

How to Place Public Service Advertising in Your Community A Primer on Local PSA Outreach

By Bill Goodwill

Public Service Advertising - also known as Public Service Announcements (broadcast) and Public Service Ads (print) - are used by hundreds of organizations at the national, regional and local level. They generate support for all different kinds of social issues, ranging from AIDS to Zoo appreciation and everything in between. This guide is designed to help both national campaign planners and the local public affairs representative in getting increased PSA exposure.

The single factor that all these issues have in common is they must be advanced by an IRS 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in order to qualify for PSA airtime and space. PSAs cannot promote profit-seeking organizations in any way, nor can their logos or products be shown or mentioned in PSAs as a general rule.



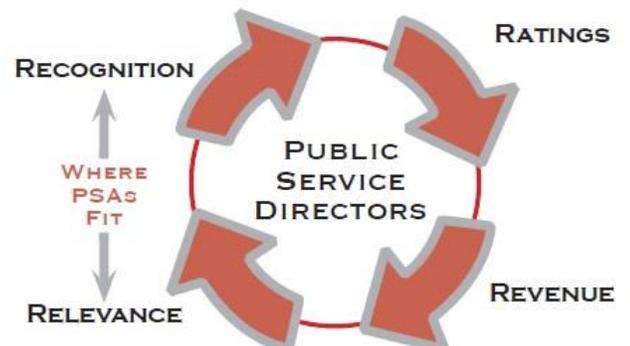
One of the most important things to recognize about PSAs is that *the media is not obligated by law or any other requirement to provide you with free air time and space.* The only exception is that stations are mandated by the FCC to air a prescribed number of responsible children's programming under the Children's TV Act.¹

While it is true that broadcasters must prove they are broadcasting in the public interest for their license renewal, there are many ways to achieve that goal. Accordingly, you must find ways to elicit voluntary media support and make a strong connection between your cause and the local media that are supporting it.

The 4 R's of Broadcasting

This graphic shows why broadcast media use PSAs, but the concepts shown apply to all types of media. The lifeblood of any media entity shown on the upper right as **Ratings** means audience – the number of people the media outlet reaches.

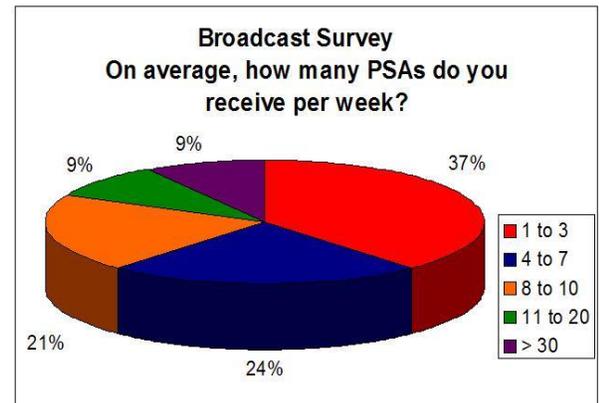
THE FOUR R'S OF BROADCASTING



¹ See article at <http://www.psaresearch.com/caf1019.html>

The more people reached by the media outlet, the greater the **Revenue** the media outlet generates. In order to generate higher ratings and revenue, they must provide content that is **Relevant** to their audience. Finally, they need to get **Recognition** in their local community for their good work, thus the circle is self-perpetuating.

Nearly all forms of media - national and local - use PSAs to fill unsold airtime and print space. That's the good news. The bad news is that there is a tremendous amount of competition for PSA airtime and space, and the demand far exceeds the supply. It is not unusual for local TV stations to air several hundred PSAs in a given month, and many more never get on the air. As shown in this graph, nearly 40% of local TV stations *get from 8 to more than 30 PSAs per week*.



Importance of Localism

Due to tremendous competition for PSA time and space, your success in PSA placement depends on how well you market your issue *locally*. All things being equal - creative quality of your materials, relevance of your issue and having appropriate materials - the organizations which do the best local marketing job will be most successful in getting exposure.

There is an old saying among politicians that "all politics are local." The same could be said for PSA campaigns. While the national office or its ad agency may create your campaign, they obviously don't know the local community like those who live and work there.

