

Hello and welcome to my May 2010 Newsletter

Jeff Ansell News & Views

I have a special announcement . . . I'm about to release my new book;

"When the Headline is You: An Insider's Guide to Handling the Media"

The book, being published by Jossey-Bass, an imprint of John Wiley and Sons, is now available for pre-order at Amazon, Borders, Barnes & Noble and at Chapters Indigo in Canada. The actual release date is mid-October.

You can learn more about it at Amazon <http://tinyurl.com/36ztcxc>

. . . or at Chapters Indigo <http://tinyurl.com/28hxnXu>

As you can imagine, I'm very excited because the book captures my decades of experience as a media coach and reporter, and will help people understand and interact even more effectively with news media.

The following paragraph always leads off my newsletters because it concisely explains the challenges people face every day when trying to communicate their message to news media.

"Everything you're exposed to in media is just someone else's interpretation of issues and events, so view it with an open mind. Skillful communication with media and in presentations can make all the difference in how your message is reported and received. It's a complicated mix of delivery and interpretation, and an ability few truly master, yet it is something anyone can learn or improve upon."

The excerpt below is from the introduction of my new book. It takes the sentiment in the message above, to a much deeper level;

"Answering questions from reporters is risky business.

Though a media interview may feel like a straightforward conversation, it actually represents a contrived and manipulative dynamic.

Knowing how to talk to reporters is like learning a new language; a language that bears little, if any, resemblance to everyday conversation.

It is a mistake for anyone to believe otherwise. It may seem as if speaking the truth should be enough to build credibility and trust, but that's rarely the case.

Exposing oneself to media scrutiny requires more than simple candor and honesty. It requires knowledge, training, and a keen understanding of how reporters write the news." . . . end of excerpt

"When the Headline is You" goes straight to the core of communicating with news media in our modern world. Communication has changed radically over the last few years, but there is still one constant humanistic dynamic; how a person or company delivers a message, and how others interpret it.

We are all subject to deeply ingrained behavioral traits, and no matter how much, or quickly technology grows or changes, the method of delivering a

message, and how it impacts us is still the same. How we react is buried in our genes lurking at a reptilian level in our subconscious.

Contrary to what many people think, citizen journalism, blogs, and Twitter have not made it "easier" to be understood. New media has, in fact made it incredibly more complex and confusing, and that is exactly why clarity from the outset is so important. My book addresses clarity at a base level.

Now, more than ever, it is critically important how you sculpt your message, and how you interact with and deliver it to news media. It is a learned skill.

Topics for this newsletter:

- 1.) NEW MEDIA MUSCLE
- 2.) THE CHANGING NEWS LANDSCAPE
- 3.) IF IT BLEEDS, IT LEADS - SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE
- 4.) "OFF THE RECORD" WITH THE NEWS MEDIA? - NOT LIKELY
- 5.) FUZZY LINE BETWEEN POLITICAL, CORPORATE, and FAMILY
- 6.) MANUFACTURING OUTRAGE
- 7.) SPEAKERS BLOG - TRUST VIOLATIONS
- 8.) SABOTAGING YOUR CAREER
- 9.) YOU TOOK ME OUT OF CONTEXT
WHERE'S THE REST OF WHAT I SAID?

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to friends and colleagues.

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1.) NEW MEDIA MUSCLE

Arguing with a journalist is a guaranteed recipe for disaster. However, the adage "never pick a fight with someone who buys ink by the barrel," is dated and not as true as it used to be, especially in the world of social activism.

There are a number of powerful websites that very effectively challenge mainstream news media. Some citizen journalism and "crowdsourcing" sites have little problem forcing mainstream news into a corner. NowPublic.com, which is one of the largest such sites in the world, has strong political influence in Washington DC. Plus, there are hundreds of organizations like this in the US and around the world. Many of these sites gang up on mainstream news and are capable of generating strong viral interest to support their views. Other similar sites in Canada include the Canadian Journalism Project, and TheTyee.ca – both of which have solid track records of challenging mainstream news.

