORD

The information cannot be used for publication.

ON BACKGROUND

The information can be published but only under conditions negotiated with the source. Generally, the sources do not want their names published but will agree to a description of their position. AP reporters should object vigorously when a source wants to brief a group of reporters on background and try to persuade the source to put the briefing on the record. These background briefings have become routine in many venues, especially with government officials.

DEEP BACKGROUND

The information can be used but without attribution. The source does not want to be identified in any way, even on condition of anonymity.

In general, information obtained under any of these circumstances can be pursued with other sources to be placed on the record.

(Source: <http://www.ap.org/company/news-values>)

NOTES

PRE-INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

Need a quick refresher on how to prepare for an upcoming interview? Here are three important areas to review:

LOGISTICS

- Do you know the logistics of the interview—where it will be and how you will get there?
- Do you know who the reporter is?
- Did you check if you will be inside or outside?
- Have you selected clothing that is appropriate for the situation and that also follows general on-camera guidelines?

MESSAGE

- Are you clear on the purpose of the interview?
- Have you prepared your key messages in the form of adaptable talking points that get your ideas across?
- Have you reviewed public reports, releases or statements from your company that you could be asked about?

PREPARATION

- Did you review your talking points?
- Did you do a practice Q and A session with a coworker?
- Have you planned to get a good night's sleep?



In general, you should always assume you are “on the record” when you speak with a reporter. Going off the record can be risky, especially if it is with a reporter you don’t know or have a relationship with. This isn’t always because a reporter is out to “get” you. Many times these conversations are confusing and you and the reporter might not be on the same page as to what was on the record and what was off the record. Also: having something off the record only works if no one can attribute it to you. If you or your company are the only ones who have a piece of information, a reporter will never be able to verify it and he or she will either leave it out or include it in the reporting. Worse, if you provide information anonymously, it could be traced back to you or your company.

Speaking to a reporter on background is a common way for PR professionals to share information for which they might not be the best source—for example, it isn’t uncommon for a spokesperson to provide “background” to a reporter before the reporter interviews his or her boss.

It most cases, either say it on the record or not at all, and engage a PR professional if you have something to say that you do not want attributed to you in the story.

Best Practices When Engaging with the Media

DO BE FRIENDLY AND HELPFUL

Good media management is helped along by friendliness and being a helpful source. Always be polite when dealing with members of the press. Be on time, do what you say you are going to do and answer questions honestly. You are representing yourself and your company or organization and you want to leave a good impression.

DON'T ASSUME A REPORTER IS YOUR FRIEND

Many journalists—especially those on TV—are chatty and outgoing. After all, they chose a field where they talk to people each and every day. Don't let a friendly demeanor lull you into a false sense of camaraderie or security. A reporter has a job to do and that job is not to be your friend. Don't assume a reporter will make you or your company "look good" in a story because he or she is friendly. Show up ready for your interview and give the media outlet good content for their story.

DO PROVIDE USEFUL INFORMATION

Being a helpful, knowledgeable source is the best way for you and your company to get repeated requests for interviews. Your messaging goals should be in the front of your mind, but that doesn't mean that you can't provide helpful information to the reporter or to explain industry terms or jargon. If it seems that the reporter doesn't understand an aspect of the topic, take the opportunity to kindly explain it to them.

TIP: Reporters who have solid working relationships with sources tend to treat those sources fairly, because they will need to revisit the source for future stories.

DO STAY IN YOUR LANE

You were called for an interview about a specific topic for a specific reason—don't deviate from that topic. If you are an expert on health insurance, you aren't necessarily an expert on auto insurance. It is okay to only answer questions about your area of expertise or the topic of the interview. If a reporter asks you something that you cannot speak as an expert on, tell them that's out of your area of expertise.

TIP: You do not have to answer questions that are not relevant to your organization.

DON'T SPECULATE OR SPEAK FOR SOMEONE ELSE

It is tempting to want to answer all of the questions—especially ones to which you know the answer or are pretty sure of the answer. However, until something is ready for publication, you can't talk about it. If you're asked, "Do you see prices going up next year?" don't speculate if the final decision hasn't been announced—even if you're 99.9 percent sure. Say, "Well, we base prices on a lot of different things, including demand for the product and the costs from the year before. It's really too early to know for certain." Also, don't speak for other organizations or companies. Speak from your perspective and then share information about other sources with the reporter so they can speak for themselves.

