



Canadian Library Association

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Canadian Library Association

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Internet Service in Public Libraries - A Matter of Trust

Paper prepared by the Executive Council Task Force

by Gary Archibald, President of CLTA; Linda Cook, Councillor; Syd Jones, Past President; Wendy Newman, President of CAPL; Stan Skrzyszewski, Vice-President

In November 1999, the Executive Council of the Canadian Library Association formed a task force of Council "to develop strategies and communications plans that will allow CLA to play a public leadership role, within the Association's agreed principles, on the issues related to the provision of Internet services in public libraries."

The Task Force prepared this paper, which summarizes issues related to the provision of Internet services in public libraries, and proposed changes to the CLA Statement on Internet Access. The task force acknowledges with appreciation the suggestions of the CLA Intellectual Freedom Committee to the development of this paper.

Background

The provision of Internet services in public libraries provides librarians with unprecedented tools to satisfy the information needs of library users. The Internet connects users with ideas and information on a global scale, and connects users with other users in the pursuit of knowledge, shared experiences and in the simple desire to communicate. It also supplements the recreational resources that libraries have traditionally provided.

Public libraries have embraced this medium as a way of enhancing traditional collections and services, and have made a commitment to ensuring that all members of their communities have equal access to this worldwide resource.

As a component of the public library collection, the Internet differs from other materials in that its contents do not pass through the rigorous selection processes that have been used to

build traditional collections. In Canada, public reaction to Internet content now available in public libraries has been mixed. Many public libraries have faced strong criticism for allowing the public, especially children, to access materials that are illegal or which some consider to be offensive or dangerous. Moreover, adults in the vicinity of terminals may be exposed inadvertently to displays they find deeply offensive. Users of all ages may well be exposed to illegal material, inadvertently or not.

CLA's Executive Council Task Force on Internet Service in Public Libraries was formed to develop tools and strategies to assist public librarians in both offering and defending this service, within the Association's agreed upon principles, and specifically the CLA Statement on Intellectual Freedom (1985). By extension, Canadian laws and international agreements are assumed to be within the accepted principles of CLA. These include such examples as the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Criminal Code of Canada.

To date, no aspect of the provision of Internet services by public libraries has been challenged in Canadian courts. However, several public libraries in Canada have sought legal opinions on the provision of these services to inform their policy development.

The legal opinions offered to individual library boards and at CLA Conferences are very similar. They consider the pro-

vision of Internet service in the context of the Canadian Criminal Code and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In summary, the opinions advise that:

Public libraries in Canada face some risk of liability as Internet access providers, resulting from Criminal Code provisions dealing with obscenity and child pornography.

Public libraries are likely subject to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which protects freedom of expression subject to reasonable limits.

Public libraries can minimize their liability by exercising due diligence to prevent illegal behaviour, and ensuring that they are not wilfully blind to illegal behaviour.

Due diligence includes a wide range of measures, appropriate to the extent and nature of an entity's activities, to prevent and correct violations of the law.

Clearly, it is the responsibility of public library boards and staff in Canada to understand the legal framework, risks and potential remedies for the provision of Internet services and to familiarize their communities with their policies and actions in this regard.

Much of the controversy resulting from the provision of Internet services in Canadian public libraries has focussed on children's access to what many consider to be inappropriate content.

For over a century, Canadian public libraries have nurtured a special relationship of trust in their communities with regard to the provision of collections and services aimed at children. That trust has many dimensions, including the trust of parents that public libraries will respect the values of families, let children choose materials for themselves, and encourage parents to monitor and guide these choices. In that Internet access in public libraries broadens the range of choices to unregulated, unselected, and even illegal content, it has the potential to jeopardize this relationship in many Canadian communities.

Librarians have been challenged by citizens, and in frequently sensationalized media coverage, to defend policies which do not restrict a child's access to materials which are considered by many to be offensive and inappropriate. The ability of children to access pornography in public libraries is the most common complaint, and there is a public perception that Internet filtering is a simple and comprehensive solution to the problem.

The legal opinions received to date indicate that filtering itself is a complex issue when considered in the context of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. One opinion states that Filtering of computer terminals used primarily by children is legally permissible but is not legally required as a component of due diligence.

CLA has noted a growing trend to filter children's workstations in public libraries as a component of due diligence being exercised locally, in spite of the well-documented limitations of filtering software. While a decision to filter may help to resolve community concerns, many recognize that filtering is simply one of several means available to deal with the issue of children and the Internet. The filtering of terminals in children's areas can coexist with full access elsewhere in the library and preserve a range of choice consistent with public library principles.

CLA believes that the best and most reliable filter is a child's parent or guardian, and that the values and skills of young people are the major means by which their well-being is safeguarded. Thousands of copies of *Have a Safe Trip*, a parent's guide to safety on the Internet, have been distributed through public libraries across the country since 1998, in print and on the CLA web site. This pamphlet stresses the essential role of parental guidance to children using the Internet and urges parents to become actively involved in assisting children in accessing all resources available at the library.

The issues surrounding the provision of Internet services in public libraries warrant the development of a series of tools to assist CLA members in taking an active leadership role in raising community awareness of Internet service. The tools must also defend the principles of intellectual freedom and universal access that are the foundations of the Canadian public library community and the Canadian Library Association.

The Canadian Library Association is committed to continuous communication to further define the issues. It will monitor the legal, community and library environment, endeavour to ensure that the issues are discussed within its agreed principles, and promote the creation and use of tools for local action.

As a starting point, the task force proposed that the CLA Statement on Internet Access be expanded to reflect the context of Internet content.

Canadian Library Association Statement on Internet Access

(Approved by CLA Executive Council, November 8, 1997; amended, February 27, 2000)

This statement is intended to be considered in tandem with both the CLA Statement on Intellectual Freedom (1985) and the CLA Statement on Information and Telecommunication Access Principles (1994). The principles enunciated in those statements apply to issues of intellectual freedom and public access to the Internet in libraries and provide guidance in this area.

