

# Working with the Media on Complex Issues

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While the clutter continues at record speed with blogs on every imaginable topic, and “news reporting” entities that actually inform their audiences from a specific agenda or political platform, traditional media’s sole responsibility is still to report the news objectively and accurately. As a story is often only as strong as its sources, communication between CPAs and the media can mean the difference between calm and chaos.

Media firestorms relating to business missteps or convoluted legislation are particularly common because information is often not explained prior to – or admitted after – a complex issue has already become problematic. Therefore, it’s essential for CPAs to provide the media with compelling and accurate information that speaks to the level of the audience’s understanding, whether they are readers, listeners or viewers. Be it complex tax legislation or a client whose business practices may be in question, being an informative resource is the key to communicating effectively with the media which can be incredibly rewarding, not to mention good for business. Here are a few suggestions to guide you when interacting with the media on complex issues:

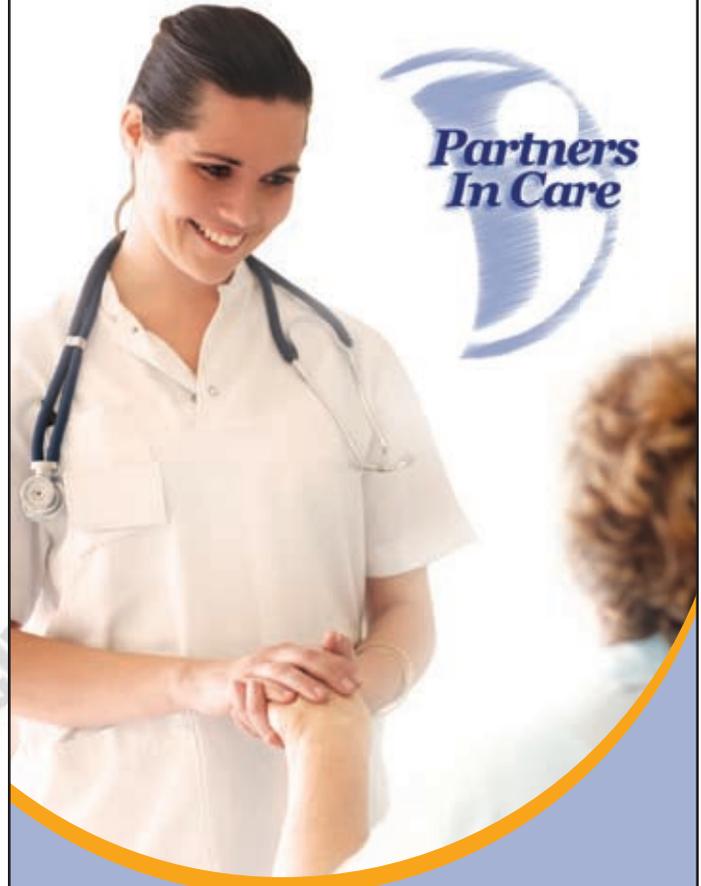
## **Be Proactive**

Before a media inquiry even arises, be proactive and “pitch” the media most relevant to your client demographic profile on your specific expertise and the topic areas about which you are most fluent. Your pitch package should include a brief history of your firm, your bio, clips of any previous media coverage you received or articles you have written, and a case study or two that demonstrates how you’ve taken a challenging issue and resolved it through unpacking the complexity. Proactively pitching the media in this way identifies you as a key resource to journalists, editors and bloggers so that they will initially look to you as they develop stories or look for topics about which to create content.

## **Be Prepared**

When a hot public topic arises, be ready with your media brief. This is a one-page document that can be quickly transmitted to the media and translated to the public by the media. The document should offer a layman’s explanation of the complexity at hand, as well as clear tips on “how to...” or “what to do if...” The brief serves as a door opener for media to follow up with you for a more in-depth perspective on the issue. Unless the matter is one that merits a position, try never to take one. The CPA’s role is to inform and

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educate in a clear, concise and consistent manner.

If the public conversation has to do with a client heading for crisis, then a crisis communications plan is more appropriate. Depending on the potential impact of the crisis, both on your client and your firm, you may want to seek the counsel of a public relations firm that specializes in crisis communications. At a minimum, prepare and practice your media statements in advance of interviews and press inquiries. Remember, everything is on the record.

### **Be Clear and Accurate**

In addition to offering clear, concise and consistent content to the media which it can readily circulate to its audiences, CPAs must ensure the integrity and accuracy of the information they are providing. Fact check multiple times before releasing any statements or briefs, even if you're certain everything is correct.

Remember, too, that the media is probably not an expert in the topic being explored, and it is relying on you to provide coherent and linear explanations around a difficult-to-absorb topic. Being direct and to the point gives the media exactly what it needs in a quote or sound bite. Simplicity fosters competent reporting and all-around improved understanding.

### **Be Friends with the Media**

After you've gone on the record, be sure to monitor the stories as they develop. You may be called by additional media outlets to give a statement or further discuss the situation. It's also a good practice to proactively offer further clarity or insight through a quick email or voice mail message. Keeping your composure throughout your media interactions shows you are comfortable under pressure and confident in tackling even the most difficult issues – all of which can prove invaluable to your business. 🧩

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