

WALKING WITH LIONS



There are times when a request for a TV interview is like an opportunity to walk with the lions.

“Dodgy widgets could harm your grandmother” and “Is this corporate icon scamming working mums?”

Great entertainment which plays on our collective sense of injustice, corporate greed and misanthropy.

If you’re one of these operators who preys on vulnerable individuals, families and the elderly, please go ahead and do your interview. You deserve the prime time publicity.

But, if you are not, there may come a time when some misguided individual taps your journalistic zeal by making unfair and unjust accusations about *you, your company and your products*.

So what can you do when invited to stick your head in the lion’s mouth? After all, you know you’ve done nothing wrong and the journalist only wants to get your side of the story.

In some instances the best advice is to decline the interview, issue a well-crafted statement, while also having a broader response strategy ready to roll out, depending on how the report is broadcast.

There are situations, however, where failing to put up a decent in-person defence could prove even more damaging. Remember, perception is reality when it comes to public opinion.

So if the determined solution is to accept the interview invitation, what should you do to reduce the risk of your position being unfairly represented or distorted?

Certainly you need to do all of the essential pre-work like interview rehearsals, question and answer preparation, key messaging, correct apparel, etc. But there’s still one little tool left in the box which is rarely used, but can be extremely effective.

Remember that what finally goes to air is decided back in the studios by the journalist and the video editor.

At this point I’m tempted to describe this final tool as the ‘interview-tamer’. In cases of an ill-founded story, it will help balance the odds and in some instances stop the beast dead in its tracks.

Here's how it works:

Firstly, and because you've done nothing wrong and have nothing to hide, accept the interview invitation. (By the way, make sure the venue is an indoor location and not at the TV station.)

Secondly, get working on the interview preparation (rehearsals, Q&A, key messages, etc.). You're still going to need this important stuff.

Thirdly - and this is the important bit – hire an experienced news cameraman to accompany you to the interview for the purpose of recording the journalist and their crew conducting the interview.

Now, and out of courtesy, call the journalist to advise that you will be making your own video recording of the interview.

Be honest, tell them that you are doing this so that you have a complete record of the interview. Under no circumstances secretly record the interview. Apart from being unethical and sneaky, it's against the law.

At this stage and speaking from experience, one of two things will happen. Either the interview will proceed, with your camera crew in tow, or it will be cancelled with the very high likelihood that the story will not see the light of day.

If the interview does proceed, however, instruct your cameraman to stay well clear of their TV crew. The last thing you want is for the journalist to accuse you on air of attempting to obstruct their interview.

Finally, even if the report unfairly depicts your response or your company, you now have the ability to publish your version of what happened on the company's website or even YouTube. There are plenty of other things you can do, but we'll leave that for another blog.

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