

What to do when a reporter calls

When a reporter calls with “just a few questions that shouldn’t take more than a few minutes of your time”, your first reaction is probably to do the phone interview with no warning or preparation.

You need to take a step back. Do two things:

- Find out more about the interview situation.
- Take a few minutes to prepare. Tell the reporter that you will be happy to answer his or her questions, but you have someone in your office at the moment and you will call back. Before you hang up, ask for and record the following information:
 - Reporter’s name
 - Station/publication
 - Phone number
 - Subject/topic
 - Angle
 - Questions
 - Deadline
 - Who else they are interviewing

Subject and angle: Ask a reporter what the interview is about and what angle they’re taking (how they are approaching the story). Knowing a story’s “angle” can determine how you prepare for the interview.

For example, the interview subject could be resources available for small businesses and the angle could be:

- General information related to Small Business Week; or
- Recent cuts in federal and provincial support to industry; or
- A disgruntled client claims he/she didn’t find the services of your office useful.

Depending on the situation, your preparation will be significantly different.

Questions: When you ask the reporter for questions, don’t look for a detailed list. You only need to know the general direction the conversation will take so you can gather statistics and facts and be prepared. Most reporters don’t know exactly what questions they will ask during the interview. Even if they do, they hesitate to give them to you because the interview loses its spontaneity.

Who else is being interviewed: It’s valuable to know who else the reporter has or will interview because you gain further insight into the story’s angle. Sometimes you can suggest other contacts for the reporter, which is generally appreciated.

Deadlines: Most media deadlines are fairly immediate, as a story usually airs or goes to print on the same day. Sometimes, however, a reporter will work on a feature story that

takes more time to prepare. Ask the reporter when you need to get back to them and respect the commitment you've made to call them back. Even if you have not been able to gather the information they requested in the given time, call the reporter and let them know.

After asking a few questions and negotiating a time to call back, use the time to prepare for the interview. Even a few minutes can make a difference.

Source: Western Economic Diversification Canada's Promotions Toolbox