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LIGHTS, CAMERA... KITCHEN?

PART I: Mastering the video media interview from home

Media interviews can be difficult to navigate at the best of times. We advise any spokesperson to undertake expert media training to learn the tips, tricks and techniques needed to tackle interview appearances and tough journalist questioning with confidence.

Conducting interviews from home via video conference call only creates an added layer of complexity. However, with Covid-19 lockdown set to continue for the foreseeable future, spokespeople and media commentators are being forced to master the art of the down-the-line video interview from home.

Infinite Global has prepared this short guide to help individuals ahead of any video interview appearance.

1 FIRSTLY, RELAX: These are unique times and audiences do not expect individuals to be able to recreate a polished studio-quality atmosphere from home. Technical problems and audio/visual imperfections have plagued many broadcast interviews in recent weeks, including those of media professionals themselves in high profile situations, such as the government's daily briefing press conference. Audiences are forgiving. Don't worry.

2 CAMERA ANGLE AND EYE LINE: Where possible, avoid staring downward into a laptop positioned beneath you on a table top. The angle is unforgiving, can generate facial shadows and hinders vocal projection. Instead, elevate the camera closer to your natural eyeline, using props (such as books) to raise the height of the laptop or camera. Sit up straight, shoulders back and position yourself sufficiently far back in the camera frame to create just a little space in which you can use gentle and appropriate body and hand gestures. If your face is too close to the camera, you will appear overbearing.

3 LIGHTING: Seek natural lighting to illuminate your face. Positioning yourself facing a day-time window is ideal. Where artificial lighting is required, avoid direct projection on the face, which can appear harsh. Experiment with electric lamps projected against the wall opposite your sitting position, to create softer, environmental light against your face. Avoid bright lights behind you, including lamps or sunny windows, which can leave your face in shadow.

4 BACKDROP: Take care in your choice of physical location and backdrop. Neutral backdrops and blank walls are typically preferable. Home offices and bookshelves are popular, though be careful that items behind you are not a distraction to viewers. This includes items which are highly personal or subjective in nature (such as overtly political slogans or posters). Pop-up banner stands displaying organisational logos can be used on rare occasions, but must be positioned appropriately and only when suitable for the subject matter of the interview (to avoid appearing overly promotional).

5 APPEARANCE: As in any broadcast interview, dress appropriately for your industry. For most media spokespeople this means a collared shirt for men or similar work attire for women. Ties are typically not necessary, but T-shirts remain inadvisable for anyone outside certain industries, such as tech or fashion. Avoid clothes with bold and complex designs (including some checked shirts) which may appear to 'shimmer' on camera.

6 CLEAR MESSAGING: It is essential in any media interview to have 3 or 4 defined messages clear in your mind. Where possible, have a proof point (such as an example, case study or data point) to back up each of your key messages.

7 MESSAGE DISCIPLINE: Remain vigilant and don't be lulled into the false sense of security that can stem from sitting in comfortable, familiar surroundings. Stay on message and do not get drawn into conjecture and hypotheticals. More than ever, accuracy and reliability of information is paramount in the public domain. Journalists are adept at using prompts, pauses and silences to encourage interviewees to say more than they had intended. Don't fill silences. Make your point and finish it succinctly.

8 VOCAL DELIVERY: Take care to slow your speech, project your voice and enunciate your words clearly. It is easy to feel nervous during any media interview, which can drive you to speak quickly and gabble. Furthermore, internet connections can be unreliable and audio / visual quality can vary from device to device. Clear, easy-to-follow articulation is essential.

9 PHYSICAL DELIVERY: Look squarely at the camera and avoid touching your face or hair. Where possible and appropriate, inject energy into your voice and use facial expressions and deft hand gestures to add vigour to your delivery. Always be careful to control your facial and physical movements. Don't look away from the camera and avoid looking at yourself on your own screen. This is particularly important if you are interviewed alongside another spokesperson, in a different location. Your picture will likely remain on screen, even while the other person is speaking.

10 PREPARE AND REHEARSE: There is no substitute for effective preparation and practice. Think carefully about your messages. Experiment with your camera angles and lighting. Most importantly, rehearse by self-recording a trial run. This will help you hone your performance ahead of broadcast.

