

ABERFIELD

POSITIVE INFLUENCE

How to handle TV interviews

At Aberfield, we've helped dozens of clients prepare for TV interviews, from positive local news pieces to more 'challenging' one-to-ones on national current affairs programmes.

We know that, when it comes to getting the best out of a TV interview, good preparation is essential.

And that preparation means you never agree to an interview until you can answer the following questions:

- Do you know why you've been approached?
- Do you know why you have been approached?
- What programme it is for?
- Is the interviewer likely to be friendly, neutral or antagonistic?
- Do they want a short 'soundbite' or something more substantial?
- Who will be doing the interview? What's their interviewing style?
- When will it be broadcast?
- Will it be live (perhaps more daunting, but your comments won't be edited)?
- Or will it be pre-recorded (less pressure, but you're likely to be edited)?
- What 'angle' are they planning to take?
- Who else are they interviewing?
- How might that impact their questions, and your responses?
- Where do they plan to interview you – in a studio or on location?

Once you have the answers, carefully consider whether you're the right person to be interviewed. Is this subject, or issue, your responsibility? Do you have the necessary expertise? If the answer to either of those questions is 'no', is there someone else within your organisation who is more appropriate? If not, be prepared to say 'No'. Just because they've asked for an interview doesn't mean you have to do it.

If you've agreed to be interviewed, give yourself enough time to prepare your key messages. We'll discuss the importance of key message preparation in more detail elsewhere, but essentially you don't want to have more than three key messages – no matter how long the interview.

When you're being interviewed for TV, take account of your surroundings. If you're outside, check out where the sun is (you don't want to squint!), and be aware of what else is in shot. Do you want your company's logo on screen? Do you want the office or factory prominent?

On TV, appearance and body language are key, so make sure you're dressed appropriately for the situation. You may always wear jeans and a t-shirt, but after an accident at your factory, is that how you want your audience to see you? Or you may be a more formal dresser, but if yours is a youth brand is that the image you want to project?

Eye contact is key. If the reporter is there, maintain eye contact with him or her. If it's a 'down the line' interview, focus on the centre of the camera lens. In either case, if your eyes are darting around, instead of fixed on the journalist or lens, you can appear nervous or even shifty.

It's the same with body movement. Whether you're sat or stood, keep any movement to a minimum as the camera will accentuate it and your audience will be focused on that, rather than your message.

And don't forget facial expression. Smiles and nods are good if it's a positive story, or as an acknowledgement. But you don't want to be smiling if you're delivering bad news.

If you have the opportunity (and you usually do), ask what the first question will be. It's likely the journalist will have prepared at least the first question, so you'll have a few precious seconds to think about your answer (hopefully a key message!) and gain some control of the interview.

When the interview's finished, wait for a signal that the camera's no longer rolling before you 'switch off'. Until then, keep focused, maintain your eye contact and minimise body movement.

Finally, remember TV interviews are rarely about humiliating the interviewee. The journalist wants a good interview just as much as you do.

And if you need more in-depth advice or preparation than that...you know where we are!