In addition, CLA encourages libraries:

To offer Internet access with the fewest possible restrictions,

To familiarize themselves, their governing bodies and their communities with the legal issues surrounding the provision of Internet access and to integrate such legal reference points into their access policies,

To incorporate Internet use principles into overall policies on access to library

resources, including time, place, and manner restrictions on Internet use, and user behaviour policies and to publicize these policies widely and post them prominently in library facilities and on electronic media,

To safeguard the long-standing relationship of trust between libraries and children, their parents and guardians, in developing Internet use policies and practices, acknowledging the rights and responsibilities of parents and guardians,

To create library web pages consistent with resource priorities that point to appropriately reviewed sites both for general use and for use by children,

To educate their publics about intellectual freedom principles and the shared responsibility of public and school libraries, parents, and guardians in facilitating access to resources in various forms of media, including the Internet, and

To assume active leadership in community awareness of, and dialogue on, the issues inherent in the informed use of this essential, yet non-selective and unregulated medium in libraries.

Canadian Library Association Statement on Intellectual Freedom

(Approved by CLA Executive Council, June 27, 1974; amended, November 17, 1983; amended November 18, 1985)

All persons in Canada have the fundamental right, as embodied in the nation's Bill of Rights and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to have access to all expressions of knowledge, creativity and intellectual activity, and to express their thoughts publicly. This right to intellectual freedom, under the law, is essential to the health and development of Canadian society.

Libraries have a basic responsibility for the development and maintenance of intellectual freedom.

It is the responsibility of libraries to guarantee and facilitate access to all

expressions of knowledge and intellectual activity, including those which some elements of society may consider to be unconventional, unpopular or unacceptable. To this end, libraries shall acquire and make available the widest variety of materials.

It is the responsibility of libraries to guarantee the right of free expression by making available all the library's public facilities and services to all individuals and groups who need them.

Libraries should resist all efforts to limit the exercise of these responsibilities while recognizing the right of criticism by individuals and groups.

Both employees and employers in libraries have a duty, in addition to their institutional responsibilities, to uphold these principles.

Canadian Library Association Information and Telecommunication Access Principles Position Statement (Approved by CLA Executive Council, June 18, 1994)

Preamble

The convergence of computers and high-speed telecommunication networks provides increased opportunity for public access to information and participation in the democratic processes of society. Conversely, access and participation could be reduced through the imposition of user fees and centralized control.

Librarians, libraries, and library organizations will work to assure the 'public good' is represented in all government and corporate initiatives for information dissemination and telecommunications policy. Co-operation with other organizations and public interest groups to protect social interests will strengthen the efforts of the library community.

All people have the right to:

1. Literacy

- The opportunity to learn to read and write is fundamental for all people. Basic

literacy includes numeracy and information literacy. Literacy is an important requirement for participating in the economic, social, cultural, and political life of the country.

- Everyone should have the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills to find and use information.

2. Universal, Equitable, and Affordable Access

- Access to information and telecommunication network services should be available and affordable to all regardless of factors such as age, religion, ability, gender, sexual orientation, social and political views, national origin, economic status, location, and information literacy.

- Diverse sources of information should be developed through encouraging non-profit organizations and community groups to provide information and opinions and by preventing information monopolies.

- Opportunities should be created for broad public participation in the determination of information and telecommunication policy.

3. Communicate

- Individuals have the right to create, exchange, access, and receive the widest range of ideas, information, and images. Individuals should have the right to choose what information to receive and what not to receive and what information to give and not give including that which others may find objectionable.

4. Public Space on the Telecommunications Networks

- Government information is fundamental to participation in the democratic process and should therefore be accessible in a current, timely, accurate, and comprehensive manner.

- Access to government information should be guaranteed through active programs of dissemination.

- Opportunities to communicate electronically with elected and appointed

government representatives is a vital extension of democracy.

- Government policy should encourage and support archiving of information in support of the collective human memory.

- Government policies should encourage and support the development of community information networks, such as Freenets.

- Government should provide resources for libraries and other community organizations to make electronic access to information available and to provide training to the public in the use of such technology.

- Individuals have the right to know the positive and negative personal and social consequences of the introduction of information technology.

- Individuals have the right to a safe ergonomically-sound environment and appropriate training or re-training when new technologies are introduced.

- Social policies accompanying the introduction of new and more efficient information technologies must emphasize benefits to the whole population, such as greater leisure time and shorter work weeks rather than narrow economic interests.

5. Privacy

- Privacy of personal information should be carefully protected and extended.

- Personal data collected should be limited to the minimum necessary and only after the prior written approval of the individual affected.

- Personal information collected for one purpose cannot be traded or sold without the express written permission of the individual affected.

- Individuals should have the right to examine personal information collected by government and corporations and have mistakes corrected at no charge.

Legal Issues Resulting from Internet Use in Public Libraries

by Ronald Kanter

The following text is reprinted from *Felicitier*, Volume 46, Number 1 (2000). Ronald Kantner is a lawyer who practises regulatory law in Ontario with McDonald & Hayden in Toronto. He has advised the Burlington Public Library and the Toronto Public Library with respect to Internet use.

Internet access in libraries raises many service issues for professional librarians, including service standards, budgetary constraints, public-private partnerships, and staff training. This article will focus on the potential criminal liability resulting from Internet service in public libraries, including the authority to regulate Internet use, relevant provisions of the Criminal Code, and due diligence (including the use of filters) as a defence against possible criminal charges.

Due Diligence

Some of the elements that would likely constitute an effective defence of due diligence include the following:

Internet use policy

Establish and communicate an Internet use policy. The policy should refer to activities that are illegal or unacceptable, and it should specify Criminal Code or internal sanctions that will result from breach of the policy.

Complaints procedure

Establish and communicate a complaints procedure to enable patrons to report suspected breaches of the Internet use policy.

Staff training

Train staff to recognize illegal or unacceptable Internet usage, particularly where child pornography is suspected, and to respond appropriately.

Filters

Consider the use of filters on some computer terminals to restrict access to objectionable material, particularly for children, consistent with the provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Filters, if used, should be programmed to block material that is illegal under the Criminal Code, and users should be advised that filters cannot block all illegal material.

1 Authority of the public library to regulate Internet use

Public libraries in most Canadian jurisdictions are established by provincial legislation, which may be supplemented by municipal by-laws. For example, in Ontario, libraries are subject to the Public Libraries Act, which enables a municipal council to establish a board that has the power to make rules for the use of library services and to punish those who are in breach of the rules. Libraries, unlike schools, are not generally required to act in loco parentis with respect to children or minors.

