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MEDIA RELATIONS



May 2024 | By Gage Harter

State of Media 2024

“The disruptive power of artificial intelligence (AI) will sweep through the information space this year at a time of intense political and economic volatility around the world. The implications for the reliability of information, and the sustainability of the mainstream media are likely to be profound in a year that sees critical elections due in more than 40 democracies, with wars continuing to rage in Europe and the Middle East. Against that background – and with one forecast suggesting that the vast majority of all internet content will be synthetically produced by 2026¹ – journalists and news organizations will need to rethink their role and purpose with some urgency.”

Executive Summary Opening of the [University of Oxford Report on Journalism, Media, and Technology Trends and Predictions for 2024](#)

State of Media 2024

These are the main findings from the industry survey, drawn from a strategic sample of more than 300 digital leaders from more than 50 countries and territories.

- Just half (47%) of our sample of editors, CEOs, and digital executives say they are confident about the prospects for journalism in the year ahead, with around one-tenth (12%) expressing low confidence. Stated concerns relate to rising costs, declining advertising revenue, and a slowing in subscription growth – as well as increasing legal and physical harassment. Reasons to be cheerful include the hope that closely fought elections in the US and elsewhere could boost consumption and interest, albeit temporarily and with the potential for further damage to trust.
- Almost two-thirds (63%) of our survey respondents say they are worried about a sharp decline in referral traffic from social media sites. Data sourced for this report from analytics provider Chartbeat shows that traffic to news sites from Facebook fell 48% in 2023, with traffic from X/Twitter declining by 27%. In response to these developments, around three-quarters (77%) say they will focus more on their own direct channels in the next year, with a fifth (22%) resorting to cutting costs and a similar proportion (20%) experimenting with alternative third-party platforms.
- More specifically, publishers say they'll be putting more effort into WhatsApp (+61 net score)² and Instagram (+39) following Meta's decision to open up broadcast channels for publishers. Interest in video networks such as TikTok (+55) and YouTube (+44) remain strong while Google Discover is becoming a more important but volatile referral source. By contrast, publisher sentiment towards Facebook has worsened further this year (-38 net score) along with X/Twitter (-39 net score).
- Related to the above, the majority of our publisher respondents say they plan to create more video (+64 net score), more newsletters (+52), and more podcasts (+47), but broadly the same number of news articles – as they lean into some of the few remaining areas of audience and advertiser growth. Around half (54%) of respondents admit their companies are mostly focused on maximizing attention rather than being more respectful of their audience's time (37%).

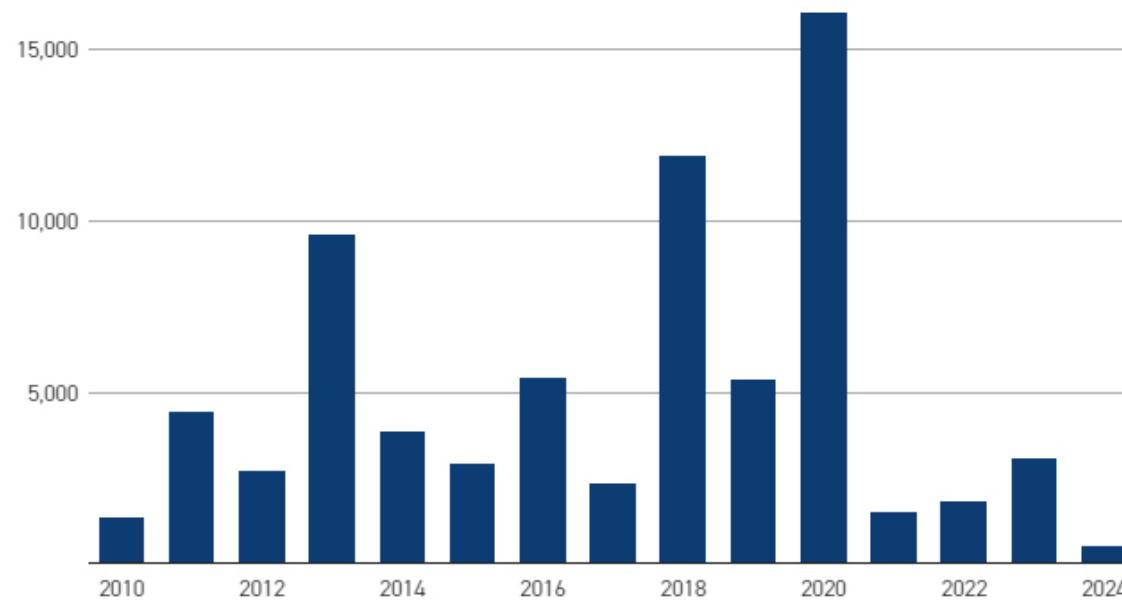
State of Media 2024

2024 off to a brutal start for reporters and journalists.

