

Helping you connect with your audience

Whether crisis or opportunity, the best communications strategy will fall at the first hurdle if you don't deliver engaging messages with clarity, control and confidence.

Preparing people and organisations to make a great connection with their audience is what we do and has been since 1984. Our bespoke media and communications courses use current working journalists, along with PR and communications professionals to help you to get the most from your communications plan.

Whether you're looking to engage more proactively with the media, prepare for a crisis, fully utilise social media or build better relationships with your team - we can help.

Spread the word...

With an increasingly sophisticated audience, effective communication is more important now than ever before. So how do you maximise your messages?

Media First Managing Director, James White and Account Director, Sharon Francis give an insight into how training can help...

The media and communications landscape is changing all the time... how do you keep up?

James

It's our job to! We're constantly working with our clients to create new courses or meet their current challenge. We're always looking to make sure that what we're offering is as effective as it can be.



Audiences have changed. You know, people are no longer obliged to listen to everything that anyone has to say. They can choose when, how, where and even IF they consume their news and entertainment. So we need to encourage them to sit up and listen. Alongside this, it's vital that businesses are transparent and trustworthy. So that's exactly how their spokespeople have to come across.

From a training perspective, it's critical that our techniques are as current as they can be and perfectly matched with our clients' communications strategy. With media training for example, we want to provide as realistic an experience as possible, which is why we use current, working journalists who are out there doing this every day.

What does your role as Account Director involve?

Sharon

It's basically about making sure that each client gets the individual attention they deserve. As James says, our training sessions are tailored around our clients' needs and their communications plan.

For example, if your goal is to try and generate column inches in the financial press (let's say the Sunday Times business section), then we'll create a course with a trainer from that field – perhaps a current or former Sunday Times journalist.

By liaising closely with clients, our account managers also get a sense of the ethos of an organisation and something about the kind of people who work there. What they believe in, what motivates them even. This is vital for creating really effective external and internal comms. It helps to coach people to be themselves. People need to sound real when they do interviews, presentations or even a live Q&A on Twitter! Corporate speaking clones just don't cut it nowadays.

I know which of our experienced journalists and trainers will be right for each of my clients and I can brief them in detail about the business and the people they'll be working with before the course. Each person is then trained to find the words that work for them.



“People need to sound real when they do interviews, presentations or even a live Q&A on Twitter!”

As a result, they’ll sound sincere and genuine in their interview with Channel 4 News or presentation to the board.

James

Trotting out the same old phrases and arguments is never going to be convincing. We don’t do standard, one-size-fits-all courses. Everything we do is put together after a detailed discussion with the client, based on their needs and our experience of media and communications. Clients really appreciate the time we spend with them making sure the course is just right.

What else is important to clients these days, from your experience?

James

Keeping it real! Our media training clients want to know that when they come to do an interview, or have an encounter with a journalist - that the experience is going to match the one they had when we trained them.

Those coming to us for internal communications or presentation training also need to know how to structure and deliver clear and concise messages, along with managing those unexpected questions. We can help with that.

Technology’s also really helpful when it comes to providing worthwhile communications training. We’re fortunate enough to have our own broadcast-quality TV and radio studios for media training, so that the people we train have first-hand experience of these weird and wonderful places.

‘Down the line’ interviews continue to be popular with broadcasters working to tight deadlines. So we make sure the people taking part in our courses know what it looks and feels like to be alone in a remote radio or TV studio, when your interviewer is hundreds of miles away and is just a face on a screen or voice in your earpiece. It can be really daunting – so we need to prepare people for it.

Similarly, most print interviews are conducted by phone or Skype these days, which is why we use off-site journalists to interview delegates using this kind of technology. The trainer then writes an extract of the article so our clients can see how a journalist would treat their interview.

How do you get the balance right between testing someone during a course and not sending them away, terrified of the media?

Sharon

Oh we love to scare people! No, I’m joking! ... Seriously... the media’s a powerful tool. Use it correctly and it’ll help you to promote your organisation and drive business. Handle it badly and it can be very damaging. We see examples of that almost every week. We don’t shy away from telling people these things because they’re true. Having said that, we passionately believe in developing the confidence of those we train. Our journalists and trainers are well-versed in providing the techniques needed to not only manage difficult situations, but to take greater control of the interview and to put across the messages that they want to communicate.

It’s not just about the journalists and trainers, is it?

