



Zacher Media Strategies, LLC

DO and DO NOT List for Dealing with the Media

Traditional media rules are changing every day, so dealing with reporters is more of an art than a science. There is a traditional distrust between reporters and public officials, but a good relationship with the media is like any other relationship. It takes the same amount of work.

Reporters know there are times when you can't comment, they know you will spin the facts, and they know there are times when you can't return inquiries promptly. These rules are meant to build trust between a reporter and a public official – the bedrock of a media relationship that will benefit you in the end.

DO respect the fourth estate.

DO NOT pick fights with people who buy ink by the barrel.

DO return phone calls promptly.

DO NOT "hide" and assume the press will not print a story if they can't find you.

DO at least attempt to find the answer to questions.

DO NOT knowingly lie. You will get caught. That will always be worse.

DO be aware of a reporter's deadline. (Generally between 4 and 5 p.m.)

DO NOT assume the press will not print a story if they can't reach you.

DO understand the meanings of "on the record," "on background," and "off the record."

DO NOT use jargon when answering questions. This leads to errors.

DO be willing to speak "on background" to reporters once you have established a relationship.

DO NOT simply refuse to comment, unless it is for legal reasons.

DO provide public documents when requested.

DO NOT hide public documents from reporters.

DO know the state's open meetings laws (Get the excellent booklet at www.scpres.org).

DO NOT hide behind privacy rules when it helps you but ignore them when it does not.

DO point out errors in stories to reporters first and not their editors.

DO NOT pitch stories to publishers or "business" employees of an outlet. Reporters resent it.

DO remember that you don't own the government or your seat on a council. The public does.

DO NOT wait until there is a crisis to establish a relationship with the media.

DO work to bring a "human element" into stories. That human element is not you.

DO NOT think the media will cover every event you sponsor.

DO remember that, like you, reporters are doing their job.

DO NOT assume reporters are out to get you.