

Conducting Broadcast Media Interviews from Home During the COVID-19 Crisis

During the Coronavirus pandemic, while CEOs have their hands full keeping their companies running and employees healthy and safe, it is still important for them to remain visible to key stakeholders by doing broadcast media interviews. But given sheltering in place and social distancing mandates, the bulk of these interviews are now taking place at home. The following tips can help C-Suite leaders continue to make an impact during interviews at this important time.

These are general guidelines, but with the pandemic, there is no one size fits all solution. We encourage clients to contact us for counsel on their unique needs during this difficult time.

Things to Remember

- Express compassion at beginning of interview — health and safety of anchor and viewers.
- Keep pace going.
- Keep answers compact and to the point.
- Viewers are less interested in tutorials about past crises; keep to the here and now.
- You can tell stories but keep them short.

Lighting/Framing

- Position yourself in a well-lit area, but not positioned in front of any windows.
- Be sure to close the door to prevent any outside sound from family or pets.
- A little texture in the background is great — a bookshelf, painting, credenza with books, etc., but make sure it isn't too distracting.
- Be mindful of clutter or private information on your desk or in the background.
- Test the technology beforehand to ensure that everything is working smoothly, that the lighting is appropriate and that the background isn't distracting.
- Do a trial run with a colleague to ensure comfort with the format — and consider a media training refresher by WebEx or other technology beforehand.

Demeanor

- Sit up straight and look into the camera on your computer.
- Don't look at the middle of the computer screen or off to the side at notes.
- Adjust the computer to ensure proper framing, which might include propping it on top of books to bring the camera to eye level.
- Don't let your gaze veer off to the sides — keep your eyes on the camera as if you were looking into an interviewer's eyes.
- It's OK to use natural hand movement to add interest and show energy.
- Don't fold arms or lean on the desk.
- Be mindful of any unwanted movements. Watch swiveling/rocking in the chair. Try sitting on the edge of the chair to minimize movement.
- Dress appropriately for the situation. Avoid white and patterned shirts and busy ties. Be mindful of jewelry.

Flagging/Bridging

- Use flagging language when you're about to make a point: "There are three major themes," "It's important to remember that...," "the most important issues are...".
- Use bridging to smooth the transition from reporters' questions to your messages. Try saying:
 - "Yes, X is a concern and let's consider the larger issue here..."
 - "Before we get off that topic, let me just add..."
 - "Let me put that in perspective."

Added Context

With unemployment and furloughs growing, CEOs are stepping up as the leaders shaping the narrative, and media are eager to take these interviews and perspectives. For communicators faced with helping leaders shape and deliver tough business decisions in this environment, it's important to remember that reputations – for leaders and for companies – are made based on how we behave when times are tough. Whatever the news, it's worth pressure testing your message against a few standards:

- Is it people first? As hard as the bottom line is being hit, if your decision and your message isn't empathetic and leading with the human impact, it likely won't be well received.
- Are you standing in front of workers, or with them? Communicate how leadership is helping carry the burden to keep the company afloat and sustain livelihoods.
- What are you working towards? Share what you hope success looks like if you can weather the tough times. It helps provide direction and instill confidence that the "collective good" is driving tough decision making, not just personal survival.

Sample questions

- What is the state of your business at the moment?
- How have your customers' buying patterns been changed because of the pandemic?
- How has your business changed with people sheltering in place and what are you doing to address their current needs?
- Can supply chains stay running if sales and traffic shift from stores to online for an extended period?
- How are you taking care of your employees?
- How are you handling employees who can't do their job from home but must be at home to take care of their children and other loved ones? Are they being compensated?
- How do you prevent layoffs, particularly if the pandemic lingers on?
- How do you balance employee needs during the pandemic with shareholder needs?
- How are you leading and motivating?
- How are you keeping the business going when everyone is working remotely?
- CEOs are being defined by their response to this crisis. How do you want to be defined?
- How has this crisis changed you and the way you manage people?

If you have questions about C-suite media interviews during the COVID-19 crisis, please reach out to: Sheila.Rose@fleishman.com, Jan.Rasmussen@fleishman.com, Diane.Poelker@fleishman.com, Sarah.Francomano@fleishman.com.