

## 20 TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL PSAs

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*The following questions and responses were developed in response to a reporter from a leading public relations trade magazine who asked us to develop a list of ten do's and don'ts for PSAs.*

### Q: What Are 10 Dos for PSAs?

1. **Research**, research, research. Do pre-campaign research on your audience, their interests and motivations; do research among the media to determine their wants and needs, and do on-going research to determine if you are meeting your campaign objectives. Include your distributor and/or evaluator in pre-campaign planning sessions because they should be able to share tips and trend data on what works to maximize effectiveness.

2. **Develop a strategic plan** which outlines in detail what you intend to accomplish via your campaign, the tactics you intend to employ to accomplish your goals; set realistic budgets and plan for optimal timing in terms of implementation.

3. **Hire a team with experience in producing PSAs** to create your campaign. Public service advertising is very different from commercial advertising and your producer must understand the subtle and overt differences in positioning your issue or cause for maximum media acceptance.

4. Budget permitting, **produce a campaign that is multi-media in scope** to use the different strengths that each type of media can provide. For example, broadcast TV is the best overall medium for reach, while radio and newspapers allow you to target specific demographic groups.

5. **Offer maximum flexibility in terms of formats, sizes and lengths.** This means sending the media what they want, including different spot lengths (a broad mixture as well as live and pre-recorded messages for radio) and print ads in different sizes. If you don't know the requirements, ask your distributor.



6. **Produce minority materials.** Remember our society is increasingly more culturally diverse, and that Hispanic outlets prefer Spanish language material, while it is best to create PSAs with some African American representation.

7. **Keep the message simple, clear and concise; offer a call to action** such as accessing your website, or call a phone number. If you use these techniques, plan to have an appropriate amount of literature available and test every aspect of your fulfillment system before you release your campaign. This means checking every aspect of your website to make sure everything works, calling the toll-free phone number, evaluating the efficiency of the operators, and testing the length of time it takes to get literature. Also remember to send samples of your literature to the media, to involve them in your campaign.



8. In the new era of digital distribution, there are only a few collateral pieces required, especially for TV, which including a storyboard, a newsletter selling the virtues of your campaign to the media, and Traffic Instructions.

9. **Develop a solid distribution plan** and a rationale for media selection that is based upon previous PSA usage patterns of all the media that are included in your plan. Think about key markets where your problem or issue needs exposure and include those media that reach your target audience. A good distributor should be able to develop a plan that takes all three of these objectives into consideration.

10. Find ways to **involve the media in your campaign** including participation in special community events, local tagging of PSAs, personalized letters to gatekeepers, and other forms of station participation. And, very importantly, don't forget to say THANK YOU to the media which use your PSAs.



**Q: What Are 10 Don'ts for PSAs?**

1. **Don't create "a campaign" that is based on a single execution in a single medium.** Don't try to change behavior or attitudes with a single spot or campaign; don't try to cram too much information into a single broadcast spot or print ad.

2. **Don't use PSAs as a self-serving PR device** just to make your organization look good. Position your message and issue in the public interest and you will be more successful in engaging both the media and the public. This sounds simplistic, but you would be surprised at the number of PSAs that are produced for self-promotional purposes.

3. **Don't distribute only a single TV or radio PSA.** You can distribute several different lengths for the same cost as a single spot, and you will get much more air-time if you provide message length flexibility.

4. **Don't use a "talking head" in a TV PSA** unless the person is incredibly powerful; don't scrimp on packaging design because good design will help you cut through the clutter. Remember we're in the direct mail business, and we've got to use the same bold, compelling graphics and copy that is used to get people to read direct mail which is how we get PSAs to the media.

5. **Don't overlook out-of-home media.** Billboards are still a very viable medium in most parts of the country; many airports have PSA dioramas; and both shopping centers and transit stops are possible PSA venues.

6. **Don't distribute PSAs during the wrong time of the year** such as the post-Thanksgiving holidays when PSA airtime is very scarce. Look for special events that you can tie into such as a well-known Walk-a-Thon or special commemorative weeks and months.

**Airport Dioramas**

- 12 airports
- Number of posters: 72
- Value: \$743,600
- Impressions: 112 million

**Shopping Centers**

- 66 malls
- 50 malls in top 20 DMAs
- Number of posters: 274\*\*
- Value: \$307,700
- Gross Impressions: 305 million

**Outdoor Billboards**

- Outdoor billboard posters placed: 1,372
- 27 markets in 19 states
- Estimated value: \$1,388,282
- Gross Impressions: 305 million

**Transit Media**

- Street Furniture
- Busses Interior/Exterior
- Metro Trains
- Metro-Subway Stops
- Number of posters: 336
- Value: \$1.1 million
- Gross Impressions: 134.4 million

7. If you are using famous personalities in your campaign, **don't use those that are out of character or context with your campaign just because they are famous.** Look for those whose public persona is consistent with your message or campaign objective. Paul Newman comes to mind.

8. **Don't put all your eggs in one basket.** PSAs are not a panacea. They are a single communications tool, and need to be supported by other forms of mass communications such as publicity, community outreach, special events, etc.

9. **Don't overlook your field operatives** such as local public affairs staff. They should be an important part of campaign planning, program development and post-campaign follow-up. Review the article on this site pertaining to Media Outreach..

10. **Don't collect evaluation data just for the sake of impressing your boss,** the accounting department or your board of directors. Evaluation data should be "actionable," meaning you should use it to fine-tune subsequent campaign strategy and change tactics based on data based decision-making.