- 3,087 digital, broadcast, and print news jobs were cut in 2023 – the highest total since 2020 when 16,060 jobs were slashed
- [According to Politico](#) – more than 500 journalists were laid off in January 2024

2020 was high point for journalism layoffs

Number of announced journalism layoffs in the U.S.



Note: Newsroom cuts include print, broadcast and digital media.
Source: Challenger, Gray & Christmas Inc.
Kierra Frazier/POLITICO

State of Media 2024

And how will AI affect journalism?



TO PERSON

KLARA INDERNACH

Klara Indernach is the name for texts that we create with the help of artificial intelligence. If articles were largely generated with the help of AI, we mark them accordingly. They are edited and checked before publication. The profile photo was created with the help of Midjourney.

This publication believes in using AI to generate content.

- As long as a human edits the AI-generated copy – the publication believes this collaboration guarantees integrity.
- The publication using the fake reporter to the left for every article written by AI.

State of Media 2024

Even the Associated Press recently published an article about five AI solutions to help local newsrooms.

[Like the Minutes AI application](#) that creates transcripts of board meetings, to include keyword identification and reporter alerts.

State of Media 2024



About this app

AI MINUTES, the only ZOOM-linked automatic meeting minutes tool with No. 1 recognition satisfaction in Japan, is now available on Google Play!
Make meetings and notes easier with real-time speech recognition and translation!

It costs \$9.99 USD/month and of course works with the web version.

For example, in the following situations.

- Office meeting transcription
- Transcription and notes of lecture content
- Online meetings using smartphones

State of Media 2024

What is your relationship with the local media?

How important is it to you as a supervisor to rely on the media to spread your message?

Some of you likely have a larger digital impact and footprint than your local media outlet. How do you incorporate the media into your communications efforts?

State of Media 2024

What is your opinion on AI-generated news copy?


Or AI-generated videos and images?

Or AI covering board meetings or events like athletic competition?


Real Time Media Relations

The screenshot shows an Outlook window titled "Media Inquiry - Message (HTML)". The interface includes a search bar, a menu bar with "File", "Message", "Help", "ESET", and "Acrobat", and a ribbon with various actions like "Share to Teams", "Move to:", "Mark Unread", "Find", "Zoom", and "Viva Insights".

Media Inquiry

 Nathaniel Cline <ncline@virginiamercury.com>
To: James Hutzler; Jeremy Bennett
Cc: Gage Harter

Thu 12/21/2023 9:48 AM

 If there are problems with how this message is displayed, click here to view it in a web browser.

You don't often get email from ncline@virginiamercury.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Good Morning,

There are a couple of things I wanted to flag for the VACO team:

- 1) Let me know if anything regarding education and transportation caught VACO's attention after the budget presentation. We can set up a phone call if needed.
- 2) A bill to allow local governments to place speed cameras in locations "deemed necessary" was filed about a week ago.

Here is a link to the legislation: <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?241+sum+HB20>

Has VACO formed any opinion on the bill? If not, what has been VACO's stance on similar versions to this bill?

I'm filing a brief on the bill. A response before noon on Friday would be appreciated.

Nathaniel Cline
Reporter, Virginia Mercury
240-478-7734 (c)

Real Time Media Relations



Re: Media Inquiry - Message (HTML)

File Message Help ESET Acrobat

Search

Share to Teams Move to: ? Mark Unread Find Zoom Viva Insights

Re: Media Inquiry

 Dean Lynch
To: Jeremy Bennett;  Vaco legislative team

Thu 12/21/2023 10:01 AM

This will be a 2 part response, Jeremy - take a shot at responding. I will review and add something on speed cameras.

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone
Get [Outlook for Android](#)

From: Jeremy Bennett <jbennett@vaco.org>
Sent: Thursday, December 21, 2023 9:53:31 AM
To: Vaco legislative team <vacolegislativeteam@vaco.org>
Subject: FW: Media Inquiry

FYI

Jeremy R. Bennett
Director of Intergovernmental Affairs
Virginia Association of Counties
1207 E. Main Street, Suite 300
Richmond, VA 23219
804.343.2510 office
804.401.0529 cell
jbennett@vaco.org

From: Nathaniel Cline <ncline@virginiamercury.com>
Sent: Thursday, December 21, 2023 9:48 AM
To: James Hutzler <jhutzler@vaco.org>; Jeremy Bennett <jbennett@vaco.org>
Cc: Gage Harter <gharter@vaco.org>
Subject: Media Inquiry

Real Time Media Relations

RE: Media Inquiry - Message (HTML)

File Message Help ESET Acrobat

Search

Share to Teams Move to: ? Mark Unread Find Zoom Viva Insights

RE: Media Inquiry

Jeremy Bennett
To: Dean Lynch; Vaco legislative team

Thu 12/21/2023 10:13 AM

On it!