Some newspapers are so intimidated they no longer allow comments on their web sites. Some serious social media activists consider the removal of a comment section on a mainstream news media site a victory, and some shun news companies that don't support unbiased commenting. They believe that if a news company doesn't respect their customers enough to allow them to comment in an unbiased manner, their credibility is less than stellar. There will always be people who don't care one way or the other, but for serious media watchers, "ink by the barrel" isn't as intimidating as it used to be.

Don't let this lull you into complacency though, because if you think you can easily "fix" something you said to mainstream news media by using these alternative new media sites, you'll discover it is often impossible to put the toothpaste back in the tube. It's still best to say it correctly the first time, and use social media news sites to support your case, not defend it.

NowPublic.com was named by TIME Magazine in 2007 as one of the top 50 websites to watch, and they haven't disappointed. <http://tinyurl.com/32l97g>

J-Source – The Canadian Journalism Project is a meeting place where professional and citizen journalists write about mainstream news media and debate news challenges of the day. <http://tinyurl.com/25fgqjt>

TheTyee.ca - Sometimes the comments are more revealing than the articles. <http://thetyee.ca/Mediacheck/2008/10/24/CanWest/>

OhMyNews, based in South Korea, is the first open source news site and has had tremendous influence in news reporting and politics around the world. <http://tinyurl.com/255vxfm>

SPOT.US is an opensource project to pioneer "community powered reporting." It is funded by various groups, like the Knight Foundation. <http://www.spot.us>

This last link will take you to a stunning story and video of the director of community relations for the Laguna Honda Hospital, Marc Slavin, confronting a television news reporter regarding allegations of misappropriation of funds. <http://abclocal.go.com/kgo/story?section=news/iteam&id=7453754>

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2.) THE CHANGING NEWS LANDSCAPE

How we gather and create news is changing rapidly.

Pew Research Center recently reported that the Internet is now the second most used medium to gather and disburse news, ranking only behind television. Second place used to be held by radio or newspapers.

On a typical day, 92% of people use many different formats and a variety of platforms and devices to gather the news, 46% get their news from six different media platforms, and only 7% get their news from a single format.

Without question, news media gathering has become a highly fractured process, and because of this, how the content is delivered and how we interpret it has changed radically as well.

Back in the 60's, technology was touted as a timesaver, and more recently, technology also promised to streamline communication. In some respects, and in both eras it proved partially true, but today, even though news distribution is easier, how we collect and create the content is more complex.

Here are a few more numbers from the Pew report that might surprise you;

33% of people use cell phones to access the news

28% place news sources and topics that interest them on their web sites

37% of Internet users contribute to news creation, comment about it, or distribute it using social media tools

72% agree that most news sources today are biased in their coverage

You can read a summary of the Pew report here. <http://tinyurl.com/ycje3n5>

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3.) IF IT BLEEDS, IT LEADS - SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE

It is a common news media maxim, and also a heading in my book.

On the surface, we all know what "if it bleeds it leads" means.

If news media can find even a hint of controversy they will exploit it.

You can count on it. It's their job. Controversial headlines sell newspapers.

Many people mistakenly believe newspapers are primarily in business to report the news, and maybe this was the case in a bygone era, but today news companies publicly admit they are in business mainly to make money. They even teach and encourage journalism students to think this way.

News media companies, like many other industries, are in a life and death struggle to survive, and if they have to do it at your expense they will. They are both your allies and enemies, and you have to respect this dynamic.

As such, you need to know how to ensure your message is heard in a manner that represents you in the best possible light.

Read more from PBS; Reporters struggle with how far they can take a story. http://www.pbs.org/wnet/insidelocalnews/behind_leads.html

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4.) "OFF THE RECORD" WITH THE NEWS MEDIA? - NOT LIKELY

Don't hold your breath if you think you can bargain with the news media.

It is a myth that “anything” is off the record. You say it - you live with it.

It might not be reported today, but eventually, it will come out.

