

Taking the Spin Out of Media Messages: Honesty Matters

By Sheryl Zapcic

How often does a public relations professional work to figure out how best to “spin” a media message? In almost every case, the answer is too often. When media trainers are teaching or guiding their clients with effective messaging, there should be no spinning or manipulating a message, but rather delivering information that is valuable to the intended audience, supportive of an organization’s strategic goals and brand messaging and that delivers a transparent message.

Learning to do that requires practice and training—training in how to create and articulate a clear, concise message, and practice in delivering that message to the media.

Honesty Matters

Perfect transparency is not always practical, because in some instances it may compromise a company from a competitive perspective. However, that does not mean media spokespeople cannot and should not be open and honest. On the contrary, honesty is important. If a plant is closing and 30 workers are losing their jobs, is it truly “corporate restructuring” or is it really “company downsizing”? Media and readers or viewers of your news will recognize it for what it is. Spinning it to say something else that may appear, at least on the surface, to be less negative is a waste of time and valuable resources—both yours and the media who are covering your story.

Honesty increases the credibility of your company, and the trust that the media and your audience place in your spokespeople. So it makes sense that transparency, as much as possible, should be part of every company’s corporate and brand voice, as well as its best practices.

With respect to the messages you want to deliver, each one should support your company’s core strategic goals, based on company values and culture. Messages, as well as positioning statements, should also demonstrate market-place differentiation and introduce a sub-group of messages that focus on brand benefits, which should also support the corporate message. In other words, all messages, both from a corporate and a marketing perspective, should

be unified—across all company divisions and across all audiences.

Unification is important for a number of reasons. First, it helps you, as the communications professional and media spokesperson, to identify the message(s) you need to convey to your audience, whether it be stakeholders, customers or media representatives. Second, a unified message strengthens your brand as it creates long-term awareness. It ensures consistency across all communications channels, enhances your brand and continues to support the corporation’s strategic goals and vision.

CRITERIA FOR MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT

As you work with spokespeople to develop key message(s), it is important to:

- Know your company story
- Consider your audience
- Unify corporate and brand goals
- Select three or four points that help communicate your message
- Keep it simple so it is easy to deliver
- Make it easy to move from one point to another
- Arm yourself with examples, figures, anecdotes and third-party endorsements to support your message
- Revise your message as necessary to meet the needs of your audience
- Be prepared to flag your message during an interview, saying things like, “The key thing is, the best part about or the three most exciting elements are...”

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