

MEDIA RELATIONS INSIDER

WHAT'S NEW AND WHAT'S WORKING TO INCREASE YOUR MEDIA COVERAGE

SUPPLEMENT TO BULLDOG REPORTER'S BUSINESS AND LIFESTYLE EDITIONS

MEDIA TRAINING

Five Tips to Transform Routine Acceptance Speeches Into Extra Media Opportunities

Congratulations, all that hard work paid off and you're finally being recognized by your peers. Now all you have to do is say "thank you" and soak up the warm glow of admiration, right? Wrong. Accepting kudos may seem like unnecessary fluff, but a lousy acceptance speech can ruin a lot of goodwill—and potential media coverage. Why? "Because it is boring and annoying to the audience for you to get up there and say, 'Oh well, jeez, gosh, I didn't prepare anything,'" says **T.J. Walker**, president of **Media Training Worldwide** and author of *Media Training A-Z* and *Presentation Training A-Z*. "That is really saying to the audience, 'To hell with you. My time is more valuable than the millions of hours collectively belonging to you people.'" Yikes!

On the other hand, a great speech can endear you or your client to an audience forever—and grease the skids for additional media impressions. Which is why, "even if there's only a one-percent chance you might win (an award), you should know exactly what you want to say," Walker coaches. "You're never going to be in front of more eyeballs, so you better prepare something." He offers the following tips, using examples from the recent Academy Awards and Golden Globe broadcasts:

1. Soften up—show some endearing emotion.

"If you're thanking someone, you should thank them sincerely. Look them in the eye. Don't look like you're reading off a Rolodex," he cautions. "For example, Jason Bateman at the Golden Globes sounded like he was reading through the phone book. There needs to be some emotion, because the whole point of accepting an award is to express thanks and gratitude."

Remember: "It's not a sales pitch," Walker says. "Most of the time when businesspeople speak in public, they are doing it with the objective of moving people to action—e.g., 'Hire my firm,' 'Give my company a higher public rating,' 'Increase my budget' or 'Don't fire me!' An

acceptance speech isn't like that. That is why it is important to convey a certain endearing emotion."

But watch out for the opposite: "Don't fall apart either," he adds. "The audience wants some emotion, but no one wants to see you blubbering away. That was the problem I had with Jamie Foxx's speech at the Golden Globes. He started off singing and dancing, but then began falling apart when he started talking about his grandmother. Unless you knew his background, you couldn't tell whether she was alive or dead. Be endearing, but not so much that you're a basket case."

2. Avoid verbal ticks. "Don't say 'you know,' 'like' or 'uh.' That will overwhelm your message," says Walker. "People have just been told how great and wonderful you are, and you get up and start stammering. It's not very impressive."

For example: "That was my problem with Clint Eastwood's speech [at the Oscars]. I counted twenty-eight 'uh's in a very short period of time."

3. Don't slump—gesture with your hands. "If you're slumped over reading and no one can see your eyes, you're not connecting with the audience," he says. "Stand up straight. Look at the audience directly. Don't clutch the lectern. Don't grab your note. Have your hands free and moving."

For example: "Going back to Jamie Foxx, he gave a good presentation overall. But, he stared down so much it wasn't as positive and powerful as it could have been if he was looking at people more directly," Walker notes. "If you're looking down, it doesn't seem as sincere."

4. Address the listeners first. "The biggest mistake most businesspeople make when giving a speech is saying, 'My name is blank. My title is blank. And today I'm going to talk about blank.' The first minute of their speech is me, me, me—which is how most people start their speeches," he asserts. "But all that shows is a bunch of clichés about you."

Do this instead: "With great speakers, the first thing out of their mouths is something of interest to the audience," Walker says. "That rule applies to whether you're accepting an award or asking your boss for a raise.