Jeremy R. Bennett
Director of Intergovernmental Affairs
Virginia Association of Counties
[1207 E. Main Street, Suite 300](#)
[Richmond, VA 23219](#)
804.343.2510 office
804.401.0529 cell
jbennett@vaco.org

From: Dean Lynch <dlynch@vaco.org>
Sent: Thursday, December 21, 2023 10:01 AM
To: Jeremy Bennett <jbennett@vaco.org>; Vaco legislative team <vacolegislativeteam@vaco.org>
Subject: Re: Media Inquiry

This will be a 2 part response, Jeremy - take a shot at responding. I will review and add something on speed cameras. I am at endocrinologist and should be back to office in about an hour. Thanks

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone
Get [Outlook for Android](#)

From: Jeremy Bennett <jbennett@vaco.org>
Sent: Thursday, December 21, 2023 9:53:31 AM
To: Vaco legislative team <vacolegislativeteam@vaco.org>
Subject: FW: Media Inquiry

FYI

Real Time Media Relations

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The email content is as follows:

Re: Media Inquiry

Gage Harter
To: Jeremy Bennett
Cc: Dean Lynch; Vaco legislative team

Good stuff!

Sent from my iPhone

On Dec 21, 2023, at 10:13 AM, Jeremy Bennett <jbennett@vaco.org> wrote:

On it!

Jeremy R. Bennett
Director of Intergovernmental Affairs
Virginia Association of Counties
1207 E. Main Street, Suite 300
Richmond, VA 23219
804.343.2510 office
804.401.0529 cell
jbennett@vaco.org

From: Dean Lynch <dlynch@vaco.org>
Sent: Thursday, December 21, 2023 10:01 AM
To: Jeremy Bennett <jbennett@vaco.org>; Vaco legislative team <vacolegislativeteam@vaco.org>
Subject: Re: Media Inquiry

Real Time Media Relations

RE: Media Inquiry - Message (HTML)

File Message Help ESET Acrobat

Share to Teams Move to: ? Mark Unread Find Zoom Viva Insights

RE: Media Inquiry

Jeremy Bennett
To: Dean Lynch; Vaco legislative team

Thu 12/21/2023 10:57 AM

Hey Dean,

How about this? Edits and comments welcome:

“Dear Nathaniel,

Thank you for your interest in these issues and for reaching out. Regarding the Governor’s introduced budget, we are still reviewing the entirety of the Governor’s proposal and its potential impact to local governments, as we weren’t consulted prior to its release in discussions involving restructuring of local revenues such as the car tax and local sales tax. We were disappointed in the failure to keep the commitment made last year on continued general funding to offset lost grocery tax revenues for K-12 education. We are hopeful that the General Assembly will address these concerns in their amendments to the budget, including providing additional funding support for K-12 education such as the elimination on the cap on support positions, as recommended by the JLARC report on K-12 funding. We are appreciative any efforts to bolster transportation funding for vital projects such as, but not limited to, WMATA and the I-81 corridor.

Regarding HB 20, we are aware of the bill and will be monitoring it and its progress through General Assembly session. We are always appreciative of additional tools in the toolbox of local government to provide necessary services to their communities.

Sincerely,”

Jeremy R. Bennett
Director of Intergovernmental Affairs
Virginia Association of Counties
[1207 E. Main Street, Suite 300](#)
[Richmond, VA 23219](#)
804.343.2510 office
804.401.0529 cell
jbennett@vaco.org

From: Dean Lynch <dlynch@vaco.org>
Sent: Thursday, December 21, 2023 10:01 AM
To: Jeremy Bennett <jbennett@vaco.org>; Vaco legislative team <vacolegislativeteam@vaco.org>

Real Time Media Relations

Re: Media Inquiry - Message (HTML)

File Message Help ESET Acrobat

Search

Share to Teams Move to: ? Mark Unread Find Zoom Viva Insights

Re: Media Inquiry

James Hutzler
To: Jeremy Bennett; Dean Lynch; Vaco legislative team

Thu 12/21/2023 12:16 PM

That sounds really good to me!

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone
Get [Outlook for Android](#)

From: Jeremy Bennett <jbennett@vaco.org>
Sent: Thursday, December 21, 2023 8:57:02 AM
To: Dean Lynch <dlynch@vaco.org>; Vaco legislative team <vacolegislativeteam@vaco.org>
Subject: RE: Media Inquiry

Hey Dean,

How about this? Edits and comments welcome:

"Dear Nathaniel,

Thank you for your interest in these issues and for reaching out. Regarding the Governor's introduced budget, we are still reviewing the entirety of the Governor's proposal and its potential impact to local governments, as we weren't consulted prior to its release in discussions involving restructuring of local revenues such as the car tax and local sales tax. We were disappointed in the failure to keep the commitment made last year on continued general funding to offset lost grocery tax revenues for K-12 education. We are hopeful that the General Assembly will address these concerns in their amendments to the budget, including providing additional funding support for K-12 education such as the elimination on the cap on support positions, as recommended by the JLARC report on K-12 funding. We are appreciative any efforts to bolster transportation funding for vital projects such as, but not limited, to WMATA and the I-81 corridor.

