Making the Media Work for You

Learn the rules to making strong media relationships that improve your business

By Shawn Duperon
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By Shawne Duperon

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Editor’s note:

Shawne Duperon is a six-time Emmy Award winning media coach and has been in the TV business for nearly 20 years. She has taught thousands how to communicate as leaders while networking and marketing and social and traditional media. Shawne works with corporations, entrepreneurs, universities, and government agencies across the globe. She’s collaborated with many best-selling authors and replaced Bill Ford of Ford Motor Company when she spoke at the Department of Defense and even lectures on cruise ships. Shawne has interviewed many U.S. presidents and filmed hundreds of celebrities. You may have seen her on national networks such as CNN, CBS’ early show, and seen her featured in USA Today.

One of her personal passions is the work that she does with multicultural groups to help delete media stereotypes through communication leadership, and she spearheaded the movement on global forgiveness with an effort called Project: Forgive. It’s a little five minute video that went viral without YouTube. Shawne is currently a Ph.D. candidate creating leading-edge research on relationships between mass media and, ready for this, gossip. Yes, gossip.

Shawne says knowing how to create and navigate communication skills as a leader is the secret to unlimited marketing and personal power.
My Background

I have been in television and film for a good 20 years, having worked in news for 11 of those years with networks such as ABC and NBC. For years, business owners, financial planners, and others call up with amazing stories that would not make it on the air because the people calling in did not know how to pitch. If you want to pitch a story, such as budgeting for school clothes, you can’t call the newsroom sounding uneasy. If your voice is shaking and the phone is shaking in your hand, you are never going to make it past the phone call because, if you’re nervous on the phone, you are certainly going to be nervous on camera. It really became a passion of mine to show people how to market themselves because it’s very easy to do when you know how to do it. Thus, I ventured into the speaking realm.

A Ph.D. in Gossip

Most people think that gossip is nasty and malicious. When you hear the word “gossip,” you think mean and nasty, right? Research resoundingly shows that mean, nasty gossip makes up only about 5 – 7% of all gossip. I examine good gossip, or word of mouth because I discovered we are inherently really good people. It certainly has been the most challenging and exciting journey I’ve ever made, and I am almost done with my Ph.D., and I’ve come to find that gossip, or word of mouth, is the best kind of advertising that exists on the planet.

The word “gossip” comes from the word godsibb, meaning “close to God.” How cool is that? In the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries, the doulas would deliver babies and spread the news that a precious child of God was born.

A momentum is built from gossip around you as a financial advisor that has people flock to you. We used these concepts of gossip research to make a five minute video. The video went viral without YouTube utilizing powerful authentic marketing. We used emotional tidbits that really tap into people’s authentic selves spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually, and it’s been miraculous what we’ve been creating through this realm of making things go viral.

Most advisors I know like to grow their business through referrals, so it’s ideal to have people talking well about you behind your back. That’s exactly what a referral is. A resounding exclamation that this person rocks, you can work with them, you can trust them. That is the epitome of good gossip.
The Difference between Paid Advertising and Free Publicity

Often, financial advisors think it’s all about getting a paid ad. There is great value to paid advertisement, especially in terms of postcards, which are actually a really good thing to be doing right now. That should be one of the spokes of your marketing.

When you garner free publicity, however, no money is exchanged. Instead, you are creating relationships with reporters, producers, anchors, influential bloggers, and prominent folks in print to give them information that helps feed their viewership. You are making a difference for audiences, and you’re doing it through the media by giving valuable information that people want that is free. There’s a time investment, obviously, and a conversation to be had about this being free.

An Implied Testimonial

If I were a financial advisor, I would be very focused on being featured in my local newspaper because the demographics show the primary folks who are reading newspapers are between 55 and 60 year old white males with high disposable incomes. Now, if you are a financial advisor, and you want to really reach that women power demographic, studies say that 94% of what is purchased in homes comes from the wife or mother. In this case, I would be going on TV at specific channels and actually generating a follow or leverage through Facebook because the demographic of women are on Facebook. If they miss my ad on TV, they are going to get it on Facebook.

