

Controlling the Narrative in Media Interviews

**AAPA Public/Government
Relations Workshop**

Toronto

June 2014

Agenda

- Today's media environment
- Define key messages
- Rights & responsibilities
- How to get messages included in *your* interviews
- On-camera practice

Why is Messaging Necessary?

- Comments need to tell your story
 - No one else will tell it
- Current media environment
 - Can't rely on reporters to "get it"
- Moves comments away from just facts
 - Limited real estate in an interview
- Digital media demands brevity
- ***Result:*** stakeholders better informed

Today's Media Environment

- You live in a fishbowl
 - Everyone is a journalist; assume every document is public; push back on legal
- Deadlines are fluid
 - Know when local stories post; have 24/7 access; be familiar with editors
- Attention spans are dwindling
 - Think visually; create shorter documents and videos; recognize multitasking

Today's Media Environment

- Your story isn't just local
 - Recognize cross-ownership; anticipate broad reaction; monitor other stories
- News is consumed on the run
 - Every word counts; media response must be immediate; train spokespersons
- Opinions appear instantly
 - Know when local stories post, have 24/7 access, be familiar with editors



Sacramento

**Didn't receive counsel, didn't
prepare, didn't message**

Key Messages Overview

- What you want readers/viewers/listeners to think
- They're the "big picture"
 - "50,000-foot view"
- Your port's point of view
- Keep it simple
 - 3 to 4 maximum
- ***Not optional***

Creating Key Messages

- What does the public need to know?
 - Keep asking “why”?
- Support each message with:
 - Facts, anecdotes, testimonials, actions, results
- What is your purpose?
 - Inform?
 - Generate confidence?
 - Bring action?

Key Messages

Merger of Long Beach and L.A. ports

5/14/2014

Background: The Los Angeles 2020 Commission released a recommendation on April 9, 2014, that the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles should be combined to create one port authority. The united port, the 2020 Commission report argues, could better compete against the ports from other regions and work to bring even more of the economic benefits of trade to the Southern California region. The idea has been looked at many times before – in 1925, the L.A. City Council voted to support a bill that sought to merge the ports. The bill did not have the support of the Long Beach Council. While the City of Long Beach has not taken a position on the 2020 Commission’s merger proposal, Long Beach Board of Harbor Commissioners President Doug Drummond has said he is not in support of a merger.

Messages:

- The two ports have grown and thrived as two separate, competitive entities for more than 100 years, and the outlook for both ports to continue to thrive is promising.
 - The benefit of trade to the regional economy will grow faster with two competing ports.
 - The 2020 panel cites the success of Port of NY-NJ, which is the third-busiest in the nation. However, Port of LA is already the busiest and the Port of Long Beach is second-busiest in North America operating separately.
- Although they compete for business, the two neighboring ports cooperate very well on environment quality, security and regional planning.
 - The two ports co-authored the Clean Air Action Plan and Water Resources Action Plan, two ground-breaking and highly successful strategies for environmental seaport sustainability.
 - The ports’ security personnel are trained, equipped and prepared to cooperate for safety and business continuity.
 - The ports’ “chassis working group” has proposed a regional solution to truck chassis operations.
 - The two ports jointly developed the Alameda Corridor and the Intermodal Container Transfer Facility.
- Having two separate port authorities governed by their city governments gives the local communities, industry stakeholders and neighbors more opportunities for participation, communication and local control.
- Separately governed ports allow leaders to be more responsive and hands-on to act on issues that need to be addressed.

Interview Rights & Responsibilities

Rights & Responsibilities: Preparation

- Before the interview
 - Work with other port staff
 - Determine the spokesperson
 - Evaluate the media source
 - Read/view related stories
 - Where is reporter going with story?
 - Who else interviewed, what prompted story
 - Don't ask for specific questions
 - Train

Rights & Responsibilities: Audience

- Who's reading/hearing your comments?
- What do they know already?
- Do they have accurate perceptions of your agency?
 - Can you correct perceptions?
- How will they respond?

Rights & Responsibilities: Process

- Control the interview – not a conversation!
 - Determine your communications objective
 - Concise message points at hand
 - *See message worksheet*
 - Support each message with:
 - Facts, examples, third party endorsements
- Develop Q&A with easy and tough Qs
- Quick rehearsal

***Tools to Get Messages
into Every Interview***

Getting Messages into the Story

- Biggest complaint:
 - “They didn’t write what I said”
- Guide the reporter to key phrases
- Can’t rely on the reporter to choose your quote
- Phrases “flag” your messages

Transitions, Turning Negatives to Positives

- “Yes, that’s been said, but let’s not forget that . . .”
- “I agree with you about x, and I think it illustrates an important point . . .”
- “What we do know is . . .”
- “The real question here is . . .”
- *See list included in packet*

Wave a "Flag" Before Message

- Flag your messages by calling attention:
 - "The key thing is . . ."
 - "What you really need to know is . . ."
 - "There are three points we need to remember:"
- Build verbal bridges

Print/Online vs. Broadcast

■ Print & Online

- Content oriented
- More chance for misquote/inaccuracies
- More opportunity for examples, stories and anecdotes

■ Radio & TV

- Sound bite oriented
- TV must have visual
- **You** are in control
- Have you ever heard the question?
- The role of a pause

Express Empathy... if Appropriate

- One of the most difficult elements for public officials
 - “Might expose us to liability”
- Can engage audience, create confidence
- Acknowledge part fault if appropriate
- Recognize frustration

Do...

- Understand media trends, be available
- Correct yourself if you misspeak
- Ask for clarification of a question
- Always tell the truth
- Use stories that bring your points to life
- Be prepared to give a final answer

...and Don't

- Go off the record
- Say "no comment"
- Worry about the tape running
- Rush to an answer
- Repeat negative words/questions



Nurse Fiasco

**Received counsel, was prepared,
messed diligently**

Key Message Platform

- **Key Message 1**
 - Proof point 1
 - Proof point 2
 - Proof point 3
- **Key Message 2**
 - Proof point 1
 - Proof point 2
 - Proof point 3
- **Key Message 3**
 - Proof point 1
 - Proof point 2
 - Proof point 3

Follow-up

- This workshop includes follow-up for you...at no charge
 - Strategize an upcoming issue
 - Develop a key message platform
 - Prepare for an interview
- Email, call, or text
 - ssummerfield@saecommunications.com
 - 510-714-4470
- Take every opportunity to be interviewed
 - Confidence builds with each one