Regarding HB 20, we are aware of the bill and will be monitoring it and its progress through General Assembly session. We are always appreciative of additional tools in the toolbox of local government to provide necessary services to their communities.

Sincerely,"

Jeremy R. Bennett
Director of Intergovernmental Affairs

Real Time Media Relations


RE: Media Inquiry - Message (HTML)

File Message Help ESET Acrobat

Search

Share to Teams Move to: ? Mark Unread Find Zoom Viva Insights

RE: Media Inquiry

 Katie Boyle
To: Dean Lynch; [Vaco legislative team](#)

Reply Reply All Forward

Thu 12/21/2023 12:33 PM

I don't think he did anything for WMATA (other than put some language in stipulating what WMATA needs to do to get additional funds) – James is checking into it

From: Dean Lynch <dlynch@vaco.org>
Sent: Thursday, December 21, 2023 12:19 PM
To: Vaco legislative team <vacolegislativeteam@vaco.org>
Subject: FW: Media Inquiry

Should have copied the legislative team

Dean A. Lynch, CAE, CM
Executive Director
Virginia Association of Counties
1207 E. Main St., Suite 300
Richmond, Virginia 23219
804-687-6196 cell
804-343-2511 office
dlynch@vaco.org
www.vaco.org

From: Dean Lynch <dlynch@vaco.org>
Sent: Thursday, December 21, 2023 12:18 PM
To: Jeremy Bennett <jbennett@vaco.org>; Katie Boyle <kboyle@vaco.org>; Gage Harter <gharter@vaco.org>
Cc: Dean Lynch <dlynch@vaco.org>
Subject: RE: Media Inquiry

Real Time Media Relations

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Re: Media Inquiry

Gage Harter
To: Dean Lynch; **Vaco legislative team**

Thu 12/21/2023 12:45 PM

My EDITS BELOW...

Dear Nathaniel,

Thank you for your interest **in these matters** and for contacting VACO. I'd like to provide some clarity on the issues you mentioned.

Firstly, Regarding the Governor's introduced budget, we are currently in the process of thoroughly reviewing the entire proposal. Unfortunately, we were not consulted prior to its release, especially in discussions related to the restructuring of local revenues like the car tax and local sales tax. We were **quite** disappointed that **the last year's** commitment, **made last year**, regarding continued general funding to offset the loss of grocery tax revenues for K-12 education, was not upheld.

However, we remain hopeful that the General Assembly will address these concerns when making amendments to the budget. This includes considering additional funding for K-12 education, such as removing the cap on support positions, as recommended in the JLARC report on K-12 funding.

We also appreciate any efforts to improve funding for our most vulnerable citizens in the health, childcare, and behavioral health arena. We are also **appreciative** **thankful** of the boost in transportation funding, particularly for critical projects like WMATA and the I-81 corridor.

Regarding HB 20, we are aware of the bill and will closely monitor its progress during the General Assembly session. We always welcome additional tools for local governments to better serve their communities and make them safer for other motorists, pedestrians, etc.


Thank you for your **understanding** **coverage and reporting**, and please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any further questions or concerns.

From: Dean Lynch <dlynch@vaco.org>
Date: Thursday, December 21, 2023 at 12:19 PM

Real Time Media Relations

The screenshot shows an Outlook window titled "Media Inquiry - Virginia Mercury - Message (HTML)". The interface includes a search bar, a menu bar with "File", "Message", "Help", "ESET", and "Acrobat", and a ribbon with various action buttons like "Share to Teams", "Move to:", "Mark Unread", "Find", "Zoom", and "Viva Insights".

Media Inquiry - Virginia Mercury

 **Dean Lynch**
To: ncline@virginiamercury.com
Cc: Dean Lynch; Gage Harter

Thu 12/21/2023 2:49 PM

Dear Nathaniel,

Thank you for your interest and for contacting VACO. I'd like to provide some clarity on the issues you mentioned.

Regarding the Governor's introduced budget, we are currently in the process of thoroughly reviewing the entire proposal. Unfortunately, we were not consulted prior to its release, especially in discussions related to the restructuring of local revenues like the car tax and local sales tax. We were disappointed that last year's commitment, regarding continued general funding to offset the loss of grocery tax revenues for K-12 education, was not upheld.

However, we remain hopeful that the General Assembly will address these concerns when making amendments to the budget. This includes considering additional funding for K-12 education, such as removing the cap on support positions, as recommended in the JLARC report on K-12 funding. We also appreciate any efforts to improve funding for our most vulnerable citizens in the health, childcare, and behavioral health arena.

Regarding HB 20, we are aware of the bill and will closely monitor its progress during the General Assembly session. We always welcome additional tools for local governments to better serve their communities and make them safer for other motorists, pedestrians, etc.

Thank you for your coverage and reporting, and please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any further questions or concerns.

