

How to feed alligators



***Ten things you need to know about
working with media during a crisis***

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#1: For most of the media... We're only in it for the money.

“But, all the nice cutesy little ethics that used to get talked about in journalism school... you're just like, that's adorable. That's *adorable*. This is a **business**.”

--CNN Supervising Producer John Bonifield,
caught on undercover sting video

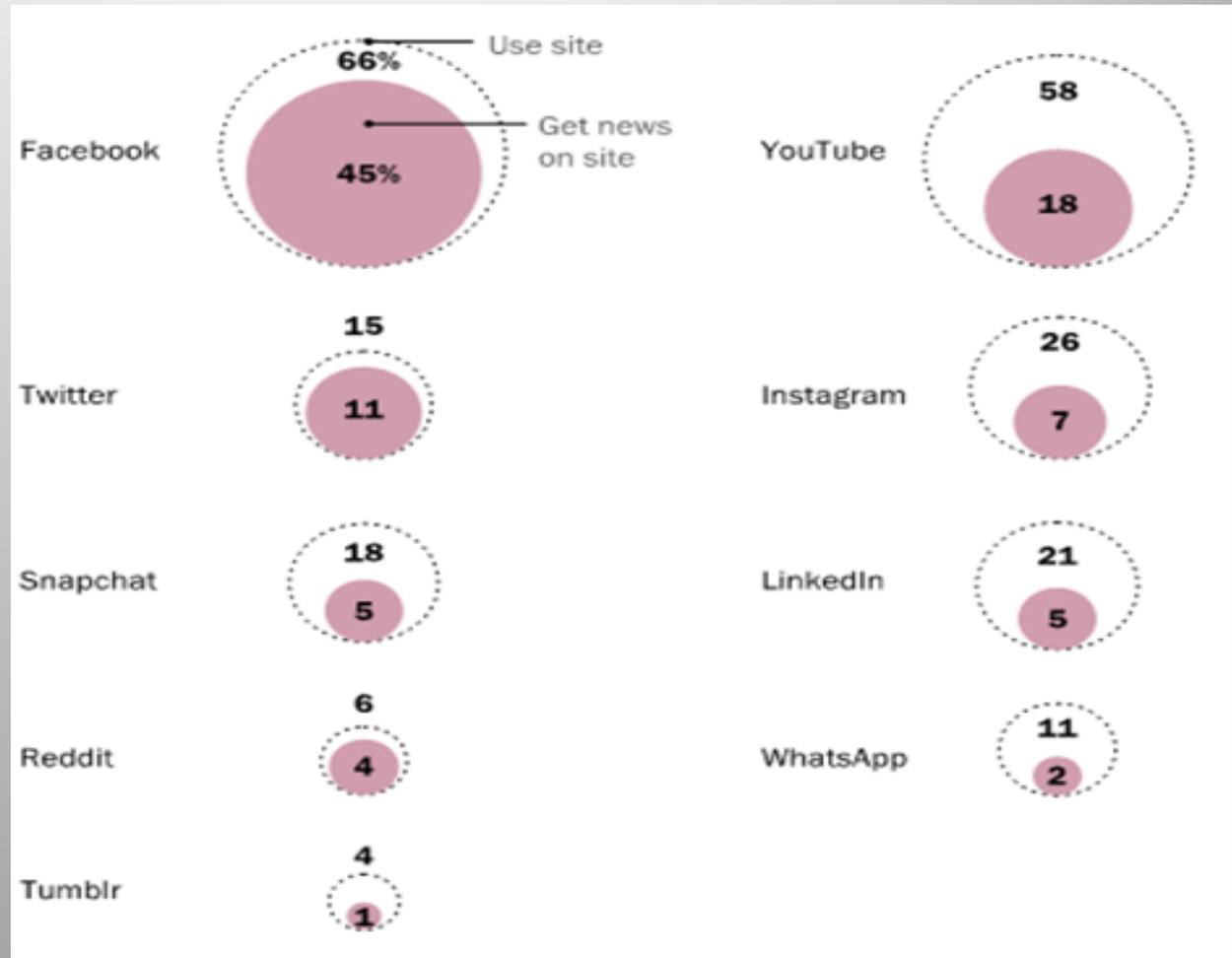
#2: Remember that old game called “Telephone?”