James

No. The people we use to deliver the courses can only do that properly if everything else around them runs like clockwork. Our team of administrators and account managers handle everything from briefings to catering. That way, our trainers can focus on giving the exceptional coaching that each person needs and everyone is free to learn without any distractions. We know that for clients too, being able to rely on us to take care of all of these details really helps the whole process.

Sharon

Bespoke courses, experienced trainers and realistic scenarios are all vital but you’ve got to get the details right. It’s always said in TV that the best producers are the ones that no one notices because everything they’ve organised works perfectly. The people who make up our support team at Media First are the best producers you could hope for.

Introducing our training team

We have more than 40 tutors, all of whom are current working journalists or communications professionals. Our trainers operate under a strict non-disclosure contract which protects the client when discussing sensitive issues and removes any conflict of interest. Within our team we have the right tutors to match our delegates in terms of expertise and experience. From new spokespeople right the way up to the board, these people can help:



Charles Abel

Experienced news, business and technical journalist. Spent 23 years with multimedia publisher, Reed Business Information.



David Addis

Journalist with a wide portfolio including work for BBC Radio 4, BBC Local Radio, Classic FM, TV-AM and EuroNews. He is a consultant in media and communications for the European Union and has a good grasp of many languages.



Judy Aslett

A journalist with over 30 years broadcast experience including ITN, Channel 4 News and Channel 5 News. Roles include Foreign News Editor, Africa Correspondent and presenter.



Paul Brennan

Pal has more than 20 years' experience as a journalist across print, radio and television. He has worked extensively across regional and network newsrooms for the BBC, ITN and Channel 5 News.



Simon Brooke

A journalist, writer and PR professional with 25 years of experience, including time as Head of Broadcasting for the Conservative Party. Simon currently writes for most of the national newspapers, along with a number of specialist financial publications.



Dominic Byrne

Voice of news on the Capital Radio breakfast show and former newsreader on Radio 1's Chris Moyles Show. Dominic presents for BBC Worldwide TV and has been a specialist in voice coaching for the last eight years.



Clare Catford

Experienced journalist and broadcaster. TV and radio credits include Channel 4 News, BBC Breakfast News, BBC Watchdog, Channel 5 News, GMTV and BBC Radio 2, 4 and 5.



Jane Deith

A presenter, investigative reporter and one of the team at Channel 4 News. She is also a regular on Today, BBC Radio 5 Live and the BBC World Service with a particular focus on social affairs and health.



Kevin Dunn

Kevin is best known for his long career at ITN where he occupied posts including Home Affairs and Political Correspondent. More recently he has spent several years as Business Features Editor at the Sunday Times.



Deborah Hall

TV journalist and presenter who has anchored news programming for BBC TV, BBC Business Breakfast and BBC World. She is a specialist in presentation and impact training.



Graham Jones

A journalist and writer who is also a psychologist specialising in the way people use the internet. An expert on social media with numerous books about the web and business to his name.



Sara Jones

A writer, journalist, editor and producer, Sara contributes to magazines such as City Limits and Arts Review. In addition she has worked on BBC local radio and BBC Radio 4's shows 'Today', 'PM' and 'Woman's Hour'.



Siân Jones

Siân has more than 15 years experience in TV and radio. She has anchored the ITV morning news, been a financial anchor on Bloomberg and CNBC and worked for SKY, FIVE and BBC.



Chris Maughan

TV and print journalist who honed his skills in the national press before spending 20 years as a reporter at ITV. Chris is also a renowned sports journalist.



Lawrence McGinty

Former Science Editor at ITN, his work has been well rewarded with many accolades including the Queen's silver jubilee medal for his work on the New Scientist, and the Medical Journalists' Association Award for 'Health Journalist of the Year'.



Harri Ritchie

Harri has worked extensively for the BBC as a presenter, producer, manager and in-house media trainer. Credits include BBC Radio 5 Live, BBC Radio 2 and BBC Radio 4.



Julian Rush

Julian has worked as an editor, producer, presenter and correspondent for Channel 4 News, the BBC Nine O'Clock News, BBC Breakfast News, LBC Radio and BBC Local Radio. For 15 years he was Science & Environment Correspondent for Channel 4 News.



Tasneem Siddiqi

Tasneem's broadcasting career has been rich and diverse, spanning 30 years in both radio and television. She has reported, presented, produced and been an editor in news and current affairs.



Lynne Wallis

Lynne has 21 years' experience as a freelance journalist for magazines and national newspapers such as; The Guardian, The Independent, The Telegraph, Sunday Times Magazine, The Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday.



