

# Interacting Constructively with the Media

**Sara Bustilloz**

Assistant Director, City of Round Rock Communications & Marketing  
Region 5 Director, Texas Association of Municipal Information Officers



## Why work with the media?

- Law mandates public information (Section 552.021 Texas Government Code).
- Media helps disseminate important messages.
- The media will do the story with or without you, and with is better.
- City staff is the subject matter expert.



# Branding – More than a Logo



# Perception is reality

“We judge ourselves based on our intentions...”

We judge each other based on observable behavior”



# Emotional Bank Account

## Deposits:

- Keeping citizens “in the know”
- Transparency
- Feel-good stories



## Withdrawals:

- Misconduct
- Legal trouble
- Public safety emergencies



# “Spinning” bad news

- Bad news cannot be turned into good news. Facts are facts!
- NEVER LIE.
- Even good organizations make mistakes; we “spin” bad news by surrounding bad facts with context.
- Do you have other communication channels to make emotional deposits, provide context, and take control of the narrative when needed?



## Who are the media, anyway?

- Reporters: Gather the news
- Editors: Assign stories; take information from reporters and help guide presentation of the story
- Producers / Publishers / News Directors / Editors in Chief: Guide the overall direction of the news organization
- Advertising Reps: Sell ad space and have nothing to do with the news



## Types of News Media

- Radio: Immediate, reaches public quickly; usually looking for phone interview; story length greatly varies; live or recorded.
- TV: Quick deadlines; need visuals; live or recorded; complex issues often simplified.
- Newspapers: Most complex; more time to work on stories; few resources.



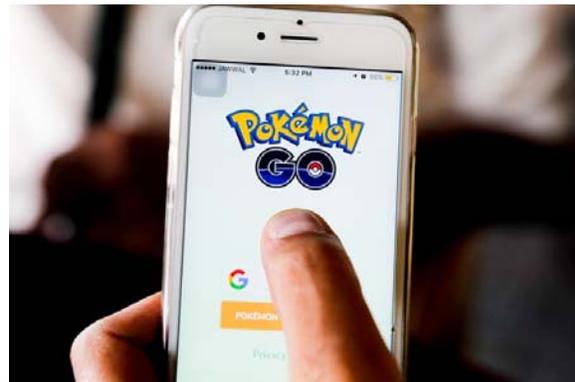
## What makes the news?

- Winners and losers
- Heroes and villains
- Controversy
- Tragedy



## What makes the news?

- Trends or change
- New, unusual, different



## Reporters are...

- ...not there to be your friend. They are there to get the story.
- ...to be treated AT LEAST equally to the public.
- ...capable of burning you (even if they never do).



## Multimedia Journalists



## Why is it that...

If you talk with a reporter for 30 minutes and are brilliant and articulate for 29 minutes, 45 seconds, but have a bad 15 seconds...

You can GUARANTEE those 15 seconds WILL be put in print or broadcast over the air!



## Structure of a TV news package

:15 Lead

:15 Quote

:15 Transition

:15 Quote

:15 Stand-Up

:15 Conclusion



## Before the Interview

- You don't have to commit to an interview, but ALWAYS FOLLOW UP in a timely manner
- Ask what deadline is, and what kind of interview they need
  - On camera, statement, information only
- Ask if there's any specific information they're looking for
- Call your PIO or appropriate staff member to develop game plan



## First Impressions

- Be aware of perception/ maintain a professional appearance.
- Think “presentation,” not “interrogation.”
- You shouldn't have to ask when the camera is rolling — if a mic is present, assume you're being recorded.







# The dreaded “um”

Pause, think, answer.



# The “Three Bucket” rule for creating your messaging



## Things we must say

- Who, what, when, where and why — the basic facts that the story cannot be published without
- Messaging that ties the issue to your Mission/Vision
  - “Our **primary goal** is to ensure the public’s safety, etc...”
  - Create an emotional connection
- Call to action / What you want the public to do



## Mission/Vision

- **Always prepare a few key messages** that connect the issue and your mission as a department.
- This should feel natural to you —begin using this sort of language in conversations with the public and your employees as much as possible.

