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Dealing with the media

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Sometimes you want the media to call: Your company invents a gizmo that triples gas mileage. An employee rescues a horse from a frozen pond next to your office. You raise a record amount for charity. Your publicity person distributes a great news release and, with some luck and timing, reporters call.

Sometimes you don't want media attention: An employee is led out in handcuffs for embezzlement. Data about your gas mileage invention was "invented." That great logo you paid \$10,000 for actually belongs to another company. The media will find you.

Good reporters seek controversy or drama. It sells papers, attracts viewers, pleases editors. A call from the media can present tough questions. Here are pointers from my 25+ years in PR/marketing with clients of all sizes: businesses, non-profits and private schools:

*Having an employee say "He's unavailable for comment" is the same as you answering "No comment." Everyone in the office should know who gets media calls and where to find that person.

*Nothing is "off the record" with reporters.

*Use the call to dispel rumors, present your side or perspective. Don't leave the message to others.

*Anticipate calls. Prepare responses to questions you would ask if you were a reporter.

*Good reporters see through "puff." Provide numbers, trends, studies, etc, to back up or refute statements. Always tell the truth, of course.

*Tell the reporter you're always accessible. Provide your direct line and email. Encourage future calls. Ask reporters to add your name to their "expert contact" list.

There are 'good news' stories in the media all the time. What's stopping you from getting positive press?

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