

# Advisor

The Newsletter of Effective Communication

## Swept Away?

Anticipating ambush interviews ▶

## Webcasts that

**Work** – "God is in the details."  
So is believability. ▶

**Front-Line Failure** Avoid a big communication disconnect ▶

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## Swept Away?

Anticipating ambush interviews

You can tell when **the sweeps** begin. Your local TV stations relentlessly promote news features about killer microbes and truck stop transvestites. And you know when sweeps end because the network shows aid their affiliates with weddings, births, shocking revelations and, if it's the WB, Team Angel preparing to battle dragons and demons.

Nielsen Research does national TV audience ratings every day, but the so-called sweeps are when Nielsen measures audiences in each TV market as well. This data is important to local stations because their ad rates are greatly affected by the outcome. **The primary sweeps months are February, May, July and November.**

[The Project for Excellence in Journalism](#) conducted a content analysis of local TV news in 2003. They found that local news is as labeled; local stories make up three fourths of the content with crime stories by far the most common. But, as you have no doubt noticed, sex, scandal and impending doom are what get promoted. **The data also show that 75% of stations say they do investigative reporting, and one in four has staff dedicated to just that.**

What does all this mean to you? If there is an investigative team or reporter in your town and a sweeps is a comin' down the pike, the odds of being swept up... go up.

What if you emerge from your car and a reporter with a camera crew charges toward you? Whether you have no clue or are about to be indicted, the response should be the same - look pleasantly at the journalists and, with your very best manners, introduce yourself and offer them your business card. Plead pressing engagements and ask them to make an appointment. Repeat several times if needed, and then leave in a friendly manner, possibly tossing out a "Call me!" over your shoulder as you go. Maintain this demeanor even if followed. Under no circumstance do you say "No comment." put your hand out to block the camera



### Quick Bites

## Did I really just say that?"

Before you make a move to vent about your supervisor or even pass on some true but embarrassing info on your blog, read the article in [Legal Affairs - The Magazine at the Intersection of Life and Law](#).

In a piece entitled *World Wide Water Cooler*, find examples of workers who discovered that they may have made their opinions a little too well known.

### Quick Bites

## Blossary?

For those who wonder if they are just a tad out of the loop (and since staying in the loop would consume your every waking and unawaking moment), here is

needed, and then leave in a friendly manner, possibly tossing out a "Call me!" over your shoulder as you go. Maintain this demeanor even if followed. Under no circumstance do you say "No comment," put your hand out to block the camera or hide your head under your coat. We all know how **that** looks. How about just ignoring them? Fact is, **not** speaking is no guarantee of staying off camera, whereas, a polite response is likely too boring to use.

After surviving the gauntlet, should you talk to them at all? **An important finding of the research was that 60% of the stories on local TV told "mostly or only one side of the story."** A prompt response to a reporter inquiry is generally the best practice, but what is said and by whom depends on your situation. Make sure your company has an up-to-date policy and contact list for media calls.

**Remember – Anyone who has been through Ammerman training can get consultation on urgent communication issues at no additional cost by calling 1.800.866.2026. Our phone is answered by a real, live person 24/7.**

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## Webcasts that Work

"God is in the details." So is believability.

It's part TV, part Town Hall meeting. Webcasts are here to stay. They have become a very common choice for disseminating information to employees and many, if not most, publicly traded companies report quarterly financial results via webcast.

According to Associated Press business writer [Bruce Meyerson](#), "This recital is often sprinkled with useful information: more data, context, current market conditions, and the near-term outlook. But the presentation frequently sounds more like a stump speech or a marketing pitch than an update on the business, with speakers repeatedly circling back to key messages, strategies, and how "focused" on "execution" the executives are."

Meyerson goes on to say that this approach leaves "many listeners multi-tasking at their desks until the less-scripted Q&A begins."

If you have ever participated or been a viewer, you know that he speaks the truth. With stakeholder trust at low levels, Enron back in the news and Martha Stewart contemplating hard time, companies must communicate not only facts, but the underlying structure - the ethical foundation of the company. A wise man once said that God is in the details. So is believability.

The webcast is both like and unlike other media. It resembles TV in the obvious ways, where bad lighting, distracting attire or annoying voices can detract. The material needs to be appropriate to the task as well. A dull recitation of things that will be seen on paper (or screen) is not a good utilization of visual media.

The webcast becomes like a town hall meeting when the Q&A begins. This is where the transparency and the credibility can best be shown. This is also where a weakness in preparation becomes glaringly obvious.

There are many reasons for less than stellar webcasts, but one of the most common is the context into which webcasts are placed. **Many people see them as just another business meeting that happens to be watched world wide**

the loop would consume your every waking and unwaking moment), here is an opinionated yet informative [blog glossary](#) so at least you can term drop with the techies.

## Real World Questions, Real World Answers

*We have been contacted by a network investigative program to provide a spokesperson on a controversial issue. Our policy is always to be as responsive to the media as possible, but I'm not sure on this one. Any tips?*

First, audition your possible spokespeople on the issue by conducting mock interviews including both general and pointed questions.