Dean

Dean A. Lynch, CAE, CM
Executive Director
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[1207 E. Main St., Suite 300](#)
[Richmond, Virginia 23219](#)
804-687-6196 cell
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The email content is as follows:

Re: Media Inquiry - Virginia Mercury

Nathaniel Cline <ncline@virginiamercury.com>
To: Dean Lynch
Cc: Gage Harter

You don't often get email from ncline@virginiamercury.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Hello Dean,

Thank you so much for providing this response and for the feedback. I will share this with the editor as we continue our coverage of the budget and future legislation.

Best,

Nathaniel Cline

Reporter, Virginia Mercury
240-478-7734 (c)

On Dec 21, 2023, at 2:48 PM, Dean Lynch <dlynch@vaco.org> wrote:

Dear Nathaniel,

Thank you for your interest and for contacting VACO. I'd like to provide some clarity on the issues you mentioned.

Regarding the Governor's introduced budget, we are currently in the process of thoroughly reviewing the entire proposal. Unfortunately, we were not consulted prior to its release, especially in discussions related to the restructuring of local revenues like the car tax and local sales tax. We were disappointed that last year's commitment, regarding continued general funding to offset the loss of grocery tax revenues for K-12 education, was not upheld.

Real Time Media Relations



VACo Media Relations Process

- It's important to us to have a good relationship with traditional and new media.
- Be diligent in answering media inquiries – 24-Hour Rule.
- Let media members know that VACo accepts email inquiries with questions, deadline and contact information – NO PHONE CALLS or FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWS unless the reporter personally knows our Team Member.
- Forward inquiry email to VACo Team and together formulate a response.
- Refer media to an outside source if we cannot answer or we don't want to answer the questions.
- **Include the media on all legislative and newsletter email blasts – be transparent.**



VACo Media Relations Conclusions

- Our media relations team effort system works for us.
- We have more control of our message.
- We are responsive and try to resolve all inquiries – leading to better relationships with the media.
- We believe the media now views us as a dependable resource.
- We feel like we've developed a good relationship with most media outlets.



Media Relations | What is Your Process?

- **What is the process when a supervisor has a media inquiry?**
- **Does only your Board Chair or Vice Chair respond to media inquiries on behalf of all your supervisors? Or can any supervisor respond to a media inquiry?**
- **How do you want to consistently respond to media inquiries? Email? Texts? Phone calls? Face-to-face?**
- **Do supervisors inform other supervisors when they've spoken to the media?**
- **How does staff let the Board know they have spoken to the media?**

Media Relations | What is News?

To understand what information is newsworthy and if it should be shared to the media – ask yourself these simple questions.

- Who is the audience? Who is impacted the most?
- Is the information timely and relevant?
- Is the information factual? Is the information verifiable?
- Is it a local, state or national story that has a significant local impact?
- Is the information best suited for newspapers, magazines, television, radio, websites, social media or all of the above?
- Am I the best person within county government to communicate the information?

Newspaper Editors and Reporters

I spoke to an editor of a central Virginia weekly that primarily covers a county. These are some comments that stood out.

- Editorial staff of 3
- He's not a government reporter or beat writer who breaks stories. He likes to write features and long prosy pieces.
- He likes to go off-the-record to get background information. He said the off-the-record source was more important to him than any short-term gain he would get by violating the agreement.
- Once he gets the off-the-record background information – he then asks for the source to give an official statement. He'll also follow up and try to confirm what the source told him. He said he never uses the off-the-record information and cites it to “an anonymous source.”
- He said he has a service-minded philosophy to journalism.
- He said he wants to be part of the solution. “It's our job to do service to the reader. We want county officials to help us understand the issues. Yes, we will ask hard questions, but we will always be fair.”

Newspaper Editors and Reporters

More interesting comments from the editor...

- Do a lot of reporting by text.
- Prefer face-to-face but that's not the reality of today's media relations.
- Many young reporters are not comfortable talking face-to-face so they prefer texting or email reporting. He thinks it's a generation thing, and that many young reporters aren't as socialized as reporters 10-20 years ago.
- He believes that it behooves county officials to develop a relationship with the people covering them. And to understand what the media is all about.
- He said he routinely meets with the county administrator, deputy county administrators and department directors, police chief, and finance folks.
- He rarely speaks to the communications department because he has built a relationship with other staff.

Newspaper Editors and Reporters

TIP

During budget time – invite reporters to the office and have your county administrator or finance director go over the budget with the reporter. This helps educate the reporter but also allows you to control the story by giving the reporter the information you want published.

Building Relationship with the Media

Reporters have a tough job to do. They are encouraged to ask difficult questions that may seem antagonistic but are usually not. Reporters are simply trying to get the job done and be thorough. Many reporters are taught to be skeptics until proven otherwise.

TIP: Many reporters are taught to follow the mantra – “if your mother tells you she loves you, confirm it.”

