

Economic Development 101

Economic Development and the Media

Today the word media has expanded to more than the traditional means of print, television and radio. It encompasses much more since the proliferation of the internet and the explosion of social media. Though the methods of media communication has expanded there are still some very basic rules of engagement.

It is worth asking how economic development professionals can best prepare themselves to communicate in the most effective manner possible. Even with these ever expanding avenues of media, it is still the good, old-fashioned methods that work best.

Prepare – This point cannot be overstated. It is at the core of successful media communication. Know what your message is and how you will convey it. This means more than just memorizing the message, it means internalizing it. Read related publications, know who else is involved, brush up on the media with whom you expect to connect. It is important to set aside time before connecting with the media to put your “game face” on. This applies whether it’s a traditional press conference, video or podcast.

Be in charge – When the time comes for the media interview you are the one who should be in the director’s chair. You must be truthful under all circumstances but be the one who leads the interview and take charge of your story. The media is there to hear from you and expects you to follow your agenda even if they may challenge it. The interview is not an interrogation nor are you on the witness stand so take charge and answer honestly.

Be concise – Pick a limited number of points to emphasis, i.e. three key messages. The media needs things quickly and precisely. By preparing well this should not be an issue. You are not writing a book, you are conveying a message that should be short and to the point. This is true for face-to-face interviews, blogging and tweeting (there’s a reason there’s only 140 characters).

Create a picture – Use powerful word images. Develop sound bites. Use well-crafted metaphors and similes. Be interesting. Most media will not have the same level of understanding or expertise that you have developed so try to relate what you are doing to the broader audience so they can relate.

Smile and engage – Just like most everything else the physical demeanor can tell a story in itself. It says whether you are passionate about your subject and whether you believe in your message. Be expressive, lean into the conversation and a smile can be detected even in a sound bite.

Develop the relationship – The use of media is not a one time event. Develop an ongoing relationship with media in your community and farther afield. Make sure the relationship is not one-sided. A supportive media can go a long way to ensuring economic development success.