Second, hire an outside media training firm that specializes in adversarial training to have them pressure the finalists during simulated interviews to achieve an accurate portrayal of how the interview could develop. Based on their performance and ability to hold up under fire and to convey key messages, you will be better able to evaluate what to do in this instance. If you decide to move forward, continue to work with your selected spokesperson on interview drills changing the pace, tone and content of the questioning to cover all bases. In this way, they have been sensitized to manage a variety of questions.

Third, prepare them for the unexpected - a new development, a change of talent for the interview, etc.

There are many reasons for less than stellar webcasts, but one of the most common is the context into which webcasts are placed. **Many people see them as just another business meeting that happens to be watched world wide instead of thinking about the attributes of the medium and using them to their full advantage.** There are many companies who consult on technical issues and can bring a lot of life to a webcast.

The next great failing is lack of preparation. **Surely, scripts are written with care, but the presenters are often at the top of the organization and thus, less likely to receive constructive criticism about their skills.** Sometimes you simply have to bring in the pros to critique the bosses. (Yes, we do webcast prep and executive coaching - call for details.) Audition people if you can.

Brevity *is* bliss. **Make sure the script is meaningful and tight.**

Staying on message is still important, but audiences are too sophisticated to fall for a few repeated phrases. **Find many different ways to say what you need to say and offer examples, anecdotes and illustrations to back up the data.** Message points remain useful when all you get is a sound bite, but more time requires more thoughtful answers.

**Rehearse.** Try to anticipate every possible question. Then, when you have crafted an answer, think of every possible follow up. Then follow up with another question. Repeat until you have exhausted the topic. Willingness to field each query completely says, "We have nothing to hide."

When designing your webcast, remember what it is you hope to achieve and work from there. Whether your viewers have invested their cash or their careers, they seek solid information, candid answers and a sense that their valuable time has not been ill used. They deserve as much, and your reputation will be enhanced for it.

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## Front-Line Failure

Avoid a big communication disconnect

**Telephone Operator:** Good morning ...

**Caller:** Don't say anything, just listen. We are the people who are causing the killing in your area. Look on the tarot card. It says, 'Call me God. Do not release the threat.' We have called you three times before trying to set up negotiations. We have gotten no response. People have died.

**Telephone Operator:** Sir, I need to refer you to the Montgomery County Police. We are not investigating that crime. Would you like the number?

**Caller hangs up.**

The DC Sniper case is the most shocking in recent memory where a killer appeared to be pointing himself out to police, but his attempts were dismissed. The note found by police in October of that year said that six calls had been "ignored" by operators at the command center in Rockville, the Montgomery County police and even the FBI. It went on to name some of the people who had taken the calls.

Law enforcement pro knew that criminal perpetrators sometimes signal their

unexpected - a new development, a change of talent for the interview, etc. If you should decide not to do the interview, develop a plan to provide the journalist with something, a written or taped statement, etc. to maintain your past commitment to try to provide something to them.

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## 2004 Ammerman Individual Enrollment Training Dates

### Effective Media Communications

November 9

December 7

### Advanced Communicators

November 11 - 12

### Media Skills for Marketing Professionals

November 10

The above schedule lists Ammerman individual, public workshops. For available dates for private (buy-out) training dates, please contact The Ammerman Experience at 1.800.866.2026.

The Ammerman Experience public workshops are scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis, and are available to a limited number of attendees to ensure maximum personalized attention. To register for a course, contact our office at 1.800.866.2026.

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County police and even the FBI. It went on to name some of the people who had taken the calls.

Law enforcement pros know that criminal perpetrators sometimes signal their identity or provide other valuable information. And with cell phones giving people a greater sense of anonymity, since many times they don't show up on caller ID, it may well embolden those with bad motive to call. Knowing what to do with these calls - what to say, how to say it and what to avoid saying, can literally avert a tragedy.

Most companies appoint a crisis team from their management ranks and train them with varying degrees of intensity and success. But the most thorough and prudent among them remember to include in their training the first line of defense - those who answer the phone. These could be switchboard operators, receptionists and administrative assistants. After hours, security guards often answer phones. A blatant bomb threat may get someone's attention, but often callers just sound like they are "wacko" and are dismissed as a real threat. Perhaps that is what the operators in Maryland thought.

It takes only a bit of time to handle a call the correct way - perhaps even averting a crisis or worsening the situation. But, imagine the consequences for handling it the wrong way. And, think about how your personnel will respond on the phone during an actual crisis - when loved ones, the media and others are pressuring the person who answers the phone for information.

**To learn more about how we can help your front-line personnel learn how to handle a variety of situations with confidence and control, contact us at 800/866-2026 or [click here](#).**

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**Our firm is a pioneer in understanding the link between effective communication and professional success. What we've learned and what we teach can improve your performance . . . and that of others in your organization.**

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