One advertisement, at least in the Detroit Michigan area where I’m from, is worth about $65,000.00. When you get in the news media, you triple it. The stats actually triple because one story is going to air on the 5:00 news, the 5:30, and then again on the 6:00 news. It’s also going to air at the 11:00 time slot, the following morning in the early morning show, and it’s going to air at the 9:00am show before airing again at noon because all of the businesses want to get the biggest bang for their buck, TV newsrooms in particular, so when they come interview you about budgeting or how to get through your tax – what are some neat things about taxes that can help you as you’re planning financially, you’re going to make it on all these newscasts.

I write an article right now for The Detroit News and the Detroit Free Press. There are no words to describe the leverage of that. I’m even incorporating the articles now into my blog. The actual articles that are published go right onto my blog every time. Everything you do can be leveraged in very, very powerful ways to create that energy around you, that gossip, that word of mouth because people do business with people they like, especially when it comes to money.

Money is a tough one. We have so many hang-ups about money – shame, upset, what we’ve done right, what we haven’t done right, are we spenders or savers. These hang ups
about money get in-between you and a potential client who might work with you. When you can clear that out and offer really cool advice as an authority in the media, you actually break down those barriers, and people really start to trust you. You have to be trustworthy.

If you are not authentically an honest, kind, advisor who is really committed to help people with their money issues, you’re not going to attract people anyway, whether it’s in the media or not.

I just want to add something for any advisors thinking in the back of their minds, “Yeah, but my compliance department is so difficult when it comes to social media or writing articles.” I would just say to put that thought aside. Of course you will deal with compliance issues, but it’s not as hard as you think. In my experience, most of the time compliance departments really want to help you grow your business. It might not feel like that, so please don’t use that as an excuse for any of the advice I give about your name out there. Your compliance department will be happy to work with you. You just have to have a conversation with them about how to navigate the landscape, whether it’s traditional media or social media.

It’s kind of ironic that people are craving simple advice from how to budget for your taxes for an entire year. It might not be your expertise, but you might have expertise around that and there might be some more generic information that people are craving that you could provide that would not put you subjective to having issues with law and all

What We’re Missing When it Comes to Working with the Media

There are high levels of discomfort because a lot of times the people that connect with the media fear going on air. If we don’t know how to do it, we sound really strange. Then the media avoid us like the plague, so it’s kind of like a one shot deal. Preparation is key: you can’t just call up and “wing it” in an attempt to get coverage because they will remember you and the mistakes you make. It’s a very small network. The biggest mistake financial advisors make is they tend to think it’s all about them and plugging their new book they’ve written or how they’re opening up a new building, etc. That’s not how it works.

It’s Like Dating

Let’s say you’re going on a hot date with the girl at a restaurant. If all you do is talk about how amazing you are, the book that you wrote, and all your tips and advice, you are not going on a second date, right?

That’s simply how the media works as well. Your interactions with the media should be handled like relationships. It’s not something to get in and get out and get over with. It’s
a long-term, deep relationship so the media can keep coming back to you over and over again as a beautiful resource and an exquisite relationship. You start slowly, by piggybacking – and that’s a big term we use in media. You piggyback off the stories that the people are currently talking about, and you suggest advice as an offering to the media, such as, “We’re approaching tax season or just getting through tax season. You might be doing a story on taxes. I’ve got three tips that will really help people lower stress in getting ready for these deadlines when they’re looking at these numbers.”

That would be a story that the newsroom would consider in that tax frame time zone. Another great one is, “Gosh, we’re in spring cleaning with spring. Spring cleaning your finances. I’ve got three tips to focus on your computer and getting your budget in order. Here’s three things you can do to make it so fast and efficient for you as you work with your financial advisor.”

One of the mistakes that could happen is you want to give them all this advice, and really they just want three easy things. Then you think, “Oh, it’s got to be me they’ve got to hire.” Think for a second if you’re a photographer and you’re pitching how to take great wedding pictures. Some people can’t hire a photographer; they don’t have the money, so they’re taking their own personal wedding photos. When you go on the news as a professional saying, “Okay, you don’t have any money; you’re doing it on a budget; you’re taking your own photos; here are the seven photos you must get…” When you give those folks templates about what you’re doing, maybe the ones that are going to use your tips won’t hire you, but other folks who do hire photographers are watching you offer your expertise, demonstrate your skillset, show people what to do, and they’re noting your generosity. That’s what inspires people to want to work with people: when you give information and your knowledge, it really makes a difference. Aren’t you personally inspired when you see that?

When we are developing relationships with the media, it’s just like when we’re developing relationships with centers of influence. These are attorneys or accountants who have lots of opportunity to refer to us. If we want them to be referral sources for years and years, then we have to really build that relationship. It’s pretty much the same with the working with the media.

