



Guide to broadcast interviews

Radio and television interviews are an excellent way to reach a large audience, giving you the opportunity to demonstrate your expertise, raise the profile of your organisation or campaign on issues relevant to your clients. Broadcast interviews can be nerve wracking, even for those experienced in speaking to the press. Many otherwise confident commentators need to prepare carefully to ensure they feel at ease whilst getting their message across clearly.

Preparation

When an opportunity to do a broadcast interview comes in, try to get as much information as possible about the piece and how you will fit into it. This will help you decide whether or not to take part and help you prepare.

- **Find out the format the interview will take**

Is it live or pre-recorded? Will you be one of a panel or on your own? Will it be a piece to camera or will you be interviewed by a presenter? Will you be in the same studio as the interviewer or will it be 'down the line'? If other people are appearing, who are they? Will it be part of a phone-in show? How long will the interview be?

The format of the piece will make a difference to how you prepare – a short piece to camera where a small clip will be used as part of a package is very different to a live debate with a hostile journalist or a spokesperson holding an opposing view.

- **Find out what they want you to talk about specifically**

Get as much detail as you can about what you will be asked and what the angle will be. If you're working with a PR agency, they will do this for you. Often broadcasters have a good idea about what they are hoping to get from you, so make sure this matches with what you are comfortable speaking about. Understanding what they want to know and the context of your interview will help you anticipate any difficult questions.

- **Check the researcher or journalist has your correct details**

Check that your name and job title are correct and that they make a note of your firm's name. Also ensure the researcher or journalist has your mobile number and you have all of their contact details. Broadcast interviews are often moved or cancelled at the last moment due to breaking news so it's important they are able to get hold of you at short notice.

- **Decide on your key messages, anticipate difficult questions and rehearse**

Once you have decided to take part and have the details of what you are going to talk about, you need to prepare for the interview. Don't attempt to 'wing it'. A broadcast interview is not like a normal

conversation and a short time plotting out the key messages you want to get across and how you will respond to difficult questions is vital.

Decide on, ideally, three key messages – any more will be a challenge to get across naturally in a short interview. These messages will form the basis of the interview. Consider the other side of the story and any difficult questions you might be asked, including areas where you will not be able to comment (often an issue for lawyers commenting on legal proceedings). Prepare an answer for these, which, where possible, gives you an opportunity to revert to your key messages.

Think of soundbites that will play well in a short piece and make a note of any statistics that will help make your point. Avoid legal jargon or overly complicated explanations – you will need to express yourself clearly and simply.

Think of how you can include your firm's name in what you are saying – often a lawyer's firm does not get a name check despite best efforts, so including this in your interview subtly is a good idea e.g. '*We at Joe Blogs & Co see countless cases of this kind.*' Avoid ostentatious plugging of your firm, however, as this will not be well received by the audience or the journalist.

Once you have decided what you are going to say, rehearse in front of a mirror or get a colleague, or your PR person, to play the part of the interviewer to give you a chance to practise.

- **Dress appropriately**

Remember that your appearance on screen will have a considerable impact on how you come across. Wear clothes that project the image you wish to convey, which in the case of a lawyer will generally mean you should dress in a smart and business-like manner.

Generally, you should stick to wearing subtle block colours rather than intricate patterns, stripes or checks which can cause strobing on camera. Avoid black or white as they can make you look pale and ensure you are comfortable. Avoid excessive jewellery as it distracts the viewer and wear at least some make up. Even men should consider face powder as looking shiny on camera is not a good look.

The interview

If you have prepared well, you will hopefully feel confident about what you are going to say. Don't feel afraid to speak to the interviewer while the interview is being set up to reiterate what you plan to talk about.

- **Your delivery**

Even when you are speaking on a very serious story, you should come across as enthusiastic about your topic. You want to appear authoritative, entertaining and opinionated to ensure that your audience are listening and engaged.

Avoid speaking in monotone and appear confident, even if you are nervous inside. Stay still and try not to move your head too much – it can help to put your feet down firmly on the floor to stop you from swaying at all. That said, you don't want to appear tense or stiff, so relax your body. Hand gestures can help you make your point but only use them in moderation.

If doing a down-the-line interview, look just above the camera lens and don't let your eyes wander around the room. Doing so will make you look shifty on screen.

If you're in a radio studio, try to keep still – even the slightest movement can be picked up by a microphone.

Try to avoid waffling or digressing and stick to your key points. Don't try to answer questions where you don't know the answers and never lose your temper, even where a journalist is being provocative.

- **Bridging**

When faced with a question you were not expecting or one you're not sure how to answer, deal with that question very briefly and then move on to your main point again. There are several phrases, which are useful for this:

- but what's really important...
- but just let me say...
- to return to my original point...
- you must remember...

The crucial thing is to move back to your original point, otherwise you lose control and allow the interviewer to dictate the agenda.

When it's all over

Be sure to find out when the piece will be aired if it's not live and watch the programme back. Be honest with yourself and get feedback from your peers about how you performed as this will help you in future interviews.