DO SPEAK ACTIVELY AND INCLUDE CONTEXT IN YOUR REMARKS

Remember that your remarks are a small part of any story. Complete sentences that offer some context to the question are helpful because they make better sound bites later, and because including context in your response helps ensure that your statement is not misconstrued or used improperly. When you're asked a question, incorporate it back into your answer. For example:



QUESTION:

"Why did your company give away 100 puppies today?"

ANSWER:

"Our company helped 100 puppies find homes today because we wanted to raise awareness about the epidemic of homeless puppies."

Body Language

Positioning yourself appropriately on-camera helps you appear more put-together and confident. Here are a few critical things to consider with your body and body language:

- Ask the reporter or camera operator where you should look during the interview. They will usually position you so that you are speaking to the reporter off-camera, instead of looking directly into the lens.
- Be aware of the microphone. Regardless of the kind of mic the reporter is using, assume it is on and recording.
- Avoid waving your hands too much. When you are speaking, do not gesture wildly with your hands, as this can be distracting on-camera.
- Straighten your clothing and remove distracting things. Once you are in position, check your tie or neckline to make sure everything is in place. Remove distractions, like pens tucked in your pocket, your cell phone or your work name badge.

WHEN STANDING

- Stand up straight, feet a comfortable distance apart, with your shoulders back and your hands loosely at your side.
- Stay in place. Don't fidget or move around too much.

WHEN SITTING

- Sit up straight with your shoulders back and your hands loosely in your lap.
- Avoid chairs that you sink into or that are too soft, because you will look like you are slouching.
- Sit on the edge of the chair and lean slightly forward to look active and alert.

WHEN STANDING AT A PODIUM

- Center yourself behind the podium and make sure you can see and be seen over it.
- Stand up straight and avoid leaning over the podium or gripping onto the sides too tightly.
- Do not leave the area behind the podium, unless this is part of a planned speech.



Conducting Strong Interviews

How you participate in an interview is almost as important as what you say to the reporter. Keep some simple interviewing tips in mind and it will be smooth sailing.

ARM YOURSELF WITH KEY MESSAGES

Before every interview you should take time to write out and practice your main points. This will help you focus your answers and allow you to feel more comfortable because you already have an idea of what you will say.

BE IN “INTERVIEW MODE” THE ENTIRE TIME

The interview starts once you step into the room with the reporter and ends when they've left the building (or you've left their office). It can be tempting to make small talk, but remember that whatever you say is generally fair game, so keep it light (i.e. the weather, sports). Don't gossip or say disparaging things—you never know when a microphone or camera is on.

TIP: Once they put the mic on you, everything is fair game. Just assume it is on and that any remark you make could end up being recorded and broadcast.

SPEAK CLEARLY AND AT A NORMAL PACE

Relax and take a deep breath before the interview starts. Reporters—and reporters with cameras—can make people feel nervous or uncomfortable and this comes across in their speaking patterns or pace. Take care to speak at a normal pace, not too quickly or with too much animation.

ANSWER IN COMPLETE SENTENCES

Reporters need full sound bites and sentences to flesh out their stories. If you answer in incomplete sentences or, even worse, with one word answers, they will have a tough time including you in the story. Take the time to speak in complete sentences and to answer “yes/no” questions with insight.

RECAP THE QUESTION

When a reporter asks you a question, instead of simply diving into your response, restate the question in your answer. This helps ensure proper context and makes it easier for the reporter to properly quote you in their story.

TIP: If you are speaking at a press conference or a question and answer session, remember to repeat the question back for everyone in the room—you are amplified, but they might not be. The audience will appreciate you saying what the question was and it allows you a few seconds to gather your answer in your head.

DON'T RUSH THINGS

Take the time to work through your messaging points and provide insightful answers to the reporter's questions. Even if you have 100 things to do after your interview, keep your full focus on speaking to the reporter and give them time and attention. You will regret not relaying all of your points if you rush out of the interview.

NEVER SPECULATE

When a reporter asks a question, our initial response is to answer it. But, pause to consider if you are being asked to speculate about something or predict the future. If you are, it is best not to answer directly. You never want to respond based on “what if” scenarios because it is impossible to predict all of the intricacies of the future. To avoid these questions, acknowledge that you cannot speculate and pivot back to your main point (i.e. “Well, I can't predict the future, but I can tell you that right now our focus is...”).