2 The Criminal Code

Four provisions of the Criminal Code contain restrictions on the content of communications, including Internet communications: obscene material, child pornography, hate propaganda, and sedition.

The provisions set out a definition of the behaviour that is prohibited, the activities that give rise to the offence, the parties who are liable, and defences to criminal liability. Case law illustrates how the courts have interpreted the Criminal Code.

(a) Obscenity

The Criminal Code defines obscenity as “any publication, a dominant characteristic of which is the exploitation of sex, or of sex and any one or more of the following subjects, namely crime, horror, cruelty and violence.”

Filtering and Intellectual Freedom
Rather than try to block all material of a sexual nature, the library should choose a filter that attempts to block the four types of illegal material (obscenity, child pornography, hate literature, and sedition). However, no filter will be able to block precisely what the courts determine to be illegal, particularly as it evolves over time.

Section 2(b) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication. Section 1 of the charter guarantees the rights and freedoms set out in it subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

The Criminal Code does not generally restrict nudity or graphic sexual imagery. Some library patrons may find such material offensive, particularly if it is viewed by children, but it is not contrary to the criminal law. The law includes the offence of publishing or distributing obscene material.

The Internet blurs traditional definitions of ‘publishing’ and ‘distributing.’ Some Canadian cases have found people who create and disseminate obscene material from a computer bulletin board to be distributing. On the other hand, it could be argued that public libraries are innocent third-party distributors and should not be liable for the content of the messages unless they have actual knowledge of the content.

Libraries can defend themselves against distributing obscene material if they exercise due diligence — that is, if they take reasonable care, in the circumstances, to avoid the illegal activity.

The Criminal Code also makes it an offence knowingly to expose to public view any obscene matter. It is possible that transmission of obscene material by a computer monitor to a group of library patrons could constitute an offence.

(b) Child pornography

Child pornography is “any visual representation depicting a minor engaged in explicit sexual activity or having as its dominant characteristic the depiction of a minor’s sexual organs, or advocating or counselling sexual activity with a minor.”

The law currently prohibits the publication, distribution or possession of child pornography. The prohibition against possession is currently before the Supreme Court.

(c) Hatred and sedition

The Criminal Code prohibits the communication of statements in a public place that incite hatred against an identifiable group where such incitement is likely to lead to a breach of the peace. It also prohibits the teaching or advocacy of the use of force to accomplish governmental change.

3 Due diligence

As stated above, due diligence is a defence to charges of breach of those provisions of the Criminal Code that are strict liability offences, such as publishing and distributing obscene material. Due diligence includes a library’s systematic efforts, appropriate to its size and budget, to prevent and correct violations of the law (see sidebars).

As Internet access providers, public libraries may be liable to criminal prosecution. We advise all public libraries to consult a lawyer with respect to the legal issues arising from public use of the Internet and to take steps to establish a policy of due diligence to minimize liability for illegal activity.



Online Resources

Here is a collection of web resources on managing public access to the Internet in the library.

American Library Association

Guidelines and Considerations for Developing a Public Library Internet Use Policy (ALA)
Although American in focus, this site also covers many valuable issues for consideration in Canadian libraries.

<http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/internet.html>

The Librarians Guide to Cyberspace for Parents & Kids

<http://www.ala.org/parentspage/greatsites/guide.html>

Libraries and the Internet Tool Kit

Tips and guidance for managing and communicating about the Internet.

<http://www.ala.org/pio/internettoolkit/>

Industry Canada LibraryNet

What Libraries Are Doing Online

Links to innovative sites that illustrate what libraries are capable of on the net. Find out what public libraries are doing online to improve service, raise their profiles, and support their communities.

<http://www.schoolnet.ca/ln-rb/e/doing/index.html>

Media Awareness Network

Web Awareness: Knowing the Issues

A campaign developed by the Media Awareness Network to highlight the new challenges and issues that arise as children and young people go on the Internet. Of special relevance is the section for librarians developed in partnership with librarians from the Ottawa Public Library and the Southern Ontario Library Service.

<http://www.media-awareness.ca/eng/webaware/librarians/lhome.htm>

Ontario Library Association

Internet Access Toolkit

<http://www.hpl.hamilton.on.ca/olita/toolkit/>

Ontario Library Services

Public Internet Access: Guidelines for Public Libraries

A collection of resources that serve as an introduction to some of the important issues public libraries must consider when implementing public Internet access. Includes sections on: Where to Start | Internet Acceptable Use Policies | Issues | Networking with other Professionals | Professional Journals / Literature Searches | Evaluating Web Sites | Web Site Design |

<http://www.library.on.ca/publicaccess.html>

U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science

Kids and The Internet: The Promise and The Perils

Practical Guidelines for Librarians and Library Trustees

<http://www.nclis.gov/info/kids2.html>

Have a Safe Trip!

A Parent's Guide to Safety on the Internet

The Canadian Library Association acknowledges with thanks the work of Dr. Alvin Schrader and Joanne Griener, authors of the first edition of *Have a Safe Trip!* Revised edition August 2000.

This brochure is produced with the generous assistance of the Edmonton Public Library.



What is the Internet?

The Internet is a worldwide network of computers that provides a wealth of information and ideas for learning, recreation, and business.

Who Runs the Internet?

No one. Anyone with a computer and software can put information and ideas on the Internet. Some information is accurate. Some is wildly inaccurate.

Parents: Net Surfing is a Family Affair

The Internet is similar to any other communication vehicle, such as television, radio, videos, or books. Your children need your advice and guidance to make the most of the Internet experience.

You have the responsibility to monitor, supervise, and set conditions and boundaries for your children's use of the Internet. All children develop intellectually, emotionally, and physically in a unique way. You, as a parent, can best evaluate your children's readiness to use the Internet, and judge their maturity to surf alone.

If you are not familiar with the Internet yourself, ask your librarian, take a course, consult a friend, or ask your children!

Review sites with your children and bookmark your favourites. When you come across material you disapprove of, make it an opportunity to reinforce your family's values.