More frequently than you might imagine, disgruntled people, and amazingly, public relations professionals think they can hold private meetings with news media OFF THE RECORD without cameras or microphones.

“Off the record” is not likely to be respected except in rare instances where a journalist might give an executive or politician with whom they have had a long term relationship special privilege to speak privately. When off the record conversations do take place, media would not agree to “never” reveal parts of the conversation just because they were asked to keep a secret.

Here’s an example of a news media company turning the tables on a public relations professional who was incensed the local television station was trashing her company. The PR pro was so frustrated she emailed the TV station asking them to stop reporting so negatively about her company.

The TV station instead published her letter in its entirety.

LCEC PR Manager Karen Ryan emailed FOX 4 TV Manager Judy Kenny stating, “For you, I know it’s about ratings, but for LCEC it is about having our standing in the community harmed and our character defamed unfairly.”

Basically, LCEC (an electric company) wants FOX4 to quit running stories about what LCEC customers allege is poor service. The TV station however, states it will continue to run the stories because it is what the public wants. From the perspective of LCEC, the company is simply following a business protocol used by tens of millions of businesses around the world - a customer fails to pay and their service is cut.

This problem however, grew out of control when LCEC customers asked TV news media to champion their cause based on “emotion in the court of public opinion,” and not on corporate law. The TV station recognized a David & Goliath story when it saw one, and Goliath wasn’t one of its customers.

Click this link to read, and then PLAY the video on the page’s top right corner.
<http://www.fox4now.com/Global/story.asp?S=11925348>

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5.) FUZZY LINE BETWEEN POLITICAL, CORPORATE, and FAMILY

More and more every day, the lines between political, corporate, and family privacy are disappearing. It seems everyone today is in the news business.

NBC, CBS, and ABC are no longer the only news sources. For years now they have had to compete with CNN and FOX, plus Jon Stewart, Rush Limbaugh, the entire Internet, and more recently, late afternoon talk show hosts.

If you’re a politician or executive and you get yourself ensnared in controversy, don’t be surprised to see yourself in a crisis cameo on Oprah Winfrey.

Former senator and presidential candidate John Edwards learned the hard way after he lied to reporters when asked about his affair with Rielle Hunter.

Edwards stated emphatically he did not father a baby with her, but this lie soon took on a life of its own after Oprah interviewed his wife, Elizabeth Edwards.

When Oprah interviews someone, just the fact she is doing the interview is news, which in a sense means the news is taking second chair to the reporter. I'm being a bit facetious here because "celebrity reporting" has been going on for a long time, but over the last few years and thanks to people like Oprah it has moved out of "National Enquirer" mode and into the mainstream.

The situation really heated up when Elizabeth Edwards published her book, "Resilience." In it, politics and family crossed boundaries never before seen.

I include two video links below. The first is simply for your reference. It is of John Edwards denying he was or could be the father of the child, and the second demonstrates the depth of detail Oprah brought to this story.

John Edwards denying he could be the father - <http://tinyurl.com/2u8gagu>

The following video is an interview Oprah conducted with Elizabeth Edwards. Introducing this interview is a "pre-interview" by Diane Sawyer who spoke to Oprah's editor about the interview.

Diane Sawyer & Gayle King, "O" Magazine editor-at-large, & Oprah on ABC <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/Television/story?id=7525333&page=1>

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6.) MANUFACTURING OUTRAGE

Manufacturing OUTRAGE is a second cousin to manufacturing CONSENT.

Manufacturing CONSENT is a common strategy politicians, executives, and news media use to surreptitiously influence people into following their doctrine. It's similar in a way to "compliance selling," except the person doing the consent manufacturing is endeavoring to sell you an idea, not a product.

Manufacturing OUTRAGE is a strategy used to make you angry. Politicians do it for a couple of reasons. The first is so they can get people worked up about supporting change. The word "outrage" carries a negative connotation, but it doesn't necessarily have to be manufactured in an angry manner.

"An Inconvenient Truth" is a good example of passive aggressive outrage. Thanks to Al Gore, people everywhere are outraged about global pollution.

