



We Need to Tell a Better Story



If you've never been interviewed for a newspaper article, consider yourself lucky, as, far too often, you'll merely have avoided the experience of being deeply disappointed in seeing your words twisted into something that is nothing close to what you said. It's one of the main reasons local governments and elected officials issue very carefully worded press releases in an attempt to ensure their message is not twisted beyond recognition.

Two recent examples illustrate how a newspaper article can create issues in a community when none existed before it was printed.

A story last week in the Williams Lake Tribune about a Ministry of Forests update to the Cariboo Regional District Board on the status of their annual allowable cut quoted me as making the claim that there has been overharvesting of green timber in the Quesnel area and the provincial government has done nothing to address this. What I actually referenced was a well-documented case of overharvesting green timber in the Morice Timber Supply Area (around Houston) and the government's publicly reported failure to respond to this in an appropriate manner. For reasons that should be self-evident, I've asked for and will get a correction to that story.

The second example isn't as simple to get corrected: the recent story in the Province newspaper that characterized Quesnel as a crime-ridden community in the midst of an economic apocalypse. Worse yet, the article gave the impression that this was my view of Quesnel, and now some people are angry and upset about their Mayor's apparent negative attitude toward our community.

The reality is that a reporter from the Province called me about our re-branding initiative, which he'd seen on BC Bid, after having done some Internet research on Quesnel. Based on what the Internet informed him about our City he questioned me about our crime statistics, the Canfor mill closure, the recent reduction in our population, school closures, and a host of other "news-worthy" stories the Internet had provided him with. I tried to correct the impression he'd formed about Quesnel and spoke about our affordability, our green spaces and trail systems, our active community, and all the initiatives Council was undertaking to ensure Quesnel remains vibrant and resilient through this transition period.

Unfortunately, we don't get to proofread these "news" stories before they're printed; the reporter always gets the final word and gets to frame the story the way they see fit. That's why politicians are becoming more and more reluctant to do open-ended interviews.

However, the Province article also clearly illustrates why we need to reposition our City on the Internet and why we must take more direct and deliberate steps to tell a better story about our beautiful community. By strengthening our communications about Quesnel through the deliberate rebranding exercise we're now engaged in, we will proactively present potential visitors, residents, and investors with our better story. By repositioning our City on the Internet and social media, we will also be making our better story more readily available to any reporters conducting background research on our community.

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