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Top Ten Media Relations and Interview “Do’s”

There’s a celebrated line in *Alice in Wonderland* that says: “If you don’t know where you’re going, any path will get you there.” In this day and age, that old adage just doesn’t work when it comes to developing a winning marketing and media strategy. Last month in this space, I talked about my “Top Ten Public Relations ‘Don’ts.’” Here are my “Top Ten ‘Do’s.’” 1. **Have a plan** – Sorry Alice, you need to know where you’re going and you’re going to need to have a plan to get there, even if it’s written on the back of an envelope. Not only is it more efficient, but it will give you a baseline for measuring your actual progress.

2. **Develop a brand message** – You’re going to need three or four talking points that reflect your culture, your brand and your firm’s promise. For it to work, though, it’s critical that it also relates to your target markets. What you’re striving for: a message that is not only credible, but memorable.

3. **Have a quick pitch** – American playwright and producer, David Belasco, once said, “If you can’t write your idea on the back of my business card, you don’t have a clear idea” – and he was right. A reporter’s time is extremely valuable, so keep it short. In fact, just assume your media contact is working on deadline. Make your query seamless with a three-minute pitch that describes who you are, what you do, and what makes you stand out from your competitors. Tip: Before launching into your pitch, ask the reporter first if he or she is on deadline.

4. **Use press releases judiciously** – I’m not a big fan of news releases. But if you do use them, be selective about where you send them and make sure they have something to say. Can the marketing-ese and drop the industry jargon. And be sure to include your contact information. You’d be surprised how many releases go out to reporters lacking even the most important fundamentals.

5. **Network and build a media relations infrastructure** – As with anything else, personal relationships are everything. Sure, you could blast your release to 100 reporters, but why bother if only a couple are going to use it and the best you can get is a mention buried on an inside page of a no-name publication? Now imagine taking your story to six reporters who know you well at six really important publications. Chances are each reporter you meet with will ask a different series of questions and each will produce an article that’s slightly different. It doesn’t get better than that. Tip: If you find yourself at a trade show or conference with the odd-moment, drop by the Press Room and introduce yourself.

6. **Come prepared for interviews** – Sweat the small stuff. Research the publication or broadcast outlet to the extent you can and familiarize yourself with the reporter’s work. It’s one thing to say you want to be on Kudlow & Company, but it’s a pure negative if it’s a broadcast for which you are not prepared or ill suited. Prior to a broadcast interview, consider rehearsing in front of a camera. If it’s a phone interview, keep a cheat sheet with performance data, trends and talking points at hand. Anticipate negative questions.

7. **Speak in sound bites** – I’m not suggesting that you be trite, but pithy quotes never hurt anyone. If it’s relevant and colorfully put, chances are good it will show up in print or on the air. Who do you think is going to be quoted first? The guy who says, “Past performance is no indication of future success,” or Warren Buffett, who said: “If past history was all there was to the game, the richest people would be librarians.”

8. **Humanize your story** – The money management industry is filled with some very bright and clever people, so it’s tempting when you sit down with a reporter to fall back on quoting performance and track records. Sure, those things are important, but if you want to get called back a second, third and fourth time, find a way to make what you say relevant to the reporter’s readers, listeners or viewers. Tell me why, for example, your fund might be particularly well suited for someone’s son, or daughter, or wife. Tell the reporter why you invest in it.

9. **Be timely and responsive** – Fulfill requests quickly. Be available and accessible and have something to say. And remember that in today’s world, the premium isn’t just on information, but insight. Establish yourself and your firm as a de facto industry or market authority by becoming a reliable source for white papers, research and trend spotting. If you can say something well and powerfully, chances are the reporter is going to come back to you on other stories.

10. **Follow up** – I typically send a thank you note or email to every reporter I meet with thanking them for taking time out of their schedule to meet with me. This is something I do in advance of the story’s publication – not after. Delivered that way, it’s a lot more credible, sincere and appreciated. Here’s one more “do.” Surf the net. There’s no better way to get a feel for what reporters are writing about or for identifying trends that are important to your business and target markets.

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