



Mueller Communications

# 2019 MUNICIPAL ATTORNEYS INSTITUTE

RESPONDING TO CRITICAL/HIGH PUBLICITY INCIDENTS

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James Madlom and Elizabeth Hummitzsch

# JAMES MADLOM

## PARTNER | CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER



James Madlom is Chief Operating Officer of Mueller Communications (Mueller). In addition to his role overseeing the work of the firm, he manages a variety of client teams responsible for developing and implementing community relations and public affairs strategies, public awareness campaigns and marketing communications plans.

At Mueller, James has led client teams that have successfully secured public financing for major redevelopment projects, protected corporate reputations during high-profile litigation and other crisis situations, designed and implemented internal employee communications programs and supported the design and implementation of a major neighborhood revitalization effort.

Prior to joining Mueller, James gained additional media and public relations experience with another Milwaukee agency, where he coordinated communications activities for clients ranging from Fortune 500 companies to government agencies and non-profits.

In addition, James brings a significant background of community outreach planning from his work with Marquette University, where he implemented a five-day orientation program for new students and their families and Marquette's largest service project, Hunger Clean-Up, involving over 2,300 volunteers and 100 community-based organizations.

James earned both his bachelor's degree and law degree, magna cum laude, from Marquette University. He is an active member of his community, serving as a director on the boards of the Alzheimer's Association of Southeastern Wisconsin, Milwaukee Public Theatre, SaintA and St. Charles Youth & Family Services. He is an active volunteer with Rotary Club of Milwaukee. Previously, he has served as President of the Shorewood Foundation, as part of the United Performing Arts (UPAF) Campaign Cabinet, and as a board member with Volunteer Center of Milwaukee, Everyday Philanthropists and Non-Profit Center of Milwaukee.

He lives in Whitefish Bay, Wis., with his wife and 3 children. They are members of St. Herman's Orthodox Church in West Bend.



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# ELIZABETH HUMMITZSCH

## VICE PRESIDENT

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Elizabeth Hummitzsch is the Vice President at Mueller Communications (Mueller). Her responsibilities include ensuring quality and consistency in client services across the agency, serving as a resource for existing and potential new clients and managing several internal teams to create and execute marketing and public relations strategies for a diverse client portfolio.

Since joining Mueller in 2008, Elizabeth has demonstrated success in creating and executing results-oriented marketing, public relations and integrated communications plans for numerous clients. Her experience includes elevating the media presence of a local medical device manufacturer to drive employee recruitment and retention and announcing a major

Milwaukee manufacturer's decision to transfer company ownership to its employees through an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP).

Elizabeth also has a breadth of experience in corporate and employee-centered communication, including developing and executing internal communications for a Wisconsin-based Fortune 500 company and helping numerous local businesses navigate through corporate changes and restructuring.

Elizabeth has also coordinated and conducted public affairs strategies and community and public awareness campaigns for Mueller's diverse client portfolio, including a communications and grassroots campaign to support statewide transit initiatives and a public awareness campaign to cultivate support for saving a local National Historic Landmark.

Lastly, Elizabeth has helped numerous clients through challenging crisis situations, helping companies and individuals minimize the damage to their reputations.

Elizabeth holds a degree in communication arts from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and is proud to be a Badger. She is a part of TEMPO Milwaukee's Emerging Women Leaders Program, designed to nurture and elevate the next generation of women leaders in Milwaukee. Elizabeth co-chairs the group's community involvement committee.

Elizabeth, her husband, and their sons, Parker and Lincoln, currently reside in Waukesha, where they are members and volunteers at Spring Creek Church in Pewaukee.





# AGENCY BIO

**At Mueller Communications, we provide our clients access to a team of the best communicators and strategic problem-solvers around.**

We leverage strong relationships, deep communications experience and unmatched problem solving abilities to help clients achieve their goals. We work tirelessly to **make things happen for our clients**: from generating brand awareness to developing buildings, from putting people to work to facilitating world-class experiences, and connecting people and organizations, in ways that benefit our clients and our community.

