

MEDIA RELATIONS GUIDE

The public and media relations department at Bentley works to generate appropriate and strategically beneficial external media coverage to enhance the university's reputation. In order to accomplish this, we often need to call on our faculty, staff and administrator colleagues to provide expert commentary. We also often need your assistance in identifying potential story ideas for the media. We've created this media relations guide to assist and prepare you and your department so you are fully informed and feel comfortable when media opportunities arise.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions that are not covered here and keep your PR contact informed of all newsworthy happenings in your department. Thank you for your cooperation.

WHAT IS NEWS?

A story's newsworthiness is determined by the reporter and the news outlet for which s/he works. Universities and colleges offer many stories that appeal to a general audience and, therefore, are newsworthy to mass media like newspapers, television, radio and mainstream online news sites. Other stories fit better in "niche" or "trade" media that reach a specific, targeted audience, or are best told through university publications or the Bentley website. The PR team researches niche/trade media on an ongoing basis, but we can always learn from those who are experts in their field so please feel free to suggest new outlets.

Elements of Newsworthiness

Reporters expect the Bentley's Media Relations staff to be "news gatekeepers" who only pitch story ideas that meet certain criteria for newsworthiness, setting them apart from other story angles. These characteristics include:

- Conflict and controversy
- Quirky innovation
- Trends
- Stories that are timely because they relate to happenings in the world at the moment. These stories may have a wide societal impact, human interest or involve very large sums of money. They could be about something unusual or rare; they might highlight a discovery or represent a major first.

Trend Stories

- Trends are broad-based business, social or cultural phenomena that journalists strive to identify and write about before anyone else. **Trends get coverage.**
- Reporters want to write about the emerging popularity of behaviors and activities that are likely to engage the masses and become part of our common vocabulary.
- To be newsworthy, Bentley needs to be on the front end of a trend or report a fresh angle on a current trend.
- It is important to ask yourself why this trend is important to the public and be prepared to explain how it will significantly alter the world around us. Remember that the trend story will fade as the new activity becomes the norm; the media will move on to the next new thing.

- It is worth noting that when the news media write stories on higher education, they are often trend stories that look at how a particular issue affects numerous schools, communities or institutions. **Often** reporters are more interested in trend stories than in a story affecting a single school.

CAPITALIZING ON MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES

If a Reporter Calls You Directly

- If a reporter contacts you directly about your area of expertise and you feel prepared to answer the questions, please feel free to grant an interview. **Be sure to ask the reporter's name, media affiliation and a phone number or e-mail address in case you want to clarify something later. After the interview, please alert Media Relations so we can track stories that feature Bentley.**
- If you would like some time to prepare before the interview, feel free to tell the reporter you need a few moments to collect your thoughts and that you will call back as soon as possible.
- You can ask the reporter what questions will be asked so you can begin formulating answers.
- Feel free to call Media Relations for assistance when you're preparing. In many cases, we will know something about the reporter and may have useful background information on the publication or program. We can talk you through potential questions in a mock interview and help tailor your responses into quotable statements or "sound bites."

Getting Quoted

- There are dozens of colleges and universities in the Boston area and thousands more across the country. They all want what we want: positive media exposure.
- So how does a reporter choose among them? A big part of the answer is that **they choose whoever is readily available and responds quickly.** Deadlines drive today's 24-hour news cycle and reporters always strive to beat their competition.
- If a reporter is seeking an expert opinion, s/he first identifies which universities specialize in the topic at hand. Often, reporters will request an expert from several universities and use the first qualified professor who returns their call. Response time is critical.
- As a general rule, the more accessible you are, the greater the likelihood that you will be sought by the media. Reporters remember who has helped them and are likely to call those experts again.

Deadlines

- Journalists work under constant deadline pressure. If a story is set to run in the next day's edition or on the evening news, the story usually will run regardless of whether you're available. That's why it is critical to understand the time constraints a reporter is working under when you are contacted.
- Of course, the reporter's emergency is not your emergency. **If you feel you cannot accommodate the request before the reporter's deadline, please refer the call to the Media Relations dept. and we will try to find someone else who can discuss the matter in time.**

MANAGING THE INTERVIEW

Below please find suggested guidelines you should follow to help manage the interview process effectively and avoid common pitfalls.

1. **Know Who is Requesting the Interview**

Before you agree to a media interview, it is critical that you know who is contacting you and the nature of the media outlet. This may be self-evident in the case of a daily newspaper like the Boston Globe. But it can be tricky with lesser-known media outlets—especially in the age of Web-based publications and cable TV programs that may vary dramatically in quality, reputation and viewpoint. If you are skeptical, ask for their information and tell them you'll call right back, then contact Media Relations.

