

Using PSA Strategy to Get Media Support

By Bill Goodwill

Six Steps for Getting Your Issue on the Air and In Print

As a non-profit executive, you must grapple with ways to increase your donor base, recruit volunteers and educate your key audiences about your organizational issues. Launching a strategic public service advertising campaign is one way to accomplish all three of these goals.

Most PSA producers would agree that the competition for media time and space is getting more intense. Where they disagree, however, is just how competitive the PSA environment is, and what can be done to ensure that they get their fair share of the pie. Our prospect database has 603 national organizations that do or have done PSA campaigns in the past.

Greater Demand

There are numerous reasons why the demand for PSA exposure is at a premium these days, including:

- The emergence of many new social ills and causes accompanied by heightened public awareness and a renewed sense of activism. Drug abuse, the environment, illiteracy and the homeless are just a few of the most topical.
- Many TV and radio stations have become increasingly involved with local issues and charities, meaning that those national issues without a local tie-in assume a lesser priority.
- In a race for greater audience shares, still other stations are using time that used to be allocated to PSAs for station and program promotions, to help them achieve a stronger identity in their market.
- In print, declining advertising revenues have led to smaller newspapers and magazines, thus reducing the amount of space available for PSAs.

The Good News

These trends form the realities of the contemporary PSA marketplace in which non-profit organizations must compete for donated time and space.

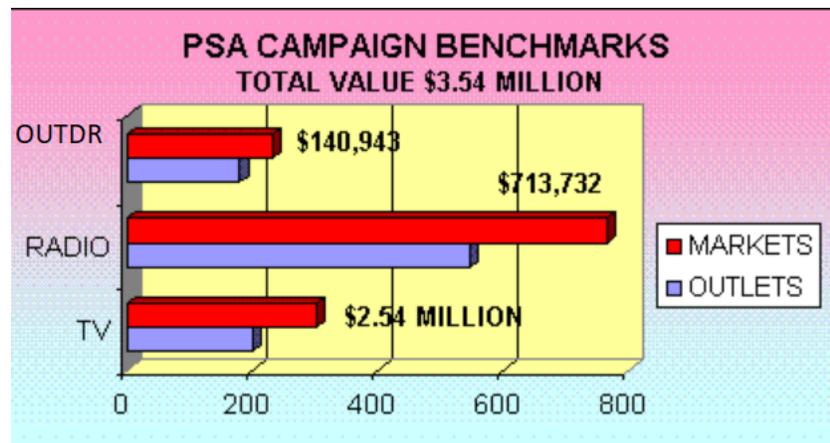
However, there is some good news. Most radio and television stations are committed to around the clock programming, meaning there is a substantial amount of airtime to fill, some of which is unsold at any given time. Also tighter news production budgets mean that many of these stations need to use material produced externally to fill vacant time slots.

Also there has been an explosion in new media opportunities over the past decade, which includes everything from the Internet to place-based information delivery systems in doctors offices, supermarkets airports, retail establishments and transit vehicles. All of these provide placement opportunities for PSAs.

Nor is there data to suggest that the media is running fewer PSAs as a whole. Data from our Public Service Advertising Analysis System, indicates that 1,091 or 76% of all U.S. TV stations regularly use national PSAs.

Benchmark data from six typical PSA campaigns also show that an average TV campaign will receive 12,466 airplays on 274 stations and will generate in excess of \$3.5 million worth of exposure.

However, these results can only be achieved *if you do everything right*. Media outlets are unquestionably becoming more demanding about the types of PSAs they use, and you need to have a solid plan to get your issue on the air or in print.



Developing Strategies

To be successful in today's competitive PSA environment, there are several basic, but important strategies organizations should include in their PSA programs:

The first is to create very high-quality, high impact campaign materials that communicate the message very quickly and clearly. And it is important to recognize the comparative strengths of different types of media.

- Television, for example, is best employed to communicate a single idea quickly, leaving the "deep sell" to other media such as outdoor where there is more linger time. TV spots should maximize visual impact via the highest possible "production values," rather than "talking heads," or less interesting visual formats.
- Radio PSAs should be professionally produced using interesting sound effects, and print ads should be designed to run in high-quality magazines, not just small weekly newspapers. You also need to provide the media as much flexibility as possible by sending your PSAs in various spot lengths and ad sizes. Since all PSAs are placed in unsold slots, no one knows what time or space will be available.
- Next, it is important to develop a comprehensive, targeted distribution plan that capitalizes on the inherent strengths of different media. Each medium has strengths and weaknesses, and since the PSA producer cannot control timing, frequency and placement, it is important to use a broad media "mix."
- While television has the greatest reach for creating widespread general awareness of a problem, it does not permit concentrated communication with a specific type of viewer. Radio, on the other hand, is audience-specific, and can provide excellent penetration of smaller markets, filling in voids where TV audiences may be light or nonexistent. Its portability - particularly in summer when more people are out of home- is another advantage.
- Unfortunately print media are no longer viable as a component in PSA campaigns but have been replaced by outdoor which is a thriving medium that uses PSAs on a regular basis.