Christian Wolmar

One of the UK's leading transport commentators. He is a regular on national TV and radio and a keynote speaker at events across the globe.

For more details on our trainers and to find out how we can help, please visit www.mediafirst.co.uk or get in touch 01189 180 545

What do our clients say?



We have been working with Media First since 2004. In that time they have always provided us with first class media training. Their tutors are excellent and their practical approach to the sessions means that all of our spokespeople are properly prepared for any media interview. In my opinion they are the best in the business.

Paula Campbell, Director of Communications & Marketing, Veolia



Media First offer a professional service and always tailors its courses to our specific needs. Their trainers are active journalists, which makes these practical sessions as close to real-life as possible. We always have a good experience.

Stuart Williamson, Head of Media Relations (Corporate), Nationwide Building Society



As always, the course was excellent. The trainers did a great job keeping the pace and energy levels up and all the participants really enjoyed learning new skills. I now look forward to getting them in front of the camera/microphone!

Mark Davison, Head of Media Relations, Stansted Airport



The Media First trainers pitched our training day perfectly. There was a good balance of 'theory' and practical and the interview sessions really made sense in putting into practice what we had learned and understood. They were also so positive, enthusiastic and constructive in their feedback, which was great. We really felt that the day was built around our individual requirements, skills and needs. It didn't feel like a 'template' day rolled out and made to fit.

Anna Perkins, Marketing Communications Manager, Equifax



Media First provided us with an excellent service from the outset, guiding us through the creation of our first video as a firm and reassuring us with their capable management of the entire filming and production process. We wouldn't hesitate to recommend their services to others looking to produce quality video in a timely and cost effective manner with an end result which far exceeded our expectations.

Jo Bayliss, Digital Marketing Executive, Boyes Turner

Media First make booking bespoke communications and media training a simple and pleasurable experience. Their team of current working journalist tutors never fail to get the most out of our spokespeople which in turn offers us, the communications team, the reassurance we need when putting people forward for interview. We've used Media First for a variety of projects and no matter what seniority the delegates are, the courses are always well tailored, effective and enjoyable.

Louise Robertshaw, Head of Communications and Campaigns, Guide Dogs



The help, flexibility and professionalism of Media First ensured our first tailored media training programme for senior councillors and officers was a complete success. The feedback from those who attended was extremely positive, particularly for the two Media First trainers who ran both a challenging but supportive day. Post-event feedback and DVDs of individual interviews were also extremely comprehensive.

Aidan Shutter, Strategic Account Manager (Media), Buckinghamshire County Council



Media First has provided excellent training for our spokespeople at Cancer Research UK. The trainers are experienced journalists and broadcasters who explain how TV, radio and newspapers work and demonstrate the best ways of getting our messages successfully across in a wide range of media outlets.

Sally Staples, Senior Manager, Press Office, Cancer Research UK



Media First delivered a tailored training session for our leadership team. The trainers were of a high calibre and the session was pitched well for a senior audience. It was a good mix of practical, hands-on exposure to media situations, with well-judged and precise feedback to the delegates.

Anna Thame, Head of External Affairs and Communications, Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust



Media First provided an excellent day of bespoke media training for our communications team. The trainers on the day were fantastic, their experience shone through and all of the team came away with increased confidence in not only speaking to the media, but also in public speaking.

James Durant, Press and Public Affairs Officer, UCAS





Media First offers highly bespoke and tailored courses. We are constantly evolving our range of products and services. Take a look at what we currently provide and call us if we can create something new for you...

Media Training

Media First has been designing and delivering bespoke media training for 30 years. We can coach and advise you on proactive strategies and crisis management across TV, radio, print and online media.

Presentations Skills and Impact Training

We have extensive experience of coaching individuals to speak to groups ranging from small meetings to an audience of thousands.

Social Media

Rather than just increasing awareness and traffic, our courses show you how to create coverage that is targeted, measurable and that drives your business.

Effective press release writing / selling your story

Journalists only take notice of a fraction of the press releases they receive. We'll help you to write attention-grabbing, compelling press releases and pitches that can generate coverage.

Business Paper / Article Writing / Speech Writing

Whatever your writing requirement, we can help you to create more engaging and impactful copy that will elicit the response you're looking for.

Supercharging your PR Activity

Developed in collaboration with a senior PR executive and a working journalist, this course will help communications professionals to get their organisation noticed and to enhance its reputation.