At Mueller Communications, our goal is not to be the largest agency, but rather a firm that is known locally, regionally and nationally by its reputation for driving exceptional results for our clients, providing unique solutions to challenging problems and conducting ourselves with integrity. Clients choose our firm because we provide high-touch client service and a deep understanding of the issues they face and opportunities they should pursue.

To top it off, our culture dictates that we have some fun in the process. We're the Wisconsin-based PR firm that you've been looking for.

## SERVICES:



MEDIA RELATIONS



CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS



CIVIC & COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT



PUBLIC AFFAIRS &  
GOVERNMENT RELATIONS



CORPORATE  
COMMUNICATIONS



SOCIAL MEDIA



SPOKESPERSON TRAINING



DIGITAL + MARKETING



# TEN CRISIS COMMANDMENTS

1

**BE**   
**PREPARED**

Develop crisis management, emergency response and crisis communication plans with senior management. Designate a crisis management team.

**MOVE**   
**FAST**

Follow your emergency response plan and get things under control as quickly as possible. The first 24 hours will be the most critical. What you do the first day will drive everything that happens afterward.

3

**DON'T**  
**FREEZE**   
**OR FUSS**

Set a plan and follow it. Don't be pushed off course by changing events or reactions.

  
**FOR HELP WHEN**  
**YOU NEED IT**

Delegate tasks. You can't do two jobs at once when you're in crisis.

5

  
**CONTROL**  
**THE FLOW OF**  
**INFORMATION**

Designate spokesperson(s) through whom you will channel all information and make sure everyone knows how to reach them.

**GET TO**   
**THE MEDIA**  
**BEFORE THEY GET TO YOU**

Develop a fact sheet and update it on a daily/hourly basis. Distribute fact sheets to key audiences quickly.

7

**TELL IT ALL**  
**« AND »**  
**TELL IT FAST**

Hiding, holding back, refusing to talk or just delaying will send rumors flying beyond control.

**DON'T**  
**LIE**   
**DO CORRECT MEDIA ERRORS**

If you don't know the answer, say you'll get back. Additionally, if the media reports something inaccurately, correct it promptly.

9

**BE**   
**AVAILABLE**

Establish a hotline system to handle all calls for information. Keep a careful record of all calls to help the crisis communications team manage situation.

**THINK**   
**AHEAD**

Prepare a damage control plan and put people to work on it immediately.

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# INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

There are certain things you should do in any interview -- print, radio, and television -- to increase your rate of success. You will expect a reporter to do his or her homework before interviewing you, such as basic research into your title, background, and area of expertise. It is also appropriate for you to prepare for the interview.

## **YOUR JOB BEFORE THE INTERVIEW IS TO:**

- Be prepared. Practice the key messages, you've developed. Likely questions and your answers. Rehearse.
- Be up-to-date on current events (last night's and today's news), especially news that relates to your industry and community.
- Plan to be early. Arrive at least 10 minutes before asked.  
Call in a few minutes ahead to a phone interview.

## **ONCE YOU'RE THERE, YOUR JOB IS TO:**

- Know the host or reporter's name.
- Establish a rapport with the reporter.
- Deliver your key message.
- Use transition phrases or segues to stay on message.





# TOP 10 TIPS FOR WORKING WITH NEWS MEDIA

## 1. BE PREPARED.

Know your facts, know your audience. You will always have some notice before a media interview (except in some ambush situations). Take the time to jot down and review key messages. Please do not try to improvise or add to approved messages and statements. Never wing it!

## 2. DON'T REPEAT NEGATIVES.

If the reporter asks a negative, loaded or offensive question, turn it around into a positive. Don't repeat the negative -- they're looking for a negative soundbite. When answering a negative question, neutralize the negative first, then bridge to one or two pertinent points that will present a more positive view.