Be aware when your children are online. Put your computer in a room where your family frequently gathers. If your children are young, remain in the room while they are exploring the Internet and check frequently to see what they are doing.

Develop your own 'Acceptable Use Policy' at home, just as many schools and school libraries are doing for Internet use. See the Resource Guide at the end of this brochure for places where you can find sample policies.

Parents: Teach Your Children Well

With your guidance, children can learn how to search effectively for information, to become discriminating consumers of information, to develop on-line communication skills, and to learn a measure of personal responsibility.

Talking to Strangers

Be aware that your children's journey on the Internet may not be a private one, because Web sites routinely track Internet use including e-mail and chat.

Teach your children that strangers on the Internet are no different from strangers on the street, on the phone, or at the mall.

Emphasize to your children never to release private information, such as credit card numbers, home address, phone number, e-mail address, computer passwords, or other private family information to strangers.

Teach your children to seek your permission before meeting someone in person whom they have met on the Internet.

Teach your children not to perform any unfamiliar computing commands that an on-line contact recommends. These commands may do irreparable harm to your computer.

No Secrets

Teach your children to share 'cyber secrets' and tell you if they see something frightening, offensive, or distasteful on the Internet.

Buyer Beware

Alert your children to Internet marketing practices and gimmicks aimed at young consumers.

Internet Filters: How Do They Work?

Most commercial software filters block words, phrases, subjects, and sites on the World Wide Web.

Some Internet Filters...deny access to sites using certain keywords, but some products allow parents to review and change keywords to create their own customized list. The drawback to keyword blocking is that the technology can't discriminate between genuinely unsuitable sites and innocent ones. Software programmed to avoid the keyword "smoking," for example, could also filter out educational anti-smoking sites, and even sites devoted to geology ("smoking volcanoes") or magic ("smoke and mirrors").

Other products block sites based on the site's rating, or block all sites that are not rated. A rating is assigned either voluntarily by the site owner, or by a third party (normally without the site owner's permission or knowledge.)

Some filters also block or control access to chat rooms, e-mail, newsgroups and instant messaging. Many software programs allow parents to control their children's access to these tools by choosing to block access to all chat rooms, or to restrict access to monitored environments. These programs can control e-mail by deleting suspicious messages or those containing certain key words in the titles or in the text of the message.

And, some products block every site until you identify it as an approved site.

All Internet Filters...use American English and spelling. They require regular updating, since thousands of new sites are added daily. It is important to remember that filters cannot fully distinguish the context in which a word is used. This often filters out useful sites.

Why You Are the Best and Most Reliable Internet Filter for Your Children

- The values and skills of children are the major means to safeguard their well-being.
- Internet filters do not block all content that violates a particular family's values and beliefs.
- Internet filters do not always work as advertised. Testing shows that all Internet filters fail to block some sexually explicit sites or sites with illegal content. Filters cannot adapt to the age and level of maturity of particular children.
- Filters do not help your children learn to make independent judgments and to say no.

- Choices of words, ideas, and topics to be blocked may be driven by the product owner's personal values, ideology, and political agenda. These factors may exclude sites that have information regarding sex education, environmentalism, homosexuality, abortion, or health-related issues such as breast cancer, among others.

Libraries, the Internet and You

Your library provides access to the widest possible variety of resources that meet the needs of all members of society. This may include resources that some may consider controversial or offensive.

Library staff can advise and assist you in selecting information resources. Staff review and recommend good Internet resources, just as they select books and other library materials.

You, as a parent, are responsible for supervising your children's access to all library resources, including the Internet. If you are concerned about your children's use of the Internet at the library, ask to see your school and public library Internet Use Policies. Although the terminals in the children's areas may be filtered, terminals elsewhere in the library may not be. Public libraries are committed to offering a range of choices for the varied needs of their customer.

The Canadian Library Association Encourages Libraries to:

- offer Internet access with the fewest possible restrictions,
- familiarize themselves, their governing bodies and their communities with the legal issues surrounding the provision of Internet access and to integrate such legal reference points into their access policies,
- incorporate Internet use principles into overall policies on access to library

resources, including time, place, and manner of restrictions on Internet use, and user behaviour policies and to publicize these policies widely and post them prominently in library facilities and on electronic media,

- safeguard the long-standing relationship of trust between libraries and children, their parents and guardians, in developing Internet use policies and practices, that acknowledge the rights and responsibilities of parents and guardians,
- create library web pages consistent with resource priorities that point to appropriately reviewed sites both for general use and for use by children,
- educate their publics about intellectual freedom principles and the shared responsibility of public and school libraries, parents, and guardians in facilitating access to resources in various forms of media, including the Internet and,
- assume active leadership in community awareness of, and dialogue on, the issues inherent in the informed use of this essential, yet non-selective and unregulated medium in libraries.

For more Information on the Internet and Cybersafety issues:

Canadian Library Association
[http:// www.cla.ca](http://www.cla.ca)

Media Awareness Network
<http://www.media-awareness.ca/eng/webaware/home.htm>

American Library Association
<http://www.ala.org/pio/internettoolkit/>

Talk to your librarian!



Getting Good Press: A Media Guide for Libraries

Effective Communications on Public Access to the Internet

Prepared by Leacy O'Callaghan-O'Brien, Associate Executive Director/Government and Media Relations, Canadian Library Association.

Introduction

Public libraries have embraced the Internet as a new element in their collection, one that greatly expands their capacity to offer library patrons an enriched range of valuable information resources. However, even as the provision of Internet services in public libraries provides librarians with unprecedented tools to satisfy the information needs of library users, it also provokes unprecedented media interest and a degree of public concern. Public reaction to Internet content now available in public libraries has been mixed. Many libraries have faced strong criticism for allowing the public, especially children, to access materials that are illegal or which some consider to be offensive or dangerous.

With increasing frequency, libraries are being called upon by members of the press to explain how their access and Internet use policies ensure safe and appropriate use of this resource for all patrons, and especially children. CLA's media guide is designed to assist library staff and board members to develop effective strategies for communicating their policies and programs on an admittedly controversial topic in a way that encourages public confidence in, and understanding of, the library. The guide is also designed to assist libraries with their day-to-day planning of effective media coverage.

