City Clerks New Law and Elections Seminar

Media Engagement in Tumultuous Times
Building Trust Through Transparency and Powerful Storytelling

Jill Oviatt
Director of Communications and Marketing
League of California Cities

Dec. 9, 2021
Communication: opportunity and risk

*Media interviews* are a great opportunity…

…and also pose a great risk.

How do we **maximize opportunities** and **minimize risks**.
Preparation is key

"By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail."

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.
What do journalists want?

**Newsworthy**

√

**WHAT SELLS**

**Emotion:** Drama and Conflict
Plain *spoken* language
Brevity/Clarity
Simplicity
Passionate delivery
Hot issues and trends
Localized and humanized
Audience benefit

**Avoid**

X

**WHAT DOESN’T**

**Logic:** Facts and dry data
Local government lingo and technical jargon
Long-winded responses
Complexity
Dull delivery
Data heavy and impersonal
Not *audience-focused*
Tool #1 – Primary Key Message (PKM)

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?
Tool #2 – TOM

• **TARGET AUDIENCE** – Who am I speaking to? Who do I want to reach?

• **OBJECTIVE** – What do I want that audience to do, say, feel, think after I have communicated with them?

• **MOTIVATION** – What does the audience care about, what motivates them, what are their concerns?
Tool #3 – Proof Points

- Example
- Data
- Anecdote
- Analogy
- Other City/Brand Messages

PKM
Aristotle outlined a method to master persuasion

- **Ethos** or character. In order for your audience to trust you, establish credibility.
- **Logos** or logic. Use data, evidence, and facts to support your message.
- **Pathos** or emotion. People are moved to action by how someone makes them feel. Storytelling will connect the audience to you and your idea.
Principle #1

You must play an **ACTIVE** not passive role in every interview you do.
Principle #2

It is not the overall conversation that is important but the **OUTPUT** that matters.
Example Output: Cal Cities interview on 2019 Auditor Report

Associated Press article, Oct. 24, 2019

• The League of California Cities characterized the analysis as a data dump without context and analysis, making the rankings "irresponsible and misleading."

• "There is not a one-size-fits all template on how to run a city's finances," said Jill Oviatt, director of communications and marketing for the league. She noted the data was from 2017, and many cities have since approved new taxes and other measures to improve their finances.
Principle #3 – Keep it short and simple (KISS)

Simplicity is complex. It's never simple to keep things simple. Simple solutions require the most advanced thinking.

Richie Norton
Principle #4 – Always stay on message

It can be very dangerous to stray
NEVER say “No comment.” Instead say, I can’t talk about that, because...

- Legal
- Inappropriate/unethical
- Not the right person/not the right time
- Don’t have the information/don’t know

But what I can tell you is … and give them something similar and your top message.

Transparency + Good and newsworthy content = Satisfied reporter
How does this affect how we do media interviews

Green Fish Good, Red Fish Bad

Reporters

Interview

Spokesperson

Quotes
Principle #5 – Build trust through non-verbal messaging

• Integrity
• Sincerity
• Credibility
• Confidence
• Intelligence
• Competence
• Transparency
• Trustworthiness
Crisis communications: doing the right thing pays off

• Nurture relationships with media before a crisis strikes
• Speed and effectiveness of organization response makes a difference to public trust AND – stock prices
• Communication deemed “effective” was:
  ▪ Accessible and prompt
  ▪ Relatable, humanized, empathetic
  ▪ Honest, transparent
  ▪ Conveys action
  ▪ Easy to understand, clear
• What and what order information is shared matters:
  ▪ Concern, Action, Perspective (CAP)
Pepsi-Kendall Jenner Crisis

- **2017** – PepsiCo launched “Live for Now – Moments” campaign
- Public backlash; claimed the ad trivialized Black Lives Matter protests

**Response**

- **Concern**: apologetic and empathetic
- **Action**: advertisement was removed in less than 24 hours
- **Perspective**: trying to project global message of unity, peace, and understanding.

Pepsi was trying to project a global message of unity, peace and understanding. Clearly we missed the mark, and we apologize. We did not intend to make light of any serious issue. We are removing the content and halting any further rollout. We also apologize for putting Kendall Jenner in this position.
US Company Stock Price Trends, By Crisis Response Effectiveness

Published on MarketingCharts.com in June 2019 | Data Source: Hot Paper Lantern

Based on an analysis of 80 companies’ response to 105 crises, measured via analysis of 450K articles and sentiment analysis of 85K social mentions
Summary

• **Prepare** - Create messaging that is newsworthy with a PKM using the TOM analysis.
• Develop **Proof Points** to support PKM.
• **Principle 1** – Be active, not passive. Be a **Spokesperson**, not an Answer-person. Take and maintain control of your story.
• **Principle 2** – Only the output matters - respond in complete “quotes” that can stand alone, out of context.
• **Principle 3** – KISS – Keep it short and simple. Simple is hard.
• **Principle 4** – Stay “**on message.**” Constantly bring back your message, your narrative. Don’t wander – it’s NOT a conversation.
• **Principle 5** – The message is much more than words. Integrity, sincerity, credibility, and passion in your message and delivery, are vital.
• Especially in a crisis, **empathy, speed, clarity, honesty, and action-oriented messaging** builds trust with residents.
Be your own media outlet
Tell your own stories
Western City magazine
Cal Cities Advocate
City website
City social media