2. **Know Your Key Points and Anticipate Questions**

Before you begin an interview with a reporter, it is extremely helpful to think through the key points you want to make. At the end of an interview, most reporters will offer you the chance to make any points they neglected to touch upon. If they do not, you should interject any point that is critical to your overall perspective.

3. **Be Succinct**

Many reporters, especially those in radio and television, need “sound bites” for their stories. Try to state your thoughts in complete, self-contained sentences rather than saying “yes” or “no” to their questions. Be sure to answer their questions completely, but as succinctly as possible. This ensures that your message won't be lost or misinterpreted. The easier you can make the reporter's job, the more likely it is that you will become a trusted and valued source.

4. **Be Descriptive**

Reporters are most likely to use descriptive, energetic quotes rather than vague or dry ones. Simply changing the perspective can help, “My research is a treasure hunt that leads me down unexpected paths” vs. “I never know where my research will end up.” Also try to speak in an active rather than passive voice.

5. **Don't Speculate**

It's best to not avoid guessing or speculating when answering a question. And also avoid answering hypothetical questions.

6. **Don't Let Reporters Put Words in Your Mouth**

Reporters often ask leading questions that you may inadvertently repeat back to them. Please be aware of this.

7. **Avoid Jargon**

Every field has its own vocabulary that is very familiar to those who specialize in it. Most people outside the field will not understand the meaning of most “jargon,” so it is best to avoid using technical terminology when doing interviews with all media other than a journal in your discipline.

8. **“Off the Record”**

The term “off the record” means something different to each individual. Comments made under this agreement are not guaranteed to remain confidential. It is best not to say anything to a reporter that you would not want to see in print or online.

9. **“No Comment”**

It is best to refrain from using the phrase “no comment.” It can imply you are hiding something or are uncooperative and does not convey the real reason you do not want to or cannot respond. Instead, explain why you would rather not discuss the matter.

10. **Statistics**

If you are sharing a number of statistics that illustrate a trend or your research findings as part

of an interview, it's a good idea to e-mail the numbers or tables in addition to discussing them verbally to make sure there are no misunderstandings.

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWS

Regardless of which type of media outlet you are working with, there are certain general rules that apply in every situation. In the orange box is a quick checklist to keep in mind:

- **Know in advance the key points you would like to make in your interview and work these into the responses to the questions you are asked. If you don't know the answer to a question, it is okay to say so.**
- **Prepare answers for the most difficult questions you think might be asked.**
- **Avoid being defensive when asked a difficult question.**
- **Be sure the reporter understands that you are not speaking on behalf of the university, but rather from your own area of expertise.**
- **Reiterate that you be identified as a Bentley University professor or administrator in the story.**

Broadcast/ Web Video Interviews

- Although a reporter or field producer may interview you at length, most broadcast news stories are less than two minutes long, and the average "sound bite" is about 10 seconds. To communicate effectively, outline key points you want to make ahead of time and repeat them several times during the interview, focusing on the most important messages you want to communicate.
- **Before** a recorded interview begins, make sure the reporter understands the background, history and context of the story. Once you are being recorded, speak to the topic and answer questions in concise, conversational, full sentences.
- Anything you say or e-mail to a reporter may appear in the story, even if it was communicated when the camera or tape recorder was off.
- Your appearance is very important. Producers recommend wearing solid, dark, comfortable clothing. Avoid plaids, bold stripes, wild patterns and noisy, distracting jewelry. We recommend faculty and staff wear business attire when possible. Consider keeping extra clothes in your office if you generally dress more casual.
- If you usually wear glasses, do so for the interview. The best approach is to be yourself.
- The set lights for studio interviews are hot, so blot any perspiration from your face before the camera rolls.
- Taped interviews may be edited later, so you can pause to collect your thoughts or correct yourself if you make a mistake. Live studio recordings of public affairs programs are an exception and are often shown without editing.
- Be aware of your posture and body language during an interview. Try to be relaxed and don't be afraid to use your hands when speaking, but not in excess.
- Look at the reporter, not the camera.
- In addition to "talking heads," television journalists need cut-away visuals, called background or b-roll, to help tell stories effectively. If you have visuals, such as photographs, artwork or graphics that could help illustrate the story, let them know.
- After taping an interview, the camera crew may shoot reverse shots of the reporter asking you questions and nodding. The crew also may tape you working or walking down the hall and into your office. These shots are used to establish the scene and help in editing the final story

If you have additional questions about media relations that we haven't covered here, please don't hesitate to contact our office.

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* Many thanks to our colleagues at DePaul University for their inspiration and wisdom in creating this media guide.