## 3. BE CLEAR, CONCISE AND HONEST.

Don't lie. Find out the facts before the interview or speech and don't exaggerate - it could come back to damage you. Speak in soundbites or paragraphs. Watch to see what quotes reporters use. Short answers are better than long ones, but don't give one word answers. Don't feel as though you must explain every answer, just answer the question and don't ramble on. Your parenthetical responses can turn out to be the quote used and may detract from your main point or get you in trouble. Stay away from technical jargon.

## 4. FORGET "NO COMMENT."

If you don't know the answer, don't speculate or say, "No comment." Instead, give a good reason for not being able to answer it and refer the questioner to someone who can answer the question or offer to get the information. "No comment" implies you have something to hide, you are uninformed or you are guilty. The following responses are better:

- "I don't know the answer, but I will try to get it for you."
- "<< NAME >> of our staff can give you better information. I'll have you talk to Pat."

## 5. STAY AWAY FROM "OFF THE RECORD."

There is no such thing as an "off the record" statement. Statements made to help provide background are subject to being quoted. Always assume a video or audio recorder is running. Most reporters or photographers will say "rolling" or "recording," but some are hoping to catch you off guard. Some may refer to comments made before the camera is rolling during an interview to make you put the information on the record. The camera never blinks; photographers or technical assistants may be listening when you're not aware of it.





# TOP 10 TIPS FOR WORKING WITH NEWS MEDIA

## 6. LISTEN TO THE QUESTIONS.

By allowing time to prepare for an interview, you should be able to anticipate and respond to a variety of questions. If a question contains negative language, don't repeat the negative. If you are unsure of the question, rephrase it before answering. A reporter's direct question deserves a direct answer, but you can use a steering phrase to make a transition to one of your talking points.

- "That's one reason, but the real reason is..."
- "While some people think that, the facts are..."
- "You have a good point, but I want you to know..."
- "Yes. Furthermore..."

## 7. SUPPORT YOUR MESSAGE.

Be prepared to appropriately use examples, facts, statistics, quotes, analogies, anecdotes, personal experience and graphics to help illustrate and emphasize your point. Use examples and data that average people can relate to easily. If you say it will cost \$4 million, also break that down to dollars per person (i.e., \$635 per person).

## 8. WORK WITH THE REPORTER/PHOTOGRAPHER.

Ask how you can be cooperative. If the subject matter is negative, set a time limit for the interview. Then you have an excuse to cut it off or you can decide if it should go on longer. Never argue with the reporter, even if s/he provokes it.

Correct major factual errors or misrepresentations immediately, but don't quarrel about minor errors. This can help to avoid other reporters from making a similar mistake in the future. Let the reporter know where you can be reached if s/he has more questions. Likewise, find out how you can reach the reporter if you have more information or need to correct or clarify a statement you have made.

## 9. MAKE SURE THE SETTING IS APPROPRIATE.

If the subject matter is positive, have a company logo or some other identifiable object nearby, such as a product or poster, so you are identified with the company. If the subject is negative, use a neutral location. Make sure the area is "sanitized" to present a good impression of you and your company and because reporters can read upside-down.

## 10. APPEARANCE COUNTS.

Try not to let what you are wearing interfere with your message, whether the interview is being videotaped or not. Dark colors work best. Stay away from white. Don't wear stripes or herringbone. Don't wear large or unusual jewelry. Don't wear light-sensitive glasses or sun glasses. Take a minute to relax before the interview.





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# MAXIMIZING YOUR QUOTABILITY

## 1. BEFORE YOU TALK TO A REPORTER ESTABLISH YOUR AGENDA.

Know what you are going to emphasize – focus on message. Try to anticipate the reporter’s questions, and develop answers that incorporate this message. State the message at the outset and reinforce at the end. Journalists appreciate concise, factual, newsworthy information.

## 2. TALK IN PLAIN TERMS. DON’T USE “LEGALISTIC OR TECHNICAL” LANGUAGE.

Avoid jargon and acronyms.