Don't Let Missed Calls Ruin Your Reputation—Four Quick Tips for Responding to Media Requests

Offering your client for an interview will never guarantee ink or airtime, but *not* having an interview source on hand after making the offer is guaranteed to leave a bad impression—and most likely burn bridges for future coverage. “I have to stress—as someone who has been on the print side and now on the broadcast side—the most frustrating thing for a reporter or producer is when a company puts out a press release and then has no one available to contact,” says **CNBC**’s LA bureau chief **Jeff Daniels**. His tips for how to stay on top of media callbacks:

1. Assign a wing man. “Good PR pros have a backup,” Daniels says. “They aren’t just relying on themselves [to set up an interview]. They always have other people available if they’re not.”

2. Eliminate red tape. “I understand a lot of companies have a policy for channeling media requests through their PR agency, but when we’re on deadline I

need a fast answer,” he says. “I typically won’t wait more than a half-hour. Outside PR agencies can be great, but they can also slow the process down.” Be sure to streamline your client’s media policy so you don’t lose any precious hits in a protocol maze.

3. Specify contact preferences—as well as primary media contacts—in your releases. You’re waiting for an email on your Blackberry, but the reporter is trying to call. Whose fault is that? Yours. “Some companies prefer the media to respond by email, but they won’t tell you that and you’ll get lost in the system,” Daniels explains. “On the other hand, when you send them an email, you get a response quickly. So if you are an agency that prefers email contact, put your preferences in the press release. It is just as easy for me to email as to call.”

4. Don’t ProfNet and bail. “I use ProfNet a lot. Some PR pros will get excited [about my query for an expert source] and pitch somebody, but then the person they offered is not available. That is not helpful,” he warns. “Especially since the deadline is mentioned in the ProfNet query. There’s nothing worse than promising us something [or someone] you can’t deliver. That really lowers your credibility—and we won’t forget it.”

Say something of interest to *them* before you start talking about yourself.”

5. Know when to stop—end on a positive note. “The speech should be brief and end on an upbeat moment,” Walker recommends. “Hilary Swank gave this huge, emotional, sincere, direct thank you to Clint Eastwood [at the Oscars], which would have been the perfect ending. Instead, she started screaming ‘my lawyer, my publicist...’ It totally ruined the moment. It cluttered up and destroyed the mood. What could have been so positive, left us with a bad taste in our mouths.” ★

PITCHING TACTICS

How to Employ Humor in Your Pitches—and Increase Hits—Without Crossing the Line

Not getting the hoped-for response rate to your email pitches? Try injecting a humorous angle. “We use humor all the time in our pitches. Our rule of thumb is that as long as it’s not crossing a line of decency, then it is more than appropriate—and often necessary,” says **Michelle**

Metzger, director of public relations for **M/C/C**.

Think about it: “Reporters get 300 emails a day. How do you expect to break through all of that noise with a pitch about ‘The New and Improved Box X’ or ‘XYZ Company Partners with 123 Company’—you know, the kind of stories that really make your head spin and increase your daily intake of Pepto Bismol,” she offers. “We’ve had great success incorporating humor into our pitches and subject lines. Reporters see them as a refreshing change to the usual boring stuff they get from nearly everyone else.”

But before you start tapping into your inner Richard Pryor, there is a cautionary side to consider. “A sense of humor is a terrible thing to waste and a dangerous thing to use,” believes **Heath Shackelford**, manager of public relations at **American Healthways**. “When applying humor to media pitches, you have to consider the nature of the content you’re pitching, the personality of the journalist in question (if known) and the greater news environment that exists.”

To that end, here’s a list of dos and don’ts to help you achieve maximum impact—and minimal backlash—by adding humor to your pitches.

1. Don't be too clever—or irrelevant. It's important to remember that it will never be enough to simply "be funny." You have to make the pitch relevant to each person you're targeting. Ask yourself, "Why would this reporter care? How does the humorous angle relate to what they cover?"

For example: "That's the trick with subject lines," Metzger says. "You can't just be clever or funny, because if you don't show relevancy, your pitch can get deleted even faster than [if it wasn't funny]. Be clever, but also be relevant to the topic you're pitching. That way reporters know it is something they'll want to open."