“...The journalism world tends to rely far more on trust than fact checking. When one news outlet runs a story, the rest of [it] tends to follow suit, each writing their own version of the story without ever going back to the original sources for verification. In short – once a story enters the journalism world, it spreads without further restraint as each outlet assumes that the one before performed the necessary fact checking.”

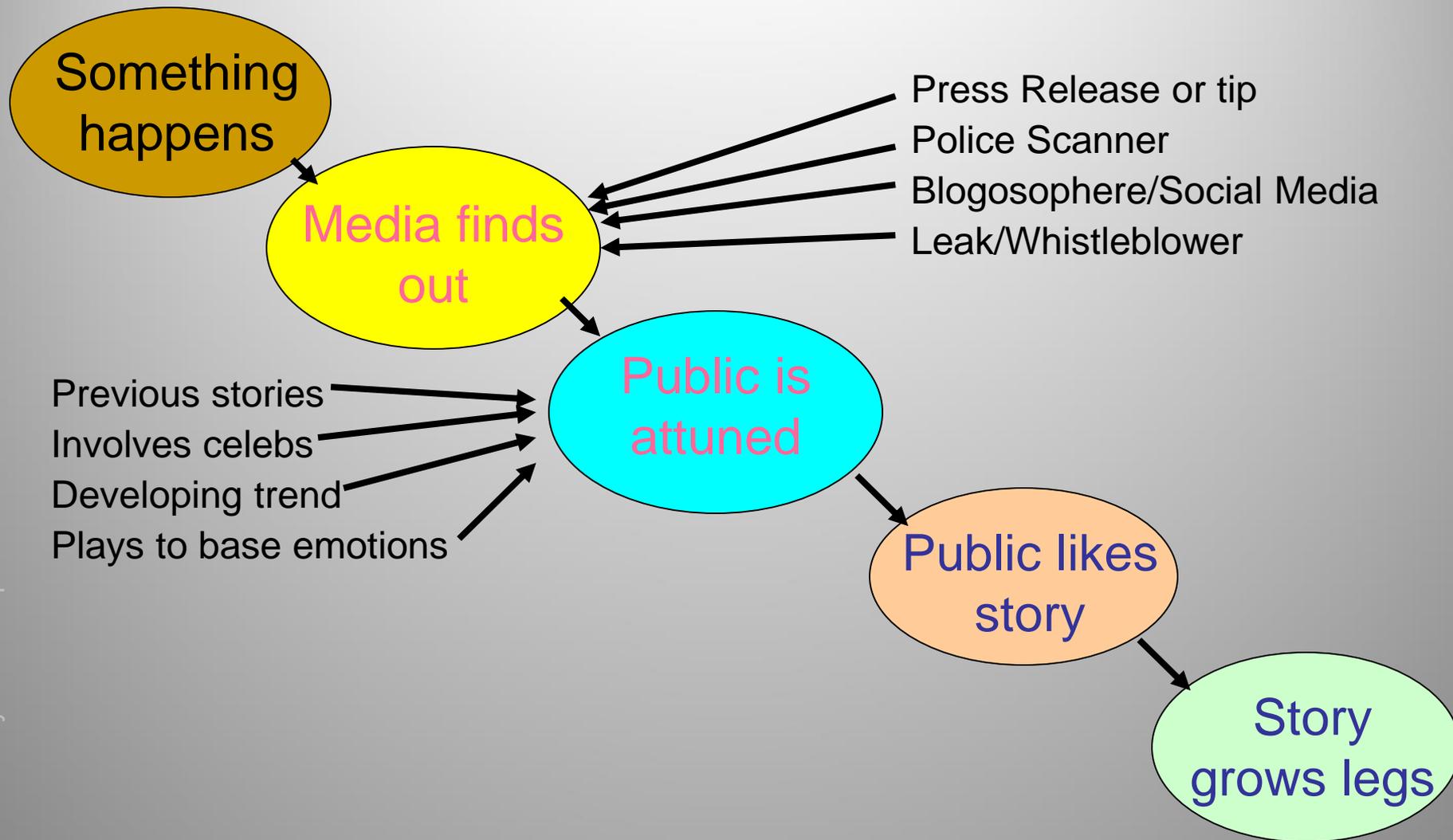
--Kaleev Leetaru, Forbes, 2017

#3 Remember newspapers? Seems like no one else does, either.