## 3. FRONT LOAD STRONG POINTS.

“The key point here is...”

“I’m here today to emphasize the following...”

## 4. BRIDGING SKILLS/TRANSITIONS.

“I’m glad you asked about that...”

## 5. MAKE IT RELEVANT TO THE LISTENER.

“The reason I believe this is news for you is...”

## 6. FINALLY, DELIVER THE SOUNDBITE.

“If I can leave you with one thing today, it is that...”

### REMEMBER:

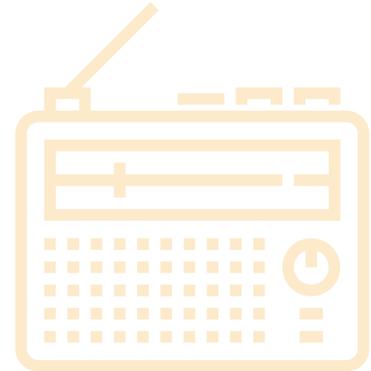
**REPETITION** of your **KEY MESSAGES** is vital  
to the **RETENTION** of those messages.  
**Repetition builds retention. What is repeated is retained.**



# RADIO INTERVIEWS

As a general rule, radio interviews can be difficult. Taped radio interviews usually are longer than television interviews, which means your host can approach the subject in greater depth. Live radio interviews can be very short and unfocused, which makes getting to your point quickly very important.

Radio interviews can range from a 30-second “sound bite” or a taped phone conversation, to one to two hours of live on-air conversation with call-ins. Make sure you know exactly what kind of an interview it is.



- If the interview is taped to be edited for newscasts, keep your answers within 10 to 20 seconds in length. This way you will ensure your main points are used.
- Always ask whether you should use the interviewer’s name in a taped interview, because the host or reporter who is on the air can change during the broadcast day.
- If you think of a better response while recording a taped interview, correct your answers by telling the interviewer you have information to add.
- Beware of long audible pauses – the “uh’s” that creep into speech. They are accentuated on radio since it’s a medium of sound only. Simply pause when you don’t know what to say or you feel an “uh” coming on.
- Many interviews will include phone-ins from the listening audience. Treat each one of these with the same respect and concern that you will give the host, even if the question is very basic. Use this time to repeat your main points. The host must handle any rude or profane calls.

# TELEVISION INTERVIEWS

Television is the least challenging of the three types of media. This may come as a great surprise to the person who approaches an interview before a TV camera with a great deal of fear, but television is both visual and oral communication. You can use body language as well as the spoken word to convey your thoughts. TV is also easier because most talk and news programs are short and deal in generalities.



- How viewers perceive you is extremely important in television, which makes the first impression critical. A friendly smile and a “thank you” to the interviewer immediately communicate warmth, and associate you with the interviewer’s own credibility.
- Conduct television appearances in a style slightly larger than ordinary. When on camera you should speak up, clearly and distinctly. Always maintain an even pace in your delivery so words do not slur together too quickly or move too slowly.
- Expand your vocal range to color important words. This makes you much more convincing and attractive, and it’s a good way to underscore major points. Men should emphasize words by using a higher pitch, women by employing a lower tone.
- Use gestures as silent punctuators. Just remember to keep the gestures high enough to be seen in TV close-ups, and complete them as you make your strong point.
- Reinforce the importance of what you have said by taking a slight pause after a very important point. This confirms that the reporter/host understood or at least heard you.
- For studio interviews, offer to bring appropriate visual material, such as videotape or slides that will graphically illustrate your points. Choose these materials carefully so they enhance your messages, and inform the show well in advance that you have these available. Be sure to review the material yourself before it appears on air.
- Always ask to see all visuals that will be used during your interview. This will preclude on-air “surprises.”

# PRINT INTERVIEWS

The print interview presents the greatest challenge since your spoken word is translated by another into the written word, and, consequently, is subject to closer examination and analysis. The print interview also is subject to the lack of understanding or prejudices of the reporter, who can misinterpret what you have conveyed or meant to convey.