SPEAK TO THE ISSUE

Sometimes you will not know the answer to the question or, in a delicate situation, it may not be in your company's best interest for you to answer too specifically. In this case, revert back to your talking points and speak to the overall issue at hand as opposed to the very specific question in front of you.

REMEMBER WHO SIGNS YOUR PAYCHECK

At the end of the day, you don't work for a media outlet or for anyone other than your company. Remember to speak

NOTES

IT'S OKAY TO ACKNOWLEDGE MISTAKES

Very rarely in today's world do people or companies want to admit to their mistakes.

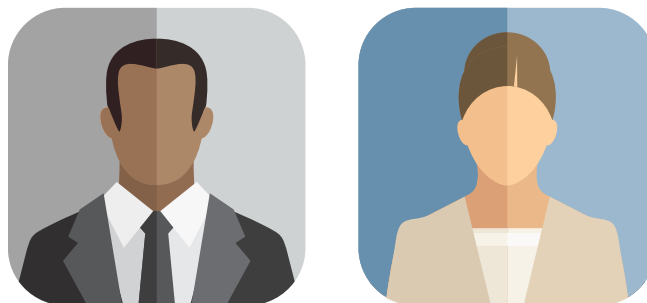
Maybe it is pride or ego, maybe it is potential legal issues or liability. However, if you have to give an interview or speak to the press or public in the face of overwhelming evidence that a mistake was made or a problem exists, you're going to look hapless and harried—or worse, overly calculating—if you will not acknowledge it.

Though these kinds of messaging decisions should always be made in consultation with your executive leadership, corporate communications, legal and regulatory teams, simply saying, “Yes, there is a problem” can be effective for several reasons.

- It's hard to stay angry at someone who admits their mistakes. When people are upset with something you or your company did, they want to feel that their complaints or concerns are being heard. By acknowledging this, you can take away some of the vitriol, because most reasonable people actually appreciate those who take responsibility for their actions.
- It takes the fuel away from the fire. Uncertainty fuels media stories and keeps the attention on the problem or issue at hand. By acknowledging the problem, you remove some of this uncertainty and smother the fire. This takes away some of the urgency for media outlets covering the issue.
- It allows you to pivot and refocus on your message. Once you “own” a mistake, complaint or problem, you can focus on the ways your hard-working team is helping your devoted, loyal customers. Putting out a response or plan allows you to move away from the problem and towards a solution.

No company, organization or individual wants to spend time with the press talking about mistakes or problems. However, it is in these instances that reputations can be made or broken and that you can establish yourself to the public and to the press as someone who is trustworthy and honest.

from your employer's perspective when you are being interviewed. If you do not feel like you can do this, let your company know so they can arrange an interview with someone who can.



Personal Presentation

Personal presentation is a key aspect of successful media interviews and public speaking opportunities. Whenever you are interacting with a member of the press or representing your company in public, dressing appropriately not only presents your company in a favorable light, it also helps you have confidence in yourself.

Most importantly, you want what you're saying to be the focus of your interview or sound bite. Dressing in a way that does not distract is just another way to ensure you are doing everything to get your message across.

WHAT TO WEAR

In general, professional business attire is your best bet. This means for men, a suit and tie (or blazer and tie) and for women, either a suit or an appropriate dress.

In general, clothing should be dark, neutral colors (black, navy, gray) or deeper colors (jewel tones as opposed to neon colors). Solid colors are best. Patterns should be small and simple shapes. If your company or cause has specific colors associated with it, incorporating these into your outfit—wearing a red tie to support heart disease awareness, for example—is a good idea.

The best “interview” outfits are simple business attire that fit well and are not distracting on camera. Necklines should be high enough to ensure modesty regardless of if you are sitting or standing. Choose clothing that makes you feel confident. Keep hairstyles, jewelry, makeup and other accessories simple and professional.

Professional business attire is not always practical for an interview, especially if you are on-site at a more casual business event or outdoors in the field. In these cases, follow

the general outfit guidelines, tailored for a business casual audience. For example, wear a solid color button-down shirt or a collared shirt. If you are participating in a corporate philanthropy event and your group has matching t-shirts, wear the t-shirt, provided it isn't too wildly colored.

