

Fronting the Media – advice for managers

Delivered by Ian Tanner, Group General Manager Assets & Major Projects, Sydney Catchment Authority at the Legends of Water event held by AWA NSW Branch in November 2012.

A few pointers to assist in successful media engagements:

- a) Know the detail -facts, figures – but choose which ones are the important ones to use. Don't overuse them, it will only confuse the audience and the journalist will lose interest. It's a balancing act between sounding knowledgeable and sounding like a geek.
- b) If it's a 'technical' subject, you must simplify it into normal everyday speak – no jargon, no acronyms, just plain English – convert technical terms as far as possible.
- c) Prepare your Key Messages – what is the 'Take Home' message – it must be simple and repeated. Limit them to a couple – one is even better.
- d) Prepare for tough questions - try to anticipate where the journalist may go with the interview – what else is in the media that is topical and may relate to your interview. Prepare a 'politically correct' answer with your Communications team. But don't try to blame/pass responsibility to another organisation. There are a number of standard responses that can be used.
- e) Practice your answers before the interview – try not to 'Um' or 'Ah' too much, nor hesitate – you will lose credibility.
- f) Develop a rapport with the journalists – especially TV interviewers – you can control these interviews and suggest content and presentation and location. If you can come up with an 'angle' or 'hook' they will love you!
- g) Make sure you have a great relationship with your Comms team – absolutely critical. They are the first point of contact with the Media. Hopefully they'll establish a "can do" and "no trouble" relationship with the journalist. This puts the TV/Radio station and the journalists in a good frame of mind to start with – meaning your experience should not be unpleasant. Shock Jocks however are a different story!
- h) Learn the tricks of doing different interviews: tape v's live, TV v's Radio.
 - a) For radio interviews (taped or live): lay out your paperwork (Q&As, Fact Sheets, Media releases, Data, etc) in front of you – know where everything is – you can then easily refer and read your response BUT as if you are simply responding – don't make it sound as if you are reading a predetermined answer.
 - b) For taped radio interviews – if you don't like the sound of something you just said (you phrased it poorly or it was wrong) simply stop and ask to start again. They don't mind.
 - c) For TV recordings, same thing. But you can control the interview and take the journalist on a 'journey' – tell them the whole story. They'll decide what makes it to air. Use props (like large scale maps, photos, etc). On site is better for the story/message impact, so suggest going to site.
- i) Remember – you know MUCH more about the subject than them.
- j) Show your passion and share your knowledge.
- k) You'll be lucky to get more than 10 seconds on Radio and 30 seconds on TV – make it count with a 'Key Message'
- l) Relax and try to be natural.

Start off by doing 'routine', low risk pre-records on radio. Then TV recordings. Live Radio is the LAST challenge, especially the 'shock jocks', after you have gained confidence.