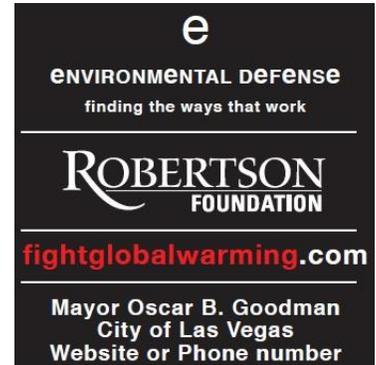
Many national organization don't have a network of local public affairs specialists with whom they can work to implement PSA campaigns, but there are still some ways to localize your issue. Here are a few:

- Look for a campaign partner that has a local network and a similar mission to yours. For example, the American Savings Education Council which has no local network, teamed up with the Social Security Administration, which has an extensive network of public affairs specialists around the country to promote a PSA campaign to encourage increased savings.
- Consider ways to localize the *impact* of your issue by using local statistics or facts on the problem you are trying to solve. For example, we used state-wide boating safety statistics in our national packaging materials to increase the interest on this subject among local media gatekeepers.

- Look for ways to tie your issue to a local activity or special event such as a walk-a-thon, fund-raising drive, bike race, etc. where you can partner with the media. They will be especially interested if you can help them garner corporate support for promoting your issue.

If you have a network of local community partners, there are lots of ways to bridge the gap between national and local interests when placing your national PSAs at the local level. They include:

- Producing local tags which identify your local organization or leaving room for a tag which permits the local media to have some “buy-in” identity and brand the PSA, giving them credit for using the PSAs.
- Producing a “Tool Kit” for local outreach staff, which includes samples of your PSAs, how they can access local distribution and evaluation reports, and templates that can be localized for your issue (speeches, editorials news releases, etc.).
- Doing a Webinar for your local community partners to share your creative, reporting procedures and provide local outreach tips.



Building Your Media List

If you are working with a national distributor, they will be able to provide community outreach specialists lists of the public service media contacts you need to reach. They should be able to break the media down by your particular geographic territory and by media type.

Making the Contact

There is no single individual or department that controls PSA access for different types of media. The decision-making process differs by media type, from one market to another, and by the size of the media outlet.

Generally, however, the media contact you want to reach at larger broadcast (TV and radio) stations, is the Community Affairs, Public Affairs or Public Service Director. At smaller broadcast outlets, the title will most likely be Program Director, News Director or perhaps even General Manager. At print outlets you would normally try to contact the Advertising Director, Production Manager or perhaps Editor and/or General Manager at a smaller newspaper. If your campaign includes outdoor advertising, the General Manager or Posting Supervisor is the person to contact.

Once you have your local media lists, the next step is to contact them either by email (preferred) or phone (not always productive due to voicemail).

We recommend sending a brief email to local media contacts before any phone calls, because it paves the way for your call, and helps the media representative understand your issue and why you want to meet with them. This note should include the URL for your website, with the link to where the media can see your PSAs online. If you have a newsletter that is fairly brief, send that too, along with some very brief background information on your campaign. Whatever you send to the media, keep brevity in mind, because they will not read lengthy materials.

Presenting Your Case

When making media contacts, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- ***Know Your Issue Cold*** - There's no substitute for having all the facts and information you can compile on your issue, including research data, news articles, opinion surveys or anything else to help you sell the media on the importance of your issue. Prepare a brief fact sheet on your issue that you can use as "talking points" in your discussions.
- ***Be Compelling*** - Facts alone can be impersonal. Compelling stories about how your issue affects people in the local community can be a powerful argument and demonstrate local relevance. If you've had PSAs on the air before and they were successful, let the media representative know how important media involvement is by pointing to your successes.
- ***Offer Other Assistance*** - Space doesn't allow a complete refresher on media relations, but there are other ways to get the media involved through news stories, on-air promos, editorials, remote broadcasts, etc. Encourage the media to cover your issue in different ways, because it all adds up to valuable exposure.
- ***Build a Partnership*** - Don't forget successful PSA placement is a partnership. The media can offer more than simply using your PSAs. They can help you frame strategies for getting your message out to the community if you ask for their help. Sometimes they may be able to offer production assistance, or introduce you to other station personnel who can help. Perhaps they would be willing to serve on your board, judge a creative contest, or volunteer in some capacity.

