

HBWC - Notes on Interview Techniques.

Nicky Marr at HCVF Meeting – 2 September 2009.

Preparing in advance...

Ask what the interview is to be about before you agree to take part.

Ask about the context too – is it a news story or are they running a feature? That will affect the angle, and give you an idea of how in depth your preparation needs to be.

Find out whether it will be live or recorded. If it's recorded, be aware that you are very likely to be edited before broadcast...editors will be looking for short 'soundbites' – clear, succinct statements which explain the story. They're often just 10-15 seconds long, so if you waffle, it can be over before you've got your point across.

Remember that if you can give the journalist two or three different 'soundbites' it might keep your story in the news longer.

Ask how long the interview will be so you know how much detail to go into with your answers.

Think about what questions you may be asked and jot down some key notes – NOT whole sentences – people can tell if you're reading your answers from paper, even on radio when they can't see you looking at your script.

Think about your audience and what they might be interested to hear.

Don't be afraid to buy yourself some thinking time – if you are phoned asking for a quote or a comment, get all the details and ask for 10 minutes before you call them back. Take the time to work out what you want to say and how you want to say it.

The interview

If you have time beforehand, think about your appearance. Make sure your image onscreen matches the one you want to portray of your business. Most TV shots are just head and shoulders, so something colourful at your neck will make you look better on screen. Try and avoid pin stripes or detailed patterns which can play havoc with the cameras, and remove sunglasses or any hats or caps which shade your eyes – even if the hat is emblazoned with your company logo!

Think about your hair and make-up. Remember that if you look good, you'll feel and come across as more confident. And that applies just as much to radio interviews.

Because most shots are close ups, facial expressions are really important. It's very common for people to frown when they're thinking of an answer, but that can come across as negative on screen, so try and control facial expressions, and keep still...don't fiddle with your hair. And never chew gum!

Try not to feel nervous or defensive. Be confident and upbeat – you are generally being interviewed because you've got something worth hearing about. And don't forget you know more about your company than the journalist does - you are the expert here!

If you don't feel confident, pretend! It's amazing how much more confident you will sound and look if you pretend you're confident...and eventually you should begin to relax and begin to enjoy it.

Take the time to concentrate on your breathing just before the interview starts – a few deep breaths can help calm your nerves.

Ignore the cameras – when you are talking, look at the interviewer, rather than down the lens.

Try to speak clearly, and slow your speech down a little. Avoid 'umms' and 'errrs' as much as you can.

Avoid jargon and TLAs (three letter abbreviations) - try to use language that's accessible to everyone. Use a conversational style – remember your audience may know nothing about the subject you are discussing, and you want to inform them, not alienate them.

Remember that the interviewer will often be edited out of a final piece, so make sure your answers will make sense if they are listened to alone. Refer to the question in the answer and it will make you sound more 'complete' and coherent – it also makes life very much easier for the person doing the editing. An answer like 'yes we decided to do that and it really helped our business' is no use when you hear just the answer.

And because the interviewer is often cut out, try not to talk over each other. It's often tempting to try and finish each other's sentences – it's what we do in real life - but on radio or tv it sounds terrible, and is impossible to edit.

Once you have said all you want to say – stop talking. Silence is the interviewer's greatest weapon – people will often reveal more than they wanted to just to fill what they perceive as an awkward gap.

If you're asked a question you can't answer, it's fine to try and deflect it...use a phrase like "That's interesting but what I feel is really important to mention is..."

If you do find yourself tripping up over your words, it is ok in a recorded interview to ask to do that bit again – just don't do it too often or you'll lose the flow of what you were saying. And remember not to ask if you can do it again if the broadcast is live!

Above all, be yourself and enjoy the experience.

Nicky Marr.

nicky.marr@tiscali.co.uk