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How to Become Invaluable to the News Media

By **Rusty Cawley**

How to Become Invaluable to the News Media by Rusty Cawley

All news reporters need third-party experts to help them explain issues, events and ideas to their audiences. A truly valuable expert is hard to find.

Here's how to become one and thus raise your value with reporters.

A reporter seeks four basic qualities from a third-party expert. To succeed, you must master all four.

First, be informed.

This is more than being educated. You must keep abreast of changes in your field of expertise by reading the top periodicals in your line. Know what is happening. Stay on top of the news. If the reporter knows more than you do, then the reporter will not consider you an expert.

Second, be reliable.

When the phone call comes from the news media, respond immediately. Tell your staff that responding to the media is the top priority. You should move heaven and earth to respond right now. Reporters call on deadline. They cannot wait for you. You must call back immediately. If you fail, odds are the reporter will not bother to call you again.

Third, be interesting.

How to Become Invaluable to the News Media

You must be different. If you offer the same old stuff that the reporter can get anywhere, then you aren't worth calling again. But if you consistently offer a point of view that is slightly askew from the norm, you enhance the reporter's story. And that means you will get called again and again, not only by that reporter, but by reporters who read that story in print or online. If you want an example, study the architect Rem Koolhaas. He has build his career by being an active iconoclast. You don't have to go as far as Koolhaus, but it wouldn't hurt at all.

Finally, be quotable.

You must learn to speak in sound bites. In the world of journalism, less is more. If you give the reporter too much to work with, the chances are you will be misquoted, taken out of context or simply lost in the shuffle. Keep your answers brisk, pithy and sharp. Don't be afraid to pause while you organize your thoughts. Better yet, try to operate from a one–page set of prepared talking points that stake out your iconoclastic position. No matter what question you are asked, you can always steer the conversation back to your talking points.

One other point: You must be ready to reposition yourself with the times.

We live in a rapidly changing world. Whatever issue you seize, over time the issue with mutate or

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vanish. You must be ready to stake out new territory when the opportunity arises.

For example, in the 1980s, many marketers staked out a position as experts in what was then known as "voice text." These were the phone numbers that you could call to get voice messages on stock quotes, sports scores and other brief helpful items.

Then came the Internet. "Voice text" vanished and is now hardly remembered at all. An expert in this field was forced to find a new field.

This eventually happens to everyone in every field. It will happen to you.

And that's OK.

The PR Rainmaker considers "change" to be just another word for "opportunity."

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Two Questions You Must Answer to Make News

By Rusty Cawley

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When considering whether to write a story, a journalist always begins with two questions:

1. What's new?
2. Who cares?

The first point is obvious. If something isn't new, then it can't be news. Most folks understand this instinctively.

It is the second point that most people have trouble understanding. It isn't enough for your item to be new. To qualify as news, your story must appeal to a broad audience. It must have significance for other people, and lot of them.

For example, consider the Taliban, the former rulers of Afghanistan.

Before the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, few news media paid any attention whatsoever to the Taliban. After Sept. 11 and through the fall of the Afghan regime, the media couldn't get enough stories about the Taliban.

What changed to make this happen? It wasn't the Taliban. What changed were the media's attitudes toward the Taliban:

1. What's new? Terrorists have attacked the United States and they are being harbored by the Taliban in Afghanistan.
2. Who cares? Virtually everyone.

Those two questions pushed the Taliban to the forefront of every mainstream newspaper, magazine, TV news program, radio news program and Web news site in the world.

This is an extreme example, but it makes the point.

If you want a story in the mainstream media, your story idea must appeal to a well-defined audience. If you want your story to appear in a trade magazine for nanotech engineers, then your story idea must appeal to nanotech engineers. If you want your story to appear in a suburban weekly, then your idea must appeal to the geographical, provincial interests of that weekly's subscribers.

The PR Rainmaker knows: If you want the news media to write about you or your company, you must clearly and concisely answer the questions "What's new?" and "Who cares?"

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