

The Sources *Hot*Link

Tips and Practical Ideas to Get Positive News Coverage

Number Seventeen, Autumn 2000

The Media Mentor

When Bad Things Happen to Good Spokespeople: Handling Tough Interviews

BY STEVE BENNETT

As you prepare for your next interview, remember that the vast majority of people in the media are not out to get you. They're out to get a good story.

Nonetheless, as [a spokesperson], you might find yourself in the hot seat if questions revolve around delayed or flawed product launches, quality problems, flagging financial performance, loss of market share or failure to increase market share, vocally dissatisfied customers or vendors, culture clashes following an acquisition or merger, and the like. And in discussing issues like these, the interview can get dicey – even hostile, if you let it.

Some causes of friction are beyond your control. For example, the journalist or editor might have:

- Had a bad day.
- Exhibited an aggressive or combative interviewing style.
- Walked in with a negative opinion of your company or its products.
- Had a very bad day.

If this happens, take a deep breath and relax. Then engage in what I call "inverse agitation." The more riled the interviewer becomes, the calmer you get. This technique works; it's hard to have a verbal skirmish if one party refuses to fight.

Other situations are self-inflicted, such as you've:

- Had a bad day.

- Become overly defensive, evasive, or impatient with the interviewer.
- Engaged in an argument.
- Shown a lack of respect for the journalist's or editor's questions, technical knowledge or understanding of the marketplace.
- Had a very bad day.

You will inevitably have bad or very bad days — that's life. But you can't afford to take them out on journalists or editors, even ones who seem unimportant or technologically unsophisticated. Every interview should be treated as an opportunity to build your brand.

So what should you do if, despite your best efforts you find yourself in a verbal duel? First, disengage. You shouldn't be arguing in the first place;

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Watching The News

BY AL ROTHSTEIN

Want to get to know how a reporter thinks? Try analyzing your friendly local newscast.

On a recent trip to Los Angeles to conduct media training for a client, I scrutinized the local news. With all the bells and whistles used and the content of the stories, the newscasts could have passed for a local version of "Entertainment Tonight". The first three stories were about celebrities and their personal lives, not offering much valuable information to the viewer.

The producer of the newscast would argue that these are the types of stories "people are talking about" in LA. Whether you agree with that philosophy or not, news stories are based on what a news organization believes reflects the public's interest.

How does that affect you when you work with the media? Whether you are pitching a story or being interviewed, you must convince the reporter that the public is interested in what you have to offer.

Personalizing the Story

Observing how stories are written by news

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News from Sources

Welcome to *HotLink* 17, Fall 2000. It's been an eventful few months at **Sources**, with the move to our new office in Toronto's "Little Italy" making this a busy, exciting and energizing fall. We are continuing to receive praise for our revamped Web site, and are even beginning to cast an eye toward our Silver Anniversary, just two short years away.

I received an example of the power of **Sources** recently, following the P.M.s "Pie in PEI" incident. After a protester threw at pie at Prime Minister Chrétien, one of our listees whose subject index headings include security, terrorism and VIP protection, received 11 phone calls and two E-mails in a 6 hour period, from journalists across Canada. Further proof that a listing in **Sources** will enhance you media relations strategy from "plain" to "à la mode"!

I welcome your comments about *HotLink*, **Sources**, and all of our publications and services. If you have media relations resources you would like to share with the more than 1000 readers of *The Sources HotLink*, get in touch with me! I am always on the lookout for above average insights to share.

Enjoy a healthy and productive fall

Kirsten Cowan
Editor, *The Sources HotLink*

SOURCES **HOT** LINK

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The Sources Mailbox

As always, we have received dozens of requests for **Sources** from journalists covering every area of interest and part of Canada. Here's just a sampling:

I have been receiving your very useful publication Sources for some time. I have recently moved and would like you to continue to send Sources to my new address

– Shirley Tessier,
Irwin Publishing, Orillia

Please send 10 copies of Sources.

