

NINE WAYS TO AVOID 'GOTCHA' MOMENTS



Who hasn't winced at those 'gotcha' moments in media interviews, particularly during election campaigns?

When Greens leader Adam Bandt responded to a gotcha-style question with 'Google it, mate', he was right on the money. But what are other ways to avoid being caught on the hop?

Here's the start of a list gleaned from professional experience and high-profile journalists and academics interviewed for the ABDC's communications guide.

1. **Establish the areas the journalist wants to cover.** If they're not in your field of expertise, say so and see if you can pass the opportunity to a colleague. (This will prevent you possibly making a fool of yourself – and your colleague may return the favour by directing more appropriate media to you)
2. **Be clear on your boundaries.** Know what you can and can't say, or will and won't say
3. **Practice the key points you want to get across** before the interview
4. **Review any relevant research, statistics and data.** Have fast facts at hand
5. **Be prepared for the worst possible things you could be asked.** Minimise the chance of unwelcome surprises. Identify hot issues and practise your response with your communications expert (if you have one) or a savvy colleague.
6. **If you think a journalist may be setting you up or have an underlying negative agenda, decline the interview.** Remember the journalist has final say over the story. Do you really want to play with fire?
7. **Don't discuss areas outside of your expertise.** 'I'm not the right person to answer that question' is a reasonable response
8. **If a journalist's questions include inflammatory words you don't like, don't repeat them in your answer.** Otherwise, you may supply an unintended, but very quotable, quote.
9. **Unless you have a strong trusting relationship with a journalist, assume EVERYTHING you say is on the record** – including before and after the interview. Also remember microphones can be much more sensitive than human ears.