The guide provides basic guidelines for:

- Media relations planning and policy
- Preparing to meet the press
- Managing the standard media interview
- The difficult interview

Media relations basics

Communications Planning

A library needs a pro-active communications plan that establishes a profile in the local media on a regular basis. Earning positive media coverage that promotes library use and fosters greater understanding of library programs and services ensures that the library is well

“With increasing frequency, libraries are being called upon by members of the press to explain how their access and Internet use policies ensure safe and appropriate use of this resource for all patrons, and especially children.”

positioned to deal with more contentious media coverage when it arises. The overall communications plan should include research that provides an understanding of current public perceptions of your library; identification of the target audience and a secondary target audience who may be in a position to influence the main target audience. Research should also analyse other external trends and environmental factors that may also influence target audience(s) and affect your communications. Once the research is carried out, the goals of the media plan should be defined, and an action plan put into place, along with a realistic budget to achieve the objectives.

The plan should define what the message(s) will be, when and to whom

the message(s) will be communicated, and a set of communication guidelines including objectives, priorities, tone and manner of communication.

Then comes the actual communications stage of the media plan, which could include the following avenues of communication:

- Press Releases
- Feature Articles/Spots
- Press Conferences
- Parties
- Publicity Stunt
- Event Sponsorship
- Interviews
- Seminars and Symposiums
- Surveys
- Media Tours
- Radio and/or Television Publicity.

You must know your media, plan your message, relate to your audience and set the agenda. Designing your public relations strategy with the following guidelines will ensure more success in capturing headlines about your library's impact on the community.

1. Gain access to the media.

Get to know the key players, people who manage the news. If you present a positive image and build a consistent relationship with them, you will be in a better position to get the coverage you want. Identify reporters, editors, editorial writers, columnists, commentators, publisher(s) and members of the board. Keep their phone numbers handy. Meet them and invite them on a media tour. Make appointments with key editors and leave them your “media kit,” which will include a fact sheet, library history, photo(s) and a current news release.

Be accessible to the media and let them count on you for a comment on library issues.

2. Make the headlines you want.

Plan your message to reflect the public's

interests. Plan each message with one central theme. Follow up on news releases, to see if they are getting through.

3. Relate to your audience.

People like to read, see and hear about other people. Talk about things that concern people and relate these concerns to the local community.

Be consistent in your positive approach to the public, but use fresh approaches.

4. Be a newsmaker.

Take the initiative and select the issues or information you want to communicate. Plan ahead. Have a comment ready when you know news is going to break

How to get your Press Releases Published More Often

1. Make it important to the readers of each publication.
2. Be sure it's really news and not just an advertisement in disguise.
3. Write it in a way that benefits the readers of each publication.
4. Make it short and to the point.
5. Include information the editor wants and needs (who, what, when, where, how, and why - and details).

Follow-up to a News Release

Telephone the editor within a few days of sending the release.

Tell the editor you sent them a release concerning topic ABC. Ask if he/she received it. If the editor says no, or doesn't remember receiving it, explain what the release concerned and offer to fax or e-mail it immediately.

Follow up again in two-three days. Identify how the release is newsworthy and would be of interest or importance to their readers. If the editor agrees, ask him/her when the release might run and

if they require additional information. If the editor says the release is not newsworthy, find out why. It may need to be rewritten.

Evaluation is a critical element in determining the plan's effectiveness and identifying future strategies. Tracking the success or failure of any media campaign is critical in building long-term communications with your target audience, and in understanding the viability of your message. Evaluation should be carried out with consideration of such questions as:

- Was the quantity of media exposure acceptable?
- Did our message effectively reach the target audience?
- Did we communicate our message clearly, and did the target audience understand it?
- Did the message have the desired effect on the target audience?

Media Relations Policy

A typical media relations policy incorporates the following principles:

Response to all media enquiries is timely and accurate.

The library's mandate, policies and services are communicated to the media and the public with continuity and accuracy. Fact sheets that describe the library's policies and programs, are made readily available to media and key personnel who are likely to be contacted by the press.

Designate a spokesperson. Only those in key positions, or those with responsibility for a program in question, should communicate with the media. Too many spokespersons result in inconsistent messages and images. Ideally, a large organization will have a public affairs

or public relations specialist who coordinates communications and media response. In the absence of this staff resource, the library should designate a primary spokesperson, often the CEO or Board Chair, who is authorized to speak on behalf of the library. An additional person should be deputized and prepared to speak on behalf of the library in the absence of the designated spokesperson. Those who should be consulted and/or informed of media interviews should be also be identified.

Establish an issue and crisis management team to anticipate and deal with the contentious issues that may arise and threaten the library's reputation and integrity, and that of its staff.

Getting ready to meet the press

Anticipate and negotiate the interview

First, decide whether you will grant the interview. To inform your decision, ask:

- Who is the caller... journalist, researcher or producer, and what media do they represent?
- What is the story about, and on what angle are they focusing?
- Who else will they be interviewing on this story?
- How much do they currently know about the subject and/or the library?
- Can you send them, by fax or email, a backgrounder to assist them in preparing their questions, for example, a fact sheet on the library, its services and policies.
- Establish a possible agenda and boundaries of the interview. What is the format of the interview? Nightly news? Feature story? Will the interview be taped? Will you be on camera live? Where will the interview be conducted? How long will it take?

To negotiate adequate time (ideally an hour or so) to prepare for the interview,

ask the reporter what their deadline is, then agree to call them back by the agreed upon time. Sensitivity to reporters' deadlines which may be weeks - or minutes - away will go a long way in ensuring positive media relations in the future.

If you can't grant an interview -- and there are times when you can't or would prefer not to for various reasons, you may wish to refer them to your local library association, or in the case of a story with national interest, to the CLA.

Determine the spokesperson

Decide who is the appropriate spokesperson in the context of the library's overall media relations policy. Determine who else should be consulted and/or informed of the interview

Gather background information

Background materials are helpful to a reporter, particularly if a topic is complex or unfamiliar to them. The library may have a fact sheet or policy document on the given subject or other information, such as brochures, statistics or historical background. CLA media relations staff will likely be able to provide additional background information on the topic on which you are being interviewed. They may also be able to provide information on unfamiliar reporters, magazines, television shows or radio programs.

