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Insights



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Burke Allen
Media Marketing Expert



Burke Allen

brings over two decades of entertainment business experience as a radio and TV host, writer, top rated morning show personality, radio station owner, national booking agent, broadcast consultant, and educator to his role as CEO and President of Allen Media Strategies, a full service media marketing consultation and strategy firm located in Washington, D.C., which was launched in 2003.

The firm currently works with national entertainers, best-selling authors, and media personalities on their individual strategic goals. Burke's varied broadcast background includes stints with top radio stations at companies including CBS Radio AM and FM, Bonneville Broadcasting, and many others. He has been involved in stations and markets including Washington, D.C.; Miami and Orlando, Florida; Huntington and Charleston, West Virginia; Savannah, Georgia; Roanoke, Virginia; Salt Lake City, Utah; Las Vegas, Nevada; and Sioux Falls, South Dakota with many impressive number one finishes along the way.

Burke's numerous industry awards and achievements include *Billboard Airplay Monitor* magazine's Program Director of the Year and Pop Music Survey Music Director of the year honors. Burke's stint as a number one ranked morning talent has given him a unique perspective on coaching high profile on-air talent.

In addition to his work with Allen Media Strategies, Burke is currently a tenured faculty member at the Connecticut School of Broadcasting, Arlington, Virginia campus. He also does some special radio projects with international broadcast consultants Alan Burns & Associates, and does occasional voiceover work for domestic clients.

In 2004, Allen's book, *Becoming Semi Famous*, was released, and his writing appears regularly in industry publications including *Radio and*

Records and All Access. Burke is also a sought-after public speaker on media and marketing strategies.

Burke's extensive background in the music business includes roles as a national booking agent, club owner, concert promoter, and artist manager. He has overseen and organized dozens of successful concert events with national headliner talent, from small club shows to festivals for over 50,000 people. In the past two decades, he has worked closely with some of the biggest names in entertainment, and Burke's passion is helping performers to realize their goals through innovative media marketing techniques.

I: What took you from behind the mic as a broadcaster to working with others in media marketing and PR?

BA: It all began after I spent many years as an on-air talent. I really enjoyed that; it's a really fun occupation.

I found a lot of satisfaction in helping other people achieve their dreams to be on the air, whether it was early in my broadcast career as a program director at radio stations when we would have a young person who was just dying for their first chance to crack the mic, or later on in my career when we began to help authors get on national television as guest experts on CNN, Fox News, or MSNBC. I found real satisfaction in helping other people achieve their media dreams.

I: What are the chief benefits of doing PR versus traditional advertising?

BA: I believe there's a great place for both traditional advertising and for public relations, so I would never steer someone away from buying advertising if it's within their budget to do so. But in order to cut through today's really cluttered media landscape, you have to have a sizable marketing and advertising budget. For many entrepreneurs, you just can't compete dollar-for-dollar with companies like McDonalds, Geico, Progressive, etc. Those companies spend millions upon millions of dollars on an annual basis on their advertising messages.

A way to level the playing field is through clever, creative PR. We help turn our clients into experts in their field so that they are able to comment on television, on radio, in print, and online as an expert. Not only is the opportunity to be on TV, on radio, in print, and online free—which is phenomenal—but it also provides an opportunity to transition from being in the advertisement world to being in the editorial world.

Research has shown that the stickiness of your message is so much higher if you're imbedded in the content of the show—if you're part of the program as opposed to being part of the advertising block.

After many years of commercial broadcasting, we're all accustomed to tune away during commercials. That's the time when you go to the bathroom or get the popcorn. If you're driving around in the car listening to the radio and the commercials come on, an awful lot of people tune away to find their favorite song or another interview or talk segment on another station.

Because people are accustomed to steering away from advertisements, if we can find a way to imbed you in the show itself, in the content, then people will retain your message much more.

I: How important is media training in order to be able to do PR for yourself or for your company?

BA: I think it's very important. One of the things that separates Allen Media Strategies from a traditional PR firm is that we spend an awful lot of time making sure our clients are seaworthy—that they're ready to get their fifteen minutes of fame, if you will. Before the camera comes in for that close-up, you need to know the tricks of the trade. It's all very learnable; anyone can do it, you just need to know what to do.

For example, if you're going to do a television interview, and you've never done one before, you need to have the lay of the land beforehand. You need to know which camera to look at, and you also need

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to be aware of little mechanical things, such as not rocking back and forth in your chair while you're on camera because it distracts from what you have to say. You don't want to wear stripes or loud patterns that cause people to be looking at your outfit rather than focusing on the message you're trying to communicate.

You also need to know the tricks of the trade when it comes to radio. For example, if you're doing a telephone radio interview, disable your call waiting or, if you're doing the interview from home, make sure you're not interrupted by your kids, your dog, or the doorbell. The training portion of what we do is really valuable in helping our clients get their message across.

I: I keep hearing that there's no such thing as bad publicity, or that all publicity is good. Is that true?



BA: If they spell my name right, for the most part, I'm very happy. I will tell you that PR is an inexact science. That's one of the big differences between advertising and PR.