– Derek Chan, Radio Canada
International, Montreal

We're desperate for Sources: whenever we go to pick them up from the mailroom, they're gone! Please send 10 copies.

– Lani Selick CBC News Magazine,
Toronto

We need a copy of Sources at the office. Thanks for your help.

– Jacquelyn Francis, MapleMusic.com

I am sending you this note and clipping in order to be put back on the Sources mailing list! I have been receiving Sources for many years and I'm not sure why I am no longer on your mailing list. I am a freelance journalist and your publication is a very helpful resource.

– Erica Simmons, Toronto

We are receiving more requests from online publications, recently including in addition to MapleMusic.com, walkincloset.com, and robtv.com. Seems no matter how high-tech the journalism, **Sources** remains a vital part of the job.

Sources is on the move!

As of October 4th, 2000,
our new address is:

489 College St., Ste. 305, Toronto,
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Our phone, FAX and E-mail
remain the same:

Phone: (416) 964-7799 FAX: (416) 964-8763

Toll-free: 1-800-299-7990

E-mail: sources@sources.com

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Watching the News...

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anchors and reporters will help you determine how to deliver your message when you are being interviewed. Notice how stories are "personalized". Words like "you" and "your money" are staples of the nightly news. These are words we should all use during interviews. It helps bring the message home to viewers.

Take a look at how reporter "packages" are edited. If a story is well-done, you should be able to understand it by turning down the volume and just watching the video. This means that if you can offer reporters good video to go along with your story idea, you will be creating a win-win situation.

20-20 Rule

Many reporters have what is known as the 20-20 Rule, meaning that there will be no more than 20 seconds of narration alternating with no more than 20 seconds of a sound bite. This keeps the story well-paced. In my reporter days, I used a 15-15 rule. This means that you should keep your interview responses to no more than 15 seconds. This way you are increasing the chances that your message will not be edited.

"Exclusive"

Count the number of times you have heard a newscaster, "As we told you

exclusively at six..." Reporters like to be the first. This means that if a reporter has worked hard to develop his/her own story, we should honor that. Of course, the exception is when the "enterprise" story is a negative one. In that case, a strategic media campaign may be necessary.

When you become familiar with how a newscast is developed, you will get a better feel for how to become successful when working with reporters. It is an important first step in getting consistently good media coverage.

Remember, whether you are pitching a story or being interviewed:

- 1 Watch the local news to learn the types of stories that are covered.
- 2 Personalize your story
- 3 Offer good video opportunities.
- 4 Keep your responses brief.
- 5 Honor a reporter who has "entered" his/her own story.

Courtesy of Al Rothstein Media Services, Inc., specialists in spokesperson training and media relations seminars.

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<http://mediabrain.home.mindspring.com>

When Bad Things Happen...

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even if you win the battle, you'll likely lose the war, because you don't control the ink. Also, don't assume that the interviewer is enjoying a fun and mutually fulfilling jousting match; chances are, he or she will conclude that you're difficult or worse and award you the coverage you deserve.

Second, listen intently. Wait for a good opportunity to put the issue in context or bridge back to your key message points. ("Yes we did post lower earnings in Q3. And that was largely anticipated, because we took a one-time charge. In Q4, we're actually ahead of plan. And our success is due to three strategies. First ...")

Finally, keep it all in perspective. Never feel that your company's honor is at stake, or that a particular interview is worth an increase in your blood pressure. Simply focus on getting across your messages and demonstrating for the interviewer what it's like to take the high road.

Steve Bennett is a Cambridge, Massachusetts-based media trainer who specializes in helping spokespersons 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 or

Help is at Hand!

Panicking over completing your listing changes?

Unsure how to get the most

out of your

listing? **Sources** listing experts can give you a helping hand. Call Tracey or Heather at (416) 964-7799 for tips and advice on getting your listing shipshape.



Listing Helpline

(416) 964-7799

We want to hear from you!!