Promotion

The third part of the strategic PSA plan is to employ aggressive promotion and marketing techniques that are designed to make the PSA materials intrusive and memorable.

To provide more campaign background on the client's issue we use a variety of tactics to ensure the media knows where to download our client PSAs which include:

- Creation of our own digital PSA platform where media materials can be downloaded as well as posting the PSAs to two other sites as shown in the logos

PSA
Digital

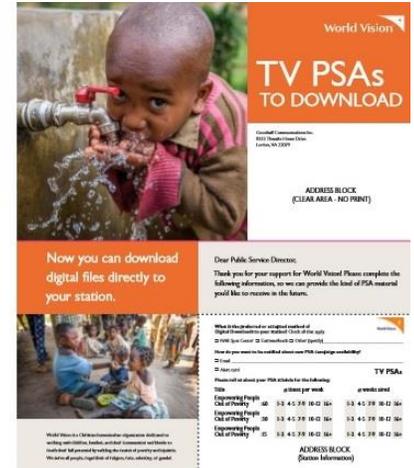


ExtremeReach

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PUBLIC SERVICE

SPOT
CENTER

- Sending TV media storyboards with facts on the client issue



- Blast emails and direct mailers to inform the media where to download client PSAs

Left: TV PSA blast email. Above: TV PSA alert card.

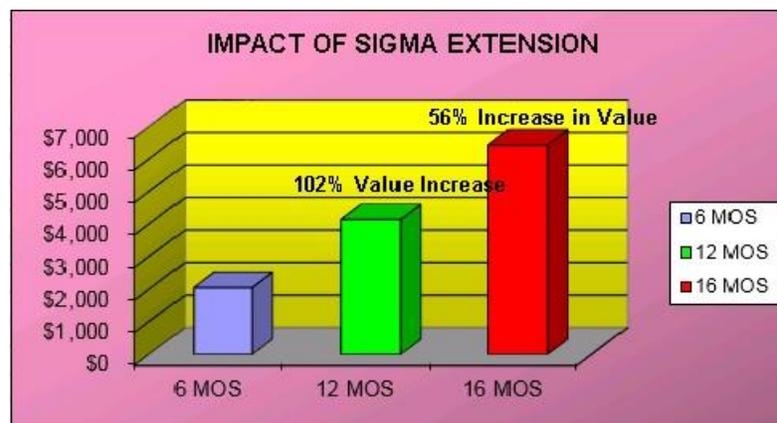
The fourth strategic step is to obtain network and media organizational support. This results from doing personal outreach to TV networks and sometimes networks or large national media chains will permit the use of their logos in your PSAs which implies endorsement.

Evaluation

The next important strategic step is to evaluate campaign impact and use evaluation data to fine-tune subsequent PSA strategy.

A.C. Nielsen's SIGMA electronic tracking system provides non-profits with accurate and timely feedback on TV PSA usage. This system, which uses an invisible electronic code imbedded on dubs sent to stations, provides data on the stations using PSAs, market size, usage by spot length, and exact time of day usage occurred.

The unknown factor about PSA campaigns is that the longer you track them, the more value you will capture. While most campaigns are tracked for 26 weeks, we have had that were tracked for much longer periods and still generating incremental usage a year and a half after distribution.



Getting feedback on PSA usage is only half the battle, however. Tracking usage just for the sake of collecting data is a meaningless exercise unless you learn something from the data and use it to change future decision-making. It is very important to carefully analyze the data to determine where your usage is strongest and areas where exposure may be minimal or non-existent. In those areas where improvements are needed, you can make phone calls to stations, have your local reps contact gatekeepers, or send reminder postcards to increase usage.

Given the current state of affairs, the competition for donated media time and space is likely to get more intense. This, in turn, will force organizations to become more competitive, accept reduced levels of public awareness, or seek new methods of generating exposure for their particular issue. By developing PSA plans that combine hard-hitting creative, imaginative distribution and using evaluation data to improve performance, organizations can stay a step ahead of the competition.

Perhaps more important, advertising can be as effective in helping us achieve a better world as it has in selling products.

Victor G. Bloede, past chairman of Benton & Bowles Worldwide, summarized a speech to the Second International Conference on Public Service Advertising by saying we have to use basic marketing skills to make PSAs more effective by:

- Using all the tools we have, including consumer and market research to find the "hot button" -- the selling proposition that is going to gain a response from our audience.
- Using all our creative skills to turn that proposition into an interesting, provocative memorable benefit to the viewer or reader.
- Using all the techniques of communication - public relations, merchandising, direct marketing, and advertising creativity to make a complete sales campaign.
- Measuring the success of our efforts against pre-determined goals.

Unquestionably, a well-orchestrated PSA campaign can help increase visibility for your non-profit and few would argue that it is easier to raise money for an organization that is well known compared to one that is not.

Bill Goodwill is CEO of Goodwill Communications, a firm specializing in PSA distribution and evaluation, located in Lorton, Va. His firm has distributed over 1,000 national PSA campaigns for non-profits and federal agencies.

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