The second reason politicians manufacture outrage is to get the public worked up about the opposition. If you want to turn the public against someone it is far safer and more effective to have a third party do it for you.

When you create a false sense of outrage people will soon jump on a soapbox to express their "anger." Manufacturing outrage is now a much more effective

tactic thanks to social media. Today, the digital soapbox careens around the world in the amount of time it takes to toast a bagel.

In some cases you would be hard pressed to recognize who exactly is behind all the outrage. It might at first seem like a benign member of society. It might even look like the guy or gal next door, but for all the big agendas, if you look closely you might discover a shell company hiding behind a shell company.

Manufacturing outrage is often based loosely on fact, but couched in drama.

According to Rachel Maddow of MSNBC, there is an official “script” for outrage and it was written by a group called Right Principles in an instruction-like format. Maddow describes it as a “tool for intimidation.” In the RP script, people are encouraged to express their outrage while politicians deliver speeches, with the intent of disruption, as opposed to discussion.

Here’s an excerpt from “the script”;

“You need to rock the boat early in the Rep’s presentation. Watch for an opportunity to yell out and challenge the Reps’ statements early. - if he offers excuses -- call him on it, yell back and have someone else follow-up, follow up with a shout out - the goal is to rattle him.

When the formal Q&A session begins get all your hands up and keep them up. The balance of the group should applaud when the question is asked, further putting the Rep on the defensive.”

These instructions are posted by Bob MacGuffie, who is associated with Freedom Works, a Washington DC lobbying firm.

The script for outrage can be found on ResistNet.com, which is affiliated with Grassfire.org and managed by Shirley & Banister Public Affairs.

As you can see, politicians and executives are having a harder time in front of the public every day because of the growth of social media activism. When you’re not prepared for this type of confrontation, it can create a serious impediment to having your message heard. I included a couple of links below to give you an idea of the organizational prowess of these groups.

Orchestrated Outrage Rachel Maddow

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlBqx4JKv1s>

Shouting Down Politicians

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htAooJZRLu8&>

Here’s another interesting example. It focuses on Andrew Briebart, a news media social activist accepting the Reed Irvine Accuracy in Media Award for a story about corruption. Briebart used his acceptance speech on the award podium to call out NY Times reporter, Kate Zernike for creating “outrage.”
<http://tinyurl.com/29skh4x>

This next example, which is also incredibly interesting, has to be viewed with a wary eye because it is edited from the perspective of social activists with strong intent to make a gas company look bad. Given the current situation in the Gulf of Mexico regarding the BP oil company, making an energy company

look bad today is not terribly hard to do. The video is very biased, but if you watch it carefully you will see a social activist “script” in action.

What started out as a PRESENTATION at Harvard, turned into a disastrous situation for natural gas company, Chesapeake Energy.

Here are a few key areas where they went wrong;

Their CEO, Aubrey McClendon implied “MIGHT MAKES RIGHT” by telling the audience his company has one million customers. He then asked, “How many people have been killed in Pennsylvania as a result of my gas company’s actions?” He then followed up by directly challenging the audience to have mainstream news media investigate - with the supposition the news media will support the gas company’s position. The audience immediately asked, “How much money are you giving the Boston Globe?” - a question McClendon ignored.

The crowd went after him in such an effective systematic manner, the Harvard moderator had to intervene and save McClendon and his gas company from further damage.

You can view the YouTube clip about the gas company clip here.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8OSqf77iG8>

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7.) SPEAKERS BLOG – TRUST VIOLATIONS

As many of you know, I do a considerable amount of public speaking, and as a result rely on a great team of people at Speakers’ Spotlight to assist me.

My Speakers’ Spotlight Profile <http://tinyurl.com/3aaso6v>

One of these people is Kelly MacDonald-Hill, Partner and Senior Vice President of Speakers’ Spotlight. For her blog, Kelly recently interviewed me about my new book, “When the Headline is You: An Insider’s Guide to Handling the Media.”