2. Do get creative. "Some PR pros are so afraid of offending a reporter or crossing a line that they don't know how to have fun," Metzger says. "But most of our clients are either brand new companies or in a category that is still emerging—which means we have to be more ingenious about how we pitch. Rather than saying, 'Cover us because we're so great,'—a common mistake among PR pros—most reporters thank us for being so refreshing."

Her advice: "Don't be afraid to have fun. We've been able to have fun with our clients and the process, and we've been able to give reporters some fun too. And they appreciate us not treating them like faceless, nameless people who don't enjoy being tickled as much as the next person. Contrary to popular belief, reporters are people too."

3. Don't be insensitive. "You don't have to be reverent, but being sensitive is important," says Metzger. "Don't make fun of people who are physically challenged. You want to be seen as a credible source, and coming across like a prejudiced person does not help your case."

For similar reasons, executive coach **Leslie Ungar** thinks it's best to avoid making jokes in your pitch altogether. "Humor yes, jokes no," she clarifies. "Think about it. There is a butt to every joke. When you make a joke in the workplace, you don't know who you'll be offending. You can't know what nationality someone's spouse is nor from what country they adopted children."

4. Do balance risque with relevance. On the other hand, "Humor is a terrific approach to soften a quirky product or [dubious] subject matter," says **Adrienne Arieff**, of **Arieff Communications**. "For example. I work with high-end sex toys sold at Fred Seagul, Maxfields and other upscale retailers. We always use humor in our pitches so editors don't feel uncomfortable. And since we are trying to turn these products into a lifestyle brand, it is imperative for us to be funny-yet-sensitive to an editor's comfort level."

5. Don't kid about safety or tragedy. "The only time you want to avoid humor like the plague is when it

comes to topics that deal with life or death situations," Metzger notes. "For example, we have a client that produces thermal imaging cameras that are used by law enforcement officials and firefighters. While most of the

SAMPLE PITCH LETTER

Being Humorous and Relevant—Here's How It's Done

The following is a pitch from Metzger's own portfolio that is clever-yet-relevant from the subject line to the closing paragraph. **Mark Marselli**, editor-in-chief of **Wire Journal International**, later told Metzger, "Just for the record, I like your style (most notably, the subject lines). You get me to open up your press releases, and believe me, I get a goodly number that do not pass that test!" She secured a bylined placement on the follow-up.

Subject Line: What do bees, cobras and cabling have in common?

Copy: The space between your wall is dark, narrow, cold and often lonely. Many secrets lie inside a building's walls. Sometimes, they are hidden dangers like the recent 500-pound honeycomb in Los Angeles that housed more than 100,000 angry bees or the king cobra loose in a Dallas townhouse community a few weeks ago. But sometimes, the stuff inside the walls isn't dangerous at all. Sometimes it's wonderful—like the cabling that supports the traffic of the enterprise network.

So, what's snaking around inside the walls of most enterprises? Is it cabling that will still handle growing bandwidth needs for the next five to 10 years? Or are business going to have to gut the place and put new cabling in to support the higher bandwidth traffic the management team demands?

Here's a tip: Do it right the first time. Enterprises can use SYSTIMAX Solutions and know their cabling is ready for the future. They can also rest assured they won't have to see the insides of their walls for at least another fifteen years. Now that's reassuring.

Please let me know if you would like to visit with an executive at SYSTIMAX Solutions about their cabling solutions. Alternatively, we could contribute an article on the subject for your readers. Just let me know how we can help you.

time we can get away with humorous pitches, we have to forego humor when the topic involves officer safety or reducing the number of fire victims. It's just not appropriate. And the truth is in those cases, humor is not necessary, since the hard facts stand on their own."