Recruitment Interviews

Put your potential latest employee through a mock media interview. Great for press, media and communications teams or more senior media-focused positions.

Video & Web Presenting

Develop and deliver effective messages and become a more natural presenter. Ideal for sales and marketing professionals or internal communications executives.

Voice Coaching

Your voice is your calling card and research shows it is often judged within six seconds. The old adage of 'it's not what you say, but how you say it' is worth remembering whether you are communicating to colleagues, the media or at a conference.

Video Production

We develop and film informative corporate documentaries, interviews and case studies. This can be done in our studios or on location.

Event Facilitation and Conference Chairing

One of our experts can facilitate at your conference or live event. Whether it's a senior management meeting, sales conference, product launch, webinar, award ceremony, virtual meeting, consumer or trade show.



The Real Reasons Your CEO Should Use Twitter

In the past year, Ryanair's 330 aircraft have flown over 79 million people to more than 180 different destinations. That's a big business. It's somewhat surprising then to discover that the Chief Executive, Michael O'Leary found time in his diary to go onto Twitter and answer questions from the company's customers. This was all the more surprising when you realise that on Twitter, Ryanair only has a little over 15,500 followers (equivalent to 0.02% of its customers).

Why on earth would the boss spend time "engaging" with such a tiny proportion of customers? This is our take...

EasyJet has over 134,000 followers and British Airways has 345,000 people following its Twitter outpourings. This makes Ryanair's faithful somewhat paltry in comparison. Of course, all of these businesses have diddy-squat followers compared with Twitter itself, which has over 25 million. Indeed, Starbucks has four million on just one of its many accounts.

Ryanair is a minnow on Twitter. Yet single-handedly, Michael O'Leary managed to use the site to generate more publicity for his business than he could have done without it. Much has been debated about what he said. He was trying

to be witty but was frankly rude at times, saying things that would make any PR manager squirm. Yet, there were thousands of column inches in newspapers across the world all talking about his one-hour stint on Twitter doing a 'Q&A with the boss'. Indeed, searching for news about this incident finds 144,000 different articles indexed on Google News.

He entered into a number of exchanges with questioners. One asked: "Is there any truth in the rumour that you plan to charge passengers for each inhalation they make after take off?". O'Leary replied: "Hi Beth, great idea. Have a team workin' on it as we breathe!" In another conversation, the Chief Executive was asked what he thought Ryanair's biggest achievement and biggest failures were. He responded: "Biggest achievement, bringing low fares to Europe and still lowering 'em. Biggest failure, hiring me!" When a Ryanair employee Tweeted: "So my boss is on Twitter right now"; O'Leary immediately responded with: "Get back to work you slacker, or you're fired". O'Leary may be politically incorrect but he knows how to generate publicity by remaining true to his loudmouth stereotype.

Of course, he is not the first boss to take to the Twittersphere. Just days before, the Customer Service Director of British Gas braved the Twitterati in a bid to answer people's questions about the recent hike in energy prices. Compared with what happened with Ryanair, you could be forgiven for not realising that British Gas had even done the exercise. All it received was a tirade of abuse about the price rises, including one person asking how the British Gas boss slept at night with "Cameron's foot on your head and the stench of dead pensioners in your nostrils?"

Like Ryanair, British Gas has a comparatively tiny Twitter following. Its almost 25,000, followers are just a small percentage of its 16 million domestic customers. Talking to just a few of them on Twitter is just sending out a small whisper, rather than proper communication. No doubt though, the PR folks at British Gas thought that the newspapers would cover the Twitter Q&A and talk about that, instead of the price rises which were announced on the same day. Ultimately, the Twitter Q&A was seen as a cynical move. Where British Gas failed, Ryanair succeeded. Mostly there was difference in the amount of humour. British Gas was very business-like, whereas Michael O'Leary was joking, making inappropriate remarks and generating what can only be described as "online banter".

One of the issues with Twitter is that because it is short-form communication, people use it for quick-fire humour a great deal. They don't expect it to be formal and business-like in just 140 characters. Recently, the mobile phone operator O2 achieved significantly positive Twitter responses, following its humorous Tweeting during a system outage which removed mobile phone access for millions of its customers for several hours.

But why are all these businesses taking to Twitter so readily when so few of their customers use it? Clearly, there is the PR benefit. But there is another reason – research. Getting information about how your customers feel is expensive and takes time. With Twitter you can get it instantly and it only takes an hour of a director's time, which is ultimately cheaper than a market research agency.

