



## How To Get Results With PSAs

by Margie Goldsmith

Once seen mostly in print media, the public service announcement, or PSA, has sprouted electronic wings. With technology's boost, the television PSA far outdistances its traditional print version, and enormously multiplies the size of the audiences that can be reached. If you are looking for a way to get your organization's message across to millions of TV viewers, enhance the image, and serve the community interest as well, the PSA may be the vehicle you need.

Unlike the video news release, designed as a local "news item," the PSA looks very much like a commercial, but the airtime doesn't cost a cent. In terms of value received, a PSA, usually shown nationally, about 25 to 30 times by each station, is worth several thousands of advertising dollars. And it can also be used for press events, presentations, or other tie-ins.

### Expected Usage

Chances of getting your PSA aired are excellent. On the average, each station airs 205 PSAs a week. Overall, an average of 1 to 1.5 PSAs are aired per broadcast hour, making a total of 47 billion impressions on American television viewers. In a study of 25 PSAs distributed to TV stations on average usage included:

- Between 60 and 100 TV stations reporting usage
- 130-500 telecasts
- 20,000,000 to 45,000,000 households reached
- 54,000,000 to 121,500,000 impressions (at 2.7 per household)

The broadcasting station interprets the tastes, needs, and desires of its audience, and determines which community issues such as health, safety, social services, civic activities, etc. should be supported by PSAs.

A most important consideration is whether the client and a particular subject matter will mesh. One illustration of an ideal match is AT&T's sponsorship of a PSA on illiteracy, with the Assault on Illiteracy Program as the nonprofit sponsor.

When we discussed topic selection with Al Winters, district manager for corporate advertising at AT&T, he explained: "We wanted a subject related to information and communications, because that's the business we're in. We also want the public to know that while we are a gigantic corporation, we're committed to performing deeds in the public interest. Illiteracy affects people of all ages, so we know we'll get exposure in all broadcast time slots." With follow-up, we found that the AT&T spot went to 400 TV stations, aired 1,374 times on 296 stations, and made an estimated 682,280,000 audience impressions.

### **Pre-Release Checklist**

When you are planning your PSA, keep the following in mind:

- ✓ The topic you've chosen should reach the market you've targeted. Stations can broadcast PSAs in time slots that coincide with a particular audience: child-related topics run in the early morning; alcohol and drug abuse run late at night. Subjects that appeal to the general audience are shown throughout the broadcast day.
- ✓ Stations frequently devote a specific time period (a week or a month) to a particular campaign or issue such as Heart Month, United Fund Drive, or Better Hearing Month.
- ✓ There are instances when a PSA should not be considered, for instance: when the organization is perceived as controversial, such as a religious or political group; when you are promoting alcohol, cigarettes, or games of chance; when there is no relationship between the client and the subject matter.

Each media outlet should also receive:

- A letter explaining the spot, written on the stationery of the nonprofit and signed by the sponsor.
- The sponsor's tax-exempt number
- A script of the enclosed PSA
- A self-addressed, stamped reply card for stations to provide feedback
- Any other information your client wants to include (how-tos or tips brochures).
- There is some controversy regarding the efficacy of making follow-up phone calls, but if decide to do them, they will take a lot of time. Because public service directors have other duties and get these calls all the time, You will have to make between three and five phone calls per station to actually connect with someone, and it will take one person two to three weeks, full-time, to contact 200 stations.

Finally, don't expect immediate results. It can take up to three months for a public-service director to schedule a spot into their rotational inventory. Your distributor should be able to provide you with very detailed usage reports showing when and where your PSAs aired and you should use those reports to take corrective actions where deficiencies of exposure exist.

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