In advertising you have 100% control of your message because you're buying that time. If your infomercial is on TV, for example, you can say whatever you want to say because you paid for that airtime.

When you're doing public relations media and marketing, you need to hedge your bets as much as you can to try to maintain control of your message, and a lot of that is learned in media training.

You most certainly don't want to be misquoted on the air or in the newspaper if you can help it. You want to do everything you can to position yourself in as good a light as you possibly can. There are lots of examples of people who don't have proper media training, or who choose to ignore their media training, and they come up really short on the air, and it hurts them.

I'll give you an example from where I'm based here in Washington, D.C. There was a famous trial here several years ago for the murder of a young Washington intern named Chandra Levy. She had been interning for California Congressman Gary Condit and was killed, and the congressman was implicated in that murder.

He was interviewed by Connie Chung on national television. He was very evasive and dodged her questions and simply said, "No comment," while looking away—he just looked guilty. The truth was that the congressman had nothing to do with Levy's disappearance, and several years later the DNA evidence proved that to be the case. The real murderer was identified, but it ended congressman Condit's career because he didn't have the wherewithal to be able to manage himself and his message on television in that time of crisis.

You never know when that kind of thing might happen, so you need to be prepared to hedge your bets as much as you can against bad publicity. You will be misquoted. That's going to happen, especially in print journalism and online interviews. It's not going to come out exactly the way you want it to be, and now, with editing capabilities for audio and video, your message can be edited in a way that makes it *seem* as though you said something in a certain way. Knowing that going in, you want to make sure that you come across in the best possible light so that it's much more difficult to be thrown under the bus.

I: What's the number one thing that someone would need to have in order to get free publicity?

BA: The number one thing is to have a **unique** and **compelling** message. Those two words go hand in hand when it comes to free publicity.

You need to be able to say something that's unique from all of the other voices out there. There are hundreds of people who comment regularly on the state of the economy. What do *you* have to say

that's a little different than the rest of the pack? How can you set yourself apart from every other financial pundit out there? Is it your message? Is it the way you deliver your message? Is it your look? Is it your sound? What's your sound bite that sets you apart?

That's the unique piece, but the other piece is that you really have to be compelling. You have to find a way to compel the user on the other end—whether they're watching you, listening to you, or reading about you—to take action on what you have to say.

Of course, you can be too unique and niche yourself completely out of the audience. There's a very fine line where your uniqueness needs to set you apart, but you don't want it to niche you down so tightly that you've alienated 99.9% of your potential audience.

The number one thing is to be unique and compelling, and a great way to do that is to look for opportunities and trends that are already making news and piggyback on those. Look for ways to comment on or incorporate those trends into your message.

By commenting on major current events, you will exponentially increase your chances of free media coverage, because so much national, regional, and local airtime and print space is being taken up by those stories. It may not always be possible, but if there's a way to tie yourself into one of the hot stories or trends that are already making news, that will certainly help you.

I: Do you recommend your clients utilize television, radio, print, or online avenues for PR exposure?

BA: We don't steer our clients towards one as opposed to the other. People consume media today more than ever in varying modalities. Sometimes it breaks down along age ranges and sometimes it breaks down along socioeconomic lines, but if you can tap into all of those avenues in varying degrees of success, then you increase your chances of making an impression.

For example, if you wanted to reach people today, and the only way that you have ever done that in your business thus far has been by advertising in the yellow pages, I would say you're going to be in real trouble very soon, because research shows that very few people under the age of fifty ever open the yellow pages. They look for that sort of information online.

You've got to look for other opportunities. If you can have a robust online presence, if you can continue to pay attention to newspapers to target the fifty-five and older age demographic (and it's a very upscale demographic that still reads the newspaper), if you can be aware of and in front of your local and national television cameras, and if you can make yourself readily available to radio—which is the most mobile of all of these mediums because you can access it from anywhere using your cell phone—then you'll increase your chances of being able to get free media exposure. I say try them all.

I: What's the chief advantage to advertising versus PR in terms of message delivery?

BA: The number one advantage to purchasing advertising is the opportunity to have 100% control over your content, your message, and your branding. When an advertiser purchases a 30- to 60-second commercial block, they control everything from the voice actors who are used, to the music beds that are behind them, to the exact wording of the script and sound effects. So, from A to Z, you have 100% control of that message, and there is a real advantage to that.

You can very strategically place your advertising in certain target markets. It's easier to track the effectiveness of paid advertising because you know specifically what markets those spots ran in and how often they ran.

I think that's the number one advantage to paid advertising if you have the budget for it, and by all means, advertising is still a very important part of your media mix.



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I: You coach your clients to do media interviews based on a strategy called “redirects.” Can you explain this strategy?

BA: I’m based in Washington, D.C. around all of these political folks. We have people on Capitol Hill who are all about the redirect, and you’ve witnessed it whenever you’ve watched a politician dodge and bob and weave like a great heavyweight boxer in order to evade questions from reporters.

A redirect is something that all politicians are coached on by their media professionals. Anyone can use this technique. It works by using certain phrases and bridging language to redirect the line of questioning.

