Checklist of Ideas for Improving Media Relations

1. Know the local newspaper, radio and television news personnel.

2. Keep a list of reporters with their newspaper, television and radio affiliations and their specialties.

3. Prepare glossary of frequently used legal terms and distribute to local reporters.

4. Schedule regular meetings with local reporters.

5. Suggest to local newspapers that they assign a reporter to "cover" the bar on a continuing basis.

6. Provide editors and reporters with a list of member "experts" (and phone numbers) who would be available to explain complex legal matters, to comment on a news story, or to act as sounding boards before a story is published to assure accuracy.

7. Learn your media deadlines and respect them.

8. Return reporters' phone calls.

9. Create a Bar-Media Committee.

10. Sponsor legal seminars for the media when complex major legal issues surface in the news.

11. Schedule lunchtime "backgrounders" to discuss at some length with reporters a particular legal issue, "off the record."

12. Consider all the options, in addition to news coverage, that media outlets offer: public service announcements, calender items, personal opinion messages and interview programs (television and radio); letters to the editor, op-ed pieces, consumer and question and answer column (newspapers).

EIGHT MEDIA INTERVIEW TIPS

1. **HAVE A MAIN POINT AND USE IT UP FRONT.** In your preparation, develop one main point, what Mort Enright, a public relations consultant calls a "SOCO--a Single Overriding Communication Objective." Rehearse it; refine it; and use it up front--in answer to the first question, if possible. Later, use your SOCO again in response to another relevant question. Use it again at the end in reply to "is there anything else you want to say?"

2. **KEEP IT SIMPLE.** Remember that a tape editor may select a 10-second piece of tape for a news show. While you should avoid stark "yes" or "no" answers, don't make a two-minute speech. Thirty-seconds or less should do for most replies. Avoid case names and legal jargon. Never use Latin. Most people relate better to examples than statistics.

3. **REMEMBER THE <u>REAL</u> AUDIENCE.** Be responsive to an interviewer's question, even a hostile one, but don't show anger. The real audience out there--viewers, readers, listeners--will be watching your reaction to the question (the camera may be on you while the interviewer is asking the question) as well as your answer. Get the real audience on your side. There are more non-lawyers in the world than lawyers. That's your audience.

4. **DON'T REPEAT NEGATIVES USED IN A QUESTION.** Here's some sample dialogue from a half hour radio or TV interview:

Q. (Interview)	"Aren't most lawyers crooks?"
A. (Bar President)	"Of course most lawyers aren't crooks. Most are honest."

On a slow news day what goes on the air may be:

Anchor:	"Earlier today, on WIMP's 'Issue and Excuses' show, we asked the president of this city's bar association what he thought about honesty in the legal profession."
Tape clip:	"Most lawyers aren't crooks."
Anchor:	"And now the weather."

Of course, that example is exaggerated. Media people are 'pros'; their job is to inform, no to embarrass or trip you up. But, remember the Grim Clipper who will be editing what you say. Build the record with a series of concise, positive 10-30 second "bits" of tape. Make the tape editor's job easier by labeling or <u>highlighting</u> key responses. Let's say the subject is judicial pay raises and your SOCO is the need to keep qualified judges on the bench:

Q. (Interviewer):	Judges here make about $40,000 a year. That's a lot of

money, isn't it?

A. (Bar President): When you take inflation into consideration, judges here are making less than they did four years ago. But I think the important point for the public is that we keep the experience, qualified judges we have.

5. **BODIES, BANGLES AND BEADS.** Avoid sharply contrasting colors and patterns. Avoid white shirts or dresses; clanging, jingling jewelry: or sharply contrasting stripes or patterns. Don't handle the mike during an interview and wait for a technician to remove it at the end. Maintain eye contact. Assume you are "on" all the time.

6. **NO "NO COMMENT"** Sometimes you can't comment. But never give a stark " no comment." Explain, in terms the real audience will understand, why it is that you can't comment: attorney-client privilege, trade secret, before the courts, etc. If you don't know, say "I don't know."

7. **LOADED QUESTIONS.** If you are not comfortable with the way a question is worded, recast it. (See 4 above.) Be alert for questions that ask you to comment on the motives of others, especially those not there; A or B questions (e.g. "Is it the lawyers or judges who cause court delay?"); rankings ("What are the two best...worst...?") etc.

8. **PREPARE.** Media appearances are one way you fill your key role as bar spokesperson and thus help shape the image of the profession. Prepare for them. As time permits, go over the issue(s) at hand with your bar executive, if you are lucky enough to have one, your president-elect, member(s) of the Executive Committee, or the chairperson of the Public Relations Committee. Draw up lists of likely questions and appropriate answers. If you are to appear on a weekly interview show, watch the shows broadcast prior to your appearance. Learn from the Washington "pros" on "Meet the Press," " MacNeil/Lehrer Report," etc. Don't expect that all the questions will be on the selected subject, especially if a big legal news story breaks in the interim. Be sure to read the papers and catch the news shows right up to interview time.

The Broadcast Interview - Special Considerations

TV News Shows

News show interviews are of a very short duration. For this reason, you will want to get your communications objectives across to the news audience in a minimum of well-chosen words. Anticipate the questions you may be asked. Then picture your reply in the form of a newspaper headline. Try to answer news show interview questions completely in one sentence. In other words, each reply should be a self-contained message, independent of any prior statement or of any comment which may follow.

The reason is two-fold. If your interview is being broadcast live, this approach will make achieving brevity much easier. If the interview is taped, the context of your message will not be

lost when the tape is cut and edited.

Radio News Show

Unlike television, where the viewer in influenced by sight and sound as well as message, radio depends only on audio to create mental images for its listeners. Delivery is extremely important when doing radio interviews. The listener cannot see your expression, gestures or visual aids, so you must rely totally on your tone of voice to emphasize key points in answering the host's questions.

Audience participation on many radio shows involves telephone call-in questions. One way to make this kind of broadcast run smoothly is to not let the caller "bully" you into giving specific advice on the telephone. Do not allow yourself to be baited into inadvertently criticizing another member of your profession. Given the anonymity in which the public can express themselves on the radio call-in shows, listeners frequently become overly aggressive and make charges they would not make in a personal confrontation.