



For the Record

Media Relations Handbook for
Home Builders' Associations
2009



Canadian
Home Builders'
Association



Why This Book?

Media relations has changed a lot since the Canadian Home Builders' Association published its last guide on the subject.

The basics are still the same, of course:

- Your goal is to let people know who you are, what you do, and why it's important.
- You have to know who the news media are.
- You have to provide them with "News".
- You have to package it for the medium and for the audience.
- If you want the media to pick up your stories, you have to pick up their calls: the relationship must be two-way.
- Your spokesperson must be well prepared.
- You must have good background information.
- Your information must always be reliable.
- You need to plan ahead – both for the short term and for the long term.

However, the landscape has been shifting for the media:

- Traditional media are being squeezed.
- The internet and new media opportunities are siphoning advertising dollars away from traditional media.
- New technologies now offer traditional audiences new sources of information.
- The media are expanding what they offer online.
- Reporters often use more than one technology.
- The 'audience' can upload comments, photos, videos and blog posts to media websites.
- News items stay available much longer.

And you have new options:

- Individuals and groups – including Home Builders' Associations (HBAs) – are becoming online 'publishers and broadcasters' in their own right.
- There are new tools that work together to reach the public and the media better.
- Communication is becoming much more of a two-way conversation.

The goal is to communicate with your 'publics' – consumers, members, government, and other groups.

You want those publics to get to know the new home building, renovation and development industry – its people, its innovations, the roles it fills, and its importance for the local economy, society and individuals.

A main tool for reaching people is still the traditional news media. They bring information into people's homes and offices.

Your other tools can include:

- your website
- email alerts
- newsletters
- social networking
- blogs
- events
- speaking engagements

The Basics

(key elements of an association media relations program)

KEY ELEMENT	RESPONSIBILITY
1. Forward Planning	
A. Leadership commitment and structure to make sure media relations become a key strength 5	<input type="checkbox"/> President, Board/Executive and Executive Officer (EO)
B. Ongoing 'environmental scan' for upcoming issues and possible responses before they become controversial 5	<input type="checkbox"/> EO and Board/Executive (regular item on agenda)
C. Strategic planning to identify messages the association wants to promote, with effective action 6	<input type="checkbox"/> Board/Executive/Special Committee with support of EO
2. Media Contacts	
A. Strong relationships with local media to ensure that they will call your association for comments, fact-checking and balance on important issues 6	<input type="checkbox"/> EO and Spokesperson
B. Up-to-date media listings that allow you to reach all significant local reporters, columnists and broadcast interviewers quickly, using their preferred format 7	<input type="checkbox"/> EO
3. News and Background	
A. A real understanding of what the media want and need, supported by solid background information on current issues 9	<input type="checkbox"/> EO, Spokesperson and Board/Executive with input from Committees, and the CHBA provincial and national
B. An ongoing communications program to provide the news they want 18	<input type="checkbox"/> EO with direction from Board/Executive
4. Direct-to-Public Communications 20	<input type="checkbox"/> EO with direction from Board/Executive
5. Well-Prepared Spokesperson	
A. Do-it-Yourself 'Experience' 23	<input type="checkbox"/> Usually the President and/or relevant Committee Chair
B. Information about interviews, from initial request to note of thanks 24	<input type="checkbox"/> EO with appropriate input
C. Information on issues, likely questions, association positions, talking points and handling difficult questions 29	<input type="checkbox"/> EO with input from Board, Committees, and the CHBA provincial and national
6. Communications Plans and Crisis Management Strategies	
A. Communication Plans 32	<input type="checkbox"/> EO with input from Board, Committees, and the CHBA provincial and national
B. Crisis Management 36	

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You never want to be caught in the middle of a major issue, without tools to respond to it.

Be prepared, and be active.

That won't avoid all unexpected questions, but they'll be a lot fewer and you'll handle them better.

With good planning and preparation you can get your messages into the public forum, and start shaping the public debate.

Forward Planning

In an ideal world, no Home Builders' Association (HBA) would ever face a question it couldn't answer, or find it hard to get people to listen to its positions.

We don't live in an ideal world. Nothing will totally eliminate difficult media situations. But forward planning and good preparation can really cut down on them, and help you deal much better with the ones that do arise.

Planning and preparation requires people to be aware of the importance of media relations. This includes:

- leadership and structure – top level commitment and reporting structure to make sure media relations doesn't get overlooked
- ongoing 'environmental scan' – knowing what issues and topics are heating up and need attention, or offer new opportunities
- strategic planning – identifying your association's key issues for the year, making sure you've planned the media relations side of them, and amending the plan as necessary to deal with significant changes or new issues.

A. Leadership and Structure

(President, Board/Executive and EO)

Without leadership, it's easy to slide back into subsistence level media relations – sending out a news alert every now and again about your upcoming Parade of Homes/Home Show, and responding to media calls about the latest housing starts release.

Active leadership can make sure media relations becomes a much more valuable part of the association's activities.

It is important to know who is expected to deal with this, and how. Some associations use a communications committee to oversee planning and implementation; others integrate it into their overall discussions of issues and regular updates of their strategic plan.

B. Ongoing 'Environmental Scan'

(EO and Board/Executive)

The association EO, elected leaders and members are your eyes and ears for upcoming communications challenges and opportunities. For example:

- the Executive Committee and/or Board includes 'Media relations challenges and opportunities' as a line item on every agenda, and expects this to be part of each committee or task force report
- the EO tracks trends and issues emerging in his/her discussions with reporters, government representatives, members, and others

- the strategic planning committee includes media relations as a topic in its regular reviews and updates, including recommendations for each top priority issue
- other committees and task forces track issues that are heating up in their areas, and report to the Board/Executive.

C. Strategic Planning

(Board/Executive/Special Committee with Support of EO)

The association's strategic plan can cover many items, but media relations and communications recommendations should be an expected part of its activities and reports. This could include:

- identifying key issues the association wants to address and messages it wants to get out
- identifying target audiences and goals (e.g., people will know something is happening, understand why it is happening, care about it, change their opinions, and/or take action)
- general communications plan, schedule and materials to be prepared in advance for each of your key events
- designation and preparation of spokespeople
- recommendations on use of traditional media, website and alternatives for spreading the message
- basic crisis management plan in case of communications emergency.

More information about communications plans is found on page 18. Information about issue and crisis management is found on page 36.

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Media Contacts

Traditional media are the backbone of any communications outreach. Newspapers, magazines, radio and TV shows – and their websites – create the common currency for public discussion. You need solid contacts with the media people writing and/or broadcasting the pieces your target audiences read, listen to, and watch.

A. Relationships

(Spokesperson and EO)

It takes four things to establish good media relationships:

- knowing who they are
- knowing what they want and need
- reliably giving them what they want and need
- being accessible.

The vast majority of people you'll meet in the media are normal working people.

They want to do a good job and they usually don't have as much time as they'd like. They're always facing deadlines.

Treat them with respect. Give them good news items and reliable information. Do whatever you can to make their job easier.

And when they've done a particularly good job of representing your comments fairly and well, send a note of appreciation to their boss, with a copy to them.

Like other relationships, media ones must be built on mutual understanding and respect. When you have messages you want to get out, it's their job to make sure those messages are legitimate news. If the story has two sides, they must try to get the other position as well. This works both ways. When someone else is trying to push a one-sided story, the reporter should be calling you for comments. Make sure you're available when they call.

They are also experts on what is news. When they are chasing down a story, try to help. Dig out files, find the best person in your association to give examples, etc. – and do it to meet their deadlines. Sometimes, you will not agree with the angle they are chasing, in which case the way you help is to make sure they know where their assumptions can be challenged and how the facts lead to a different conclusion.

Media relationships must also be based on trust. Make sure all information you give them is correct and doesn't leave out important elements. Never lie to them – you will be found out, and they will not forget.

Don't automatically assume that a 'bad' news item is the reporter's fault. After those items leave the reporter's desk, they are edited and often cut and headlines are created by other people – sometimes miles away. You may want to call the reporter directly for their side of the story: "I was really disappointed in the way that story turned out. You're usually fair. What happened?" Don't get angry with the answer. Use it to learn.

B. Up-to-Date Media Listings (Primarily EO)

The housing industry is lucky. HBA's don't have to try to create media interest from scratch. Everybody is already interested in housing. And their interest comes from many different angles. In newspapers, for example, housing stories end up on the front page, in the real estate section, the business section, the 'life' section, political pages, entertainment (e.g., home shows), and sometimes even sports, if you sponsor a little league team.

Most Executive Officers and senior elected people are already familiar with a number of reporters who cover housing. But you may be missing some good contacts, or not using the most efficient contact methods.