For example, if an interviewer asks you a question that you don’t know the answer to, you certainly don’t want to back yourself in a corner by trying to answer questions that you are not qualified to answer. Instead, respond by saying, “I don’t know about that, but what I do know is . . .” and that redirects the conversation back to your comfort area—to your level of expertise.

Redirecting or bridging language is also useful if someone brings up a topic you don’t want to talk about. In this case you say, “Well, the real issue here is . . .” If you incorporate that sort of bridging language in the conversation very subtly, it will appear seamless, and most reporters and interviewers will just let it go. It’s a great technique.

I: When you talk to TV and radio interviewers, what do they tell you they want in a guest?

BA: They want energy. They want topic knowledge, certainly, so if you pitch yourself, or if your media or PR firm pitches you, you need to know what you’re talking about. But really, at the end of the day, they’re looking for that energy that will compel a television viewer or a radio listener to stop changing the channel and stay there for the bulk of that interview.

That’s one of the reasons why the Fox News channel is beating CNN and MSNBC. It doesn’t have so much to do with political leanings as it has to do with the entertainment value that channel brings to their guests and ultimately to their viewers. They spend a lot of time on things like graphics that pop, whiz, spin, and are colorful, and they have hosts who are very aggressive and in your face.

We’ve had clients who have appeared with Bill O’Reilly on *The O’Reilly Factor* and with Glenn Beck, and there’s a reason why Glenn Beck cries on camera and why O’Reilly pounds on his counter and leans into the camera—you stop when you see that as you’re changing channels to see what people are so worked up about. These producers want that from their guests too.

They don’t want you to be professorial, they want you to be engaged and animated about your subject. If you’re an expert on privatized armies and an interviewer asks, “How do you feel about privatized armies?” and you give them a very milk toast answer by saying, “Oh, I don’t think there’s a real problem there,” that’s not very compelling for the listener or the viewer. You need to be charged up and energized about whatever your point of view is. If, in your opinion, there’s a great injustice taking place in the world, then you need to be passionate about correcting that injustice when you’re on the air.

Tips for How to Prepare for an Interview

Research the media outlet. This is the number one thing we coach our clients to do before they go on the air. It’s so much easier now than it was ten years ago because so much radio, television, and print journalism is available online. If you get booked to do Carson Daily’s morning show, which is a Top 40 station in Los Angeles, go online and find out what Carson’s delivery is like. Who is his target audience? You can pick that up by listening to the show.

Make sure you fit with the program. Are you a good fit for the program? Do a little background research on the host so that you can work in some points of commonality with them to make them feel comfortable. Where did the host grow up? What do they like to do for a living? Look for ways to

work those things in.

Do your homework and be prepared before you go on the air. Find out how long the segment is going to be. Will it be three minutes like on *The Today Show* or *Good Morning America*, or is it going to be a longer media interview, like on *Charlie Rose*? That will tell you how to frame up the answers to your questions.

Practice. Do some mock interviews off the air. Have a friend, neighbor, or family member interview you so that you can work on your responses. Rehearse it and play it out a little bit.

When great musicians go on tour, they go into a rehearsal hall and practice for a month or six weeks before they ever do their first concert. It's the same concept when you're going to do media interviews. You need to be ready for what's going to come and be able to approximate that off the air as well as you can, so that you can do as well as you can when you're actually on the air.

I: What is your definition of success as it relates to media?

BA: It's all about whether I got my message across in a clear, concise manner that will allow the consumer an easy opportunity to act on that information. For example, we work with a lot of authors—some best-selling *New York Times* authors and even some self-published authors—and many times when they do media interviews, their end goal is to have the viewer, the listener, or the reader visit their Web site to find out more about them. Success in this case is based on whether your message pointed people in the direction you wanted it to.

Are you on air to help a cause such as a charity? The goal in those interviews then is to drive traffic to that charity. Make sure you've got clear, concise messaging, and you'll succeed with the media.

I think it should be a lot of fun. There's no harm in being picked up by a Lincoln Town Car and being taken to a television station to get pampered in the makeup and hair chair so that you look your best on national TV, or doing a radio interview in your bathrobe and being heard by four million people who have no idea that you're in your bathrobe. Make it sound like you have your finest pearls and your Calvin Kleins on. Have a great time doing it. It really is and should be a lot of fun.

I: What is your most powerful moment of success or life change?

BA: I'm a very family-oriented guy. The day I watched my wife walk down the aisle of that church as the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen, being there on the morning of March 5, 2005 when my youngest son was born and seeing him come into the world and wrap his little fingers around my big finger in the first 30 seconds of life—those are the things that no camera, no microphone, can ever replicate.

I: Do you mind sharing your Web site so people can find you and get some more information?

BA: If any of your readers need to sort of talk it out and make sure that their message is on point, we are happy to offer a free, no obligation consultation. Visit us at www.allenmediastrategies.com and mention that you read about us in *Insights*. We're in metro Washington, D.C. You can come by the office and visit with us, or call us at (703) 589-8960 and I or one of my media booking specialists will be happy to talk with you.



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