

Media Corrections – When to Ask

Has a journalist, blogger or media outlet reported incorrectly about you, your business or your firm? Perhaps a quote was misconstrued, a name misspelled or a situation described incorrectly. Sometimes mistakes are minor, but other times, they could have serious implications. What should you do?

Maintaining your relationships with reporters

Keep in mind that reporters are humans and mistakes happen, especially in the age of 24/7 news coverage. It is hard to receive criticism, so knowing when and how to ask a journalist for a correction is key to maintaining an ongoing relationship. First and foremost, be careful about assigning blame – be sure the error was the reporter's fault. Reporters and editors typically verify and double-check details, so it's possible wrong information was provided. The error also could have occurred in the copyediting phase, especially with more and more publications outsourcing that process and even doing without proofreading altogether.



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Is your correction justified?

You may not like the way your quote reads in the context of the article, how your firm or company is portrayed, or the tone of the article, but it's only appropriate to ask for a correction when there are factual errors. A reporter's credibility is on the line and they appreciate knowing about mistakes, especially in instances of misspellings, incorrect titles, wrong descriptions, statistical errors, etc. In fact, publications such as the *New York Times* have systems in place to handle corrections. For online articles and blog postings, it is generally easy to correct errors real time.

Mind those manners

When asking for a correction, the reporter or editor may feel embarrassed, so **be polite and gracious**. Digging into, lecturing or insulting the reporter isn't the best course of action. Keep your emotions in check while politely pointing out the inaccuracy, giving the reporter the right information and asking them to run a correction.

New York Times reporter Lela Moore wrote an entire article on the *New York Times 2018 corrections*, saying that "... it's embarrassing to err so publicly, and having to correct any of our journalism is regrettable. But some of the corrections we ran in 2018 not only set the record straight, they also did so while affording our readers the pleasure of schadenfreude at our expense."

Correction vs. retraction

Sometimes these terms get mixed up. A retraction is an admission that a reporter or media outlet got the story completely wrong. A correction is a factual error to set right an inaccuracy that did not take away from the main point of an article.

One of the most widely followed recent corrections came from the *Washington Post* after its coverage of Native American activist Nathan Phillips and the student group from Covington Catholic High School in Kentucky. *Per the Post*:

“Subsequent reporting, a student’s statement and additional video allow for a more complete assessment of what occurred, either contradicting or failing to confirm accounts provided in that story – including that Native American activist Nathan Phillips was prevented by one student from moving on, that his group had been taunted by the students in the lead-up to the encounter, and that the students were trying to instigate a conflict.”

Don’t be afraid to point out an inaccuracy. You do want stories about your firm to be accurately reported, but a key part of public relations is *creating and nurturing relationships with the press*. A heavy-handed approach, such as *demanding* corrections, could set back a relationship and do more long-term harm to your public relations efforts than the short-term damage caused by a factual error in an article.

Faced with an awkward media situation? Contact me at laltman@jaffepr.com.