Keep existing contacts up to date. This can be done with quick phone calls once/twice a year (or more often if required in your local area) to confirm:

- contact information
- beat they are responsible for (if applicable)
- how each person prefers to receive news alerts (e.g., email, fax, commercial newswire, RSS feed or Twitter)
- how they prefer to receive larger reports and background information (e.g., print, email or link to website)

To set up a news alert through Google, go to www.google.ca/alerts?hl=en and combine some or all of the following basic key words as your search terms:

- (your city)
- (your name)
- housing
- residential
- construction
- home
- builder
- renovation
- (Mayor's name)
- (key municipal contact's name)
- (specific issue)

Put multiple word search terms in quotation marks (e.g., "Medicine Hat").

- if anything you're currently sending to them should go to someone else in the office instead, or be eliminated
- if there's any kind of information you're not currently sending to them that they would find useful.

Extend your reach:

- use your press clipping service and/or Google email news alerts and/or association members to collect additional news coverage of *housing issues* in your area, including special interest and ethnic media
- from those clippings, check bylines to identify any additional writers, radio/TV interviewers, show hosts, etc. who should be on your media list
- look for which reporters are covering the *people* (e.g., government committees or representatives) you want to reach
- if it's not already included in the clipping, phone the media outlet for their contact information
- call or email the person, and introduce yourself ("We saw your report on ... and thought you would like to receive our news alerts and reports")
- where no byline is given, call and ask the media outlet who is the best contact for news items for that show or section
- don't overlook influential freelancers and key bloggers.

Deepen your information (Recommended for Executive Committee too):

- scan additional newspapers from time to time, tune in to different local radio stations each day on the drive to work, and watch different TV newscasts at home, so you get a feeling for who their audiences are and what they are interested in
- as well as following a key media contact's work as it appears in 'real time', you can use the internet to help build a profile of his or her interests, styles, favourite questions, show formats and so on
- search for their name, or the name of their show (in quotation marks); if you are using a search engine like Google, use the 'Video' link at the top of the results page to find TV clips
- go to their newspaper/magazine/radio/TV station's own website and use its internal search function the same way.

News and Background

Your association will be judged by the quality of news it delivers. This means knowing what is news to other people – not just what you want to tell people about. It also means being able to deliver strong messages, at the times and by the methods media people want. Finally, those messages must be reliable: supported with solid background information, research, and/or real life examples, as appropriate for each issue.

A. What the Media Want and Need

(EO, Spokesperson and Board/Executive with input from Committees, and the CHBA provincial and national)

1. 'Real' News

Newspapers, magazines, TV and radio need news stories the way the housing industry needs land and building materials. They can't function without them.

People sometimes look at what ends up in the news and ask: "Why did they choose to use this?" Or, even more importantly, "Why did they *not* choose my story?"

There is lots of competition for the space – along with the normal accidents, disasters, and politics, lots of people are clamouring for their pet issues to be covered. Fundamentally, editors choose the items they think will keep the audience coming back. That is the way news people measure success (and how the marketing department sells advertising as well).

There are several basic elements that help make something 'newsworthy'. The more of these things you can include in your story (and the better you can show how they affect the audience), the bigger its potential news value will be:

- **Timeliness**
Things that have just happened, are happening right now, or will happen soon. (*It isn't called the "News" for nothing.*) You can also connect to events in the past using anniversaries. (*"Three years after new policy, downtown has been transformed."*)
- **Change**
Decisions and innovations that can change the way people act or think. (*Can range from a new understanding of the universe to new materials for kitchen counters.*)
- **Firsts**
This doesn't have to be first ever – it can also be first in a geographic region, an industry, etc. (*"First net energy-producing house in PEI."*)
- **Disasters**
These can be actual or threatened natural disasters, violence, losses, or personal catastrophes. (*Nobody likes to admit it, but we're all drawn to these stories.*)
- **Triumphs**
Heroes, activists, prize winners, people who accomplish something admirable, and people who survive difficult challenges. (*This is wired deep into the human psyche.*)
- **Conflict**
From hockey games to dysfunctional families to politics. (*Also wired deeply.*)

Remember that "Man bites dog" makes the news because it doesn't happen very often.

Be aware of that when you plan your ongoing communications.

If you're always saying "This is a great time to buy a home" no matter what the underlying conditions, people will probably stop paying attention.

- **The oddball**

Things that are out of the ordinary also pique people's interest. (*Did you know that the French style of outdoor staircases comes from a very old policy of taxing indoor ones?*)

- **Important names**

If the Prime Minister says something "should be fixed", that's news; if Joe Blow says exactly the same thing, it's not. (*Also works for movie stars, sports figures and your HBA President – at least within your local area.*)

- **Wide impact**

If a lot of the people in the audience will be affected, that's probably news. (*A tax hike in your municipality will get covered in the local paper; it isn't likely to make the national news unless it's also really unusual.*)

- **Deep impact**

If people will care a lot about something, that's probably news as well. (*They may care as breadwinners on some issues, as individuals, parents, citizens, potential home buyers, environmentalists, or amateur hockey players on others.*)

- **Statistics**

You wouldn't think so, but it's true – at least when the figures give measurable evidence of something people care about. (*"Unemployment drops 2%"; "500,000 wait for Pope."*)

- **Events**

Media are more likely to cover an issue when there is an actual event that brings the pieces together. (*Events like a Parade of Homes, First Time Buyers' Seminar, guest speaker or panel, presentation to the Mayor, etc. are timely, often involve important names, and usually deal with issues that will have a wide and deep impact. Sometimes there's even conflict thrown in, and calls for change.*)

2. Supported by Solid Information

All news items, comments, etc. that you give to the media must be correct. Comments must be true and not misleading. Positions must be based on experience and facts, not just opinions. Figures must be right. Names and position titles must be pronounced and spelled properly.

Every HBA should have basic information prepared and ready to give out to media contacts in print and/or electronic format:

- **A fact sheet about the association** (*like the About Us and Contact Us on your website*)

Name, address, phone, email, website, social networking sites, etc., brief description of membership, goals and objectives, and name and contact information for EO.

- **A biography and photograph of the current President** (*doubles as both a media handout and a brief speaker's introduction*)

Head-and-shoulders photograph, name and contact information, title and role in the HBA, title and role in own company, brief biography.

- **Short information backgrounders about each of your top three or four issues** (*include at least one photograph, chart, or other visual if possible*)

Make the reporter's job as easy as possible. If you know of reports – your own or other peoples' – that would be helpful for their article, let them know.

Point out websites, send pdfs or links, suggest they call the reports' authors and give them contact information for useful spokespeople.

By definition, industry associations take positions that support their members' long term interests.

Unfortunately, that can lead the general public to assume the associations are just self-serving.

Good research reports are really important to counteract this type of assumption. They provide the independent, third-party data and analyses showing what the real problems are, and how different groups will be affected.

Date, contact person and phone/fax/email/website, short statement of the issue, two or three punchy quotes from your spokesperson, video if available, brief history, list of major arguments (with point form summary of research, facts, experience, etc. under each one), and sources of more information. (See the various toolkits from the CHBA national office.)

- **Detailed papers and research reports where applicable** (*may include links to relevant reports online*)

Background information prepared/commissioned by your local association, CHBA provincial or national office, or independent third parties such as government departments, consultants, universities, or other associations or groups, which can be quoted in interviews and/or given to reporters who want to look more deeply into your issues.

- **Event/speaker background**

Parade of Homes/Home Show: description, history, figures on the size of the show, map, number and names of exhibitors, highlights (e.g., speakers, 'dream home', giveaways)

Seminars, dinner speakers, and so on: description of event, brief speakers' biographies, head shots, and copies of presentations if possible.

The HBA should also be able to assemble similar backgrounders quickly for media as key new issues arise. (These background information pieces are also very useful for briefing your association spokesperson prior to media interviews and appearances. See page 29 for other suggestions.)

The CHBA national office makes toolkits available. Depending on the topic, these can include some or all of: sample news releases, position papers, backgrounders, PowerPoint presentations, media clippings on related initiatives, research reports. Provincial associations can also provide information on issues that come within provincial jurisdiction. Expanding these materials with local statistics, surveys, examples of builder experiences, examples of home buyer/owner experiences, etc. all add to the newsworthiness and credibility of your message.

Where you are generating the news (e.g., media alerts, news releases, speeches, or press conferences), make sure your spokesperson is thoroughly briefed. Boil down the complex issues into one brief and understandable key message. Write out the main supporting facts and figures, and choose short, interesting examples that show the problem and/or potential solutions. Also, try to think like a reporter and predict a range of questions. Help your spokesperson practice until they are comfortable answering those questions without notes. See section 5, especially page 23.