Outline your main points

Once you've decided to grant an interview, you should determine the key message and prepare three to five points to get it across as briefly as possible -- preferably in 20 seconds or less.

Consider these questions:

- What is the issue?
- What is your involvement in or position on the issue?
- Why is it important?
- Who is the target audience?

Anticipate tough questions and prepare your answers

List the ten most difficult questions you might be asked regarding the interview topic and the ten most difficult questions regarding libraries in general. Think about how you will make the transition from answering these questions into a key point you want to make.

“Tracking the success or failure of any media campaign is critical in building long-term communications with your target audience, and in understanding the viability of your message.”

If the library does not have a media relations office and/or designated media contact, CLA communications staff are available to help you anticipate and prepare for tough questions. Colleagues and friends often can provide good sounding boards as well.

Rehearse

Go over the questions until you are confident you can handle each and every one. Have a colleague work with you until you are comfortable with your ability to manage the interview. You might even record answers with a tape recorder. However, it is not recommended that you read your answers during the interview.

Relax

Print, radio or TV interviews present the opportunity to tell the public something interesting about library programs and events. As difficult as it may seem, a friendly and confident approach to the interview will create audience interest in your message.

Managing a media interview

Getting the message across

Come to an interview prepared with your messages and find opportunities to

get them across without ignoring the reporter's questions. It is important to take the initiative and demonstrate your expertise. The audience is the public, and this is an opportunity to speak to them with authority. For example, when it comes to communicating about public access to the Internet in the library, key messages are:

- Libraries are a safe place for children to discover and explore the Internet.
- The Internet is an exceptionally rich tool to satisfy the information needs of library users.
- Librarians are experts at assisting children to access appropriate and authoritative resources, and advising them on Internet safety.
- Libraries offer a variety of public education programs to assist patrons of all ages in safe and appropriate use of Internet resources.
- Parents and librarians should be encouraged to encourage children to ask for help with their research at the library; librarians, parents and guardians share the responsibility for teaching children to use technology resources wisely.
- Parents play an essential role in guiding their children's selection and use of all library resources, including those found on the Internet.
- The **best** and most reliable filter is a child's parent or guardian; the values and skills of young people are the major means by which their well-being is safeguarded
- Librarians know and respect the laws and have procedures in place to ensure that they comply.

Sample questions and recommended responses on the subject of Internet Access in the library

Why do librarians allow kids to have access to pornography?

The Internet has many wonderful resources for children, but it is unregulated. Since there is no foolproof way to eliminate inappropriate material, libraries are taking special measures to instruct and protect children in their use of the Internet.

What's wrong with filters, anyway?

Filters can have a legitimate place in a broader program to protect children from inappropriate materials. However, filters do not guarantee that all inappropriate material will be blocked. They can also block useful material. Therefore they should be considered as only one element in the library's program to provide Internet service in a safe and welcoming environment.

What is the solution to protecting children?

The very best way to protect children is to teach them to be their own filters - to teach them how to make wise decisions about what they view - whether they are at home, a friend's house or at the library. Most libraries offer guidance to children on how to search online and other tips for using the Internet safely. Librarians help guide children.

Are libraries safe places for children?

Libraries have always been safe and welcoming places for children. Older children are used to coming to the library on their own. That's why it is important to teach children how to make good decisions about what they read and view no matter where they are.

Are libraries having trouble with people looking at pornography?

It can happen, but it's rare. When it does happen, the library staff apply the appropriate policies and procedures to maintain the library's safe and welcoming environment. The fact is the vast majority of children's and adults continue to use the library responsibly and appropriately.

Libraries don't subscribe to Hustler. Why would they allow people to view hard core porn on the Internet?

These are very different media. Libraries select and buy individual items for their collections, but the Internet is not selective, and there is no manageable way to make it selective.

Why should tax dollars be used to support pornography at the library?

Your tax dollars support access to the most important information technology of our time. Less than two percent of almost one billion sites contain pornography. The vast majority of sites contain perfectly legitimate information.

Won't computers and the Internet put libraries out of business?

On the contrary, we'll need libraries more than ever! Polls indicate that the public agree with this. For many children and adults, libraries are the only place they can go to surf the Internet. Librarians are experts at helping people find what they need on the Internet efficiently. Besides, libraries are places where people connect not just with books and computers but with other people.

I understand the American Library Association has taken a strong anti-filtering approach in its position statements and advice to its members. What is the Canadian position?

Like ALA, the Canadian Library Association believes that the best and most reliable filter is a child's parent or guardian, and that the values and skills of young people are the major means by which their well-being is safeguarded. Many libraries distribute the CLA's public education pamphlet called ***Have a Safe Trip: a Parent's Guide to Safety*** on the Internet, which stresses the essential role of parental guidance to children using the Internet and urges parents to become actively involved in assisting children in accessing all resources available at the library.

Libraries look to the Canadian Library Association for direction in forming access and usage policies. They take advantage of resources like the CLA Position Statement on Internet Access, which was developed in accordance with legal opinions based on the distinct Canadian legal framework, including as the Criminal Code and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In its statement, CLA encourages libraries to offer Internet access with the fewest possible restrictions, but recognizes that that filtering is simply one of several means available to deal with the issue of children and the Internet. The statement allows that filtering of terminals in children's areas can coexist with full access elsewhere in the library and preserve a range of choice consistent with public library principles .

What is the community's role in setting library policy?

The community plays an important role in establishing library policy. Most public libraries in Canada are managed by library boards made up of community representative who serve as the policy making body for the library. Librarians encourage public awareness and discussion of the important issues involved in Internet use.

Take an informative approach, rather than a conversational one

News interviews are exchanges of information, between you, the source of that information and the reporter, who represents the public. Interviewees should not feel obligated to maintain the social rules of conduct that guide conversations. Some reporters use a technique of remaining silent, encouraging you to ramble or dilute your original message. While it is human nature to want to fill a lull with conversation, resist the urge to do so.