Tip: Most interviews are shot from the waist or chest up. You can absolutely ask a reporter or camera person to frame you in a certain way for interviews.

WHAT TO AVOID

In most cases, when dressing for an interview, avoid the following:

■ OUTFITS COMPRISED OF VERY LIGHT COLORS

In certain lighting, light colors or white can wash out your skin tone. With an inexperienced camera operator, white can glow or bleed on screen.

■ BUSY PATTERNS

TV is not the time to wear a plaid blazer. Stick with solid colors where possible (including ties!), as they are less distracting on camera.

■ CLOTHES THAT FIT POORLY

Clothes that are too tight or too loose may make you uncomfortable, which could come across in your interview.

■ FLASHY ACCESSORIES

Jewelry or other accessories that are reflective, large or fussy could be distracting on camera. This includes hats, in most situations (unless worn for safety reasons), and sunglasses.

Post-Interview Follow-Ups

You survived your interview. Congratulations! Unfortunately for you, the process isn't over yet. A media opportunity doesn't end just because the camera turns off. You can use the time after an interview to clarify points, share additional information and "fix" problems you might see with the interview.

PROVIDE ANY INFORMATION YOU PROMISED DURING THE INTERVIEW

If you referenced a report or statistic, or offered to research a question, find out what the reporter's deadline is after the interview and provide the information as soon as possible. If you say you're going to look into something and then you never follow up, that could become a factor in the story.

CLARIFY ANY STICKY POINTS

Did you stumble over an issue? Speak in an unclear way? Follow up with an email afterwards to thank the

reporter for their time and then restate your point or clarify something you said. While you cannot completely change the audio or video of your interview, clarifying or reiterating sticky points is allowed. Phrase these clarifications as being on you—not on the reporter. For example, say, "I want to make sure I was clear—we do believe XYZ." You can also correct minor, honest mistakes like being slightly off on a monetary figure or percentage.

CORRECT INACCURACIES OR NEGATIVE COVERAGE

Deal with a story with inaccuracies, or one that is overtly negative, as quickly as possible. If the inaccuracy is the media outlet's fault, you have to calmly bring up this issue to the journalist and ask if the online version of the story can be clarified. Remember to tread lightly and avoid accusatory language. Your goal is to work with the media outlet to correct or clarify a point, not to fight with the reporter. If you cannot get a satisfactory result from the reporter or you feel like you are being treated unfairly, you can appeal to his or her editor. However, this could be seen as an aggressive act and should only be done in extreme circumstances. You should ALWAYS discuss clarifications, corrections or complaints with the original reporter and then his or her editor in private before discussing the story externally.

TIP: In many cases, if you are complaining about the media outlet being unfair, you've already lost the messaging battle.

SHARE POSITIVE COVERAGE

If you are pleased with the coverage, make sure you share it, either on your company's social media networks or on your personal social media networks. Highlight that the publication interviewed you or your company as an expert and tag the media outlet or reporter in the post. Reporters are judged by how well their stories perform. Links, hits and social engagement matters.

TIP: Twitter is where many reporters share live, real-time updates and links to their stories. Consider retweeting the reporter's tweet about the story (instead of the media outlet's tweet) to help build the relationship with the reporter.

SHARE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OR RESOURCES

If you think of an additional informational resource, such as a report or a program website, sharing this after the interview via email shows the reporter that you care about them getting a quality story. It can also solidify your status as a helpful source, which builds your reputation with that reporter. Be careful to make sure the resource you are sharing supports you and your company's message.

Plan

The purpose of this Crisis Communication Plan is to manage communications around a crisis with the goal that staff respond in a unified, professional manner that reinforces leadership, creates loyalty and keeps people safe and informed.

It includes who can manage the distribution of critical, sensitive information to the media, investors and the public.

Crisis Communication Team

NAME	TITLE	EMAIL	PHONE

AUDIENCE	EMAIL / PHONE	ASSIGNED COMMUNICATOR
Staff		
Customers/Clients		
Vendors		
Board/Investors		
Media		

Designated Spokesperson and Media Protocols

Identify who is authorized to speak to media and other inquirers.

