

May 2005

www.porroLLC.com

NOT A SPEECH, NOT A PRESS RELEASE, IT'S....

Specializing is great, but most promotional writers find themselves called on to write a dizzying array of materials. Here are some tips on doing executive summaries and sound bites, as well as a link to a great resource for PR advice.

- [1] Executive summaries: get to the point and reel 'em in
- [2] Sound bites: Advice from CommCore's Andrew Gilman
- [3] On the web: a resource for nonprofits, and everybody

1. Executive summaries

I'm not crazy about writing long reports, but I love doing executive summaries. Why? Because they're usually the only sections of a report a reporter will read, and (therefore) every sentence is important. So when I write an ES, I approach it like a press release—get the message up front, make the message easy to find, and look for ways to draw readers in.

Rule #1: Keep it short, no more than two or three pages.

Rule #2: Make sure the ES talks about actual people, not just statistics.

Rule #3: Be absolutely sure that you conclude or recommend something. And be sure your conclusions are clear and direct. The conclusions or recommendations convey your message and tell your story. If the conclusions are powerful, reporters (and other readers) may actually be tempted to read the whole report.

Obeying rule #3 may prove the most challenging, because the policy wonks who wrote your report will probably want long, convoluted conclusions. Resist them if you can. Save the long and involved stuff for the body of the report.

Porro Associates LLC helps corporations and nonprofits improve the written and spoken materials they use to reach key audiences. <http://www.porrollc.com/results.html>

2. Sound bites: Advice from CommCore's Andrew Gilman

I know you'll be shocked, shocked to learn that sound bites rarely just happen. Most are scripted well before an interview or speech takes place. Andrew Gilman, President and CEO of CommCore Consulting Group (commcoreconsulting.com) has been preparing CEO's and others for interviews for more than twenty years. He says a good sound bite has three key parts: the headline (an attention-grabbing phrase or sentence); proof #1 (facts that back up the headline); and proof #2, which Gilman also calls, "Make me care." It appeals to the listener's heart, not the head.

Here's a recent example. Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Thomas Friedman is out promoting his third book, *THE WORLD IS FLAT*. On the Charlie Rose Show, he said, "When I was growing up, my parents used to say to me, 'Finish your dinner, Tom. People in China and India are starving.' And I tell my girls, 'Girls, finish your homework because people in China and India are starving for your job.'"

His sound bite had the headline and the "make me care" built in. In the interview with Rose he provided the data to back it up.

3. A Web resource for nonprofits, and everybody

Check out www.spinproject.org, Web site of The SPIN Project (Strategic Press Information Network). SPIN "provides media technical assistance to nonprofit public-interest organizations across the nation who want to influence debate, shape public opinion and garner positive media attention." But you'll find its advice and resources very useful even if you're not a progressive nonprofit. It's got advice on everything from news hooks, internet PR, wooing reporters, how to work with PR Consultants, and a lot more.