Be brief

Reporters generally don't want lengthy, drawn-out explanations. They're looking for quotable quotes -- a punchy line that will fill three lines of newsprint or 20 seconds of air time. Use your 20 seconds to get your message across -- there's much more likelihood it will be used. Knowing what you want to say in advance will go a long way in simplifying your answers. Forty-five seconds is about the maximum response time for television and other media as well, unless the reporter truly wants a complete understanding of, for example, a complex scientific subject - in which case they may allow 90 seconds.

A formula that works well in media interview situations is

one commonly described as "the Wedge" (see Figure 1).

Don't go off the record

There is no such thing as off the record. An "off-the-record" comment may not be attributed to you directly, but the reporter often will use the information to confirm a story with other sources. If you don't want something to appear in print, don't say it.

The role of spokesperson

When you are conducting an interview, reporters will not distinguish between

personal opinion and the library's official position - and neither will the public. All questions must be answered in the context of the library's official policies.

Don't use jargon - a straightforward approach works best

Avoid using terms or acronyms that can't be quoted without explanation. Avoid bureaucratic language: For example, not "It is clear that much additional work will be required before we have a complete understanding of the issue." But instead, "We're working on it."

Tell the truth

Give a direct answer when asked a direct question, even if the answer is "No," "I don't know" or "I'm sorry, I can't answer that question."

Don't lose your temper

Some reporters use intentional rudeness as a technique to elicit a charged response. Don't fall into the trap. Respond politely, in control at all times. Don't get into arguments - angry comments may be reported without any mention of the provocation.

Be friendly

It's an interview, not an interrogation. Establish rapport with the reporter.

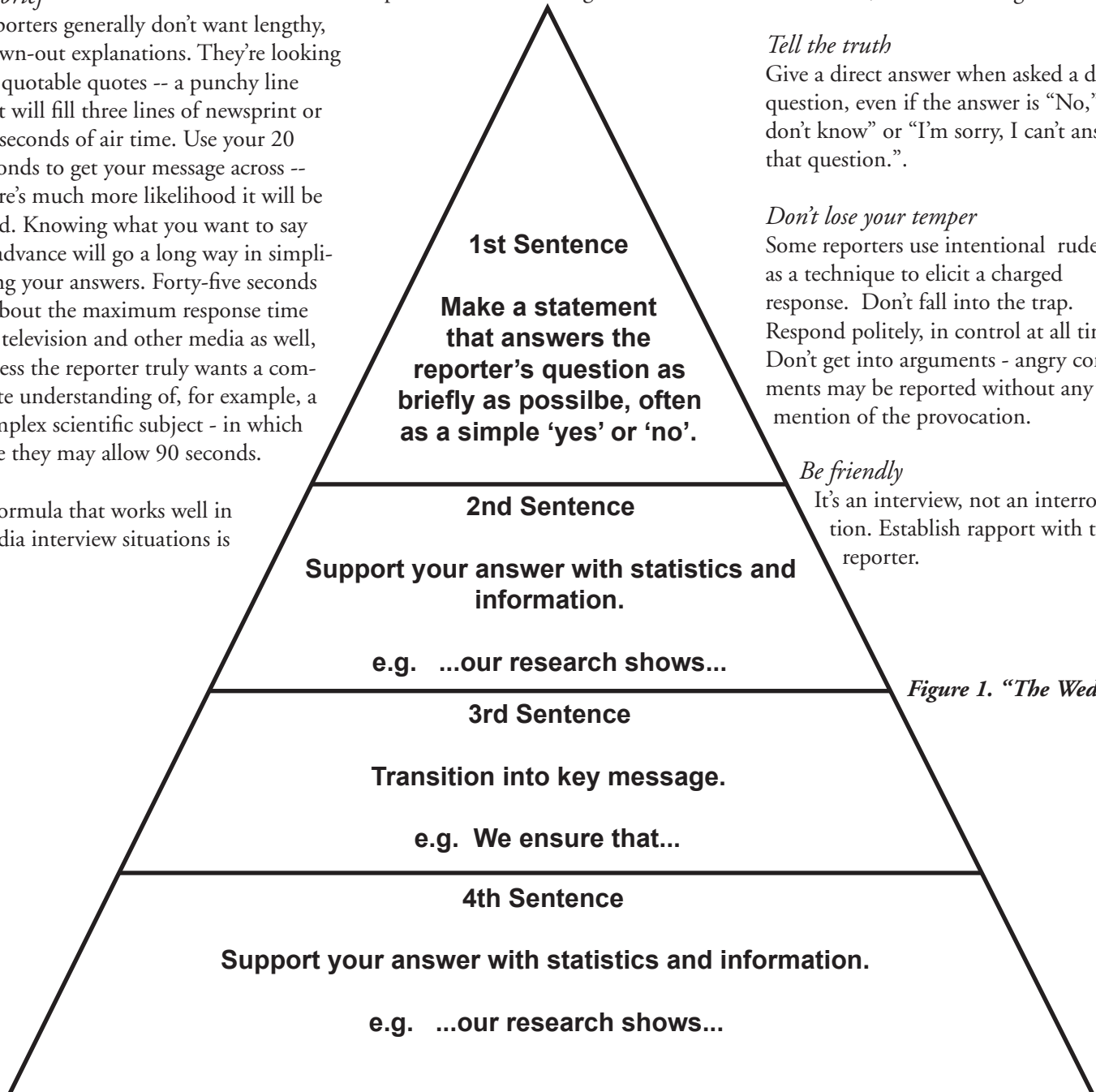


Figure 1. "The Wedge"

Don't answer a question with a question, or resort to a "No Comment"

If the reporter asks, "What do you think about _____?" Don't say, "What do you mean by _____" or, respond by asking, "What do you think about it?" Such responses may come across as evasive, pejorative or hostile.

Avoid the classic "No comment" or "I can neither confirm nor deny." The public views this as: "I know but I won't say." Instead, tell the reporter that you are unable to comment and, if possible, explain why. If a reporter asks about a policy document that is in draft form, for example, tell the reporter: "I'm sorry, this is a working draft, and I'll be able to comment as soon as it becomes public." Offer to let the reporter know when the document is available. Don't answer when you shouldn't. If you know the answer to a question but can't say, don't hesitate to refer the reporter to another source if you feel it is appropriate. Don't forget to let others know when you have referred a reporter.

