

Pivot Point

How to get good information
from interviews and
transform it into good content

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The interview

- What is an interview?
- Is it a big deal?
- Who are professional interviewers? What can we learn from them?
- Why do we do them? What are you producing? Who is your audience?

The interview

- What is an interview?

CONVERSATION

- Is it a big deal?



The interview

- Who are professional interviewers? What can we learn from them?
 - Journalists
 - Medical workers
 - Police/legal workers
 - Tech writers!
- Who is your audience?
 - Consumers
 - Expert end users
 - Non-expert end users

Elements of the interview

- Getting the interview
- Preparation
- Process
- Questions

Getting the interview

- Persuading the outrageously busy or reluctant
 - Getting through the minders
 - Finding the unknown source
- Asking for low-risk conversation
- Ongoing, regular relationship
- Assigned
(They may have to talk with you, but they don't have to talk well, or to make it easy for you.)

Getting the interview

- Source unknown
 - Ask third parties
 - Industry experts
- Too many minders
 - Reason for protection
 - Conflicting business goals/messages
- Reluctant
 - Conflicting business goals/messages
 - Fear of unknown
 - Once burned
 - Lone ranger

Getting the interview

Persuading the outrageously busy or reluctant

- Get introduction from trusted third party—put name in subject line of email
- Ask, not for An Interview, but to talk with them
- Sell your interest, expertise, reputation with audience
- Sell your audience—who will see the piece?
- Reduce uncertainty—walk them through the process
- Prime the pump—ask more than once
- Build a relationship—show interest when you *don't* need something from them

Preparation

- Do your homework
 - Background reading
 - Conversations with third parties—more interviews!
 - Seeing the environment/process/machinery in action
- Ask for the demo in advance
 - Arrive in time to observe the process
 - Appropriate gear/apparel
- Sketch out questions
 - What *must* you have answered?
 - Must you get everything in one session, or will you be able to follow up?

Preparation

- When there's no background
 - System requirements, software design docs
 - The Web
 - Third parties—who assigned the interview?

Process

- Reduce/eliminate distractions
- Walk them through, especially if they are not a paid talker
- Record—full disclosure
- Take notes
 - In case the recorder fails
 - To highlight places to listen back
- Begin with full name, spelling, title, topic
- Start with less challenging material to establish rhythm and rapport

Process

- Paid talkers
 - Should you be in the know? Play dumb? (Dick Cavett vs. Terry Gross)
 - Challenge assertions or go along and fact-check later?
 - When is it wise to go off-topic or in an unanticipated direction?

We're finally there!

- What is an interview?

CONVERSATION

- What did Mom tell you about making conversation?

LISTEN

- Really listening will lead you to better

QUESTIONS

ASK QUESTIONS!!

Questions

- One at a time—subject won't remember both parts of a two-part question, so you'll lose at least one part
- Brief—short questions and statements better mimic conversation
- Prime the pump—ask more than once, from more than one angle
- Be willing to go out of order— balance need for order with conversational flow or unexpected opportunity
- Active listening—feed back their responses to elicit confirmation and elaboration

Questions

- Specific questions
 - Avoid yes/no, either/or questions
 - “What” and “when” questions get short answers
 - “Why” and “how” questions get long answers
 - Examples—get them to tell you a story
 - Demonstration—encourage them to narrate
 - Trusty follow-ups
 - Why?
 - How does that work?
 - And then?
 - What happens next?
 - Is there anything else you’d like to add? (Doorknob phenomenon)

Difficult subjects

- Unwilling/belligerent
 - Personal chemistry
 - Business conflict
- Passive-aggressive—gives you useless material
- Distracted
- Nervous
- Heavy accent/language skills
- Knowledge gap

Pivot

Turn your interview(s) into the final product

- Organize your material
 - Review notes
 - Transcribe recordings
 - Flag holes, contradictions, weak or confusing spots
 - Begin building follow-up requests

Pivot

- What are you writing?
 - Help desk
 - Documentation
 - Proposal
 - Marketing
- Lead with story or surprise
 - Don't be slave to chronology
 - Go back to source(s) as often as needed for clarity
 - Review draft with source(s)
 - Review copy with past users, lay people—new perspective

More like this

- Beyond Rubies, Kirkwood Community College
Friday, March 16
 - Conveying Your Message—Clearly, Cleanly, Effectively
 - Just Enough SEO
- Kirkwood Continuing Education
 - Writing for the Web—March 26
 - Crafting Effective Email—April 9
 - Tailoring Your Message for the Channel—April 23

Pivot Point

More questions?

Thank you!

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