6. Do reference pop culture. "On the flipside of that, we did develop a pitch for our thermal imaging client around Spring Break that was irreverent," Metzger relates. "It played on Mastercard's "priceless" ad campaign and read, 'Being rescued from the snow before having to eat your friends: priceless.' I also signed the pitch 'Michelle "Snow Bunny" Metzger.' Shortly after, I got a response from a **Better Homes and Gardens** editor saying, 'Hello, Snow Bunny. I guess you can tell I read your whole pitch.'"

Why was it OK to joke about life and death in that case? "It was irreverent, but it wasn't based in recent events," Metzger explains. "It was more of a pop culture reference. Whereas, if we'd said something like, 'Keeping officers from being killed in the line of duty: priceless,' that's not funny."

7. Don't carry on. You don't want to get so into your 'standup routine' that you wind up losing your audience. "You have to be cautious using humor in your pitches—especially by email—because many reporters want you to get to the point," Shackelford notes. "It's an easy way to ensure you miss the mark with your intended message."

Metzger agrees: "Don't belabor the humorous aspect," she says. "Your first paragraph can be about the anecdote [or other variety of funny business], but by the second paragraph you should draw it down to what your client does. If you spend more space [than one paragraph] on the anecdote, then it will come across as rambling and lose its relevancy. You always have to draw the pitch back to why the reporter should care." ★

TOOLS & TECHNOLOGY

Quit Stalling—Use These Tips to Start Your Own RSS Feed Now

RSS will never replace email or the telephone as the best ways to make first contact with target media, but it is a great tool for providing regular updates to interested parties without them having to visit your website or receive hundreds of emails—which can easily be lost in overstuffed inboxes. In addition, "RSS is growing in popularity among mainstream media, such as **The Economist**, **BusinessWeek**, **Financial Times** and **CNN**—which will only increase its popularity," reports

Elizabeth Albrycht, chief strategist for **Albrycht McClure & Partners Communications**, co-founder of the **New Communications Forum** (www.newcommforum.com) and alliance partner in **BloggingPlanet.com**.

What does this mean to you? "RSS is an important new channel for communications and marketing professionals, and it should be provided for the growing number of people who prefer to receive information that way," Albrycht says. Best of all, "With so many ways to add RSS feeds to your website, it is easy to get started." Here are some tips and tools to do just that:

1. For the tech-savvy—Google a DIY guide. "With a little programming, you can add RSS feed generation to your website yourself," says Albrycht. "There are plenty of tools and libraries available to integrate into your website, and a Google search on 'creating RSS feeds' will point you to many do-it-yourself guides."

In addition: "There are two good books available that cover do-it-yourself techniques, as well as some of the software and services available today: *RSS for Dummies* by Ellen Finkelstein and Chris Pirillo; and *Unleash the Marketing and Publishing Power of RSS*, published by MarketingStudies.net."

2. Download an RSS software package. "There are stand-alone software packages that you can download, which will provide feed generation," Albrycht says. Two she recommends are: *FeedforAll* (www.feedforall.com); and *Castle Software's NewzAlert Composer* (www.castlesoftware.biz/NewzAlertComposer.htm).

3. Sign up with an RSS feed service. "If you want to minimize the involvement of your IT department, or you don't *have* an IT department, your best bet is to sign up with companies that provide feed development as a service," she says. "There is *Nooked* (www.nooked.com), which is specifically designed for PR and marketing. Another good one is *MyRSSCreator.com*."

In addition: "The benefits of going with a software package or subscribing to a service is that they also usually provide tracking technology, so you can see the number of people subscribing to your feed," Albrycht adds.

4. Start a blog. "Another quick way to generate an RSS feed is by using blog software," she says. "For example, you can create a blog specifically for news releases and then put a link to the RSS feed, which is automatically generated on your website. You can install *Movable Type* (www.sixapart.com/movabletype/) or *WordPress* (www.wordpress.org). You could also use a subscription service like *TypePad* (www.typepad.com), or a free service like *Blogger* (www.blogger.com)."

—Scott Sherwin