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BLOGPOST: How to conduct effective interviews



Magazines, corporate blogs and even podcasts are now elements of the content marketing mix for many companies. Public relations professionals producing high-quality content for these assorted corporate channels really enjoy the opportunity to ask the questions. But how can you make an interview exciting? What do you need to consider to prevent your interview from becoming a boring conversation that brings readers or listeners little added value?

Preparing ahead of time is only half the battle

Before you interview a person, you should find out more about them: Is there any special background? What surprises or rough edges are lurking in their lives or careers and what questions might perhaps bring them out of their shells?

But getting ready also means putting yourself in your target group's shoes: What interests your readers, listeners or viewers? What information provides added value to make them wonder, smile or think?

Getting off on the right foot

If the person you're interviewing happens to be very nervous in the beginning, have a preliminary, relaxing conversation beforehand and start off with easy "icebreaking" questions. But if they are a true media professional, leading with your strongest question can draw your audience into the story right away.

Actively listen

What counts the most during interviews? Listening carefully! Because the next questions you ask can often come from the answers they've already given. That's why your mind should be 100% with your guest and not thinking about what comes next. You can also build up tension by asking targeted questions or even provoking a response.

Asking the right questions

This interviewing technique distinguishes between the different types of questions that will have different effects on the person you're interviewing. For example, there are closed questions where the answer can only be yes or no. They work when you're seeking a clear position.

Open questions give room for free, spontaneous responses. That makes them better suited for encouraging the other person to talk.

Suggestive questions imply something, (e.g. "What's your opinion on...?"). But use them sparingly and only when they fit the theme.

You should try as much as possible to ask one question at a time instead of stringing several of them together (question chain). When questions are strung together, the interviewee will tend to reply to just one, whichever happens to be the easiest.

More critical, probing questions are supposed to follow towards the middle of the interview, after a good framework has been

established for the two of you to converse with each other.

Absolutely “no go” questions: are those that are defamatory or offensive. Any discussion of private issues should have been agreed in advance.

Interviewing somebody difficult to handle

Humour can open someone up who is shy or reserved. Asking a surprising question that makes the other person laugh will lighten the mood and help you learn more than if you had stuck strictly to the questions you had on your list.

If the person you are interviewing gets too talkative, only a clear announcement will help: Interrupt in a friendly way and move on to the next topic by pointing out that there's little time left.

It also gets tough when the person being interviewed just sticks to generalities. Stay persistent and keep asking for concrete examples.

Oral or written interviews?

Interviewing face-to-face, over the phone, in a videoconference or by email: What's the best? In this case: Written interviews aren't inherently more superficial than face-to-face conversations, whether virtual or analogue. As a rule, the latter are livelier. But even in a written interview, you can ask critical questions and you should definitely do so if the answers are too flat or vague.

Appealing body language

Authentic body language is a prerequisite for building common trust in interviews. Be open and approachable to the other person when you are interviewing them face-to-face. You should be signalling to the other person: to make clear you are listening and interested in what they are saying.

Photo and video shoots are best carried out using professionals

Use professionals when you are using images or filming videos. Whether the image is static or dynamic: you should be capturing dynamic situations and recording the person you are interviewing from several different perspectives. Here the rule tends to be: the closer the subject of the interview is, the more intense, denser, more serious they look. The further away they are, the more relaxed and chilled they appear. For good images, lighting conditions and background are also decisive factors. If additional lighting is needed, make sure it doesn't disturb the person being interviewed. The background should not be too sharp and yet also not completely unrecognisable. In no case should it distract attention from the subject of the interview.

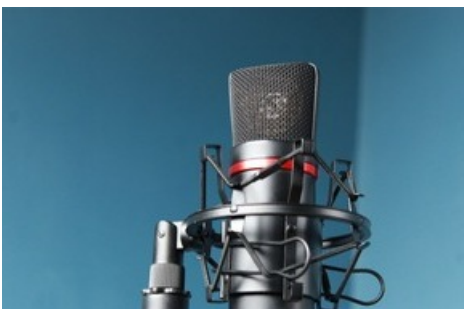
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