Making media contacts is definitely an art. Compiling the list of appropriate contacts is only the first step. Now you've got to make a strong case for why the media gatekeeper should let you through the gate to state your case. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

DO:

- **Make an Appointment** and promise to keep your meeting with the media representative brief - 15 to 20 minutes maximum. They are very busy people and don't have time to waste.
- **Be Prepared** - learn as much as you can about the media organization i.e. program format of radio, coverage area, the kinds of stories they air or print, personalities, etc. *and how your issue and their station can mutually benefit from a partnership.*
- **For TV, bring a flash drive, your laptop, or tablet** so that you can show the public service director your PSAs and tell him or her where they can download broadcast quality digital files. Provide them with "leave behinds" which include a storyboard on your TV PSA campaign and why it is important to the local community.
- For radio, bring a portable CD or cassette player and a CD or cassette of your PSAs and a live announcer script for use in live voice over broadcasts.
- If you are asking for the public to request materials, have samples on hand to show the media. Also share any success stories from previous PSA campaigns in terms of the impact they have made on your issue or cause.

DON'T:

- **Be a Nuisance** – don't keep calling the media to ask when your PSA will appear on air or in print; since PSAs are placed on a "time/space available" basis, the media person can't give you any guarantees on if or when it will be used. Many media people regard these calls as a nuisance, so find a more engaging way to make contacts.
- **Try to Force Meetings** with media people - they are very busy and if they can't see you personally, handle your contact via email, instead of a follow-up phone call.
- **Expect the Media to Do Your Work for You** - make your materials ready to use. Do the work for them and you increase your chances of getting your materials used.

Evaluation/Follow-up

Your national office should share PSA usage data with you, so you know what type of follow-up action is appropriate.

The evaluation reports from the national office will provide usage data by media type, and broken down to show PSA usage in your local community.

These reports will show the name of the call letters or print media outlet, the city and state where exposure occurred, the number of plays or print ads that were used, and the estimated dollar value of all PSAs. When your campaign is distributed, you distributor should provide a list of all media outlets to which your PSAs were distributed, and an indication of previous usage practices. By reviewing these reports, you can see specifically which media outlets have and have not used your PSAs. (Your national coordinator will give you the URL for the website where you will be able to access these both distribution and evaluation reports).

If your PSAs were used, send the person you work with at the media outlet a letter of appreciation , or perhaps send them a small gift such as a coffee mug, calendar or other premium. ***The most important thing you can do is to say thank you for the thousands of dollars worth of free exposure the media has donated to your cause.***

When sending letters of appreciation, have the most important person in your organization (president, chairman, Executive Director) **write to the General Manager** of the media outlet which provided support to your organization. Thank them for the support and time provided and **cite the person who assisted you at the lower level**. Also, send that person a copy of the letter, so he or she will know what you've done.

If you have not seen or heard your PSAs and they are not on local evaluation reports, follow up with a reminder phone call or postcard 45 days after your initial contact, and see if there is something more that you can do.

Just remember that the media have dozens and perhaps hundreds of issues presented to them, all of which are important to the organizations vying for time and space.

In summary, be professional and thorough in your approach, and respect the media's time. Make them a part of your issue, and you stand a good chance of getting your day in the sun.

The Local PSA Take-Away

- Rule 1: The media are **NOT** obligated to provide free time and space for your issue.
- Rule 2: Because of Rule 1, you must find ways to elicit voluntary media support and make a strong connection between your cause and the local media that are supporting it.
- Rule 3: If you want to make a strong connection with the media, then think like the media rep who receives your materials thinks. Know what is important to them and their mindset.

- Rule 4: Localism, in its many forms, trumps a national issue every time, so find a way to localize your message.
- Rule 5: If you do not have a network of community partners, create one, tap into one that exists, or use other tactics to localize your message.
- Rule 6: Use all the tools your national office and their distributor can provide to help you at the local level in your outreach efforts, including media lists, creative samples, and follow-up materials to express media appreciation.
- Rule 7: When making the actual contact, do your homework on the person whom you are meeting with and the media outlet itself. Be very well prepared and be respectful of the time constraints busy media people are working under. Don't just tell them about your PSA; show them and then listen to what they need from you.
- Rule 8: **Remember to say thank you.** Even if the media outlet did not use your materials, if you send them a personalized thank you card for spending time to meet with you, they will remember that. Why? Because, in this 24/7, always-on, always connected world we live in today, no one else does it.