- Before agreeing to an interview, find out what areas are to be discussed and when and how the material is to be used. This will allow you to prepare answers to anticipated questions.
- Set a time limit for the interview. The longer you spend with the interviewer, the greater the risk of wandering into irrelevant or undesirable areas.
- If a reporter is on deadline, ask how much time you have to get back to him or her, and ask what information is needed.
- If you need more time to give additional thought to your responses or if you're in doubt about an essential fact, don't hesitate to tell the reporter you'll dig up the facts and call in the response. Then be sure you do.
- Inform the reporter that as new information is available, you or someone else will contact him or her.
- Make sure you spell and define unusual terms, technical language or difficult names, including your own. It's a good idea to translate acronyms that might be unfamiliar to readers. Be extremely certain that figures are understood in context.
- Offer any photographs, graphs, or other illustrations that would be appropriate and might heighten reader comprehension or interest. Select visual materials that fit the style of the newspaper, magazine or journal.
- Newspaper reporters do not allow you to review copy before it is printed, so don't ask. You can extend your influence over the article by inviting the reporter to call you for more information or for clarification before he or she completes the story. This extra step might help ensure that your remarks appear in print without distortion.



# CRISIS CHECKLIST

## FIRST 10 MINUTES

- Call Emergency Response (if applicable)
- Secure site, employees and members of the public
- Call <<NAME>> to set the phone tree into action
- Onsite contact completes Incident Information Fact Sheet
- PR and project team begin collecting information for initial key messages

## FIRST 30 MINUTES

- PR Firm deployed to site and crisis team convenes in office (for offsite meetings: <<INSERT LOCATION>>) or on conference call (set up via [www.freeconference.com](http://www.freeconference.com) )\*
- “Gatekeepers” answering phones/doors direct all media calls to PR Firm; all media calls are recorded on media log sheets.
- If media arrives ON SITE prior to PR Firm’s arrival, a spokesperson only says: “We are still confirming details and will get back to you shortly.” Take them to a secure location on site; don’t permit them to wander around.
- Confirm media spokesperson for incident
- Confirm interest from media outlets; identify which additional media outlets to contact proactively
- Identify other stakeholders that need to be contacted
  - Local law enforcement / first responders,
  - Family of employees involved,
  - Regulators,
  - Significant customers / suppliers impacted,
  - Consumers,
  - Etc.
- Identify and assign next steps
- Complete incident information fact sheet: who, what, why, where, when
- PR Firm begins drafting initial key messages for approval including standby media statement

## FIRST TWO HOURS

- Team develops list of customers / distributors for product(s) impacted
- PR Firm shares draft key messages with team
- Crisis team reconvenes to approve key messages and standby media statement
- PR Firm begins media / social media monitoring and continues fielding media calls
- PR Firm begins preparing communications materials

## FIRST 24 HOURS

- PR Firm drafts an updated standby statement if more information is available
- Crisis team reconvenes to review and finalize communications materials
- PR Firm continues media monitoring and fielding media calls
- A news conference is convened if necessary for media updates

## FIRST 48 HOURS/ONGOING

- Crisis team reconvenes every 3-5 hours in person or by phone and updates communications materials as needed
  - PR Firm continues media monitoring and fielding media calls
  - PR Firm sends media coverage reports to crisis team on a regular basis
- 



# INCIDENT INFORMATION FACT SHEET

FOR INTERNAL USE ONLY – CONFIDENTIAL – NOT FOR EXTERNAL DISTRIBUTION

*Clarifying facts for developing key messages, statements:*

**Who** is involved?

**What** occurred? Who is impacted as a result? How does this impact the company? Employees? Customers?

**Where** did the incident take place?

**When** did the incident take place? When did you find out? When will appropriate parties be notified?

**Why** did the incident occur?

**Action:** What next steps are being or need to be taken?

**Referrals:** Who can answer further questions?





# SOCIAL MEDIA PROTOCOL

**In a time of crisis, social media is as important – if not more important – as traditional media. In an age when anyone with a smart phone is a journalist, and stories “break” on Twitter, social media channels cannot be ignored. The following is a social media protocol to follow should a crisis hit:**

**Monitoring:** It is critical that you know what is being said, when, and by whom. As soon as a crisis hits, begin monitoring social media channels through key word searches and provide timely and relevant updates to the team, as well as plans for responses, if appropriate.