**Internalize – don’t memorize!!**



## Mission/Vision

- Local business owners are questioning more stringent development codes.
- “At the end of the day, **our purpose is to keep residents (and property) safe, even as we continue to grow.**”



## Mission/Vision

- Reporters are questioning the cost of new equipment for a police department.
- “At the end of the day, **our mission is to keep residents safe, which means being able to respond appropriately and efficiently to calls.**”



## The “Three Bucket” rule



## Use “Flags” so reporter will use your green bucket message

- “The bottom line is...”
- **“What’s important is...”**
- “At the end of the day...”
- “Our main concern/top priority is...”
- <https://youtu.be/ea55C0HUGu4?t=1m43s>  
– Uber spokesperson



## Use “Bridging Statements” to pivot to your green bucket message

- “First and foremost...”
- “Some people might see it that way, but...”
- “Actually...”
- “Yes, and let me explain what that means...”
- “No; what we are focused on right now is...”
- “Yes, and looking at the bigger picture...”



## Remember...

- Fall back on your messaging as the base of your answer, not their question — Do NOT repeat the reporter’s question!
- Take a breath before answering — “That’s a great question...”



## Don't entertain hypotheticals

- Stay in the present — only discuss what you are doing RIGHT now.
- “I’m not going to speculate, we’re still focused on what’s important right now, which is \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “I can’t speculate, but what I CAN tell you right now is...”



## Ending the Interview

- Once you are done pouring out your green bucket, **it's time to end the interview.**
- YOU have the power to choose when the interview ends:
  - Reusing your talking points
  - Discussing any time restraints BEFORE the interview begins
  - When you say a news conference is over, WALK AWAY.
- You do not have the right to see the article before it runs.



## “No Comment”

- “I’m not able to answer that right in this moment, but let me check into that and we will reach back out to you.”
- “My top priority right now is handling the situation at hand. You can contact our PIO in the mean time.”

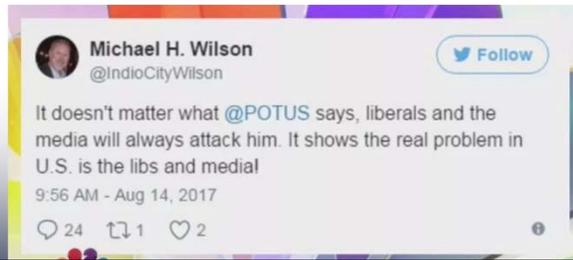


## Going off the record

- Nothing is off the record.
- If someone is throwing their organization under the bus, they will soon realize that they are attached to it!



# Media trends



MIO

# Recap - Scenarios

TAMIO

## What would you do?

- Media has called you about an officer-involved shooting that happened in your community, and is asking you for your opinion. The City has scheduled a preliminary press conference that afternoon to discuss the case.



## What would you do?

- The media is asking for an interview about a City road project happening in your community.



## What would you do?

- Media has been covering a possible ethics violation by the Mayor and approaches you at the dais before a council meeting with cameras rolling to ask you your opinion.



## What would you do?

- A resident shows up to a fire station ribbon cutting ceremony with a phone pointed at you, demanding answers about a road project in their neighborhood.



## Does your City need a PIO?

- Internal & external communication
- Builds relationships with media, reporters, residents
- City spokesperson
- Website, social media
- Help with talking points for interviews, speeches
- PEG channel coordination
- Communications planning (including crisis communications)
- Proactively increases awareness of City activities, programs, services and events
- Help build branding and community pride



## What is TAMIO?

- Texas Association of Municipal Information Officers
- TML Affiliate
- Membership is \$85 per year
- Annual Conference
- Great training, idea sharing and idea stealing
- Mutual aid in times of need
- [www.texastamio.org](http://www.texastamio.org)



# Questions?

**Sara Bustilloz**

Assistant Director of Communications and Marketing

City of Round Rock

[sbustilloz@roundrocktexas.gov](mailto:sbustilloz@roundrocktexas.gov)