Key Messages and Talking Points

SAFETY & SECURITY

In any crisis, a key talking point is safety and security. To build a message, identify the hazards and potential for danger in the situation. Then, speak to what you are actively doing to mitigate the danger. Do not spend time describing the danger—focus on what you are doing to stop it.

PRIVACY OF OUR CLIENTS/CUSTOMERS

An excellent way to keep confidential information confidential is to implore the media to respect the privacy of your clients at this difficult time. Generally, people are willing to step back and hold off on photographs of people when you use this key message.

BY-LAWS

If financial or legal information is requested, you should reference that you can only release information with approval from your Board of Directors. This offers you time to decide what information to release and what to determine is privileged.

Holding Statements

IN THE EVENT OF DISASTER:

The safety and security of _____ clients and staff is of the utmost importance to us today. We are working with first responders and law enforcement to help our people and assess the damage. We will alert you as we know more.

IN THE EVENT OF LEGAL ACTION:

At this time, our lawyers have advised us not to discuss ongoing legal matters. We can say that our organization was founded to _____ and this goal is what drives our team in all that we do.

IN THE EVENT OF ETHICAL OR FINANCIAL CONCERNS:

Our Organization is committed to understanding and being transparent on all matters of management and this issue is no exception. At this time, we don't have enough details to be able to comment with accuracy on the situation. We ask for your patience while we look into these troubling concerns.

NOTES

DEALING WITH SENSITIVE SITUATIONS

A “sensitive” situation is the polite, PR person way to describe an interview or a story that has the potential to be negative for your company. Typically only high level executives or spokespeople would conduct these interviews. However, knowing what to do will help you in basic interviews that take a turn as well.

DO NOT SPECULATE

Never “guess” about what is happening next—especially not in a crisis or soon-to-be crisis. If you don’t know a definitive answer, find a way to say so. Speculation almost always leads to disappointment later when you cannot live up to whatever you said would happen.

TIP: If you know something is happening, but it isn’t ready to be announced or rolled out in public, do not talk about it. Until it is made public, the details could change, which would muddy your message.

KEEP THE PACE EVEN

Some reporters will pepper you with rapid questions quickly to keep you off-balance or throw you a tough question to try to disrupt your thought process. Do not fall for this—pause and count back from three in your head before you answer to take back control of the pacing of the interview.

Tip: The person who controls the pace of the interview has the upper hand. In a contentious situation, anything you can do to slow that pace down is helpful to your cause.

STAY CALM

Do not let a reporter or their questions rattle you. Avoid being too emotional, raising your voice or making a negative or accusatory comment. Take a moment to calm yourself. You will be happy later that you didn’t let emotions overtake your interview.

DON’T DO PR FOR THE PROBLEM

In a crisis, reporters will ask you about how bad the problem is or how big the mistake was. Flip the script and focus on what you and your company are doing to respond to the issue at hand. People may want to hear about how bad something is or will be, but they want to know about what those involved are doing to make it better.

SURVIVE

Some interviews you brag about and others you just live through. If an interview turns adversarial, sometimes the best thing you can hope for is to stay calm, avoid mistakes and move on. Watch yourself when the interview airs or runs and make notes about what to do better next time.

MASTERING TRICKY MESSAGES

No matter how hard you try, there may simply be times in an interview when you cannot answer the question or give information. There are simple ways to gracefully decline to answer a question or give a statement.

Instead Of Saying...	Try...
NO COMMENT	<p>We're unable to provide any information right now, but we will keep you updated.</p> <p>This is a serious issue that our team is working on right now. Once we have more information, we'll provide an update.</p>
I DON'T KNOW	<p>That's not really my area of expertise, but I can tell you that our company...</p> <p>I would have to look into that a little bit for you.</p> <p>The best person to direct that question to is...</p>
I CANNOT COMMENT ON PENDING LITIGATION	<p>We are reviewing the claim and will be responding through the proper legal channels.</p> <p>I can say that this unfortunate incident has made us "proud of our safety record" or "pleased with the responsiveness of our employees on the scene."</p>
WE MESSED UP	<p>We have heard from our customers about some of their problems and we are working with them to fix the issue and ensure they receive the service they have come to expect from us.</p>
THAT'S NOT FAIR	<p>A broader view of the situation offers a perspective that...</p>

NOTES

NOTES

This information is provided for the sole use of Covalent Logic clients, partners and those given a copy by Stafford Wood.

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