

## • BLUEPRINT •

# How to Control the Conversation When the Media Gets it Wrong

In addition to pushing product, a company's Web site can help companies deal with errors, misinterpretations, and omissions in media stories. Jim Lukaszewski, president of the Lukaszewski Group, a management consultant firm specializing in corporate communications, has coined a term for how companies — and PR execs — can stay ahead of the curve when the media gets it wrong: Corrections and Clarifications. He says the technique allows organizations to make corrections and clarifications directly to a story, post the corrections on the corporate Web site, and — perhaps most important — electronically provide the corrected documents to whomever the company feels needs to be aware of its actions (read: various stakeholders). "This approach is real-time responding, completely and without editing or filtering, a point for point rebuttal," Lukaszewski says. "If [a company] wants to manage its own destiny, regardless of what the media does, this is something that all organizations should do. The thing is to correct everything. The media is on another mission, and that's fine." *PR NEWS* asked Lukaszewski on what's involved in a Corrections and Clarifications plan:

**Step 1:** With a print story, simply array the paragraphs of the entire story on the left hand side of the Web page, vertically, numbering each paragraph.

**Step 2:** Identify those quotes, concepts, text, or examples that have problems.

**Step 3:** Right next to those items, in the same location (i.e., an error in paragraph three will trigger a correction to the right of paragraph three), make your comments. Keep in mind, you can be quite extensive in your responses. If you have a tape recording and transcript of the interview, you can quote from the transcript of the interview exactly what the reporter asked and what you told the reporter (it might be useful to put the transcript, or a link to the transcript, on your Web site in this part of your response).

**Step 4:** Continue this process until you've responded to as much of the article as you care to.

### Cautionary notes:

>> **Stay positive and declarative.** Avoid judgmental, angry, emotional lan-

guage. Anger or insults will guarantee a response publicly and, perhaps, another story. Remember your goal is to correct and clarify. Keep your cool.

>> **Carry out this activity as promptly as you can.** Once erroneous articles have appeared, condition your various constituencies to look for your corrections or clarifications. You'll find your employees are the most keenly interested and will be grateful that you're responding, whether or not official corrections or clarifications ever appear in the offending medium.

>> **Set-up the correction and clarification process before the interview begins.** Audiotape interviews. Videotape only in the most controversial circumstances, such as pieces that run on "60 Minutes" or "20/20." Transcribe and share interview transcripts with appropriate individuals and groups so they understand the entire context of the story and the spokesperson's comments. Be sure and e-mail a copy of the correction and clarification to the reporter who did the story.

>> **Make the corrections area highly visible on your Web site.** Avoid burying it in your "newsroom" or other hard to find

locations. Put a button on your home page. You'll have lots of traffic and appreciation for doing this.

>> **Keep your corrections and clarifications focused on what matters.** If you make a mistake in a clarification, run a third column on the right of your clarification with any corrections. This puts the entire matter out there for everyone to see. Today, transparency is credibility.

For examples of this technique, visit [www.powerthefuture.net](http://www.powerthefuture.net), click on "Clarifications and Corrections," or go to [www.mrc.com](http://www.mrc.com), click on "Forum," then "In the News," then "Newspaper Archives," scroll down to *The Wall Street Journal*.

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For more on this topic, read *PR NEWS*' July 14, 2003 article, "Your Next Steps When the Reporter Gets the Facts Flat Out Wrong" which can be accessed by going to Article Archives at [www.PRandMarketing.com](http://www.PRandMarketing.com).