If a reporter is 'cold calling' you about an area you are not thoroughly familiar with, it's fine to say: "I don't know enough about that yet. Let me look into it and get back to you." This can also apply when governments announce new policies, or when a decision has been taken that you haven't read yet, or similar unexpected news. Find out what actually happened/was decided/was said, talk to some members, and think about overall ramifications and the possible implications for the HBA as a whole before taking a position. See also page 32 on communications planning and crisis management.

3. Available at the Right Time

All media are consumed by time. They have limited time to prepare. For a magazine, the schedule may be measured in weeks. For a news item in the daily newspaper or TV, it's a day or a few hours. For radio news (and updating TV and print websites) it can be even less. For any of these, the reporter may be calling you at the last minute.

Similarly, everyone has a drop-dead deadline. If it isn't finished by then, it's too late for that issue or show.

Print magazines are usually assigning stories at least two or three months in advance, with a deadline one month before the issue date. A reporter may have until 4:00 pm for tomorrow's daily newspaper. For a weekly publication, the deadline may be the Wednesday before the Saturday delivery date. You will never hear a radio or TV newscast saying: "Sorry everyone, we are still pulling together the information on the home builders' position, so tonight's newscast won't start until 11:05."

The internet is changing deadlines somewhat – online updates happen at the websites of many media outlets, and archives and special sections give some stories a great deal of longevity. But in general, it's still true that nothing is deader than yesterday's news.

If a reporter asks you to call back by noon today, call back at noon to tell them what you've been able to find out. Even if that is "nothing so far", at least they know they can count on you to get back to them.

Find out the deadlines for your key media contacts. Try to time your events and news alerts so they come before those regular deadlines, leaving reporters enough time to prepare their stories.

If you can, avoid scheduling events or sending out press releases on days when there are predictable major news stories. There are only so many pages or minutes available for news. Something like an election, major political meeting, sports championship/playoff game, or city-wide festival will use up the vast majority of it.

4. Delivered by the Right Method

There are many tools you can use to reach media contacts. Check which they use, and which they prefer. Key methods now are virtually all electronic¹. Delivery methods include:

- **Snail mail**

This is only appropriate for things that are not timely. It's fine for sending the early invitation to your annual conference or similar event to your media contacts. It may be OK for some backgrounders as well, but check with the recipient in advance.

¹ These could become outdated quickly, but if you are looking for some really simple-to-understand videos explaining electronic communications tools, try <http://www.youtube.com/user/leelefever>.



- **Courier or hand delivery**

Useful if you want to deliver materials – especially packages containing several pieces, photographs (print or on diskette), longer video, and/or long printed reports – to a reasonably small number of people.

- **In-house emailed news alert or release**

Probably the most common type of release at the moment. You send news items to your association’s media contact list (or sub-list for specific issues).

Remember everything is speeding up, messages are getting shorter, and they’re often being seen on small hand-held devices. Use a good ‘headline-type’ phrase in the Subject line. Put the text into the email itself, rather than expecting people to open an attachment. Include links to further material on your website, blog, Facebook page, Twitter, YouTube, etc. (and other people’s, if appropriate).

- **RSS feed**

A lot of reporters subscribe to RSS feeds offered by key people, companies and associations for their news beat. RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication (that’s also a great way to think of what this does). Feeds permit instant distribution of items on your website, blog, etc. to people who subscribe. You can tag them with keywords to help in searches and distribution. They are offered by virtually all media websites, as well as corporate and personal websites and blogs.

New items that you post will be sent to each subscriber’s ‘reader’² along with all the new items posted on other sites/blogs that they have chosen. It can also be viewed on many of the most popular communications devices. Although you do not know who your subscribers are, you can get information on how many you have, where they come from and what they view most.

- **Social network news posts**

A kind of informal news feed. Sent to people who sign up for your posts. Twitter is one example currently popular with some reporters and communications people. This sends very short (140-character maximum) messages. You add a “follow us on Twitter” link to your website as well as all news releases, etc. Once someone has signed up, the new posts can pop up on his or her computer screen or mobile device. See also page 20, Direct-to-Public-Communication.

- **Commercial news wire**

These paid services send your media releases, alerts, photos, videos, and so on directly to publishers and broadcasters. You can choose which regions and sectors to send to, by which distribution methods – or use your own list. The services also publish online, so releases can come up in searches, and offer RSS-type news feeds categorized by region, subject or industry. Some examples include CNW group, formerly Canada News Wire (www.newswire.ca), PR Newswire (www.prnewswire.com), and CCN Mathews’ Marketwire and PR Direct (both available from www.marketwire.com). Before using these services, you should look at the cost benefits. If you have good contacts and relationships with local media and your story is primarily local in impact, using a newswire may not produce much additional coverage.

² Several free RSS readers are available, including www.google.com/reader, www.bloglines.com, www.newsgator.com, and www.yahoo.com.

Is it 'President' or 'president'?

In traditional news style, a title such as 'president' is only capitalized when it appears before the person's name: i.e., Association President Cathy Citizen. (This treats the title as equivalent to Mr., Ms., etc.).

Where the title appears after the person's name, it is not capitalized: i.e., Cathy Citizen, president of the ...

- **Phone**

Generally, alerts and news releases are sent to all relevant media at the same time so nobody gets an advantage. Phone calls are reserved for situations where you only have a small number of people to contact, or for follow up. After sending an alert about the advance media tour of your Home Show, for example, you can follow up by phone to find out whether reporters plan to attend, or if they will want the information package sent to them instead.

5. Given in News Format

Your news is competing with everything else that comes across reporters' desks. You need to grab their attention the moment they see it.

If they already know you only send interesting, reliable news, your name will be enough to make sure they look at the piece. Then, use the text to show them how your piece is newsworthy.

Media Alert

Media alerts are like beefed-up invitations. They give details on your upcoming events, announcements, research report releases, etc. They are also used to let reporters know that the HBA President will be available for comment on issues such as budget announcements. If it's a media alert about an upcoming event, say so in the main heading/email subject line:

Media Alert:

'Our City HBA' to present Long Term Growth report to Council

(... name ...), president of the 'Our City Home Builders' Association', will present the group's new report on Long Term Growth at next Tuesday's City Council Meeting.

(May include a short description of why the report was commissioned, who prepared it, etc., but nothing about actual findings or recommendations.)

*Where: Council Chambers
(address)*

*When: Tuesday, September 14
Between 2 – 5 p.m.*

Contact: (EO's name, title, phone number, email address, etc.)

See also: (website, links to earlier discussions, etc.)

News Release

a) **Headline**

When writing a news release, pay special attention to your headline. This is the newsworthy message, boiled down to its essentials. It can be a bit longer than a real newspaper headline, but must fit on one line. And it must actually relate to the story.

Reporters don't necessarily call the contact person you designate on your news releases.

The President should always inform the EO when reporters call them directly about news the HBA is generating.

And if the President gets a cold call, she or he should always arrange to call the reporter back. Then, they should contact the EO for background information, messages, etc.

Other members interviewed about general issues should also be encouraged to contact the EO.

(Don't expect that this will become the headline for the actual news article. It is your chance to hook the media. They will write their own headline to hook the public.)

Let's take the example in the Media Alert above:

"Three years after new policy, downtown has been transformed"

It supports the association message that redevelopment is good for the town. It also has timeliness, change, elements of triumph, and suggests both a wide and deep impact.

If you are sending an email, put an even shorter message in the Subject line:

*"New policy has transformed downtown", or even
"Downtown transformed"*

b) Contact Information

Make sure you put contact information near the top of the piece:

"Contact: (Name of EO, title, phone number, email address, etc.)" In some cases, you may want to include the same information for the designated spokesperson.

Elected leaders are usually the designated spokespeople – reporters want to get quotes from 'the horse's mouth', not from an association bureaucrat. However, making the EO the first contact for reporters helps to keep things moving smoothly.

The EO can find out the reporter's deadline and ask necessary pre-interview questions (see page 24) before contacting the spokesperson with the key details: "Greg from the Star needs you to call him in the next 20 minutes. He's interested in That's like question number 6 in our Q and A. Do you want to go over the key message and some of the examples?"

If the item is time sensitive, make sure you have contact information that will actually reach the person from early morning to late evening. If it is a real crisis, a spokesperson should be available around the clock.

c) Main text

Make sure you cover the key details in your first paragraph. News reports get cut from the bottom – if your last paragraph is a great conclusion summing up your points it will be the first thing to go. Cover the reporting basics: Who? What? Where? When? and Why?:

"Council's May 2006 redevelopment policy has already transformed the downtown core," says (... name ...), president of the 'Our City' Home Builders' Association. "As of May 2009, two mixed use developments have been completed, with 42 new homes, three retail stores and a very popular new restaurant," says (... name ...). "Another small project is under construction and there are applications for two more."