Furthermore, business owners often know that what the newspapers say about social media is not always completely true. They may say that a company's Twitter activity is negative and cynical, but the company can look at share prices and sales figures. The day after Ryanair's Twitter chat for instance, the company's shares went steadily up. Remember that was the day when it had its maximum media coverage, all fuelled by the banter and humour. Whilst the media commentators were attacking Michael O'Leary's "publicity stunt", his accountants were busy counting the additional company value.

So, sometimes Twitter is not what it seems. Organisations may not be using it for "customer service" at all, but may be driving wider media coverage and publicity. They could even just be conducting customer and market research quickly and cost-effectively. Or they may be focusing on making money and ignoring the negative publicity on the basis that 'all publicity is good publicity'.

Ultimately though, the companies that do the best are those that see Twitter as vital alongside the other aspects of their business – integrating Twitter activity within PR, or within market research, for instance. They do not see social media activity as an add-on but they integrate it within their entire business activity. I suspect for all his tomfoolery on Twitter, that's precisely what Michael O'Leary has done.

To read more from our blog, go to www.mediafirst.co.uk/blog



12 Lessons from Cameron's Conference Speech: A Media First Analysis

Writing the Prime Minister's party conference speech must be a labour-intensive challenge. It requires the identification of themes and ideas, development of catchy soundbites and finding the right words to suit the PM. You then have to turn them into a coherent, memorable and rousing speech. This is after all, usually the most powerful speech delivered by the most powerful person in the country.

So what can business leaders and others learn from David Cameron's 2013 speech? It received a reasonably positive reaction – but why? We look at 12 techniques, used by Cameron and his team – that you can use when delivering your next presentation.

Lesson 1: Format and preparation

David Cameron followed the usual political speech format – a few jokes to warm up the audience, an attack on the opposition and then a strong summary of Tory policy, followed by a rousing call to action. It's a logical development that is easily followed and works for most speeches.

Lesson 2: Key messages and memorable soundbites

He also identifies a key message and a memorable soundbite – again something that every speech or presentation should contain. In this case it's "land of opportunity". Cameron repeats it regularly and the media, duly briefed, have picked up on it.

Lesson 3: Make it relevant

He goes on to address the issues that are in the minds of the audience at the moment - seeking to turn a negative in a positive; "Profit, wealth-creation, tax cuts, enterprise — these are not dirty, elitist words. They are not the problem. They really are the solution, because it's not government that creates jobs, it's businesses".

Lesson 4: Contrasts

Cameron uses a number of contrasts to differentiate himself from the opposition. This kind of contrast between words or ideas is a great way to make a point. He uses contrast again later: "I didn't come into politics just to fix what went wrong, but to build something right".

Lesson 5: Repetition

Repetition in a speech is a great rhetorical device that helps drive home a message, as well as giving the sentences an appealing rhythm. "What matters is the effort you put in and if you put in the effort you'll have the chance to make it", Cameron says. In another example, when talking about defence he argues: "This is not about national vanity, this is about our national interest".

Lesson 6: Conviction and energy

To add even more conviction and energy to his speech, Cameron uses both contrast and repetition together. “In place of the casino economy, one where people who work hard can actually get on. In place of the welfare society - one where no individual is written off. In place of the broken education system, one that gives every child the chance to rise up and succeed” he says. Notice here that favourite device, the power of three; “I came, I saw, I conquered” being another such example.

Lesson 7: Short sentences – urgency and theatre

Another writing style that adds energy, urgency and a sense of theatre is the use of short sentences. Take his references to his predecessor, Margaret Thatcher: “Giving power to our people. Spreading home ownership. Creating work. Winning the Cold War. Saving the Falklands. An amazing record”.

Lesson 8: Varying pace

Short sentences would get pretty wearing on their own and so very sensibly, the Cameron speechwriters introduced a contrasting style. Varying the pace and tone of a speech is essential to keep the audience's attention. So, he uses gentle, self-deprecating humour: “If you saw those pictures of me on the beach, you'll know I've got the stomach for the fight and Ed Miliband has said he will never take his shirt off in public. So Ed, here's the deal: you keep your shirt on, I'll keep the lights on”. Notice how he uses the joke to make a point, in this case about energy pricing policy.