It took us a while to get together, but when we finally did meet we had a great discussion about the challenges people and companies have with news media during crisis situations. We covered issues that ranged from Tiger Woods “trust violations,” to “competency violations” of Toyota, and many points in between. It was an interesting conversation.

You can read Kelly’s blog here.

<http://blog.speakers.ca/2010/04/when-the-headline-is-you/#more-563>

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8.) SABOTAGING YOUR CAREER

It never fails. Every time I publish a newsletter, a high ranking executive or politician gets caught once again sabotaging their career by saying something they should not have into a live microphone or camera.

Occurrences of this nature happen so often, you would think people in the public spotlight would learn to measure their thoughts more carefully, even in what they believe to be private conversations. We know these people are intelligent. How else did they get to where they are today? The answer is addressed at length in my book, but basically, they are caught off guard speaking without thinking - a sure way to damage a career and/or lose an election.

Here's the latest incident; outgoing British Prime Minister Gordon Brown recently met a sixty-four year old woman, a supporter of his Labor Party, on the street during a public outing. He spoke with the woman in the presence of news media, and then got into his chauffeur driven-car forgetting he was still wired to a live lapel microphone. As the car drove away, and while speaking privately to his entourage in the car, he called the woman a bigot and asked how he ended up in such an uncomfortable public situation. News media recorded the conversation and within a few days more than 287,000 people witnessed his indiscretion firsthand on YouTube.

After the incident occurred and he realized he had put his foot in his mouth, Brown stuck it in even deeper by denying he called the senior a bigot, blaming his staff, and then actually blaming the woman. Three strikes and you're out.

When you callously demonstrate your lack of remorse, recovering is almost impossible and often a career killer, as would prove to be the case when only three days later Brown lost the national election and was ousted as Britain's prime minister. This gaffe was certainly not the primary reason he lost, but it was a very close race and when you are running neck and neck every single vote counts.

This link is of the prime minister on ITN News feebly trying to explain himself.

It goes from bad to worse.

Ex-British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, accusing a woman of bigotry.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TbhPWAMx2y0>

Trying to deflect the blame.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3F_ly9xSqQ

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9.) YOU TOOK ME OUT OF CONTEXT WHERE'S THE REST OF WHAT I SAID?

Actor Will Smith learned the hard way after a headline in "The World Entertainment News Network" screamed,

"Will Smith: Hitler was a 'good' person."

Other headlines read, "Hitler, Schmitler: He Wasn't that Bad."

The fact is, Will Smith has no one to blame but himself for serving up such a caustic quote.

Even the Associated Press reported the Will Smith / Adolf Hitler story, only the AP version advanced the story by quoting Jewish community leaders calling for a boycott of Smith's new movie.

Will Smith does not strike me as an admirer of Adolf Hitler, so, how could media everywhere report that Smith thinks Hitler is a good guy?

It's easier to see what happened when we read Smith's comments in their entirety. While talking to a Scottish tabloid about human nature, Smith said, "Even Hitler didn't wake up going, 'Let me do the most evil thing I can do today.'" Smith went on to say, "I think he woke up in the morning and, using a twisted, backwards logic, he set out to do what he thought was 'good.' Stuff like that just needs reprogramming."

To clean up the mess, Smith actually had to issue the following statement to explain, "Adolf Hitler was a vile, heinous, vicious killer responsible for one of the greatest acts of evil committed on this planet."

Knowing how journalists edit the news is central to understanding the dynamic of media communication.

Many people confuse the editing process with being taken out of context.

What newsmakers see as "out of context," is seen differently by the reporter.

Will Smith Takes a HIT over HIS QUOTE – ABC News
<http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/story?id=4052017&page=1>

Politicians often complain of being taken out of context. Here's an example of the Washington Post taking Barack Obama out of context even before he became president.
http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-502443_162-4306672-502443.html

That's it for this edition of News & Views.

I hope you found it informative and valuable.

Sincerely,
Jeff Ansell

Be well . . . and Thank You !!

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