Infinite Global has delivered expert media training to hundreds of individuals and organisations over the past 25 years. Our international team of experienced reputation management advisers and media professionals are available to provide the support you need to navigate difficult times.

Contact one of our specialists to discuss your needs.



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PART II: Turning your spokespeople's homes into makeshift studios

The term 'content is king' has never been more pertinent and, in the current climate, the sentiment is especially applicable to digital forms of thought leadership. With social distancing taking face to face interaction out of the equation, multi-channel content is no longer a nice to have, it's non-negotiable.

However, much like the difficulties of conducting media interviews on camera remotely, creating professional looking video and audio content from home presents its own unique set of challenges.

The second part of this short guide is aimed at helping individuals looking to create content with a personal touch make the most of their surroundings despite the limitations imposed by social distancing. Once face to face interaction is back on the table, brands won't decide to do away with everything they've learned and implemented.

1 SOUND: Your choice of room is vital when recording audio for videos or podcasts. You want your words to sound up-close and personal, and recording in a very reverberant space will make that intimacy nearly impossible. Try to use a small-to-medium sized room with items such as beds, couches, pillows and rugs, which absorb sound, making the space less reverberant and more neutral for a better recording. Avoid rooms with a lot of hard surfaces and windows.

2 LIGHTING: The techniques discussed in the previous section still apply, however audiences will expect higher standards from your video content. Dimmable lamps and light boxes can be purchased for relatively little cost, but the key is to experiment with the light sources you have available. Straight-on lighting is best, especially if you have a window with natural light on your side to fill out your shadows. Avoid harsh side lighting when you can.

3 BACKDROP: It is no surprise that the right backdrop is even more essential for video content recorded at home than media interviews, where it is accepted from the outset that you are in your own environment. This is especially true if you are filming something that is less static than an interview, which requires you to remain in one place. You can also be more promotional with the way you curate your space through background objects than you would during an interview. This is your content.

4 CAMERA: Most smartphones are advanced enough to allow you to record high-quality video at home without too much effort or the need for more expensive camera equipment. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the different recording modes such as tracking and auto-focus before shooting to get the most out of the tools you have at hand.

5 MICROPHONE: Investing in a good quality microphone is essential if you're going to create professional sounding content. Relying on your computer's in-built microphone isn't going to cut it. However, that doesn't mean that you have to break the bank. Clip-on lapel microphones or video call headsets – when speaking on podcasts – are inexpensive options that will improve your recordings.

6 SWITCH OFF: Outlook reminders, email alerts and messaging app notifications have plagued many recordings that we've had to completely scrap and re-record for clients. Longform content such as podcasts are more at risk to outside noise while a participant is speaking, which can be difficult to edit out in post-production. Make sure all your alerts are switched to silent mode or your devices are switched off completely.

7 AVOID SOUND CLASHES: If you have prepared notes for a podcast make sure that you shuffle or turn the pages during a moment of silence to avoid background noise whilst someone is speaking. The same applies to shuffling, adjusting seat position or clearing your throat. These sounds can then be removed easily in postproduction.

8 CHECK YOUR INTERNET SPEED: When connecting with people remotely for podcasts or webinars, a slow internet connection can massively affect the overall quality. Conduct an online speed test before you begin. Make sure no one else in your household is using excessive bandwidth or streaming their favorite boxset while you record.

9 PLAN YOUR CONTENT OUT: Whether you're recording a hangout-style webinar, a roundtable, a talking-head video or a podcast with multiple guests, make sure you know where you plan to take the audience first. If you're recording a video then make sure you learn all of your talking points before recording as editing will be much harder than audio only content. If you're recording a podcast it's a lot easier to create notes and prompts to help you.

10 TAKE YOUR TIME: Unlike with live media interviews, you have the luxury of making as many mistakes as you need to in order to get the content right. If you make a mistake, stumble, repeat yourself, or hate the way you sound, that's perfectly fine. Very few people get it right first time. Simply stop and re-record until you're happy with the outcome.

The above is a small summary of the key points we cover when training clients who wish to film more personal content themselves before sending their handiwork over to us to craft into something that will look great on all of their digital channels. This approach helps them be more agile and reactive with their output whilst also overcomes geographical restrictions when content cannot be created in our studio.

Contact us to see how our digital and content strategists can provide the support you need to navigate difficult times.



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