



When The College Store Meets the Press

A quick reference guide for working with the media

Positive stories in the media can enhance your store's image and reputation. Conversely, negative stories can undermine them. Although you are pressed for time during RUSH, investing *some* time in media relations is beneficial. This guide is intended to provide you with a few suggestions for working and communicating effectively with the media.

Establishing a good relationship with the media

Understanding the Media

The media's role is to inform, advise and entertain the public. In order to fulfill these roles, they need access to the decision makers within an organization or institution, timely responses to their inquiries, and all the available facts.

Reporters work under tight deadlines! It's best to ask a reporter what their deadline is so that you can respond in a timely manner.

Caution

If your store is operated by the institution you serve, talk to the public relations/communications office before establishing any media contacts. Many institutions require that all media contacts be handled or supervised through a central office. They may also be willing to work with you to establish contacts with reporters, or disseminate information for you.

Recognizing Potential News Events

Reporters respond best to news pitches that include a local interest, widespread appeal, well-known people, or a local angle to a national story. Examples of news that takes place at your store might include new personnel, positive customer service policies, new product lines, expansion/renovation, visiting authors, or just your expert opinion on industry trends and developments.

Positive News

When pitching a story to the media, you need to convince them that the story idea is something that their audience would be interested in. In order to do so, familiarize yourself with the publication and its audience.

When meeting with or calling a reporter, be prepared. Provide a business card to ensure the proper spelling of your name and your correct title. Determine the reporter's knowledge of the subject and adjust your responses accordingly without putting the reporter down. Make an effort to simplify complex, technical explanations. Give the reporter copies of reference materials that will facilitate their preparation of an accurate story.

Negative News

Negative news, such as a fire, robbery, or controversial/sensational allegations surrounding the store, can be a media disaster if you are not prepared for the attention these situations can trigger.

When a negative event occurs and you are reasonably sure that the media knows about it, it is best to go to them before they come to you or write a story on the matter without contacting you at all.

If you are contacted first, don't respond until you obtain the facts. You can advise the reporter that you will call him or her back after you have looked into the situation. When you do talk with the reporter just give the facts — never speculate beyond what you know. Let reporters know that you will share additional information when it is available.

Try to anticipate where the line of questioning may lead and be prepared to break it off with an acceptable response. For instance, "we can't speculate," or "it's inappropriate to comment while an investigation is pending."

Controlling the Interview

Whether it is a positive or negative situation when you meet with a reporter, you can maintain control of the interview if you are prepared. If you don't understand a question or would like it clarified, ask that it be repeated or explained. Offer information and object to any false conclusions the reporter may make. Remain calm, sincere, and avoid debate.

Stop talking when the message is delivered. A silent pause in the conversation is okay. Often a reporter will remain silent while writing down their notes. Avoid rambling or answering questions that haven't been asked. Always keep in mind that everything you say is on the record! Be aware of how you phrase things and how it may read in a newspaper article. Sometimes things take on a completely different meaning in print.

Call Upon NACS

When local reporters contact you regarding issues facing the college store industry (i.e. textbook costs), you can also refer them to NACS. NACS can provide broader background perspectives on the industry, as well useful statistics and information based on our professional research. Ask reporters to contact:

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