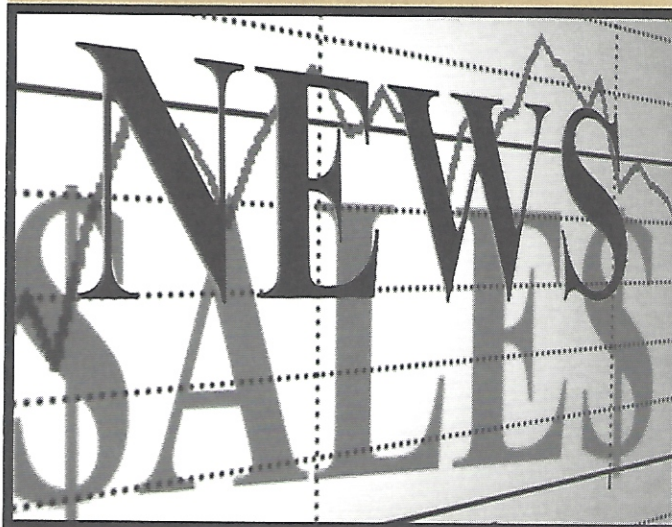


# News and Sales:



A joint project of



Committee of Concerned Journalists

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## Clarifying the Relationship

# News and Sales: Clarifying the Relationship

To attract both viewers and advertisers, television news must be credible. Protecting the integrity of the news product has become increasingly challenging, however, as stations seek new revenue sources in difficult economic times. Good journalism and a station's economic goals can sometimes conflict. But stations risk damaging the foundation of their business if they produce or avoid news stories to please sponsors, or solicit or place advertising in a way that weakens the integrity of their news operation. With that in mind, a group of news and station executives developed these ideas for helping news and sales managers deal with the pressures they face.

## Overview

The following general principles should serve as the basis for all decisions affecting news and sales:

1. News content should be determined solely through editorial judgment.
2. News sponsors should not dictate or influence news content.
3. News content should be clearly distinguishable from advertising content.

## Guidelines

Written guidelines help to manage the relationship between news and sales. Managers must decide—and then clearly articulate to the newsroom, sales department, and sponsors—what is and what is not for sale. In past instances, people have been fired and companies have been subjected to national embarrassment because specific guidelines were not in place or not properly communicated. Among other issues, guidelines should clarify:

- What is content and what content can be sponsored.
- Whether newscasts in different day parts or on different days of the week are subject to different rules and if so why.

- Whether the news department will create content specifically as a vehicle for advertising and if so under what terms.
- How news and sales people communicate, especially about story ideas or sales suggestions.
- Who must see and approve sponsorship proposals.

## Useful Questions for All Situations

To develop guidelines and to work through most situations involving news and sales, answering these four basic questions will help:

1. What are the short-term and long-term consequences of making or not making this sale or arrangement?
2. What will viewers think when they see this on the air?  
For example: Could this sponsorship influence or appear to influence the content of the story in any way? Could this sponsorship affect the station's brand, image or reputation?
3. How will you explain this decision to viewers, critics and station personnel, and are there any details you would be uncomfortable making public?
4. Should this arrangement be in writing?

## Useful Questions for Specific Cases

In addition to the questions listed earlier for developing guidelines, the following questions may be helpful when deciding specific cases:

### Story or franchise sponsorships:

- ✓ What are we selling with this sponsorship?
- ✓ Will the sponsor provide or expect to provide experts on this topic, exclusive or otherwise?
- ✓ Does it make a difference if the idea for the franchise or story came from the newsroom, the station sales office or the advertiser?

### Station campaigns and partnerships:

- ✓ Will you co-sponsor an event or activity with just one sponsor?
- ✓ Will you handle campaigns differently if the outside sponsor is non-commercial?
- ✓ Will the partner provide or expect to provide experts or guests, exclusive or otherwise?
- ✓ What role will news personnel play in the event or activity? (For example, will they endorse or appear to endorse any products or services and what effect will that have on their ability to report on this topic or sponsor?)
- ✓ How will you respond to requests for news coverage of an event the station is co-sponsoring?

### Billboards and logos:

- ✓ Where in the newscast will you place billboards? How often can they run?
- ✓ Where in the newscast and where on screen will you place sponsor logos? (For example, will you allow sponsor logos to appear over news content?)
- ✓ Will sponsors be able to brand or title

elements of your newscast? (For example, the XYZ Doppler Radar.)

- ✓ Will sponsor logos or billboards also include audio mentions, and if so, by whom?

### Coverage of a sponsor:

- ✓ How and when will the newsroom inform other station management that a story about an advertiser is in the works?
- ✓ How and when will the newsroom inform co-owned stations about a story involving one of their advertisers?
- ✓ Who will respond to questions from the advertiser?

### News personnel:

- ✓ What can news personnel do on your air, outside of news programming?
- ✓ What can news personnel do for air on other stations?
- ✓ What can news personnel do off the air? (For example, appearances, speeches or endorsements.)
- ✓ What can news personnel do for pay and what can or should they do pro bono?

### Outside experts:

- ✓ Will you disclose the expert's associations on the air? How, and how often? If not, why not?
- ✓ Can an expert sponsor his or her own on-air appearances?
- ✓ What product or company endorsements or mentions, if any, will be allowed during the expert's on-air appearances?
- ✓ What will the expert be allowed to do outside of on-air appearances?

### Online/new media issues:

- ✓ Do the same guidelines applied to broadcast content apply to online content and sponsorships?
- ✓ Can the user clearly tell the difference between news and other content online?

- ✓ Who owns and who benefits from any database created by online sign-ups?
- ✓ What are the privacy rules on your Web site and how do they apply to sponsor information?
- ✓ Do you disclose these rules? Why or why not?

## Management

The general manager should be directly involved in developing station guidelines, and ultimately is responsible for ensuring that sales proposals do not “cross the line” and jeopardize the station’s integrity.

- The general manager should personally review any sales or promotional agreements that could affect the credibility of the newsroom or its employees, or the station’s image.
- The general manager should be the final arbiter of disputes involving news and sales.

## Communication

Everyone in the station has a stake in the credibility of the news and the success of the business. Stations can foster understanding between news and sales employees in various ways. Here are some examples:

- General managers can bring all department heads together to watch and discuss newscasts.
- The news director can speak to groups of clients to explain in general how and why editorial decisions are made.
- News managers can hold periodic meetings for sales personnel, trainees and others to explain the newsgathering process.

**We hope you find these suggestions helpful. If you put them to use, or if you have any questions, please contact NewsLab or CCJ.**

## People Who Helped Develop These Ideas

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