

Lessons Learned: Media Strategy, Influencing Journalists, and Media Interviews

It is one thing to have a Christian perspective on contemporary issues. It is quite another to deliver it into the public square in a way that influences public opinion and public policy. What are the essential components in mounting an effective media strategy? How does one identify and build relationships with sympathetic journalists in order to help them promote your messages? What is the best way of preparing for live and recorded interviews on broadcast media? How do you take control of an interview or debate to make sure that your messages come across effectively? We will review some practical strategies from 15 years of experience of contributing to media debate.

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I. The Current Media scene

- A. The rise of militant secularism
- B. The global village and the media explosion
- C. How the media works – the ‘shark fest’
- D. Social networking – Facebook, Twitter and Blogs
- E. Online newspapers and rapid responses

II. Why get involved

- A. A wider audience
- B. Opportunity for dialogue
- C. Giving Christians confidence

III. Some biblical principles

A. The Apostolic precedent

1. Taking thoughts captive (2 Cor 10:4,5)
2. 'Dialogue' – the truth in words they understand in a place they feel safe

B. Scriptural principles

1. Being surrounded (2 Kings 6:14-16; Psalms 118:9-11)
2. Examples of firestorms (1 Kings 18; John 7&8; Acts 21:27-40)
3. God is in control (Ephesians 1:15-23; Daniel 4:17, 25, 32)
4. Be realistic about the spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:10-20)
5. Be prepared and willing (Joshua 1:5-9; Esther 4:13,14; Isaiah 6:8)
6. Keep your head (2 Timothy 4:5; Philippians 4:6; Psalm 46)
7. Trust God (Exodus 4:10-12; Isaiah 54:17; Jeremiah 1:5-10; Luke 21:14, 15)

IV. The Media

A. The Press

B. Radio

C. Television

D. New Media

V. Influencing journalists

- A. Use a media consultant if possible
- B. Identify sympathetic journalists to feed
- C. Present your message on a plate (press releases and briefings)

VI. Handling interviews

- A. Decide what issues you will focus on
- B. Say 'yes' and be prepared to 'drop everything'
- C. Find out what kind of interview/debate it is
- D. Decide what your key messages are and the language you will use
- E. Get your messages out early regardless of what they ask you
- F. Look for opportunities to 'turn' the interview
- G. Be pleasant but passionate and try to get the last word

VII. Being Prepared

- A. Being reactive and proactive – who is lighting the match?
- B. Stay connected
 - 1. Key news bulletins
 - 2. BBC news stories
 - 3. Twitter
 - 4. Google news
 - 5. The blogosphere
- C. Preparation
 - 1. Horizon scanning and diary planning
 - 2. Agreed strategy and position
 - 3. Media training

4. Social media

D. Develop key support structures

1. Campaign Director – Oversees strategy for campaign
2. Press Officer – fields calls and allocates media opportunities
3. Office administrator – distributes releases/briefings and updates website
4. Media spokespeople – trained and strategically deployed
5. Researcher – chasing up information needed in the campaign
6. Advisors – wise heads to consult
7. Rapid responders – tweeters, face-bookers, tweeters and rapid responders

E. Resources

1. Laptop, tablet and smartphone
2. Press releases, media briefings and articles
3. Website, email lists and social networking
4. Speakers list

VIII. Personal challenges

- A. Anxiety
- B. Reticence
- C. Clarity
- D. Pride
- E. Publicity Addiction