If your press release gives a 'pro and con' type of story, make sure that is obvious.

Otherwise, you may end up with an article focusing entirely on the positive statement you made in your first paragraph.

Use headings to make the points clear.

- 1. New plan is generally positive**
(short points about overview)
- 2. But we could see a shortage of small lots within 5-6 years**
(short points about entry-level housing)
- 3. And water may be a problem in northeast**
(short points about servicing).

Fill in the rest with some information about the policy change, and details of the projects. If the redevelopment is controversial, try to head off criticism – maybe with quotes from supportive neighbours. Include links to appropriate sections of your website (and/or others'), photographs, video and/or audio clips, and any other news tools you use.

"See us on Facebook/YouTube", etc.

This type of release is a nice stand-alone "good news" article. It also could be valuable if your association plans to recommend a similar policy for another area of the city. It can be useful to have the release vetted by CHBA national or provincial, or by a public affairs consultant before it is sent out.

d) Timing

Check timing and deadlines for your key media. Early in the week is often better than later for news releases.

News Posts

A post to an informal social newswire-type service such as Twitter needs to be shorter, and can be more personal.

"New homes, stores and resto in downtown core – great vibe. More on the way. Council's 2006 redevelopment policy is working. See (... URL ...)"

News Conference

A formal news conference requires reporters to come to a location of your choice, where they will all see and hear the same presentation at the same time. This should only be used where there is really important news to convey.

Some associations with great media coverage rarely use news conferences. Some only use them during their annual conferences, as a way for media to talk directly to key speakers and/or the incoming President after he or she addresses the general membership. Sometimes, an invitation to an event like a groundbreaking for your charity house serves the same function as a news conference, with better visuals.

a) Timing

- late morning is usually best to meet daily deadlines
- for an event such as a demonstration home or home tour, arrange the pre-opening tour on a Tuesday or Wednesday, to accommodate deadlines and encourage coverage just prior to the Friday opening.

b) Location and facilities

- book a room in a hotel, convention centre, city press room, your own facilities, etc., or a covered/indoor area to provide shelter if your outdoor press conference/event experiences bad weather

Your spokesperson should practice delivering messages and answering questions. (See page 23, Do-it-Yourself 'Experience'.)

Consider having someone knowledgeable video-record those sessions. It can help your spokesperson to see what works well and what needs to be improved. And the best versions can be posted to your website or blog, or on YouTube.

If they are high enough quality, they can also be sent to local TV stations.

- arrange for:
 - sufficient easily accessible parking
 - head table or podium with microphone(s) and plug-in for audio
 - your Home Builders' Association signage to be prominently displayed
 - other signage as appropriate for the news
 - screen and projection system, computer/PowerPoint or equivalent, if required
 - sufficient electrical outlets.

c) Invitations and follow up

- sent to your media contact list (or sub-list for specific issue), by the contact method they prefer
- try to send one week in advance
- call people the day before. ("Are you thinking of coming to this?" If not, ask if they would like to receive the media kit.)

d) Message

- stick to one story, and tell it well
- it may have several facets, and several pieces of supporting documentation, but it is one story and should be able to be expressed in a single sentence of no more than 20 words
- prepare speaking notes for your spokesperson
- anticipate difficult questions and prepare answers.

e) Spokesperson

- choose a good spokesperson, well-versed in the issue
- prepare her or him well (see page 23)
- three is the absolute maximum number of spokespeople at a news conference; the fewer the better.

f) Media kit

- usually delivered at the event
- may be sent to reporters who cannot attend (timed to arrive at the same time as the event takes place, or shortly after)
- contents:
 - news release
 - copies of all speeches
 - photos and biographical information
 - backgrounder(s)
 - fact sheets.

What if you really hate a news article?

A lot of people want to sit down immediately and write an angry letter to the editor or comment on the website. But experts say that's usually not worthwhile.

First, you're likely to overreact. Second, you can extend discussion of something that would otherwise pass quickly.

It is often much more effective to call or email the reporter directly. Find out if it was their fault. Without getting angry, just clarify what you actually said, and/or what the reports actually conclude.

(Send Letters to the Editor and website comments when you really like what they've done.)

g) Own coverage

- arrange for photographer to document the event (stills, video and/or audio)
- post information and multimedia on your own website and blog (if using), and send out social networking-type news posts – preferably this should go live as the event is going on.

h) Check for potential 'hijacking'

- check for breaking news right up to the last minute (if the last five townhouse projects have collapsed and the builder is now in Venezuela, the question and answer period will prove a lot more exciting than you expected)
- know what's going on and be prepared to deal with it.

i) On the day

- have a sign-in sheet and name tags
- start on time and keep the event moving briskly
- agenda
- pre-conference assembly and refreshments (if provided)
- welcome and introduction (EO or other designated person keeps order)
- main presentation(s)
- questions from the floor (flow of questions should be directed by the EO or other designated person familiar with most of the press).

j) After the news conference

- send press kit to all key media who did not attend
- check sign-in sheet and update your media contact list as necessary
- post to website, blogs, Twitter, etc., if that hasn't been done already
- send thank-you notes to presenters
- consider sending notes of appreciation to media who did an exceptional job (keep in mind their intense desire never to appear to be in anyone's pocket; e.g., thank them for their clear explanation of a complicated issue, or similar example of professionalism, not for great coverage).

B. Ongoing media communications program

(EO with direction from Board/Exec)

In today's information-overloaded society, you need to keep your name and your issues in front of people. That means finding interesting news on a regular basis to send out to media.

The housing industry has some regular built-in news 'hooks' that can be used to attract ongoing coverage, including:

- **Monthly, quarterly and annual housing statistics**

Your HBA President can comment on Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's monthly starts figures and market trends – preferably with

Make sure your association EO is getting key news releases such as CMHC housing starts figures at the same time as the media.

The News or Media section of key websites often allows people to sign up for alerts or an RSS feed. Or you can call the office and ask to be added to their media list.

When releases come in, the EO and the President can go over the information and prepare for media questions.

a slightly different twist each time. You can talk about the strength of the first-time buyer segment one time, how the figures show the effect of a new planning policy the next, how the stats will affect job growth in the trades the time after, impact of mortgage rates the one after that, and so on. Releases of other forecasts (including your own) and rental market reports are also strong news hooks.

- **Your Annual Conference**

Your President's address, key speakers, panels, etc. will be newsworthy if they deal with issues people care about (refer back to page 9). Trade press writing for new home builders and renovators will be more interested than consumer press. Plan news alerts, releases, recordings and your own website/blog/social newswire posts to get best advantage from them.

- **Awards**

Your own awards programs generate media interest. So do awards that any of your members receive from the provincial or national level. Don't forget local newspapers where these award-winners live, work or have building sites.

- **Dinner speakers and events**

Invite media on an ongoing basis to newsworthy speakers – especially visits from your provincial and national CHBA Presidents.

- **Home Show or Parade of Homes**

Great opportunity to show how innovative the housing industry can be – new design, products, techniques. Very good for photos and video as well.

- **Renovation Month and New Homes Month**

Full media support – e.g., sample articles and press releases – is available from the CHBA national office. Adding in your local statistics and stories targets this directly to your audience.

- **Charity and/or community works**

Good photos, quotes, etc. make your point without bashing people over the head.

- **Elections**

Municipal, provincial and national elections usually have a housing aspect. Associations should not back one party or candidate over another, but they can definitely ask candidates questions and circulate their answers.

Think about the communications needs and opportunities for each of these news hooks, and any others you know about. Will you want to issue news alerts/invitations, news releases, speeches, photos, backgrounders, audio, video?

Try to photograph and/or video as many events as possible. You don't have to use the images, but at least you will have the choice.

It can be helpful to put together a calendar of these expected events, and work back to set timing for backgrounders, photography, media alerts, news releases, and so on.

Now add in some of the things that are more difficult to time:

- **Your Top Priority issues**

Associations often choose three or four top priority issues to focus efforts over the year. Plans for those should include communications needs and opportunities as well.

See page 32 for more information on communications plans and crisis management.

four ►

Traditional media offer people a package deal of news and entertainment from a wide variety of sources.

Essentially, the offer is: “Read our newspaper or newsmagazine, or tune in to our radio or TV news show, and we’ll give you a variety of items with something that interests you every time you do.”

It’s impossible for an HBA website to match that.

But news readers and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter can – because people use them as a single source of news from lots of different personally chosen sources.

Direct-to-Public Communications

(EO with direction from Board/Executive)

All HBAs are already publishers. They have regular print or electronic newsletters or alerts as part of their communication to members. A number send these to other ‘publics’ as well, including news media and government representatives.