Lesson 9: Humour

Later, on foreign policy - he jokes that not only did Britain beat Russia in the 2012 Olympic medal tally, but the biggest selling vodka brand is made in the UK. It might not be side-splitting humour, but it's a contrast to the more powerful lines and let's face it, it's not as if he's doing a stand-up routine at a comedy club. Getting the audience on your side and then joking about common experiences or poking fun at a common enemy is essential when adding humour to a speech.

Lesson 10: Ditch the jargon – be relatable

Referring to the economy, the Prime Minister talks about what “puts food on the table”. As well as using simple, everyday words - it's a very visual image that everyone can relate to. This isn't the time for high falutin' economic jargon.

Lesson 11: Case studies

Later, he says: “I met a couple on Sunday, Emily and James. They'd both had decent jobs, but because they didn't have rich parents, they couldn't get a big enough deposit to buy a house”. Politicians are finally understanding that references to human beings – real people - are what the audience relates to most. Corporate speakers need to bear this in mind too. Talking about individual members of staff, clients and telling stories – all these things work well in presentations.

Lesson 12: Image: Consider your personal brand

Words aside - manner and image are very important. Cameron has chosen a dark navy suit, a cream (not white) shirt and a pale blue tie. Hand gestures are also very important for senior politicians, just as they are for senior business leaders. Margaret Thatcher started with (rather bizarrely), a wrestler's overhead hand grasp until her advisor, Sir Gordon Reece persuaded her to wave politely at certain sections of the audience. Tony Blair had a habit of pointing, which looked aggressive. Instead he was advised to make a gentle fist with a prominent thumb. David Cameron goes for open hand gestures which are not aggressive but instead have an inclusive feel.

Whether this speech will help to put Cameron and the Tories ahead in the polls long-term remains to be seen. Either way, as with other prominent figures; an analysis of his speech can be interesting and useful to those looking to give effective presentations.

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Journalist Tricks and Traps: 10 questions you need to prepare for ahead of an interview...

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on training

At the start of each of our media training courses, we ask delegates what they think of 'The Media'. The replies are rarely complimentary but over the course of the session, they learn techniques to build confidence and help them manage their media interviews. However, asking questions is the bread and butter of journalism and it is a journalist's job to get a story. Even the most experienced interviewee needs to stay on their toes, look out for tricky questions and make sure 'the story' is their key message. Sometimes these questions are inquisitorial, as the reporter seeks information. On other occasions they might be accusatorial as he or she asks the interviewee to defend their position. Whether it's "How did you feel about that?" or "You care more about profits than your customers", having an answer ready is key to doing a successful media interview. The only way to be prepared with an answer is to spot the difficult questions before they're put to you.

Here are ten tricky questions that a journalist might ask you or a colleague:

1. The first question

This can be disconcerting. You've agreed to talk about a particular subject or to approach it from a particular angle, but the journalist starts off with something completely unexpected. This scenario is particularly likely during interviews on fast-paced local radio, where presenters have minimal knowledge and might find themselves doing ten or 15 interviews during a morning.

Sometimes journalists use it deliberately to throw an interviewee off-guard. "I notice that you went to such and such a school, you didn't know X did you?" or "You look very fit, do you work out?" are also great ways of getting a spontaneous response from even the most experienced, media savvy interviewee.

2. The chatty/friendly question

A journalist's small talk, (apparently to warm you up) might not be as innocent as it sounds. "Gosh, you look very well, have you been away?". You mention a fortnight in the south of France or a winter break in the Caribbean – how lovely. Except, that is, when it appears in an article which mentions that your staff have not had a pay rise in two years, or that redundancies are being announced.

You can make small talk in meetings but just be aware that what you say is still on the record and can be used in any way the journalist wants.

3. Putting words into your mouth

Journalists will sometimes use negative phrases in their questions. Very often the interviewee repeats this negative language, even when they are defending themselves and rebutting the accusation. For example you might be asked: "This is very disappointing isn't it? Aren't you disappointed?" You answer: "I wouldn't say it's disappointing..." But you just have. The journalist's negative language can now be attributed to you. Whether it's broadcast or press, they have a neat soundbite with you using their negative phrase. Don't repeat negative language.

4. Speculation

Journalists are obsessed with the future. Journalism has sometimes been described as the "relentless pursuit of the new". If we don't know something, we can always speculate about it and invite you to do the same. "What would happen if...?" is fascinating to the media but risky for interviewees. Even something as anodyne as "Where do you see turnover in three years time?" can make you a hostage to fortune.

In crisis situations in particular, speculating on the cause of the incident or its possible consequences is very dangerous. If you don't know, then don't guess.