Don't guess

If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. And offer to either find the answer or find someone else who knows. Don't guess, assuming the reporter will check elsewhere. With tight deadlines, there's a good chance that misinformation will appear in print.

Mistakes happen

If the tape is rolling and you realize you've made a mistake, or, due to nervousness, suddenly find you have no idea what you're saying - stop. Say, "I'm sorry, I haven't answered your question very well. Let me start over." The reporter usually will choose your new, thoughtful response for a sound bite.

Talk from the public's point of view

Remember that you are talking through the reporter to the public. What is

the impact of your Internet use policy on individuals in the community? How does it affect their children's use of the library? Make statements in terms that create empathy with readers and viewers.

Cite facts

Reporters appreciate facts and figures that will lend credibility to their stories or make certain points, as long as they are not exaggerated by the use of superlatives that make things sound bigger and better than they are.

Be prepared to repeat yourself

Reporters may repeat their question because your answer was too long, too complex, they didn't understand you, or they're simply trying to get a more "quotable" quote. Welcome the question as another opportunity to state your message, perhaps more clearly.

Be confident

You're an expert, with a message to deliver. Recognize that reporters in fact may be somewhat intimidated by your expertise or position. Put them at ease.

Manage and respect the reporter's deadline

Find out their deadlines and return calls promptly. Showing respect for deadlines will go a long way toward building positive media relations.

Don't be defensive

Make positive statements instead of denying or refuting comments from others. State your message; let others speak for themselves.

Be aware of when you are being taped

In broadcast situations, such as in the studio or when talking to a radio reporter, it is wise to assume that everything you say is being recorded.

Use anecdotes, humor

Use examples to illustrate your points. What will sell a story about Internet use

in public libraries are not statistics but human interest about library patrons who have had a positive experience exploring the 'Net at the library. Use humor, or an interesting quote. Television in particular is "entertainment" so entertain when appropriate.

In general, avoid reading from prepared statements

This is especially true when you are in front of a camera. You are the expert and ought to know what you want to say without a "script." However, in the case of a press conference or media 'scrum', a prepared statement may serve as a tool to deliver a key message before facing a barrage of questions.

Never ask a reporter to preview the story

Reporters generally never let sources review stories, though they often check back to verify statistics. Remember, it's their job to gather the facts and tell the story accurately -- to suggest they can't do so without your input insults their professionalism. Besides, they won't let you, so there's little point in asking. It's better to listen carefully during an interview to be aware of when a reporter may not understand something. Remember that the likelihood of your being misquoted is reduced substantially if you speak briefly and clearly.

Handling the Difficult Interview

Most reporters are concerned with honesty, accuracy, getting the story straight and getting it first. Some may be openly biased or even openly antagonistic - reporters who try to make you lose your composure and say something you'll regret. All reporters, however, have one primary goal: to get information. And whether they are good or bad, they may use interviewing techniques that are difficult to handle.

Loaded questions

The reporter lists three to five items to build a case and then asks the "loaded"

question. Begin by either accepting or countering the statements, then bridge to your message.

Unacceptable alternatives

The reporter asks you to choose between one extreme or the other, neither being acceptable.

Hypothetical situation

The reporter creates a hypothetical situation and follows up with a specific question. Don't respond to the hypothetical; state your message. If reporters don't give up, don't try to go back and answer in a manner that will make them happy. You might rephrase your answer, but stick to your message.

Commenting on others' comments

Essentially, the reporter is asking you to speak for someone else. Don't do it, especially if you did not hear the individual make the statement yourself. It's possible the person was misquoted.

Divide and conquer

Reporters may want to divide you from your superiors or colleagues by asking, "How would YOU handle this?" If something is out of your area of expertise, say so. Then create a bridge to your message.

False premises and conclusions

Reporters' questions may contain false premises. Respond by countering immediately or a viewer may accept the false premise.

Negative entrapment

Never repeat a reporter's negative statements. Reporters often ask questions in a hostile manner. When responding, turn the sentence around and stress the positive. Use your own words; don't repeat a reporter's hostile question filled with buzz words. Remember, they will quote you, not themselves.

Machine gun style

The reporter asks a string of questions simultaneously. Let them build a trap.

Use body language (your hand) to stop it. Then respond by simply answering the one question which you most want to answer, ignoring the other parts, then bridge to your message.

Interrupter

The reporter interrupts you while you're trying to answer a question. Respond politely, yet firmly: "Let me finish answering your last question first..."

Embarrassing silence

Beware of the reporter who remains silent, encouraging you to ramble on and on. Once you feel you've answered the question, stop. There are several things you can do to fill an embarrassing silence. You can ask, "Do you have any other questions?" or, "Have I answered your question?" or you can also simply remain silent.

The set-up

If you feel the reporter is setting you up, chances are you're right. Reporters often think they know the answers before they've asked the questions. Let them know that you are the expert.

The ambush

It's not uncommon for reporters to ambush a news source outside their office or home. Respond as if the reporter had called you on the phone. Follow the procedure for the standard media interview... ask what the story is about and when they need the information. Assure the reporter that you or someone else will be able to get back to them before their deadline. There is no obligation to consent to an ambush interview if you are unprepared or the time is inconvenient.

The question on top of a question

Slow down. Patiently answer one question at a time. It is to the reporter's disadvantage to take this approach; s/he often will look rude in these situations.

The heckler

Be sensitive to the feel of the interview. You may want to answer a question very

briefly or be silent while the reporter continues. Keep your cool.

When asked a tough question

Avoid the platitude, such as, "That's a very good question" or "I'm glad you asked that question." The audience recognizes such devices as obvious stalls. However, a brief pause before responding is your privilege. Dead time is seldom aired on the news, and silences obviously can't be quoted in print. If your interview is live, a short pause often will give the impression that you wish to make a thoughtful response.

Avoid the appearance of patronizing with phrases such "Well, as I said in my speech" or "I already told you..."

Use the reporter's first name, showing that you still feel friendly and comfortable in the face of the difficult questions.

You may want to rephrase the question, giving your audience a chance to hear it in your words: "If I understand your question correctly, you're asking..."

If you disagree with something a reporter or talk show host has said, you must counter it. If you don't, the audience can only assume that you agree.



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