Virtually all HBAs now have websites too. These are a tremendous opportunity to publish your information, messages, news and videos. Until recently, however, they had a fundamental weakness: you had to get people to keep checking in to your site regularly. That’s a tall order.

Websites needed a way to ‘push’ news out, rather than having to ‘pull’ people to them. For a long time, the best most associations could do was offer a subscription service where people could sign up to get news sent out to them by email. Now, many sites offer RSS feeds as well – allowing anyone to sign up anonymously to receive new items as they are posted on a website, blog or similar online pages.

Blogs and social networking sites offer another option for direct-to-public communication (see below). Your association doesn’t need to use these tools. But if you can convince people to become your ‘fans’, ‘followers’, or equivalent, you can ‘talk’ directly to them on a continuing basis, on a medium they use frequently – their computers, cell phones, BlackBerrys, or whatever technology they’ve specified.

Even better: the pages are easy to set up, and often free.

The technology is still changing rapidly, so the examples below can only illustrate general principles. When you are looking at social networking, you should check what other services have become popular and what they offer.

Short news bursts

As discussed on page 13, Twitter (www.twitter.com) is one example that functions rather like an old fashioned newswire – but much more brief and personal. It only allows you to post very short messages, but you can cram quite a bit in there, including web links. Someone who wants to know more can get your contact information with one click.

Reporters use the internet to research their stories. The public use the internet to find out more about housing.

Take a look at the public side of your HBA's website through 'media' and 'public' eyes.

- Is it up to date?
- Does it contain useful and realistic information about the association?
- Is association news posted regularly?
- Are upcoming events listed?
- Does it include background information on your HBA's top priority issues?
- Are there links to useful reports, etc?
- Can site visitors find general information about buying, building, and renovation and link to members' websites?
- Can visitors find your contact information, including phone number?
- Can visitors sign up for news updates?

Here are two sample posts from the Greater Vancouver Home Builders' Association (GVHBA) Twitter account in 2009:

"AGM last night. Guest speaker City of Surrey Mayor Dianne Watts talked about the economic investment action plan. Positive direction."

"Tonight's First-time Home Buyer Seminar will be standing-room only! More than 875 people already registered and calls are still coming in!"

GVHBA follows the major news media's Twitter posts, as well as some government agencies. And its own followers include a number of reporters.

It's important not to overuse this tool, though. Keep in mind that most people are getting a lot of information. Make sure your items are always worth reading. Also keep track of whether the number of people following you starts to drop.

Blogs

These are websites, or portions of websites, that consist of regular entries of news, opinions and commentary about a particular topic. Although they were originally very text-heavy, many now include a lot of videos and/or photographs.

There are literally millions of blogs on the web, on all kinds of topics. The entries are searchable using engines such as Google, Yahoo and Technorati. Content can be given tags and keywords, which help get your information out to people who want to read it. Many reporters search blogs for recent information on topics they are researching.

A key concept is sharing knowledge and thoughts. Readers can usually comment on what the blogger has posted³. Bloggers themselves often comment on and link to posts on other blogs. These comments are very important, creating an ongoing conversation, allowing for networking and outreach, and developing a community. They are also tracked by search engines, giving popular posts higher priority.

Blogs are easy to set up on your own website, or through a free service such as www.wordpress.com or www.blogger.com. However, they are a definite commitment. You have to post to them regularly (a minimum of two or three times a week).

Social networking pages

Social networking site Facebook (www.facebook.com) allows people to set up personal pages and invite people to become 'friends' and share thoughts, photos, etc.⁴

³ You may get negative or odd comments, too. But apparently a few negative comments are less damaging on blogs than in other endeavours – especially if you see them as suggestions for improvement and respond appropriately.

⁴ Other popular social networking sites include www.linkedin.com and www.myspace.com.

Facebook also allows businesses to create pages that people can join as ‘fans’ – a slightly different relationship. From a business page, you can send short news-flash-like items which go out to all your fans’ pages. The extra value is that any of their Facebook friends can see those items too – and they can pass them on.

As well as news, Facebook lets you post photos in ‘albums’, videos, links to other sites, etc. You can create a blog-like discussion board and invite comments. You can make event listings and invite people to them, or make them open to anyone. Any time you do one of these things, a news item will appear on your fans’ pages. Again, those can also be seen by all of your fans’ friends.

You can control how much information other people can send to or see on your pages: e.g., no posts or uploads, just comments on your discussion board, or uploading news, photos, videos, etc. to your wall.

Make sure you create a business page (where people can ‘become a fan’), rather than creating a group or organization page that people can join as ‘members’. Otherwise, you will have Facebook-group members who are not members of your HBA – which could be very confusing.

Go to the Facebook website, and click on the ‘To create a page for a celebrity, band or business’ link. At the time of this writing, it was probably most useful to choose ‘other business’ or ‘non-profit’ for your category.

Using several tools together

These tools can all work together to great effect, to support your regular media relations news alerts, releases and so on, and broaden your impact.

For example, an event can be described in detail on your website with pdf brochures and online registration forms. It can be sent from your website to everyone who has signed up for your RSS feed. It can also be ‘created’ and promoted to your fans and their friends on Facebook. Fans can pass that on to their friends. You can post a blurb about it using Twitter, which can be forwarded to other Twitter users. You can put something on your blog, which readers may comment on or link to on their blogs.

Similarly, an issue can be ‘headlined’ on Twitter, with links back to your website, blog, Facebook page and/or YouTube for video of your President making the three key points. For anyone who wants to know more, detailed information, and background reports. can be posted on your website. Those can also be sent out to everyone who subscribes to your RSS feed, etc.

Of course, any time you start publishing on a social networking site you should let all your members and media contacts know so they can sign up.

Well-Prepared Spokesperson

The association's EO plays a very important role in helping to prepare designated spokespeople. He or she helps the volunteer leaders get comfortable in the role of speaking on behalf of the group, provides information about individual interviewers and/or shows, and makes sure they are armed with key messages, background information and supporting facts.

Section 5 A gives spokespeople a low-stress way of practicing message delivery and question-and-answer sessions. This can be useful for other situations than the media interview as well. (If your association is interested in putting short video clips on its website, blog, YouTube, Facebook, etc., consider asking a good video camera operator to record the spokesperson speaking on your top priority issues. Then take the best versions to post.)

Section 5 B gives information on interviews in general: handling the initial interview request, getting information about style and format, and further tips specifically for phone, print, radio and TV interviews.

Section 5 C – perhaps the most important – gives information on preparing messages and content.

A. Do-it-Yourself 'Experience' (Spokesperson/EO)

Being interviewed gets easier with experience. But what if you don't have that?

With today's consumer electronics, you almost certainly have at least one video recorder in your digital camera, cell phone, laptop or equivalent. So, you can set up your own mini TV studio and practice interviews in the privacy of your own home or office well before you have to do the real thing.

If you have a minicam built in or attached to your computer, that may be the easiest. It may not have great resolution and focus but it can play back immediately on your computer screen. Set it up at the right height, and then interview yourself. Don't read prepared text; talk normally.

Replay it first without watching – just listen to the audio. How will you sound to the reporter and the audience? Trustworthy? Wooden? How well are you making your points? Do you say 'um' and 'ah' all the time? Are there words or phrases you say too often?

Now replay it again with the visuals. Do you come across differently? Do you smile too much? Too little? Fiddle with papers? Rock back and forth? Need a haircut?

No problem. Try it again a little differently and see how THAT works. Don't be too hard on yourself. And don't try to lie to the camera. Just learn how to relax and let your own knowledge, intelligence and personal warmth show through.

No matter what media you're dealing with – print, audio or video – it helps to practice interview techniques.

This section shows how you can get comfortable with the interview experience without the stress of facing a real live reporter.

For more tips on how best to present yourself on video, see page 28.

For tips on handling content and difficult interview questions, see page 31.

At first you might want to do this in your office after hours with the door locked. (Great idea – your most frequent types of media contact will probably be over the phone from your office anyway.) But after you’ve had a few practice sessions you’ll get more comfortable. Then, it can be really useful – and fun – to get one or two friends, colleagues, your association EO, or even your kids to act as the interviewer(s).

Give them some questions – easy ones and hard. Ask them to throw in something else that you’re not expecting. This doesn’t even have to be about housing. See how you handle the back-and-forth of the interview setting. You might even want to deliver one purposely awful response, where you do as many things wrong as possible. You can learn from that, and everyone will get a good laugh.

Ask people to watch the replays with you and give you their impressions. You want honesty here, not flattery. You might not notice if you’re using too much jargon or looking bossy or shifty-eyed – but your audience will.

