Guide to dealing with the media

Using the media is one of the best ways to publicise your work and get noticed by a huge and varied audience. Through television, radio, newspapers and online you can reach millions of viewers, listeners and readers. Here are some handy hints on how to get the most out of the media.

Why engage with the media?

Publicity is often a condition of your research funding. Getting your name and research in the trade and academic press will help you get noticed by specialists such as funding bodies and professional associations. Publicity is also an effective way of recruiting for study volunteers or promoting an event. Expert comment can add weight to media discussion and is an essential element to many news stories, features and documentaries.

How to approach the media

There isn’t really one simple way of doing this and even if you do make contact with a journalist there is no guarantee that they will use your story. You have to be versatile. The traditional method of approaching the media is through a press release but today there are a variety of other avenues. There’s also a growing demand for good strong interesting images or you can put together a podcast (audio or video) and make use of social media – Facebook, Twitter, ItunesU.

Be media savvy

If the media ask for an interview what do you do? Don’t be afraid to ask the following questions.

First of all make sure you know whether the interview is for TV, radio or the print media. This is a simple question but one which can sometimes be overlooked. Also get the name of the caller, the organisation they work for and their contact details – telephone numbers and email address. It also helps to know who will be asking the questions and what sort of areas they want to cover. You won’t get a precise list of the questions but you have a right to know the context of the interview.

Find out if the story just about you or if it will form part of a broader story or debate?

If it is for TV or radio then make sure you know if the interview will be live or recorded. Radio stations often like to interview people in person live in their studios. TV often do interviews on location but on occasions they too like to do interviews live in their news rooms or studios.

If it is for print they may want to take photographs. If a reporter asks for pictures these will need to be good quality images in their original format – jpeg or tiff. Otherwise they may send their own photographer along.

If TV want to talk to you make sure you know how much filming they will need to do – even if they ask for an interview be prepared for them to ask for additional footage of you and your team at work. This is important to know in advance as it can be time consuming and difficult to arrange at the last minute. However, it is worth the effort as it can sometimes be the difference between coverage and no coverage at all.
Where will your interview be seen?

You can’t always control this but if there is time it is useful to do some research about the organisation and the programme so you know their audience. This will help you pitch your story in the right way.

Beware – if you are interviewed by the BBC TV your interview could end up on any of their TV channels or BBC radio. Once you have been interviewed there can be a snowball effect as good stories attract the attention of other media outlets.

Have a strategy

Keep to your message and find a few ways of saying the same thing. Don’t use jargon, abbreviations or anagrams – they confuse. Challenge any assumptions. Assert your authority but do not be tempted to speculate or patronise. Keep it simple.

In a crisis

Do not panic. Judge whether a response will be to your advantage but give the media as much information as you can. If you do agree to be interviewed remember your key messages – three will do – and do not be drawn in to speculation.

Afterwards

Never contradict what you said in the interview and do not drop your guard until the cameras and journalists have gone.

A few final handy hints

Don’t over prepare but think about what you want to say and how you want to say it. Avoid using notes – looking down makes you appear shifty and look as though you don’t know your subject. Check your appearance – first impressions count.

For more information

If you need any further help or guidance please contact one of the Media Relations Managers in the Communications Department.

Tim Utton, Deputy Director of Communications, on +44 (0)115 846 8092, tim.utton@nottingham.ac.uk
Lindsay Brooke, Media Relations Manager, on +44 (0)115 9515751, lindsay.brooke@nottingham.ac.uk
Emma Thorne, Media Relations Manager, on +44 (0)115 9515793, emma.thorne@nottingham.ac.uk
Emma Rayner, Media Relations Manager, on +44 (0)115 951 5793, emma.rayner@nottingham.ac.uk