Outer ring is % of Americans who use the platform. Pink is the percentage that gets news from it.



What Becomes a Story?



Story structure and framing

Reporters like characters, including:

- ❑ Victims
- ❑ People who face adversity – particularly if they can be framed as David v. Goliath
- ❑ People who are doing things about things that they (the media) believes are significant issues

Journalism is all about storytelling

In order to tell the story, the journalist must find some things out:

- ❑ Who
- ❑ What
- ❑ Where
- ❑ When
- ❑ Why
- ❑ How

Journalism is all about storytelling

“Who” questions

- *Are all about identifying the characters*

Examples:

- Who did it happen to
- Who made it happen
- Who was responsible for keeping it from happening

Journalism is all about storytelling

“What” questions

- *Are all about getting to the core of what occurred*

Examples:

- What happened
- What are you doing about it
- What is the extent of (injury, damage, etc.)
- What will you do next, as a result of this

Journalism is all about storytelling

“When” questions

- *Are all about placing the event and other story elements in time*

Examples:

- When did this happen
- When did you learn about it
- When did you last train for this sort of thing
- When will you know (the answer to some variable)

Journalism is all about storytelling

“Where” questions

- *Are all about locating the event and other relevant story elements in geographic space*

Examples:

- Where did this happen
- Where else has this happened
- Where are/were the people responsible for this happening (or keeping it from happening)

Journalism is all about storytelling

“Why” questions

- *Are all about understanding causation of the event*

Examples:

- Why did this happen
- Why did you respond as you did
- Why didn't you do (more, better, different)
- Why does this keep happening?

Journalism is all about storytelling

“How” questions

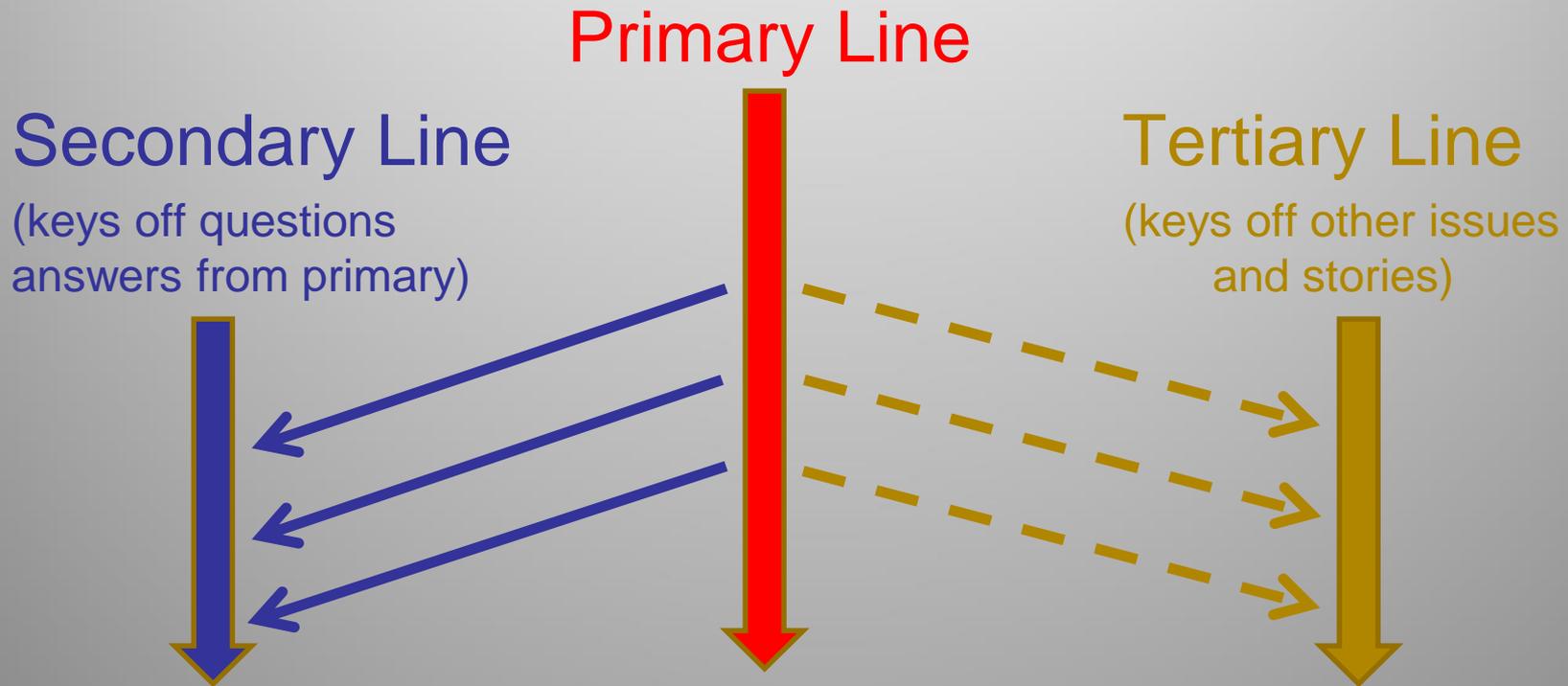
- *Are also about understanding causation of the event – and the response*