Again, try it out a few more times. You’ll create a physical memory of what looks and feels right. And that will help you look and feel much better when the real thing comes along.

B. Interviews: From Request to Thank-You Note (EO with Appropriate Input)

1. Handling the Initial Interview Request

Usually an interview will start with a phone call to the association’s EO or President. Any other members who are contacted to speak *on behalf of the association* should check with the EO for the appropriate spokesperson and up-to-date information.

Tell your office staff that if someone calls from the media, you will make yourself available. Tell them to pull you out of meetings if necessary. The media need to know that you will do everything you can to help them. You need to find out if they are offering you a chance to set the record straight on a story that’s going to press in 15 minutes.

When the call comes in, you should be asking the reporter/host (or the person setting up the interview) several questions:

1. What’s your deadline?

This should always be your first question. If the reporter is up against his or her deadline – especially if they are calling you to add balance to a one-sided story – drop everything else. If not, you can arrange to call them back at a time that’s convenient for both of you.

“Hi! What’s up?”

“What’s your deadline?
I’d like to clear my desk and
call you back.”

“Good. What’s the issue you
want to talk about, and is
there any particular angle?”

“How much do you want
from me?”

“OK – I’ll pull some infor-
mation together, put my
other calls on hold and be
back to you (*in five minutes,
in half an hour, at 2:00
this afternoon, tomorrow,
or whatever fits THEIR
schedule*) ...”

2. What issue do you want to talk about? Is there a particular angle you're looking at?

Find out what the story hinges on, perhaps an event, a statement or decision by someone, a report, etc. "Are there any particular studies or pieces of information you would like me to comment on?" This allows you to do some research and reduces the chances of getting caught off-guard by unexpected questions.

3. How much do you want from me?

If they're looking for one or two quick quotes over the phone for print or radio, you need less preparation. If it's a long, wide-ranging interview, you need to know that. Ask what audience they're aiming at as well, so you can talk at the right level of understanding. Condense your message so it works for their audience within the timeframe they've got.

4. (For phone interviews) Can I call you back?

Even if the reporter IS on deadline, you should ask if you can take a couple of minutes to collect information (and your thoughts). Even five minutes can make a big difference in how effective you'll be. Make sure you call back on time.

In all other cases, set a time that works for the reporter, and allows you to call your EO, get background information and define what you want to say.

5. (For in-person interviews) When and where do you want to meet?

For many interview shows, you will need to go to the broadcaster's studio. In most other cases, you may be able to suggest a location.

Sometimes it may be most convenient to meet at your office or the association's office. But other times it may help to make your point if you meet at another location: on a building site, perhaps, in front of city hall, or at your home show. "Yes, the market is down right now, but new homes offer a lot of features that older homes don't – like this piece of equipment, for example ..."

6. When will the piece appear, or air?

Keep that date in mind when you are talking about when things took place or are expected. After the interview, you can also ask how you can get a copy.

Here are a couple of other useful questions for radio or TV interview shows:

7. What's the format?

Is it a side-by-side interview? A remote interview with the host in one city while you are in another? A call-in show?

Is it live or taped? If you stumble over your words in a live interview, you'll have to try to recover in real time. For a taped show, you can ask for a chance to do it over. (If you've just inadvertently given them a news story, though, you can forget a second chance. "Builder calls Mayor a %\$*!" will probably air, no matter what you say after it.)

8. Who else will be interviewed on the show with me?

This can help you tailor your message. If one of the other interviewees is known to be a strong advocate for more regulation, or has just published an interesting report, you can prepare a speaking point to address that.

2. Information on Interviewers, Style and Format

The association's EO should give the President or other designated spokesperson information on the interviewers and tips for different interview formats.

Research the interviewers

If you don't already know the print, radio or TV interviewer, take time to look at their previous work on the internet: articles, radio shows or TV segments. Make sure you have their name right, and practice saying it correctly. Look for style and format elements that could affect you.

Are they assigned to this 'beat', or do they cover many different topics? Have they already done stories on this particular topic? Are they generally fair and thorough?

Listening to radio and watching video clips, you can get more information. Are the interviews conversational or 'hard'? Does the interviewer save difficult questions to the end, or get them in early? Are there things that annoy him or her? Ways they like to be addressed? What seems to work for them and what doesn't?

Tips for different types of interview

Different things are expected of you if the interview is for print media, radio (audio) or TV (video). As well, it makes a difference whether you are being interviewed over the phone or in person, at your office, on site, or in a studio.

Location

If you are travelling to the interview, arrive early. You need to find parking, get to the office or studio by the allotted time, and have time left to relax, breathe deeply, and review your speaking notes.

If you are meeting the reporter at your office, make sure to leave yourself enough time to do the interview without rushing through it.

Use a quiet space where you can close the door and not be interrupted. If that's your office, clear off your desk. Remove any sensitive reports or papers, or turn them over. (No reporter or photographer worth his or her salt will pass up an opportunity to read – upside down if necessary – something interesting left in front of them.) Bring your local association website's home page up on your computer screen.

Research the media outlet and the reporter and (if applicable) the show before your interview.

You can bet they have done research on you and on the association before they talk to you.

Turn off your cell phone and BlackBerry, and set the office phone to 'Do Not Disturb'.

If you are meeting on a building site, make sure it is properly protected and clear of debris, and that everyone is wearing proper safety gear. Provide hard hats for reporters and cameramen.

Phone interviews

Print journalists often conduct interviews over the phone. In many ways, this is the easiest form of interview because it means you can have your speaking points in front of you. If you want to, you can even use sticky notes reminding you not to say 'um' or keep clearing your throat. For many people it's also less intimidating than having the reporter in front of them. Print journalists often record their interviews, so be prepared to have your exact phrases transcribed.

Radio journalists also sometimes record interviews over the phone. In this case, make sure you read the tips about radio interviews and especially avoid anything that could cause distracting background noise.

In either case, even though you are not in front of the reporter, do not lean back in your chair with your feet up on the desk. This is an important interview and you need to be very attentive.

In-person interviews

Dress professionally and appropriately, even if no cameras are present. It will have an effect on how you project yourself, the way you use your voice, the way you organize your thoughts.

Do not wear ball caps or sunglasses. You look shifty and evasive. If you are a trade contractor, dress the part – clean clothing, no offensive slogans, avoid ostentatious jewellery. If you are the CEO, dress for a normal work day, not for a fund-raising gala.

Radio/audio interviews

Avoid "ums," "ahs" and verbal "nodding". It sounds silly on radio.

Don't fidget, click your pen, etc. The microphones will catch that and make it seem much louder. Similarly, women should not wear necklaces that could knock against the mike, or jangly bracelets.

If you are not on a live show, the interviewer will try to leave a couple of seconds of silence after each of your comments. This allows them to cut and paste one or more of your statements later to assemble the news story. Many people are uncomfortable with this silence and try to fill it up. Don't. That's when you will make mistakes.

Use your voice to add emphasis – raise it slightly or speak a little more loudly on key words. Use stories and anecdotes to help make your points. Paint word pictures.

If you will be doing a side-by-side seated interview for TV or the web, practice that setup beforehand with a friend or colleague and your videocam.

Arrange chairs so you look the same distance apart as the people you see on the show. That is often quite a bit closer than you would choose normally for a conversation.

Talk back and forth until you feel comfortable with the setup.

TV/video interviews

All the points above under Radio/audio interviews apply. Plus, with TV/video, your 'look' takes on extra significance.

As well as dressing appropriately, you have to think about how the camera sees you. Avoid highly patterned clothing and ties, shiny white shirts, distracting earrings, etc. Solid deep colours are usually recommended. Look at what TV hosts wear and take your cue from them.

If you are standing, balance evenly on two feet and avoid swaying. If seated, sit up straight and lean slightly forward. Use gestures sparingly.

Watch the show in advance to see how the interviews are set up. If people are seated side by side in a conversational setting, do they look directly at each other? If so, you will need to ignore the cameras and do the same.

If the interviewees are taped at a remote location, are they put up on screen looking directly out? If so, you will need to look directly at the camera and speak to it. If that makes you nervous, try visualizing a photo of a good friend pasted on the camera lens, and talk to that friend.

Check as well whether segments cut from host to guest as each one speaks, or keep both on screen all the time. If the latter, you cannot relax while the interviewer questions you. You must continue to look at the camera as if it was the questioner.

3. Enjoying the Interview

Remember that interviewers are not the enemy. Most likely, they are friendly to you. They have a job to do and want to be recognized as being good at their work, like everyone else. Their role is to reach wide audiences, which will allow them to become more successful. So is yours.

Relax. Address them by name, and thank them for arranging the interview. Smile as you do – people can hear a smile even over the phone or on radio.