Building Relationship with the Media

Always Be Responsive. One of the best ways to develop a good working relationship with a reporter is to be responsive to their inquiries. Whether you can answer at that moment or later – just replying to their call, email or text within a couple of hours goes a long way. Reporters operate on deadlines. To do their jobs, they appreciate timely responses. Understand reporters' deadlines and meet or beat them. Establishing a reputation for responding quickly to reporter inquiries will earn respect and appreciation. Playing hard-to-get may cause the media to wonder what one is hiding, which may encourage the media to dig for something to uncover.

TIP: If you cannot directly answer the media's inquiry either by lack of information or not having a desire to respond – you can offer them an alternative source. Deflect them to a state agency. Deflect them to VACo. Deflect them to an expert on the issue. This way you will be responsive and helpful but still not commenting.

Building Relationship with the Media

Be Prepared. Find out what information the reporter is seeking and then, whenever possible, take the time to prepare for an interview by gathering facts, figures and key messages that will be responsive to the questions the reporter is likely to ask. It is okay to have this information as a reference during an interview when not on camera. Unless one must, do not wing it. In the instance of a crisis, it is wise to have a standard holding statement such as, “I want to help you with your story, but I need to gather more facts before I can answer any questions. I know we all want to get the story right, so I will contact you soon to give you an update.” Then, be sure to follow through.

Be Accessible. Reporters generally want access to elected officials instead of the county spokespersons. Reporters need you to do their job. The quickest way to tick off a reporter is put up barriers.

Be Friendly. Treat the media as you would like to be treated. Get to know the reporters that are covering local issues. Occasionally make small talk with them or even take them out to lunch.

Be Real. Authenticity matters to both reporters and constituents. The goal is to sound knowledgeable, use plain language, and be sincere. If more information is needed to respond, make the reporter aware and follow-up promptly.

Building Relationship with the Media

Be Concise. Reporters want and need good quotes. To be quoted (and not misquoted), keep statements (both written and spoken) short, relevant and interesting. Do not use jargon, acronyms or wonky terms. A written quote should be one or two short sentences. Radio and television will edit down a statement to sound bites that are only three to seven seconds long, on average. Avoid the temptation to talk too much. Don't speculate or speak in hypotheticals; stick to the facts.

Be Courteous. Sometimes you may not have much knowledge or interest in a topic to provide what a reporter needs. In this case, say, "Thank you for thinking of me for your story, I don't think I am the best source for your topic." If possible, try to suggest another contact.

Be Proactive. Sometimes it is appropriate to reach out to reporters if there is a story that needs to be covered. Do not hesitate to suggest stories or offer responses to newsworthy events before being asked.

Building Relationship with the Media

Be Accurate. Double-check and even triple-check any facts and figures used in interviews. Once inaccurate information is distributed, it's hard to pull it back. The risk is that accidental inaccuracy will be mistaken for dishonesty. Let reporters know you need to look up information and get back to them before the deadline.

Be Careful. Assume that everything is “on the record” and will be attributed. Don't say anything that shouldn't be included in a news story. Never go “off the record” with a reporter you don't know. A reporter can get confused when reading back over his/her notes over what was “off the record” or they may just decide it's too good to pass up and betray your trust. If you cannot say it on the record, do not say it with an unknown reporter.

Building Relationship with the Media

If You Really Want to Start a Great Relationship

Take a reporter to coffee or a meal and get to know him/her.

Call or email a reporter who writes about the county and comment positively about a recent article.

Invite the reporter to the county offices to meet with staff experts who can explain complex issues to the reporter.

Tour a newsroom, TV studio, radio studio, and learn what goes into producing news.

Building Relationship with the Media

Takeaway...

Be responsive is probably the biggest takeaway. It goes a long way toward relationship building.

Question...

How would you respond to a reporter misquoting you or printing incorrect information? Do you ask for a printed correction?

Speaking with a Reporter

SOME COMMON MISTAKES WHEN SPEAKING TO A REPORTER

Trying to be funny or witty is dangerous and risky. Often an analogy can be confusing and misconstrued. Just deliver the message. Also, a message is rarely strengthened with curse words. Keep your comments clean. Finally, be careful of falling victim to political incorrectness. A seemingly harmless statement can be deemed inappropriate or offensive. Keep your comments on message without getting personal or generalizing. Over time, you will build credibility within the local news media and gain public trust. You want to be a valuable resource and effective spokesperson not only for yourself but for your county, region and state.

Speaking with a Reporter

THE SHORT SOUND BITE

Many times, when we see a quote in the newspaper or on video or television or radio – it is a portion of what we said. The media will choose the part of your quote they think appropriately fits their story. They may also paraphrase your quote to present your message in a shortened version.

The key to controlling your message and having most or all of what you say appear in the article or video is to learn how to respond to questions with short, concise answers.

Whether being interviewed live on camera or via email – be prepared to respond to the series of questions with two or three points you want to convey. Make these points positive and stay on point.

