



Working with The Media Webinar

29 April 2021

For media messaging, the perfect marriage exists somewhere between your goals and your audience's needs and values.

Types of Messages

There are many different types of media messages, but they frequently fit within one of the following four categories:

1. Fact/Result
2. Problem/Solution
3. Advocacy or Call to Action
4. Benefits

In the messages below, you'll notice overlap among the categories. That's because the same message can usually be written many different ways, depending on your goals.

The Fact/ Result Message

This message spells out the link between a fact and its implication.

"Children in low-income families receive a much poorer education than children from wealthier areas and are too often doomed to a lifetime of low-paying jobs as a result."

The Problem/Solution Message

This type of message describes the problem in the first clause and its solution in the second; the formula can also be reversed.

"Lake Rotorua has become badly polluted and is no longer safe for swimming or fishing but by closing it for three years, we can restore it and open it for swimming and fishing again."

The Advocacy or Call-to-Action Message

This kind of message goes a step further than the previous ones, providing your audience with a specific call to action.

"More New Zealand workers are living in dire poverty than at any other time since the early 1900's, so I'd ask everyone listening to sign our petition demanding a fair minimum wage."

The Benefits Message

Benefits messages focus on selling point for potential buyers.

“We are taking the hassles out of air travel by offering passengers the airline they’ve long wanted, with free itinerary changes, more legroom and Internet access.”

Sound Bites

Mark Twain captured it best when he said, “It usually takes about three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech.”

A sound bite is a short phrase or sentence that expresses one of your messages in a particularly memorable or witty manner. The media love sound bites and audiences remember them. They make dull stories livelier and boring guests more interesting.

“It’s like trying to fill the bathtub with the drain open.” Mary Johnson, Medicare policy analyst

“Any one flight I space on the space shuttle is as dangerous as 60 combat missions during wartime.” John Young, astronaut

“We’re burning the furniture to heat the house” – John H. Quigley, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation, on hydraulic fracturing

“I outwit them, then I out hit them.” – Muhammad Ali, three-time heavyweight boxing champion

“Our choices right now are not between good and better: they’re between bad and worse.” – Alan Greenspan, former Chairman of the US Federal Reserve

How to Create Sound Bites

Few people can compose captivating sound bites in a single sitting. Don’t give up. You can develop media-friendly sound bites by experimenting with comparisons and different techniques.

Here are ten types of sound bites the media regularly quote, along with examples for each.

- **Similes, Metaphors and Analogies:** “It’s as if Republicans and Democrats are planning a trip but they disagree over whether you should start the trip from Buenos Aires or Greenland.”
- **Triples:** “We help ordinary people get rich without working on Wall Street, inheriting wealth or marrying a millionaire.”
- **Rhetorical Questions:** “More than 5,000 New Zealanders lost their jobs last month. How many more families need to lose their economic lifeline before this Government acts?”
- **Contrasts, Conflicts or Paradoxes:** “Our food is fresh. Our customers are spoiled.”
FreshDirect, online grocer
- **Definitiveness or Power:** “We are in this to win.” – General David Petraeus
- **Superlatives:** “This is the biggest technological advance in 50 years in the oil business.” – Phillip Crouse, oil analyst

- **Pop Culture:** “There’s a greater likelihood that I’ll be asked by Madonna to go on tour as her bass player than I’ll be picked to be on the ticket.” – Former Governor Mike Huckabee assessing his chances of becoming Mitt Romney’s vice-presidential running mate in 2012
- **Emotions:** “As a New Yorker, I am absolutely horrified by what happened in my city last night.” – Commenter on Daily Kos website about alleged police brutality at a local protest
- **Surprise Twist:** “I will not exploit, for political purposes, my opponent’s youth and inexperience.” – President Ronald Reagan, diffusing accusations that he was too old for a second term
- **Tweaked Cliches:** “Money doesn’t grow on trees, but it does grow faster in credit unions without those greedy big-bank fees.”