Examples:

- How did this happen
- How could you have prevented it
- How will you change things to prevent a future occurrence

Journalism is all about storytelling

Anticipating questions in advance of an interview – the Three Major Lines:



#5 You do have some tools at your disposal.

- “Must Air” Points
- The “Killer Quote”
- “Cans and Cant's”
- The Clock

“Must Air” points

- These are the things YOU want to have come out in the interview.
- The trick is to get them in even if you aren't asked.
- Must air points can be offensive or defensive.
- You must be careful that they don't come off as plugs.

“Must Air” points

In a catastrophic incident, 2 of the 3 are already spoken for:

1. An expression of concern and compassion
2. A statement about commitment to safety
3. Dealer’s choice

“Must Air” points

What’s the difference between Must Air Points and Talking Points?

- Must Air Points are essential.
- Talking Points are what you’d like to have in the story, if you can.
- **Hint: you most likely can’t.**

The “Killer Quote”

It's what you WANT to be quoted as saying.

- Short, sweet, interesting – 20 to 25 words
- Ideally reflects at least one – maybe more – of your Must Air points
- **MUST SOUND CONVERSATIONAL!!!!**

“Cans and Cant’s”

- Things you CAN talk about
- Things you CAN’T talk about, and why
- Anything you CAN’T talk about, you need to provide an explanation that passes the smell test.

The Clock

YOU control the clock. Set reasonable limits.

“Must Air Points,” “Killer Quotes,” “Cans and Cant’s” and The Clock

Here’s the key: You want to send your spokesperson into an interview...

- ***Knowing what he/she will be asked***
- ***Knowing how he/she will answer***
- ***Knowing how he/she wants to be quoted***
- ***Knowing what lines of questions are off the table***
- ***Knowing how long it will be until this particular slice of misery is over.***

#6 Anyone who walks into an interview without a plan deserves whatever happens.

Six rules for PLANNING interviews

The only lie it's okay to tell a reporter: "The boss just called me and I'll be tied up for a bit. But I can get back to you in about half an hour."

Six rules for PLANNING interviews

- Get as much information ahead of time as possible. *“What do you already know? Who have you already talked to?”*
- Determine thrust of interview – get sense of questions in advance if you can (do NOT ask for the questions themselves) *“What would you like to talk about,”* or *“what is it that you need from me?”*
- Particularly if it’s broadcast, make sure you find out who will be conducting the interview (the reporter, NOT the producer) and the format of the story (Live? Tape? On-site?)

Six rules for PLANNING interviews

- PLAN for your interview. Anticipate questions. Draft answers. Create your Must Air Points.
- Create “Cans and Can’ts” for interview – control time and determine what topics you can discuss, identify what you can’t, and why you can’t.
- Prepare your “killer quote.” This is the good, tight, brief soundbite that’s too good NOT to use.

#7 Planning is one thing. Managing is another.

Eight rules for MANAGING interviews

- ESTABLISH YOUR CANS AND CAN'TS—
AND SET THE CLOCK

Eight rules for MANAGING interviews

- BE READY WITH YOUR ALL-IMPORTANT KILLER QUOTE(S). MAKE SURE THEY'RE THE MOST INTERESTING THING(S) YOU SAY TO THE REPORTER. SHORT, SWEET, TO THE POINT, AND INTERESTING.