A point about breathing: it's OK to do it – expected even. It also stops you from sounding rushed and breathless, or from turning blue, for that matter. Remember that it is good to have some butterflies in your stomach before an interview as this is a signal that you are taking the interview seriously.

Keep in mind that you're having a conversation with the interviewer. While you want to get your points out, you don't want to look like a robot who says the same thing no matter what it's asked. Pay attention to the question, and connect your answer to it. Keep it concise and friendly.

Much of your interview will not be used, so always try to have a 'sound bite' ready. If you do not provide one on purpose, the reporter will choose one for you.

The EO should help the spokesperson prepare. That includes:

- assembling background information
- providing key messages
- helping to decide on anecdotes, data and examples to back up the key messages
- assembling a number of sample questions – including difficult ones
- helping the spokesperson practice delivering the messages.

If the subject is controversial, acknowledge that there are differing viewpoints and that while you respect other opinions and the dialogue which surrounds the subject is welcome, you feel that (...).

Don't try to hide appropriate feelings. Empathy is important. If you are speaking about fire protection on the heels of a tragic fire in the community, let your own concern show: "We all feel for this family and the tragedy it is going through."

Do not use jargon or acronyms. Also, if you are introduced as being "Joe Blow" from the Canadian Home Builders' Association then preface what you have say with "The Canadian Home Builders' Association ..." and not "I ...".

Don't get too relaxed, of course. Even the friendliest of reporters will use a headline-grabber if you inadvertently hand them one.

After important interviews, it's a nice touch to send a brief thank-you note. This can be a simple email: "Thank you for the opportunity to explain the Home Builders' Association position on ..." You can also add such things as:

- "It was a pleasure to meet you ..."
- "Here is the information I promised on ..."
- "This is a complex issue and can be hard for people to understand. You did a very fair job of explaining/balancing ..."
- "I would like to clarify one point for any future articles/shows you may do on this topic ..."
- "In the attached report, on page ..."
- "We were very impressed with ..."
- "After our interview, you also expressed an interest in Here is a link to more information."
- "I look forward to speaking to you again (*reading/watching/hearing your future work*)."

C. Content Information for Spokesperson

(EO with Input from Board, Committees, and the CHBA
Provincial and National)

The local association EO should provide information to spokespeople on a regular basis. This should include background on significant ongoing and emerging issues, association positions, and talking points. See page 10 for more details.

Information sources include CHBA toolkits, reports and newsletters, as well as provincial HBA materials for provincial issues.

The EO should provide or arrange for a list of possible questions the spokesperson may face, including potential answers. This includes being aware of breaking news and controversial issues which could produce unexpected questions, and helping prepare appropriate answers.

If you are the designated spokesperson and you can't reach your EO, or they can't provide this information for some other reason, get on the phone or internet and get it for yourself.

Know what the interview is about, and what you want to say. Discuss this with your EO. Write your key speaking point(s) down on paper and make sure they parallel the messaging that your national, provincial and local associations have set out. Be upfront: acknowledge controversy and different opinions.

Say your speaking points out loud. If you have enough time, make an audio or video recording. Practice until you can say them confidently several different ways without sounding rehearsed. *(In a radio or TV news story, your statements will often be cut down to five or ten seconds long. It's hard to condense years of work into a few seconds. But if you don't do it, the journalist will, and you may not be happy with the outcome.)*

Start with the conclusion. This sounds backwards, but it's important, especially for live broadcast interviews. You need to deliver your take-away message first, and THEN give the explanations.

Verbally underline your key points: "The most important thing is ..." or "It's critical how they deal with ..."

If it's an interview on a complex issue, you may need to make several connected points. Say so, and keep on talking until you've listed them all. "Good question, Peter. There are four main reasons for that. First, *(our population has grown/shrunk by 15 per cent in two years)*. Second, ..." and so on. This makes it very hard for radio or TV broadcasters to cut part of your argument out. But remember, it's got to fit into a short time slot.

Equally, don't over-answer questions. When you have made your point, stop speaking.

Don't ask to see the finished piece before it is printed or broadcast – that would be a breach of journalistic ethics. If you are concerned that a reporter may not have understood what you've said, ask them to repeat it back. You can also encourage them to call for clarification. If you are really concerned, you can ask them to read you the specific quotes they are using from you, but don't be surprised if they refuse.

If you've told an interviewer that you don't know the answer to a question but you'll find out for them, do it fast.

Find out when they need it to meet deadlines.

Do everything you can to get what they need by that time. If you can't, call them and let them know.

If you expect to be able to give them more later, tell them when. New information or a new angle on a breaking story will usually get coverage.

1. Handling Difficult Questions

Here are a number of techniques for handling difficult questions:

When you don't know the answer

Say so. That can feel uncomfortable in an interview situation, so practice in advance till you can say something like this naturally: "I'm sorry. I don't know the answer to that question. But I'll find out and get back to you as soon as I can."

Here's another alternative, where you don't know enough about the question, and there's good information back at the office. "Gee, I wish I had known you were interested in that. The Canadian Home Builders' Association has some really good examples I could have brought with me." (Be ready to send that information right after the interview. And who knows? You may get invited back to do another one!)

When you shouldn't be expected to know the answer

"I'm sorry, that question really relates to (*commercial and industrial construction, City policy, etc.*) You may want to ask ...(*so and so*) instead." Or "I can talk to you about the general principles, but for a specific situation like that you should really be talking to (*an accountant, real estate lawyer, mechanical engineer, etc.*)"

When it's an important question that nobody knows the answer to

Acknowledge the situation. "That is something a lot of people are looking into right now. Here is what we know ... Here is what we don't know ... Here is what various people are trying to do about it ..."

When a question is getting off track

Listen for the bigger issues behind the question, and then use that to 'bridge' or 'segue' into a point you want to make. "Yes, we've seen that too. But I think the real issue is (*WHY that is taking place, or what will happen if we take that approach, etc.*) The research shows that ..."

If a question is negative

Respond with a positive. Never repeat misleading or accusatory words. Instead of responding: "NO, builders are not all CORRUPT!" say something like: "No, that's not right. Our builders take great pride in working fairly and ethically." Then address the underlying issue.

If the question is loaded

Point that out. "Wait a minute. There are a number of wrong assumptions behind that question. First, ..."

If the question is hypothetical

You don't have to comment on the interviewer's possible future scenarios. "I'm sorry, but that is a completely hypothetical question, and I can't comment on it. There are lots of other possible hypotheses. Let's get back to what we really know."

If a reporter still tries to force you down the wrong path

Politely stand your ground. “That is (*your, the Minister’s, that consultant’s ...*) opinion, not mine. Here’s what the Canadian Home Builders’ Association is seeing (*on our sites, in our sales offices, in the figures ...*)”

When you need some time to think

As long as it’s not negative or loaded, you can repeat the question, or ask the interviewer to do so. You can also say something like: “Oh, that’s an interesting question.” (If you’ve never been asked it before, add that. This has the advantage of making the interviewer look good and letting you think a little longer.) If it turns out you don’t know the answer, apologize and say that you will find out, as above.

Never say “No Comment”. People will always believe you have something to hide.

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Communication Plans and Management (EO with Input from Board, Committees, and CHBA Provincial and National)

A. Communication Plans

Section 3 (page 9) of this Guide talked about some of the key recurring and one-off events that draw media attention to HBAs. A good communications plan can tie these opportunities together, allowing you to bring a consistent message to consumers, government, potential employees, and others in your area.

Most of the time, your HBA will want to cooperate and work with the media. Where it’s a good news story, you have nothing to lose. Where it’s a potential bad news story, you will usually want to get your viewpoints on the record quickly.

When should your HBA NOT initiate a conversation with the media? Here are some examples:

- when you don’t have enough information yet
- when commenting on a situation would require professional qualifications you don’t have
- when the situation doesn’t involve you or your members (it might be industrial construction, or involve a different municipality)
- when someone without any credibility is making outlandish allegations or speculating on things that might or might not happen in the future.

If you are in one of these situations and a reporter is calling you for comment, don’t just say “No Comment” – explain why. See page 31 for some examples of how to respond to their questions.

Overall messages

All HBAs should vet their communications activities against the CHBA's "What we do" statement. These are worthy goals, which give a good understanding of how the association pursues joint goals of new home builders, renovators and developers, and their customers.

The Canadian Home Builders' Association works to achieve a healthy business environment for its members.

We are committed to a fair and competitive marketplace, where all members have the opportunity to operate their businesses profitably.

The Canadian Home Builders' Association works to support the professionalism of its members.

We believe that skills, experience and integrity are the cornerstones of professionalism in our industry. We are committed to providing our members with opportunities to learn, grow and take pride in their achievements.