Make these two or three positive answers short and simple. Try to use words you would use when explaining the issue to someone at the grocery store or the local restaurant. Avoid using jargon, acronyms and complex words.

Speaking with a Reporter

EXAMPLE OF BAD ANSWER – “The County’s financial situation is perilous because the revenue source is not maintaining pace with the expenditures, and we face the possibility of layoffs soon.”

Speaking with a Reporter

EXAMPLE OF GOOD ANSWER – “Things are tough right now, but we’re all working hard to figure a way to keep jobs instead of cutting them.”

Speaking with a Reporter

Most reporters are likely to use sound bites that average readers and viewers will understand. Remember who your audience is when giving sound bites.

When doing a video interview, always look at the reporter when answering questions and not the camera. Also, don't worry about filling the "air" silence. It's natural to think or feel you should fill airtime, but you don't.

TIP: Stick to the message, give the answer, stop talking and wait for the next question.

Speaking with a Reporter

When a reporter asks a question that you cannot answer or do not want to answer – reply that you don't have the information the reporter needs to reply to the question. Or if it's a county policy not to discuss certain issues – reply that “it's not our policy to discuss this issue” but have a bridge to something the county can discuss. Never say “no comment.” Saying no comment can be construed as having something to hide.

Speaking with a Reporter

A good sound bite usually includes complete thoughts. Yes, sound bites should be short and concise. But local officials can use sound bites as an opportunity to market the county and all the good things in the county.

EXAMPLE QUESTION – What should people know about safety when hiking the county's trails?

Speaking with a Reporter

EXAMPLE ANSWER – Nelson County’s hiking trails are some of the most beautiful in the state, and to stay safe, hikers should stay on the marked trails.

Media Relations

- E-Newsletter Roanoke Rambler Magazine
- Virginia Business Newspaper
- Bedford Bulletin Newspaper
- Cardinal News Newspaper
- Danville Register & Bee Newspaper
- The Enterprise Newspaper
- Franklin News-Post Newspaper
- Laker Weekly Newspaper
- Martinsville Bulletin Newspaper
- News & Advance Newspaper
- NRV News Newspaper
- Nuevas Raices Newspaper
- Roanoke Star Newspaper
- Roanoke Times Newspaper
- Roanoke Tribune Newspaper
- Smith Mountain Eagle Newspaper
- Southside VA News Newspaper
- Star Tribune Newspaper
- Valley Business Front
- Online Somos
- Virginia Radio iHeart Media- 93.5 FM, 96.3 FM, 104.9 FM Radio, WFIR-960 AM, 94.5 FM, 107.3 FM Radio, WFJX-910 AM, 104.3 FM Radio, WQMR-101.3 FM Radio, WSLK Lake Radio- 880 AM Radio, WVTF/Radio IQ- 89.1 FM Radio, WYTI-1570 AM, 104.5 FM Radio, WZBB-99.9 FM
- TV Cable 12, TV WDBJ-7 TV WFXR-27 TV WSET-13 TV WSLS-10 TV BTW-21

Social Media

Nearly **60%** of the world's population uses social media now.

Around the world, there are **5.07 billion internet users**, equating to almost **63.5% of the world's population**.

Over the past 12 months, the number of active social media users increased by more than **400 million**, an **addition of 9.9%** for the total number to reach **4.55 billion**.

More than **two-thirds of the world's population** have access to **mobile devices** contributing to **5.29 billion unique mobile users**.

TikTok passed the **1 billion monthly active user** mark at the end of September 2021. It's the **7th** platform to join the exclusive billion-user club of social media platforms.

6 out of every 10 people on the planet have a **social network account**.

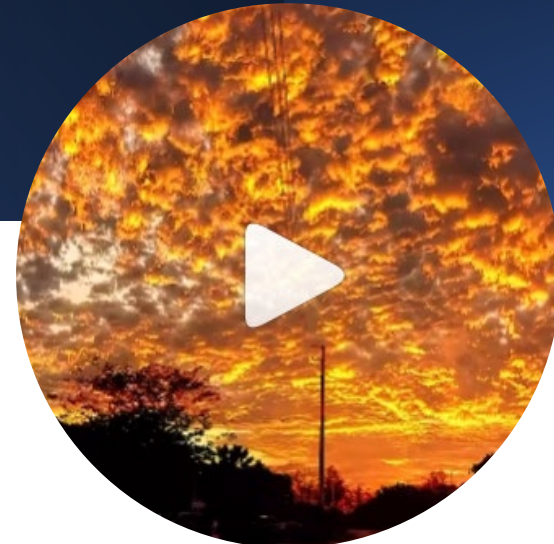
85% of marketers rate short-form videos as the **most effective** type of **social media content**.

Almost **75% of internet users** **research** products on social media.

The average daily usage of social media is **2 hours and 27 minutes**.



Social Media



Which of these photos is the most liked Instagram post of all-time with 75.7 million likes?

Social Media

What Can Social Media do for Elected Officials?