**Getting Started**

When you call the newsroom, and you have a story to pitch that day, the first thing that comes out of your mouth when someone answers the phone live is you ask them for permission to talk. It’s not about bowing down, and it’s not about arrogance. It’s really letting them know that you’re taking the L off your forehead, which stands for loser.

Newsrooms are really, really busy. The phone rings constantly, and so many people call the newsroom with very odd requests that don’t know what they’re doing. Someone calls up and the first thing that comes out of their mouth is, “Do you have a quick second for a
story pitch?” My ears burn, I focus on them, and I say, “Yeah, what do you got?” because I want stories, and I want people that know what they’re doing to give me stories, so that is one of the most significant things you can do.

Financial advisors should make this a game. Once every two weeks, you should plan to call on a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday. Newsrooms love statistics, and all kinds of studies come out on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Newsrooms love to piggyback off of those stats.

Let’s look at some examples. Imagine a new study comes out today in *USA Today* that says 47% of Americans are obese, or a study comes out today from the American Accounting Association that 22% of Americans are in debt by more than $10,000.00. Those are great stories because the local newsrooms are going to piggyback on them; they are national stories, and newsrooms want to include national news in their newscast. It’s simply how it works, and the more you educate yourself about how newsrooms work, the easier and easier it gets. Once you increase knowledge, you lower your fear.

That is why you keep seeing the same people over and over. The same financial folks, the same lawyers, the same people on your local news keep appearing because they learned how to pitch, they became really good at it, and the media trusts them. Sometimes they say really stupid stuff, right? I’ve seen financial planners say, “Even I know that’s wrong,” or a financial advisor say, “I even know that’s wrong.” But it’s a game. The newsroom has this basket of apples that they’re picking stories from because the bulk of what makes it on the air is pitched. The same people pitch the same stories repeatedly, and they produce the same basket of apples.

As a trainer is, “Okay, get your orange, get your cumquat, get your grapefruit and throw it in the basket because they don’t even know it exists.” Developing story ideas becomes a game because if you pitch well, you will get covered.

**Who to Call and What to Say**

There are a few easy steps to pitching an idea.

- **Call the newsroom** – If you call the newsroom between 7:00 and 8:30 in the morning, you’re typically going to get the assignment manager, or the assignment editor. She, or he, is the queen bee, and they’re usually getting prepped for the 9:00 meeting that’s going to happen pretty much all over the world across Europe and also across Canada.

- **Say, “Hey, do you have a quick second for a pitch?”** – If the person answering the phone isn’t the assignment editor, they’ll find him or her for you. Once you get the real person, the first thing you want to do is have a pitch that piggybacks off a story.
• **Always talk in threes** – Our brain grasps in threes, so pitch your story that way. Say: “I saw the story today on how 20% of Americans are lowering their debt. They’re doing really, really well. I’ve got three things right now that can help families get in that 20 percent and really lower their debt.”

• **Have a press release ready to go** – Because the assignment editor might say, “Great. You’ve got a press release?” And your answer must be, “Yes. What is your e-mail?” You’re simply going to send him an e-mail detailing the story. Within the body of your e-mail, “Great to talk to you.” And end your email with, “Here’s my cell phone number.”

This is a rhythmic formula that fits into what newsrooms are looking for. The biggest thing I like to say about news media is once you know all the rules, such as talking in three sentences or 12 to 14-second sound bites, you can break every rule in a powerful, powerful way just by being charismatic.

**Networking How-to**

I go to a lot of corporations and teach networking and communication leadership. My ulterior goal is to teach mostly in the diverse communities how to approach communication organization so they can actually be on camera. Companies can quit saying their diverse and start being diverse. Most of the people I media train are white men in their 60s. In order to reach that diverse talent pool, I started teaching networking because it’s the same skill that you work with reporters.

There is a basic skill that I teach that is called the Cycle of Reciprocity. This is the giving and receiving that happens in a relationship, in mentorship, and when you’re at networking events. The only thing that stops it is fear.

