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10 Tips for Handling a Media Blitz

Is there such thing as too much good press? Here's how to master your PR in a press onslaught and keep a positive business buzz going strong.

By Alyssa Danigelis | Nov 17, 2010



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When Oprah chose the [We Take the Cake](#), a bakery in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, as one of her favorite things in 2004, owner Lori Karmel says she was warned in advance to be prepared to be slammed with orders.

"I didn't know what *slammed* meant," Karmel says. "I thought it meant a few hundred orders." Being featured on Oprah's show was the mother of all media blitzes.

The cake shop's shared Web server couldn't handle traffic and its site went down repeatedly. The mailboxes for three phone lines filled to their 45-message capacity every few minutes. Employees resorted to returning customer calls from home phones.

Six years later, Karmel is still learning about limits. She recently sold 2,000 of her signature cakes in one hour on QVC. When asked if she could return in December to offer 3,000 more, she had to decline. "Everything we do

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is by hand," she says. "It's physically not possible to take it on during fourth-quarter season."

Even if Oprah Winfrey doesn't come knocking, another large media outlet might. Or your company could find itself in the center of a controversy. When the story catches fire, you can crash and burn—or you can bask in the glow. Here's how to make the most of your moment.

1. Be ready with a media kit.

Media coach and marketing strategist [Susan Harrow](#) suggests creating an online press kit that includes a bio, photos, a fact sheet, and a pitch letter. This saves producers and journalists time, and it gives you more control over the way you and your business are being presented.

Harrow also recommends making and posting a two-minute video to show you can handle yourself in an interview. "The national talk shows are really looking for that," she says. "They want to see that you're media-genic."

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2. Prepare your website for a big traffic boost.

Even when the onslaught of traffic didn't crash Karmel's site in 2004, it slowed everything down. Harrow advises checking to make sure the hosting platform can handle a traffic surge. Before she went on CNBC, Harrow contacted her Web hosting company to let them know that her video would be seen nationally.

Tonilee Adamson and Bobbye Brooks, cofounders of the media company [Media 4 Women](#), suggest saving every interview and media mention to post on the site. "One of the biggest problems we see with websites is people don't keep them updated," Adamson says. "That's important for the media to know: You're active and you're doing this."

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3. Connect with your merchant services.

Prior to her CNBC interview, Harrow also made sure to contact her merchant account and let them know that the volume would probably change dramatically from the norm. She says that once, when she didn't give them advanced warning about a big bump in sales, her account was closed.

"I never thought about that," she says. "Why wouldn't they want more money in?"

4. Streamline your commerce process.

If you are selling a product, Harrow says that it's essential to communicate with the people who handle inventory. Even though predicting the exact volume might be impossible, she suggests coming up with a best-case scenario and a worst-case scenario, so manufacturing can quickly be ramped up if needed.

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Whether requesting call-center service, adding temps, or putting in an automated system, those parts all need to be connected, Harrow says. "You want to not have any repetition of tasks. It's about streamlining those processes as much as you can."

The whole system should already be designed to deliver excellent customer service. Part of that design should include a process for keeping customers happy and updated on the process if the product or service can't be delivered immediately. "If you set those expectations, people will be happier," Harrow says.

5. Prioritize interviews.

When media outlets are clamoring, Brooks recommends prioritizing the responses by the ones that will reach the most target customers. "When you have a lot of media coming at you, start at the top with the ones that will give you the best exposure," she says. Sometimes an online interview could have a larger impact than one for TV.

Prioritizing shouldn't mean ignoring requests, though. "Never turn down an interview, because you never know where it's going to lead," Harrow advises.

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6. Perfect the message.

When Harrow coaches clients prior to a media appearance, she helps them perfect their message. It might be an oxymoron, but be so prepared that you're free to be spontaneous, she says. That makes sure your key points come through clearly.

"What you want to do is create stories with emotional impact," she says. The facts should support the story. "In any campaign, leave your customer with a good feeling."

Wardrobe and appearances are part of the message. "You have an image to maintain," Adamson says. "You don't want the attention to go to what you're wearing as much as the message you're saying."

7. Strive for calm.

A media blitz can strain schedules, and nerves. "You can almost act angry toward it," Adamson says. "If you start looking frustrated or overwhelmed, it's not going to do your business any benefit. You have to stay calm."

Harrow recommends practicing simple breathing exercises to get into a relaxed and receptive state. "Breathe in for 10 counts, breathe out for 10 counts. Do that for five minutes," she says. "This calms your automatic nervous system so you can easily access thoughts."

8. Set up appropriate filters.

"At first I was taking all the calls, and then it became ridiculous," Karmel says. "I have a business to run!"

Brooks says that if you're the one in front of the camera, and running the business, and you're inundated, that's going to be a serious problem. "You need a good assistant,

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someone taking the phone calls, taking the messages, being able to filter through those things," she says.

One woman came to Harrow saying that a newspaper article had prompted 100 calls to her business, but only two translated into sales. "That's not a good use of your time," she says. "Part of your system is setting up the filter, discerning whether the people who are calling are the right customers for you."

Harrow has her own strong filter for communications, which includes a form that usually separates the sincere from the sincerely crazy.

9. Comment carefully.

Harrow uses Google alerts to stay on top of media coverage. A steady stream of online comments is inevitable. Harrow cautions against responding to haters. "You don't want to fan the fire of negativity," she says. "If it's incorrect information, just respond with correct information but no emotion. Recognize that not everyone will love you."

For a slew of positive feedback, Harrow says a mass thank you to everyone is a good idea, and an opportunity to share interesting information related to the business. "Do a value add," she says. Something like, "You might be interested in knowing about this."

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10. Offer extras to the press and potential clients.

Interviews shouldn't just be about answering questions, Adamson says. "Give your contact information and a call to action for a potential client who might overhear this interview."

Harrow tells her clients to help create as much content for media outlets as possible. "If you make suggestions and they're really good, it makes their job easier," she says. At the same time, it's possible to work within limitations. She says that one client interviewed on NPR offered a detailed list of tips to go online, aware that the outlet directs listeners to its own site.

Keep the lines open when the interviews are over, Harrow says. "Once you're in someone's database, keep in touch with them."

"It was six years ago, and we still get Oprah 'dividends'—if you could call it that—to this day," Karmel says. "I personally always strive for the media because that's totally our best friend."