5. The two-part question

Journalists will sometimes make a statement during a question. For example; "I know that you're launching X next week, how do you see the market developing over the next few months?" Another one might be; "You're due to make redundancies, I know, but what are the big issues facing the company over the next year?"

If the statement is correct and you're happy with it, then that's fine. But if not, then challenge and if necessary, correct it before going on to answer the question.

Journalists will sometimes do this because they genuinely believe what they're saying but more likely they're 'flying a kite'. In other words, testing to see whether something is true or not. Either way, if it's not accurate then don't let it go unchallenged.

6. The Personal question

You've promoted a product or defended an issue very effectively by giving the organisation's official line. But then the journalist asks you about your personal experience or preferences. "Would you like a nuclear power station/hypermarket/major road next to your home?"; you might be asked. Or it could be "Do you eat this stuff?" or "When did you last do something for charity?"

Many people will remember Matt Barrett, the £1.7million-a-year head of Barclays, admitting that he didn't borrow money on his credit card. Barrett was actually giving evidence to the Commons Treasury Select Committee but either way, your personal experience or preferences are fair game to journalists.

7. Just for background

You're discussing all the issues that you've agreed to talk about, when the journalist asks you for some facts or figures just for background. This is fine, but you need to think about how they will be treated. Will they be attributed to 'a source at (your organisation)?' Will it be quoted at all? Does it involve commenting on competitors or on market-sensitive information? Depending on what you say, what was intended to be in the background of an interview could easily end up in the foreground.

8. The oft-repeated question

Why do journalists keep asking the same question again and again? You're asked a difficult question and you answer it with the line that you decided to take. The journalist looks quizzical and then asks the same question, only in a different form. Or perhaps they go on to ask a couple of other questions and then come back to this question. Then they do it again. Then they apologise or look confused or frustrated – and ask it yet again.

Why won't they leave it alone when you've already answered it? The simple truth is that many people, when asked the same question again and again will (out of boredom, politeness or a mix of both) eventually give a slightly different answer and then the journalist has them.

9. 'While I've got you'

This is usually put towards the end of the interview. You've discussed all the issues that you arranged to talk about and have answered all the questions on the topic. Then suddenly, the journalist asks something completely leftfield. It's topical and vaguely related to what you do, but nothing to do with what you arranged to speak about.

Being familiar with other issues connected to your sector or organisation that are in the news that day and having an answer ready for any questions about them is essential.

10. The final question

The interview has gone well. The journalist has asked tough but fair questions and you've answered them all successfully. The pen and tape machine are being put away when the journalist asks a final question and it's a stinker. A classic example of this is Jeremy Paxman finishing an interview with the former Chancellor, Norman Lamont on Newsnight. "Do you enjoy your job?" asked Paxman. It's an easy question and Lamont, who has acquitted himself during the interview very well, makes some anodyne comments about it being a challenging but enjoyable role. At this point Paxman then asked: "Are you going to miss it then?". Cue look of horror on the face of the Chancellor.

"Do you really think you're worth your salary?". "Let's catch up again this time next year – if you still think you'll be here?". "Do you agree with the government's policy on...?"

Leaving the nastiest question to the end is a classic journalist trick – be ready for it.

If the journalist asks you the same question five, six, seven or more times then smile, be polite and give the same answer every time. Better still, try and move the conversation on to something more positive from your point of view.

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Blackberry Crumble: Analysis of Bates' BBC interviews

Blackberry was once a pioneer in the smartphone market. In September 2013, it announced it was to cut 40 per cent of its worldwide workforce amidst huge losses. These losses were attributed primarily to the poor performance of its newest model, the Z10.

In January 2013, Stephen Bates, European Managing Director of Canadian firm, Research in Motion which makes the Blackberry smartphone was given two plum media spots to publicise the product. This is where Blackberry started to crumble...

We've become accustomed to the glitz, tech-speak and hollow marketing slogans that characterise the launch of electronic products. Manufacturers' spokespeople sometimes seem to live so entirely in this world that they have difficulty in communicating with their customers via the media. Stephen Bates, seems to be one of these.

On the morning of January 30th 2013 he was interviewed by BBC breakfast reporter, Stephanie McGovern and BBC 5 Live's Nicky Campbell.

In both cases his performances were severely marred by some basic errors. The interviews have since been remembered more for these than the product they were intended to publicise.

We can learn some valuable media training lessons from these.