Social media is a communications tool like we've never seen before. It can provide elected officials with a quick, far-reaching, inexpensive and meaningful form of engagement with constituents and citizens.

Traditional media is generally one-way communications while social media allows for two-way conversations in real time.

QUESTION – What are some benefits of using social media to engage constituents and citizens?

- Increased understanding for all participants
- Building Trust
- Making better and more sustainable decisions
- Improving citizen satisfaction

Social Media

Social media also gives elected officials the ability to share information with potentially an unlimited number of followers.

“One of the big challenges facing me and my staff every day is how we can talk to everyone and be responsive about the issues that matter to them. It would be hard to do without social media.” – U.S. Representative Don Beyer (in SCHAR Report)

How will you use this powerful communications tool? How do you want to be perceived on social media?

TIP: Know your county’s policies to ensure you understand the line between government employee, political/elected official, and private citizen.

Social Media

Questions Elected Officials Should Consider Regarding Social Media

Please ask yourself these questions whether you are starting a social media site or have one already existing.

- Have I surveyed my constituents on how they wish to be communicated with?
- Does my area have high-speed internet to support my use of social media?
- Do I use Facebook, or Twitter, or Instagram to communicate with constituents? Are they personal or professional accounts? Do I know the legal implications and pitfalls?
- Does my county have a social media policy?
- Have I assessed whether my social media sites are reaching the full demographics of my jurisdiction?
- Do I have access to legal advice for usage of social media?
- Are social media communications consuming a large part of my time?

Social Media

Options for Elected Officials

- Avoid social media completely
 - Avoids all legal risk
 - Limits communication and openness to the public
- Have an information-only site
 - Limits First Amendment risks
 - Loses some interaction with citizens
- Fully-interactive social media
 - Maximizes benefits and challenges of social media
 - Opens door to First Amendment disputes

Social Media

Using Social Media

Establishing and maintaining a social media presence can be a daunting task if you don't plan. Following these guidelines will help in developing robust and effective social media sites.

- Have a separate social media presence for you as the elected official. For example – do not use your personal Facebook page to communicate with citizens and constituents.
 - Make a clear distinction between your elected official account, campaign account, and personal account
 - Set your personal Facebook, Twitter, Instagram pages to private
 - Everything you do is subject to scrutiny – it's better to keep your private life separate from your public life
 - You can avoid having your personal site becoming subject to public records
- What to DO to keep your personal account from becoming subject to public records
 - Post a disclaimer on your personal account that identifies the account's purpose and that the opinions you express are your own
 - Limit the account content to personal use
 - Understand the use privacy settings to manage the account
 - Know how to respond to or forward county-related comments to the county

Social Media

Using Social Media

- What NOT TO DO to keep your personal account from becoming subject to public records
 - Don't write posts on personal account that would fit within the job scope of your elected office
 - Don't discuss your private account in public meetings or documents
 - Don't link to your private account from an elected official account or your campaign account
 - Avoid using county devices to maintain your private account
- Social media is a brand platform
 - Your name as an elected official page is your brand
 - Once elected you become an entity and not an individual – meaning you represent your community, your county, your constituents, your party

Social Media

Using Social Media

- Keep your content positive
 - It's too easy to harp on everything that's wrong
 - Be different and highlight all the things that are right with your county, your Board, your community
 - Share feel good stories about citizens or a county staffer
 - Share sports success stories or stories that unite the community

Social Media

Using Social Media

TIP: People enjoy positive content. My mother-in-law lives on a farm in Indiana. She often posts political stories and memes. Those posts generate no likes to a couple of likes. She recently posted several photos of the beautiful snowfall on her farm and captioned it, “God paints a beautiful picture this morning in Indiana!” She received more than a dozen likes from her 84 friends.

Media Relations Challenges

Challenge 1



One of your most loyal and longest serving employee has been arrested for the second time for DUI following a wreck. You as the Chair just heard from another Board member. Now the county beat reporter is calling your mobile phone. What do you do?

Media Relations Challenges

Challenge 2



After several weeks of discussions, a deal is struck with Wal-Mart to build a new distribution center in your county's development authority's industrial park. The deal, which would bring 675 new jobs to your community, is close to completion. Wal-Mart has made a requirement that no one find out about their plans until the deal is signed. The deal should be ready in a week. The local media just called you, the Chair, and left a message asking for an interview about a rumor they have heard that Wal-Mart is coming to town. What do you do?

Media Relations Challenges

Challenge 3



A large-scale derecho has struck your county causing extensive damage to property. Downed trees have disrupted power and many of your 75,000 residents are in the dark. There have been reports (but nothing confirmed) that there are some injuries and possible fatalities. Due to the conditions of roads some staff and elected officials are unable to travel to the command center but may be able to work remotely. The forecast for the few days includes more several thunderstorms. Emergency personnel are concerned this could hamper response and recovery. The local media has called asking for an update and some reassurance from county leadership. They would like an immediate response. What do you do?