

# The Sources *Hot*Link

Tips and Practical Ideas to Get Positive News Coverage

Number Sixteen, Summer 2000

## Oh, the Mistakes Spokespeople Make: Ten Sure-Fire Ways to Blow an Interview

BY STEVE BENNETT,  
MEDIA MENTOR

Question: What do many new spokespeople at technology companies have in common? Answer: they make similar mistakes and fall into similar traps. Based on my experience as a media trainer, the most common ones include:

- 1. Misunderstanding the Media.** Too many spokespeople confuse PR opportunities with free advertising. Ouch! No reporter, editor, or host wants to be a billboard for your products or service; their job is to provide interesting and useful information to their readers or audience. And if you help them do so, you'll maximize your chances of positive coverage.
- 2. Misunderstanding the Spokesperson Role.** Some spokespeople think that they're on a sales call when they meet the press. So they toss out puffery and hyperbole or try to "close on the objection." Then they become frustrated by the "poor" coverage, if any, that they receive. The key is simple: inform, don't sell.
- 3. Lacking Message Points.** At first blush, it might seem that telling spokespeople to have message points is as obvious as telling them to wear clothes during an interview. But in fact, many spokespeople do arrive metaphorically naked for interviews — bereft of key message points. Deliver several strong messages well, and you might just see them in print or on the air.
- 4. Unleashing a Core Dump.** When spokespeople feel the need to educate the interviewer about everything that could be known about their products, services, or companies, the interview loses focus. An effective spokesperson knows when to cut to the chase and assess what level of detail the interviewer is seeking.
- 5. Over-Answering.** Most inexperienced spokespeople don't know when to stop talking. By babbling on, they increase their chances of being misquoted or driving the interview off-topic. Don't snatch defeat from the jaws of victory — keep answers short and to the point.
- 6. Failing to Listen.** A guaranteed way to irritate an interviewer is to interrupt or finish his or her questions. You need to establish a rapport and communicate respectfully — just as you would with a colleague or friend.

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## New Media... Endless Possibilities!

BY DAVID SAXBY

An electronic brochure, a presentation tool, an electronic catalogue, a demo video, a voice clip, an interactive training program, a customer survey and more — all in one format? New media technology (or multimedia) gives speakers endless possibilities, whether delivering a presentation, a marketing tool, an educational system or a customer measurement device. And, your clients can view it at their own pace which gives you an advantage in the market. The added benefit is you can involve all of the viewer's senses (the exception being smell... so far). Everything can be delivered in a convenient format too; either a CD ROM, a mini CD (the size of a regular business card), an Internet Web site, an intranet (internal corporate internet) or on a laptop computer. Presentations on Powerpoint (and even more sophisticated programs) can be saved as a "projector" format (self-contained) so neither you nor your clients require the proprietary software to view them. Promotional literature, workbooks and other print documents can be stored in a ".pdf" file format (Adobe Acrobat software) so any computer can view and print

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### Inside This Issue:

-  Interview screw-ups! *And* how to avoid them  
**Page One**
-  New communications resources reviewed **Page Three**
-  Plus: News from Sources, Success Stories and more!



## "Success" Story

Shelle Rose Charvet of Success Strategies was kind enough to call Sources and let us know how her listing was working. On May 4<sup>th</sup>, the *Globe & Mail* featured her on its popular "Facts & Arguments" page, as author of an article entitled "Ten survival tips: Here's how to play your cards when dealing with the health-care system." Shelle's alternately funny and moving article outlines the hardwon lessons she has learned through her experiences as a breast cancer survivor. Shelle is the author of *Words that Change Minds: Mastering the Language of Influence*. Visit her on the World Wide Web: [www.successtrategies.com](http://www.successtrategies.com).

## Share the Good News

Has your organization generated media coverage recently? Share the details and a copy of the story the next time you're in the news.

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## News From Sources

The dog days of summer approach, but there is no time for soaking up the rays yet for us at *Sources*. We've been hard at work over the past few months preparing *Sources 46, Summer 2000*. Over 120 new organizations have joined us in time for the new issue. We're enjoying the successful launches of our new publication *Media Names & Numbers*, and our redesigned, expanded content Web site. By upgrading our Web site service, we are able to improve the services we offer all our clients. If you haven't already sent us your logo in colour, do so now — we will display it online in glorious technicolour at no charge. All your subject headings are

also now displayed online with your listing, enabling journalists to see at a glance what your organization specializes in. If you haven't taken a look yet, visit [www.sources.com](http://www.sources.com) today. Contact our webmaster with comments or questions about technical matters, site design or our online content. We never want to stop improving the services we offer, and offering new ones that make your media relations job easier. We welcome comments, suggestions and even complaints at any time.