**Becoming Part of the Conversation:** Just like when working with traditional media, it is critically important to be authentic and honest in social media interactions. As you monitor online conversations, there may be a desire to engage through your social media channels. Social media engagement should only occur when deemed absolutely necessary to enhance the conversation, correct misinformation and/or to point to official resources, when available. When developing social media responses, consider the following best practices:

- **Speak in a respectful tone.** Regardless of the tone of the commenter, take the high road and interact in a polite, respectful way. Consider any comment a direct quote that can be attributed to the company. If you wouldn't want it to show up on the front page of the local paper – don't post it.
- **Point to resources.** When possible, point commenters to resources that can help answer questions and correct misinformation.
- **Don't argue.** Do not engage in a back-in-forth, point-for-point argument.
- **Equip others to speak on your behalf:** Third party supporters can play an instrumental role in protecting your reputation online.
- **Take the conversation offline.** Whenever possible, work to move the conversation offline to engage in a one-on-one conversation.
- **Whenever Possible, Don't Delete.** There are very limited instances when it is appropriate to remove content posted on social media channels. It is very important not to censor the viewpoints of your followers, but rather to ensure that all content is appropriate and inoffensive. That said, it may be appropriate to remove user comments in instances such as:
  - » When inappropriate language or “hate speech” is used
  - » When there are repeated negative comments from one user – only after you have attempted to rectify the situation and/or take the conversation offline
  - » Allegations from current/former employees  
(For legal purposes, we cannot discuss personnel matters online)





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# MEDIA PROTOCOL

## What do you do when you are approached by the media:

Media inquiries must be responded to in a way that is clear, concise, accurate and timely to help ensure the media reports accurate information and offers a balanced view of the issue.

To ensure a controlled message, statements to the media will be made only by designated members of your staff (to be coordinated by your PR Firm, after contacting the interested media outlet.) Under no circumstance should any unauthorized employees talk to the media.

## If the media approaches an employee, he/she should:

Decline requests for an interview or a statement.

No matter the circumstance, do not say “no comment”

Ask for the names, affiliations and / or business cards of the media.

Inform the media that, “I’m sorry I cannot speak with you at this time, but if you let me know what information you are looking for, I will have the appropriate person respond to you.” {See protocol on following page...}

Report the request immediately to:

<< **NAME** >>

<< Company Name >>

<< Phone Number >>

<< Email Address >>

**RECEPTION:** If a TV camera approaches reception, offer to place them in a conference room while you seek an appropriate company representative.





# MEDIA PROTOCOL (CONTINUED)

## Protocol for phone calls from the media:

In the event that you receive a phone call from a member of the news media or a news media representative comes to the office, the following procedure should be implemented:

Please respond in the following manner:

**“I am sorry, the person who you should speak with is not available at this time. We want to meet your needs in a timely manner and I will have someone get back to you as soon as possible.”**

(Ask the caller for the following information)

Can I get your name?

---

What is the name of your organization?

---

What is a telephone number where you can be reached?

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Do you have a deadline? \_\_\_\_\_ What is it? \_\_\_\_\_

**“I will pass your message along to the appropriate people and someone will get back to you. Thank you.”**

As you receive calls, forward the information to:

**<< NAME >>**  
<< Company Name >>  
<< Phone Number >>  
<< Email Address >>





# CALL LOG TO RECORD CALLS FROM THE MEDIA

TIME	NAME / ORGANIZATION	PHONE NUMBER	DEADLINE	QUESTIONS