Eight rules for MANAGING interviews

- BEFORE AN INTERVIEW STARTS, IT'S OKAY TO ASK A JOURNALIST WHAT THEY'VE ALREADY LEARNED AND WHO THEY'VE ALREADY TALKED WITH. THEY MAY OR MAY NOT GIVE YOU A USEFUL ANSWER, BUT SOMETIME YOU CAN LEARN SOMETHING VALUABLE.

Eight rules for MANAGING interviews

- **DON'T GET TRAPPED BY LEADING OR DELIBERATELY VAGUE QUESTIONS. IF UNCERTAIN ABOUT WHERE A REPORTER IS GOING WITH A QUESTION, ASK HIM OR HER TO CLARIFY IT FOR YOU. YOU WANT TO SPECIFICALLY ANSWER SPECIFIC QUESTIONS.**

Eight rules for MANAGING interviews

- YOU CAN TAKE TIME TO THINK ABOUT YOUR ANSWERS, IF NECESSARY. STILL, DO NOT VARY FROM THE SCRIPT.

Eight rules for MANAGING interviews

- **KEEP YOUR ANSWERS BRIEF. FIFTEEN SECONDS IS A VERY LONG ANSWER. RUN TOO LONG, THEY'LL CUT AND PASTE SNIPPETS FOR LENGTH. ODDS ARE YOU WILL NOT LIKE THE RESULTS.**

Eight rules for MANAGING interviews

- **IF YOU FUMBLE AN ANSWER (ESPECIALLY IF BEING TAPED), DO NOT BE AFRAID TO STOP TALKING RATHER THAN BULLING THROUGH. ASK FOR THE QUESTION AGAIN.**

Inappropriate questions

An inappropriate question is one that the reporter has no right to ask, or has nothing to do with the story. Examples include:

- Invasive questions about people or the company
- Questions that put you in a position where you're required to display expertise you don't have – such as discussing the effectiveness of helmets
- Speculative or 'what if' questions
- *Don't confuse unpleasant questions with inappropriate ones.*

#8 Handling hostile or confrontational questions is one hell of a lot easier if you're ready to answer them.

Handling Hostile or Confrontational Questions

Tactic A: Acknowledge question, move to what you want to discuss

Tactic B (preferred):

1. Acknowledge question
2. Provide supporting anecdote
3. Provide third-party endorsement (if avail.)
4. Move to Must Air

Handling Hostile or Confrontational Questions

ACKNOWLEDGMENT:

“Yes, there are risks involved in challenge courses, and the rarity of accidents doesn’t make them any less tragic when they occur.

ANECDOTE/SUPPORTING INFO

“But we have extensive experience in the operation of challenge courses, and have top level certification by the Association for Challenge Course Technology.

MUST AIR:

“We take safety very seriously. We use state of the art training and we supervise carefully. And we’re truly concerned about this staff member and what happened.”

#9 Learn the tricks reporters use to get the goods

Tricks Reporters Use

- Establishing false rapport
- Off the Record
- False Flag
- Going silent after you answer
- Asking the same question in a different way
- Asking wide-open questions, then narrowing
- Asking narrow question then asking for expansion
- Repeating what you say (almost) or getting you to repeat what they say

#10 Your job isn't over once the reporter is out of your face.

What to monitor:

- Local news outlets
- Regional and national news outlets
- Set up Google search strings
- Social Media that YOU use
- Social media that you DON'T use
- Hashtags can be useful!

If conventional media gets it wrong...

- Contact the outlet, identify the mistake, and ask for a “write-through”
- Much harder to do after a story has been printed or broadcast

If social media gets it wrong...

- Establish yourself as a reliable source of information, and stand ready to correct misinformation
- Don't engage on channels you don't control. Redirect to ones that you do.
- Be tolerant and sensitive. Monitor constantly. And don't be afraid to repeat yourself - you may have to.

Gonna be feeding some alligators...?

1. Make sure you've got trained spokespeople and savvy social media bird dogs.
2. Make sure you've got an emergency communications plan that identifies all of the human and physical resources you might need – and how to deploy them.
3. Practice with your team at least once per year – preferably more often.

Questions...?

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