Stay cool and have a wonderful summer!

Kirsten Cowan  
Editor, *The Sources HotLink*

## The HotLink Resource Shelf



### Say It With Presentations: How to Design and Deliver Successful Business Presentations

by Gene Zelazny

McGraw-Hill, 1999, 154 pp. illustrated

### Writing for the Web

by Crawford Kilian

Self-Counsel Press, 1999, 139 pp.

### [www.presenteronline.com](http://www.presenteronline.com)

These resources provide a powerful array of tools for self-promotion and communication in the oldest and the newest mediums — in person presentations and the World Wide Web.

Gene Zelazny's *Say it With Presentations* takes a hands-on approach to teaching effective presentation techniques. Loaded with graphics and learn by doing exercises, the program outlined in this book will leave you, if not a suave emcee, at least able to give a presentation that communicates your message and doesn't bore your audience into submission. A particular strength of *Say it With Presentations* is

material Gene presents on avoiding the biggest problems with presentations, both in content and form.

Crawford Kilian's *Writing for the Web* has a different flavour from *Say it With Presentations*, but it is no less impressive as a resource. Crawford Kilian is the author of a number of titles on writing techniques for Self-Counsel Press and his background as a written word communicator stands him in good stead. In a field often overwhelmed by flashy technobabble, Kilian puts communication before flash and produces a readable and helpful guide.

Unite these two streams and take a look at [www.presenteronline.com](http://www.presenteronline.com). By registering for this free site, you can access tons of articles on presentation skills, including technical how-to on some popular presentation software. Worth surfing over to.

*Do you have a Web site, book, publication or resources you think HotLink's readers should know about?*

Phone (416) 964-7799 or

E-mail [sources@sources.com](mailto:sources@sources.com) and we'll check it out!

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## The Mistakes Spokespeople Make...

*Continued from Page 1*

7. **Speaking in Jargon.** It's often tough for spokespeople to adjust their technical level to that of the interviewer. But it's also critical. If you talk over the interviewer's head, you'll decrease the chances of an accurate write up; if you "dumb down" the information for a technologically-sophisticated interviewer, you'll likewise decrease the chances of getting the kind of coverage you desire.
8. **Missing the "So What?"** Too often, spokespeople focus on the intricacies of their technology and forget that ultimately, the game is about offering a better value proposition for your customers. Demonstrate how your products and services solve your customers' problems and help them achieve their goals.
9. **Trashing Competitors.** Spokespeople can easily lose credibility if they boast about overthrowing the 800-pound gorilla in their market space. Far better to talk about the unique features and advantages of your offerings and how you plan to increase market share. In short, take the high road when it comes to competitors — you'll do more to increase your chances of obtaining the good press you deserve.

10. **Playing Tug of War.** Some spokespeople believe that they need to come across as "tough," so that they can control the interview through intimidation. Bad idea; you might win a battle or two, but you'll still lose the war. Victory goes to he or she who controls the ink. So be a smart player and check your ego at the door.

Are there other mistakes spokespeople can make during an interview? Sure. But if they can avoid the "Big Ten," they'll maximize their chances of a successful experience with the media.

*Steve Bennett is a Cambridge, Massachusetts-based media trainer who specializes in helping spokespeople of high-technology companies deliver effective strategic messages to: the trade, business, and consumer media; analysts; stakeholders; and the public. An active journalist in the computer field, Steve is also a sought-after freelance spokesperson by major corporations. You can reach him at [steve@mediamentor.com](mailto:steve@mediamentor.com) or by calling 617-492-0442.*

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## At a Glance — Web sites mentioned in this issue of HotLink

### [www.sparkcommunications.com](http://www.sparkcommunications.com)

The Web site of David Saxby, author of *New Media... Endless Possibilities* on page one, has a bevy of articles by this media-savvy consultant and president of the Calgary chapter of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers. Visit the CAPS Web site at [www.canadianspeakers.org](http://www.canadianspeakers.org).

You can see samples of their newsletter, *So To Speak*, where David's article first appeared and learn more about this great organization.

### [www.successtrategies.com](http://www.successtrategies.com)

Web site of Success Strategies, the *Sources* listee featured in the *Globe & Mail's* Facts & Arguments page in May. The full story of Shelle Rose Charvet (president of Success Strategies) and her moving and enlightening article is found on page two.