The Canadian Home Builders' Association works to promote the interests of housing consumers.

We believe that all Canadians should have the right to a reasonable opportunity to own their own homes. We also believe that all Canadians have the right to decent, safe and appropriate housing.

Look for opportunities to reinforce these statements during your regular activities, and as issues come up. Make sure your key committees include 'communications issues and opportunities' as a regular item on their agendas, and report back on them to the Board.

Create a calendar for communications priorities during the year. This would include the ongoing activities, as well as key decision points for important government policy. This plan will not be 'cast in stone' – it must be able to respond as new issues emerge – but will help to keep activities on track.

Analyse communications opportunities and challenges for your association's top priority issues each year, and add them as well. The chart on the next two pages gives more details.

COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING OPTIONS (Annual Top Priority Issues)

	<h2>COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING OPTIONS (Annual Top Priority Issues)</h2>
Issue	This should be one of the association's key priority issues.
Spokesperson	Identify one key person, and prepare him/her well.
Target Audience(s)	Who you most need to reach with your message(s): key shared characteristics, including location (within your municipality, region, province, etc.), and interests (first-time buyers, taxpayers, voters, seniors, government representatives, etc.).
Goals	<p>You want people in your target audience to (one or more of):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • know something is happening • understand generally why it is happening • know how to find out more* • care about it • change their opinions • take action <p><i>(*Note: Trying to make the general public into 'instant experts' in your issue is never an appropriate media relations goal. Instead, focus part of your media message on telling those who want full details how to get them, and post reports/information/links on your own website.)</i></p>
Key media	<p>One or more of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • print (dailies, weeklies, magazines, trade press) • radio (news, interview shows, call-in programs) • TV (news, interview shows, local/cable) • online (newswires, blogs, traditional media websites)
Key dates	The scheduled events which will be newsworthy, and can suggest news angles; e.g., (for a planning issue) departmental meetings, publication of reports, deadlines for comments, council meetings, public meetings, elections, key speaking engagements, publication of your association's research report, etc.
Supporters	Who has similar positions to yours, and what arguments they are using.
Opponents	Who opposes your positions and what arguments they are using.
Available background	Existing reports and data from the CHBA national, provincial or other locals, from government departments, consultants, other jurisdictions, etc.
Research required	What gaps need to be filled in, whether there's enough time to arrange for research, and if so how it will be done.

Key messages	Short memorable statements illustrating your issue with the detail required to meet your goals. (e.g., “We need more red carpet, and less red tape.”) Support those with interesting anecdotes and examples.
Calendar	<p>When and how those messages should be delivered, e.g. one or more of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • setting up the issue in advance (stories that show the problems and how they are affecting real people) • pointing out weaknesses in advance (alternatives that haven’t worked) • promoting your solutions (including stories of what has worked) • speaking at meetings • commenting on decisions as they are taken
Tools	<p>Appropriate mix of one or more communications tools, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • normal government relations techniques • your newsletter • taking photos, audio and video • adding material to your own website • sending news alerts, releases, etc. to your media contacts • sending releases over commercial newswires • email campaign • posting on your own blog and/or online news pages (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) • posting to others’ blogs, online news pages • speaking to HBA conferences, other associations, service clubs, schools
Events	<p>Whether it will be necessary to stage extra events, and if so, what, how, and when? Possible events include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speeches at association or other events • public seminars • traditional presentation to council • signed petitions • symbolic awards (‘best of’ or ‘worst of’ or ‘most deserving’) • demonstrations

B. Crisis Management

Bad things do happen from time to time. In the home building industry, things like residential fires, construction deaths, housing failures, cheated buyers, bad regulations or policy, or economic upheaval may pose real crises for your HBA.

Having a crisis management plan before a crisis actually happens can make a world of difference for your credibility. The plan will set out steps and procedures for responding to the crisis, who takes the key decisions, and how.

It is crucial that you let people know that you care about their welfare.

If members are alleged to be involved in a crisis situation, the association must find out what actually happened and, where warranted, take action. It will need to keep the public informed of its plans and progress.

- An initial release might say: "Here is what we know already. Here is what we are still trying to find out."
- A later release might add: "Here are a few more things we have found out, and here is what we are planning to do."
- Later releases might deal with actual program details, official start up, initial results, etc.

See below for key elements of a crisis management plan.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLANS		
	Comments	Preplanning for action
Ethical response	This should underlie all actions and statements. The only way to deal with a crisis is from a deep commitment to do the right thing. It is useful to put yourself in other people's shoes: "What would I feel and need if this were happening to my family?"	Show your concern for others. Take responsibility where that is warranted. Do not try to cover up. Never lie.
Risk Analysis	What are the possible crises? Which are most likely to happen? How much might they harm the HBA and its members?	Identify three or four priority types of crisis which may need to be addressed.

	(For each of the top three or four types of crisis)	
	Comments	Preplanning for action
Ongoing relationships with key contacts	Who are the key government officials, media, and other important contacts you would need to reach if this type of crisis happened? Do you have good existing relationships with them? What needs to be improved (if anything)?	Create contact lists, fill in any holes, set up new required connections.
Existing information	Does the local, national or provincial have an existing position/approach to the issue? What reports, analyses, regulations, position statements, etc. are available?	Know where to get the most recent information for backgrounders. Assemble key points.
Identification of crisis	How will you find out about this type of crisis? Who is most likely to hear first? How can you make sure the information gets to the HBA?	Tell members how to inform the HBA. Ask outside contacts to inform you as well.
Information central	Who will be the central contact for information coming in? Who will decide to take crisis response measures?	Identify who members and the press should call (likely the EO). Have phone number(s) that will reach him or her.
Designated spokesperson	Who will be the spokesperson for this type of crisis? What if they can't be reached? Who will be the alternate?	Choose spokesperson and alternate. Make sure the EO has their day and night phone numbers. Inform members that only those people are authorized to speak on behalf of the HBA.
Initial questions	<p>What questions will you need to have answered to be able to comment/ take action? For a residential fire, for example, these would include:</p> <p>Fundamental human response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was anyone hurt? (details) • Is the fire out yet? Is there still danger? (details) • Can we do anything to help? 	List generic questions, and the best sources of answers, if possible. Set out which people the HBA will contact to answer them, including contact names and details, and who is responsible for getting in touch with each of them.

	Comments	Preplanning for action
Initial questions (cont'd)	<p>Response as HBA representative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it one of our members' sites/ homes, or not? <p>Response for future policy purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did the fire start? • Could it have been prevented? If so, how? • Was there a working smoke alarm? Did it go off? • Was there a working sprinkler system? Did it go off? • How old is the house? (Was it built under new codes requiring wired-in smoke alarms?) • What kind of construction was it? • Was it still under construction? (Were the built-in protective surfaces and other fire protection completed yet?) 	
Initial actions	<p>What steps could the HBA take next (to investigate further, to help the affected family, to consider changes in recommended industry practice, etc.)? Who will decide whether or not to take them, and how?</p>	<p>Identify which person/group will analyse possible next steps, and decide which to take.</p>
Website, etc.	<p>If the crisis is a significant one, will the HBA want to put updated information onto its own website? Or a special website, blog, Facebook page, etc. created for this purpose?</p>	<p>Design generic information pages in advance, which can be quickly filled in as details become available. Identify which person/group will decide whether and how to use them.</p>
Key messages	<p>What are the top 3-4 points you need to make about this situation in particular (including its impacts on any victims) and this type of crisis in general? How can they be summed up in sound bites? What research supports them?</p>	<p>Assemble notes for spokesperson about this situation, and add to generic key messages and sample tough questions.</p>

	Comments	Preplanning for action
Initial media contact	<p>Will the HBA wait until the media calls them, or try to contact reporters? Within how long?</p> <p>If the media starts calling before the HBA has all the information, what should the spokesperson say?</p>	<p>Identify which person/group will decide on initial media contact. Assemble notes for spokesperson on questions you are trying to get answers to, and actions you will be taking (as applicable). Prepare and practice answering tough questions.</p>
Ongoing media contact	<p>Do you want this issue to stay in the news?</p> <p>Or will it stay there anyway, no matter what you do? If so, how are you going to keep your message fresh?</p>	<p>Look for different angles/examples to help tell your story as necessary over the next few days/weeks.</p>
Other actions	<p>Should this issue be put on your list of top annual priorities for HBA action?</p>	<p>Refer to Board/Executive and/or Strategic Planning Committee (if applicable).</p>
Information and practice	<p>Do your staff, members, spokesperson and elected directors know what is expected of them?</p>	<p>Inform people of procedures and their roles. Consider running practice sessions.</p>



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