Lesson 1: Acknowledge the question

The interviewer is asking questions on behalf of the viewing or listening public. He or she is asking what the audience wants to know. So to avoid or ignore a question is to appear evasive, unhelpful and impolite before the very people the interviewee is trying to reach with the product launch. Stephanie McGovern asked Bates on at least three occasions why Blackberry had not been able to launch the product earlier, as expected: "What went wrong?" Three of his replies were:

1. "I'm really proud to be part of this industry..."
2. "This is a great market. We've tried lots of things..." and
3. "This is a phenomenal market..."

These firstly evade the question. They do not lay to rest the issue of technical or corporate problems that Blackberry may or may not have faced. Instead of giving an adequate answer, they instead provide forced enthusiasm and corporate marketing language.

Bates made the same mistake with Nicky Campbell. In this interview, a prime time three-minute radio opportunity; Campbell asked him on no less than six occasions: "What have you learned from the iPhone?". Let's remember this





very question addresses an issue that is, or has been on the minds of millions of listeners who have wrestled with the question of whether to choose an iPhone or a Blackberry for their next phone. Bates' replies included amongst others:

1. "Blackberry is a unique product..."
2. "This market is a great market..." and
3. "So, so, so, Blackberry was one of the inventors of the smart phone."

I'll come to the "So, so, so" in a minute, but again we see the same evasive response. There is a complete failure to address why the customer should buy a Blackberry rather than an iPhone. The replies are delivered in marketing language and at this point in mobile phone history, are listeners likely to care about who invented the smartphone? This reply is irrelevant.

What Bates should have done can be summarised in the simple mnemonic A.B.C:

- A Answer or acknowledge the question
- B Bridge to a key message or subject the interviewee is more comfortable with
- C Communicate what you want to say to the audience

This is something that Media First regularly teaches on its courses. Nicky Campbell himself later Tweeted in response to a question about the interview: "Absolutely, bury it, bridge and move on".

Lesson 2: Dump the jargon

I'm guessing that most of the people watching or listening to these interviews would be interested in learning about the new phone, what it can do and how much it costs. They received virtually no help with these questions. Mr Bates instead argued that the new phone; "delivers a new, unique user experience". Nicky Campbell responded to that by suggesting that it sounded as though he was reading from a press release.

"Delivering a solution" was a second piece of jargon. In fact, one of Bates' favourite turns of phrase was that BB10 is "transitioning". The new BB10 "...transitions the essence of what Blackberry is about..." he told Campbell. What that means is not entirely clear. Maybe it means the Blackberry is changing but it may also apparently mean that the Blackberry-type business phone is now able to meet personal needs as well. Jargon not only sounds phoney, it often obscures meaning.

Lesson 3: Corporate – who cares?

"It's an exciting day for us," Bates enthuses. "We invented the smartphone..." He says that the company has been through major changes. So what? In any case, this tells us nothing about the company at all. If he intends to give us corporate data, then where are the facts and figures? Would you buy shares in RIM on the basis of this information? In fact this stuff is irrelevant to both existing and potential Blackberry customers along with investors. Why waste any of a precious three-minute prime time opportunity saying this?

Lesson 4: So, so, so

Shakespeare buffs may recall King Lear's "so, so, so..." muttering as he comes to terms with his new found tragic wisdom. Mr Bates however never finds his. In three out of his six responses to Nicky Campbell's questions about the influence of the iPhone on the new Blackberry, Bates replies:

1. "So, so, so, Blackberry was one of the inventors of the smartphone..."
2. "So, so, so the focus around the smart phone..."
3. "So, so, so we've spent the last few months with BB10 engaging our customers"

An unfortunate tic perhaps, but this appears to be Bates' way of pausing to think how he can avoid the question. After a while, the audience can spot an evasive answer about to be delivered. It's a minor point maybe but everything can be heard on radio and TV. You can't hide. If you are delivering to millions of viewers and listeners, it's worth getting your performance, words and mannerism perfect. In short (and this applies to the totality of Mr Bates' performances) his minders and media trainers would have done well to prepare him, his content and his manner far more thoroughly than they have.

Corporate MDs are not media stars, but if they are going to represent their business and the products they sell in the media, then they need to remember the three most important media training words of all: Preparation, Preparation, Preparation.

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mediafirst

specialists in communication training

Holybrook Hosue
63 Castle Street
Reading RG1 7SN

01189 180 545
hello@mediafirst.co.uk
www.mediafirst.co.uk

www.mediafirst.co.uk/blog

 @mediafirstltd