### [www.mediamentor.com](http://www.mediamentor.com)

The resource-rich Web site of Steve Bennet, whose article on interview techniques begins on page one. More informative and insightful articles from Steve appear on his Web site.

### [www.capcollege.bc.ca/magic/cmns/fwp.html](http://www.capcollege.bc.ca/magic/cmns/fwp.html)

The fiction writers' page of Crawford Kilian, author of *Writing for the Web*, reviewed on page three.

### [www.selfcounsel.com](http://www.selfcounsel.com)

The Web site of those publishers of everything handy, Self-Counsel Press. They published Crawford Kilian's *Writing for the Web* (as well as his other *Writing for...* titles) reviewed on page three.

### [www.zelazny.com](http://www.zelazny.com)

The charming and imaginative Web site of Gene Zelazny, the author of *Say it with Presentations* reviewed on page three.

### [www.books.mcgraw-hill.com](http://www.books.mcgraw-hill.com)

Publishers of Gene Zelazny's *Say it with Presentations* (as well as a bevy of related titles) reviewed on page three.

And don't forget...

### [www.sources.com](http://www.sources.com)

Visit the *Sources* information supersite for links, resources, information about media relations and of course, back issues of the *Sources HotLink*.

From the listings desk...

**Thank you!**

*Many thanks to all of our clients who responded to our recent Renewal and Update information request. Having the opportunity to add or make changes to your listing ensures that journalists receive accurate information about your organization.*

*We will be sending out Renewal and Updater packages again in the fall, but in the meantime, REMEMBER — we are here to help! Whenever you have changes or questions about your listing give us a call at Sources. Our team will help you stay connected and any changes that you require will appear on-line within a week, making your latest information just a keystroke away!*

*Enjoy the summer!*

**Tracey Parn**  
**Listings Co-ordinator**



## New Media *Continued from Page 1*

from the files. You don't have to have the font style or the graphics on your computer. The file is self-contained and adaptable to any computer operating system. To include pictures, ".jpeg" or ".gif" files can be stored in a minimum file size (for example, a 5 1/2 x 7 1/2 file could be as small as 50k) and viewed or printed from almost any computer, again with no special software requirements. Even video clips can be stored in files the size of a single photo (e.g. a 30 sec. clip could be 300k) using file formats such as "avi", "Quicktime" or "Real Player." Plus, they can be played back with reasonable quality, even on a full size computer monitor. Sound clips can be stored in a similar size as a ".wav" file or in one of several other formats. Software to create a number of different file types and formats is available via the Internet or in a computer store at a very minimal cost. If you don't want to do the work yourself, hire someone to build these files or have them design an entire multimedia production for you. The cost is reasonable compared to printing brochures or producing/editing a video. And turnaround time is often faster.

Recently we worked with a Toronto speaker to produce a CD ROM of video clips taken from a training video he supplied. We loaded the clips onto a CD so he could use them in conjunction with his Powerpoint presentation and deliver them from a laptop computer. It took under a week to produce the CD and have it on his doorstep. As a speaker, delivering this presentation in the traditional way would have necessitated a video player, a TV or projector, overheads and the list goes on. Making arrangements for such equipment can be time consuming and generally more expensive. Some of the distinct advantages of new media are:

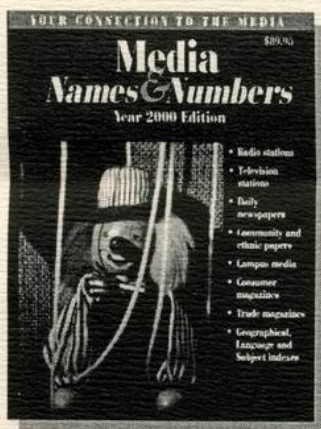
- ease of traveling with less equipment
- faster searching for short clips
- lower production costs and shipping expenses
- convenient client viewing — at their leisure
- easy client access to print your material — as they need it
- simplicity, just insert the CD ROM versus "finding" the video player

And the most important advantage — multimedia is still perceived as new and has a novelty factor from a marketing perspective. In the near future, technology will give us palmtop computer systems (credit card size) which will offer more information and delivery capability than the average desktop computer today. I'm not certain that smell will be a part of new media but the possibilities for speakers are endless. If you are looking to penetrate a market, new media can be the edge in the battle for the mind of the customer.

*David Saxby is a keynote speaker and seminar facilitator on the design and delivery of successful presentations, strategic marketing communications and creative problem solving.*

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