By now, you should have received your **Sources** listing package. The deadline for submitting your changed or updated information is **October 31, 2000**. Responding to us by this date will ensure that journalists have the latest information concerning your organization, something that will help you stay connected with the media. If you know that you are unable to respond by the deadline, don't despair! Give us a call and we can make accommodations to suit your organization's schedule.

If you need help with any other aspect of your listing please give either me or Heather Easton a call at **Sources**,

we'd love to help.

Remember - if you are mailing back your renewal or update - we have moved!! Our new address is 489 College St., Ste. 305, Toronto, ON M6G 1A5. Our fax and phone number remain the same. Hope to hear from you soon!

Tracey Parn,
Listings Co-ordinator

P.S.: If you have lost, misplaced or didn't receive your package, don't worry! Call us, A.S.A.P., and we'll fax you another one.

The HotLink Resource Shelf

Going for Gold! A Complete Marketing Strategy for Speakers

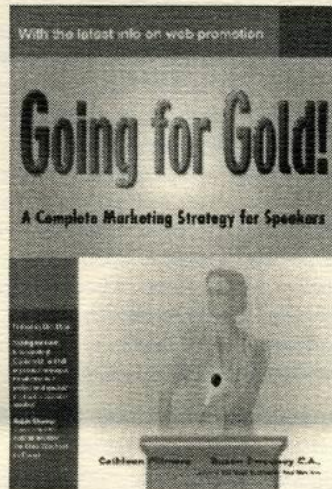
by Cathleen Fillmore &
Susan Sweeney C.A.

Elias Press, 2000, 220 pp.

REVIEWED BY KIRSTEN COWAN

Cathleen Fillmore and Susan Sweeney, two prolific Canadian speaker/authors, have teamed up to create a friendly, warm hearted guide to establishing yourself in the increasingly crowded field of professional speaking. With topics ranging from finding your niche, cultivating your network, and making the most out of new technologies and the now de rigeur Web site, Sweeney and Fillmore have compiled a readable and approachable resource that should find a comfortable home on the desks of aspiring speakers as well as anyone with an interest in marketing their uniqueness.

Going for Gold! is really two books in one. Part one, authored by Cathleen Fillmore, editor of *Speakers' Gold* newslet-



ter, delves deeply into the nitty gritty details of beginning and maintaining a career as a professional speaker. From developing a media kit, through cultivating relationships with journalists, how to record a promotional audio or video tape, and etiquette with speakers' bureaus, Fillmore gives a thorough and readable treatment of her subject. It holds a tight focus on the subject of professional

speaking, although much of the marketing material does have "crossover" appeal.

Susan Sweeney, author of *101 Ways to Promote Your Web Site*, takes the reins for part two of *Going for Gold!* Sweeney's treatment of Internet marketing how-tos definitely has appeal beyond the realm of the would-be professional speaker. From maximizing the use of E-mail, through the dark netherworlds of Meta-tags and keywords, Sweeney does an admirable job of translating the buzz words of Internet marketing into real strategies.

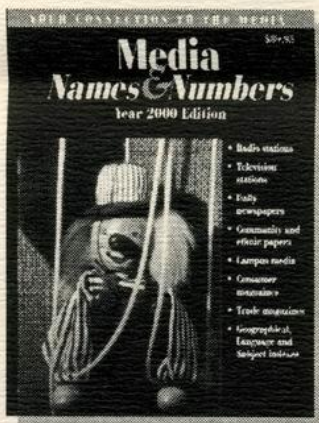
All in all, *Going for Gold!* provides a solid introduction to the world of professional speaking, and reaches beyond it to provide an excellent marketing guide for anyone looking to promote a unique person or cause.

Cathleen Fillmore's listing in Sources is on page 258 of the Summer 2000 edition. Visit her on the Internet at www.speakersgold.com

Susan Sweeney C.A.'s listing in Sources is on page 318 of the Summer 2000 edition. Visit her on the Internet at www.connexnetworks.com

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