



Network Clearance - A Producer's Checklist

by Bill Goodwill

There was a time when getting your TV PSAs cleared by the four major broadcast networks meant the difference between an "average" TV PSA campaign, or one that entered the "outstanding" category. The current reality is that the "big four" (ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox) use very few externally produced PSAs, preferring instead to create their own "branded" messages, using actors and personalities identified with their networks to deliver PSA messages.

The good news is that there has been an explosion in national cable networks as smart programming executives tap into serving very specific lifestyles of their audiences, sometimes referred to as "niche networks." We currently work with more than 200 of these national cable networks.

In this article, we address some of the Do's and Don'ts of dealing with the networks. Every broadcast producer should review these rules at the risk of getting less exposure than they could have gotten, or worse yet, no usage at all because they don't know the rules of getting on the air.

Do Your Homework

If you are launching your first-time PSA effort, or you have something unique to convey, consider getting appointments with network clearance directors. Be advised, however, they are busy people and receive hundreds of PSA submissions for consideration, so you should respect their time demands.

As an alternative, send a letter with your PSA concepts (draft copy and storyboards), to the networks, and then follow-up with personal phone calls. Provide them with facts on your issue and why it is important to national audiences.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Campaign Storyboard.

TELEVISION PSA

"FREEDOM TO COMPETE" FACTS

Blow-up of Campaign Facts

"FREEDOM TO COMPETE" FACTS

- The "Freedom to Compete" initiative is designed to ensure that all Americans have the freedom to compete in the workplace and achieve their fullest potential, without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, or disability.
- Invisible barriers deny our workers the freedom to compete on a level playing field, to be judged on merit and not on reasons as irrelevant or immaterial as race or gender.

How will communities benefit where PSAs are shown?

- The PSAs will urge all employers to take an aggressive, proactive role in promoting workplace practices that free up workplace opportunities for the best and brightest human talent available.
- The PSAs will inspire employers and employees to embrace the freedoms available in America's workplaces.
- The stronger relationships developed between employers and employees will enhance economic stability, and therefore growth, in communities across the country.

To ensure that your PSAs will be cleared by the networks, your producer needs to know a few of the network rules regarding what you can and cannot say or show in your PSAs:

- The sponsoring organization must be national in scope and dedicated to public service or charitable activities.
- PSAs cannot, directly or indirectly, promote the sale of commercial products or services, including showing any logos or any other visual references.
- The campaign cannot deal with sectarian, politically partisan or controversial subject or issues, nor can it be designed to influence legislation or government actions.
- You should avoid direct appeals for funds in your message. CBS Network policy, for example, says a direct appeal for funds such as "send your check to...or please make a donation..." is not acceptable, whereas statements such as "please help...please support" may be acceptable. When in doubt, contact the networks.

If you adhere to the formal review procedures required by networks, there are four basic steps to follow for network approval:



How It Works

Ad-ID is the industry standard for identifying advertising assets (broadcast, print and digital) across all media platforms. Similar to the UPC code of the packaged goods industry, the Ad-ID system generates a unique identifying code for each advertising asset digitally, and applies that code to all media. Using Ad-ID greatly improves communications between agency, advertiser, media and their associated vendors.

1. Ad-ID Code: This code is the industry standard for identifying broadcast, print and digital assets across all media platforms, and most media outlets will not use your PSA without the code. For more information, go to: <http://www.ad-id.org/how-it-works>.
2. Organizational Clearance: if you are a new organization or have not produced PSAs previously - get registered with either the Philanthropic Advisory Service of the Better Business Bureau, or the National Charities Information Bureau. The networks might ask you for proof of your registration, and you should also submit a copy of your (IRS501C-3) tax-free certificate.
3. Digital Download Platform: You or your distributor need to post your PSAs to a platform where they can be downloaded by the media and you need to let the media know the URL for the platform.



4. Technical Requirements: All PSAs submitted to TV networks or stations have stringent technical specifications which you can view by clicking on this link www.psaresearch.com/biboverall.html and then click on *PSA Producer's Guide*.

Typically, unless there is a problem, networks will simply schedule the PSAs to air and your PSA distributor should be able to share network usage data with you.

If they reject your campaign, they may or may not tell you the reason why it was not accepted, and thus the best way to handle networks is to call each of them after submission of your PSAs. They may tell you they need substantiation for claims or statistics used in the PSAs, which should be easily handled, and then PSAs can be re-submitted. The networks may ask for more background information on your organization or cause, beyond observing the procedures above. These include providing:

- An audited annual report on your organization.
- Background information on your organization's history, purpose and objectives, and the percentage of your budget used for fundraising.
- Samples of materials you plan to distribute to the public, particularly if mentioned in the PSA.

While all of this sounds like a lot of work, let us give you some data. For one of our clients, network usage accounted for two-thirds of all usage - and how much was that? \$67 million dollars! For that kind of money, it seems prudent to follow the rules, get to know what networks want, and monitor their usage, with gentle follow-up calls to those that committed to using your PSAs but are not showing up in your evaluation reports.

Finally, if they did use your PSAs send them a letter of appreciation signed by one of the top officials of your organization, which will help the next time you come to them asking for air time.

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