It is the same premise as what happens in networking events when you create that truly exciting relationship. You almost feel a zing between you and the other person. It happens when you find the love of your life. You can talk for nine hours, and you don’t even know where the time went, and the same thing happens exquisitely in a TV or radio interview where a conversation seesaw goes back and forth between you and a reporter so the flow is so natural, so charismatic, so exquisite that someone in the kitchen peeling carrots will turn and drop everything they’re doing just to go see who is that alive and charismatic person. That curious person is thinking: “I don’t know what they’re talking about and I want to know who they are.” People respond to authenticity, charisma, and authentic information, and it really makes a difference.

**Visiting the Station**

I just want to make a really big distinction between broadcast and print. Broadcast and
print are really, really different.

One this to remember is that food is good in broadcast. When you come on the radio station or the television news set, you should bring bagels for everybody. After you’re on a newroom interview, whether it’s live on the set or they came to your office, you send a big basket of something – the bigger the better. In terms of word of mouth – first of all, somewhere. In broadcast we do not see food brought or sent as bribe, we see that as loving gesture in a romantic relationship, a fostering of loyalty and making a difference for us too because newsrooms and broadcast really struggle getting food. The newsrooms suffer especially. They are doing lots of stories in one day, and a lot of times they’re at the vending machine just getting crackers or stopping quickly somewhere.

Print is a very different game. Do not do that for print because print reporters would get very offended by that. Television people would not because we’re party people. We bring food into the middle of the newsroom and share it with everybody. The bigger the basket, the better you look.

Then, the gossip that gets generated goes a little something like this:

Newscaster 1: “Oh, Susie, where’d you get that?”
Newscaster 2: “Oh my gosh, I got it from Joe, the financial advisor guy.”
Newscaster 1: “Oh yeah, I saw him. Actually, he did pretty good. I’m looking at doing a piece just on a business owner on ________, do you think he might be good for that?”
Newscaster 2: “You know, he really might be good for that. Let me give you his number on my rolodex.”

When you’re good on camera, responsive, know how newsrooms operate and you respond to the media very quickly, they start to pass you around.

**Following Up**

Your system of following up depends on how deeply you create the relationship. Often, I will send a handwritten thank-you note with my business card, and I never ask them when my segment is going to air. A lot of the time I might be told my story is going to run on one specific date, and it doesn’t. In pursuing a date or time, your questions can feel intrusive if they don’t have a deep, deep relationship with you.

Usually I create the deep relationships with the print reporters who will send it to me because they know I’m going to blast the article out into social media and make them look like a rock star. But don’t break the rules unless you know them. Make sure you’ve got a great relationship before you start asking some of those questions.

I sometimes send them an e-mail letting them know or tagging them in my social media that I’m just promoting the heck out of them. Depending on how well I know that print
reporter, I might put a $5.00 Starbucks card in my thank you note, and I would preface it with, “I just wanted to buy you a coffee. Thank you so much.”

If I deepen that relationship, I can take other steps. When I come into the newsroom, such as if they are using me for a panel, I might bring a whole big thing of bagels or whatever depending on that relationship. You must be much more conscientious and strategic with print than it is with TV and radio.

Get Training

When you get trained and your discomfort, or your fear level, is low, handling the media becomes easy. You can watch the momentum being built as you get better at appearances because it usually takes three or four tries when someone’s on camera to really start rocking. I have clients going on Dr. Oz and Dr. Phil. One woman, an organizer, is featured on national programs all through Canada now, just for having that little spark that said, “You know, I really could do this.” When you get trained really well on charisma and being present and authentic, the sky’s the limit.

I used to do boot camp a couple of times a year, once even in Canada. Now I do the camp once a year in the U.S. because I’m that awesomely busy. You will have pretty major breakthroughs in fear because that’s all I do is dance between discomfort and fear.

I really believe fear is like a fart. If you can stand the smell long enough and you can be with it, pretty soon you have a capacity to handle very uncomfortable things that are not uncomfortable at all. You just get so comfortable in your skin. I do spend a little bit of time on crisis, but most companies will not deal with the crisis, and it is so silly that most media training focuses on crisis. About 99% of what I talk about is how to be comfortable in your skin, generate amazing stories, give tips and advice that people really, really need. My audience is usually high-end business owners, speakers, and trainers. The networking opportunities alone are pretty much worth your attendance at the workshop. It’s that pretty exquisite, and the best way to sign up is by visiting www.mediamasterybootcamp.com.

If you can’t attend the workshop but would like to discover different ways to work with the media, get more PR, etc., visit my website: www.Shawnetv.com.

I wish you success in every area of your life. Remember, be great and create great every single day.