



Strategic Communications for Nonprofits
A Step-by-Step Guide to Working with the Media
Second Edition

Chapters Online
Making Paid Advertising and Public Service
Announcements Work

Part of the Jossey-Bass Nonprofit Guidebook Series

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Making Paid Advertising and Public Service Announcements Work

- Check out PSA's, run-of-station and other cost savers.
- Be aware of advocacy ad clearance issues.
- Identify advertising experts who can provide services.

Advertising takes a thousand forms, from skywriting and blimps to tiny labels on the fruit in your supermarket. But almost all advertising is paid communication designed to persuade or influence behavior. Advertising is a powerful force that shapes our attitudes about everything from what we eat to what car we drive to whom we vote for and which public policies we support. The nonprofit sector can use advertising to great effect, if it proceeds from an understanding of both the nature of the advertising business and its relationship to the media and their audiences.

Closely related to paid advertising, but distinguished from it by the fact that they are broadcast by media outlets at no cost to the nonprofit organization, are public service announcements (PSA's), designed to promote some public good. By contrast, "earned" or "free" media results from outreach strategies designed to influence the reporting of news and related commentary. Earned media is the focus of most nonprofit campaigns.

It is valuable to know something about paid advertising and PSA's, even if your plans do not currently call for them. At some point in the future, your strategy may expand to include paid advertising, which can be invaluable for achieving your communications goals.

PAID ADVERTISEMENTS

Advertising is a big business, with its own language, terms, and protocols that can be daunting to outsiders. Nonprofits sometimes ignore or even disdain paid advertising in favor of PSA's and earned media coverage. Some nonprofit leaders have a passionate belief that their issues are so important that they should never have to pay for public attention and that news coverage alone will carry the day for them. Although that sentiment is lofty, it is misguided for two reasons.

First, the tools and techniques of advertising are generally adaptable to any communications strategy. Survey research, media content analysis, focus groups, and other components of a sophisticated communications strategy all started in the world of commercial marketing and advertising. Focus

groups are a good example. Before launching a multimillion-dollar national ad campaign, you should test your themes and language on scientifically selected groups that represent potential audiences. That way, you can catch potential flaws or make refinements to your strategy before committing serious resources.

Second, paid advertising can jump-start a media outreach campaign and is a useful complement to it over the long term. An example is the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, which has consistently used newspaper ads to reinforce its highly successful efforts at obtaining news coverage. Many public education campaigns over the years have bought space in a prominent newspaper as part of an introductory or “launch” strategy.

Do not automatically assume that advertising is too expensive for your organization. Advertising need not break your organization’s budget. Inexpensive but effective campaigns can be developed and can help pay the costs. For example, we noted earlier that a full-page nationwide ad in the New York Times might normally cost \$75,000. But a small organization like the Native Forest Council in Eugene, Oregon, had good results with a full-page ad placed only in selected editions of the paper on a “space available” basis that guaranteed that the ad would appear at some time within a 14-day period.

Another way to make a newspaper ad more affordable is to join forces with other groups to purchase a “signature ad” that carries the names of prominent individuals and sponsoring organizations, all of whom share some portion of the ad’s cost. This strategy can also have value as an organizing tool. Getting groups to agree on ad copy is a good way to find their common ground. When the ad is published, it gives exposure to all of the signatories in the context of working toward a common goal. Some groups still include coupons that the reader can send in for more information to make a donation, but the popular and more effective practice is to drive readers to a Web site where they can take action. But realize that fundraising ads rarely pay for themselves.

Commercials on local TV stations can also be surprisingly affordable, at rates ranging from \$100 for 30 seconds in small-town markets to as much as \$20,000 for 30 seconds in a major metropolitan area. Likewise, 30-second local radio ads can range from less than \$100 to \$1,500, depending on market size. Few companies produce ads for their own products. Most ad campaigns are designed and produced by advertising agencies, subject to the company’s approval.

Advertising on the Internet has become hugely popular. Banner ads usually are placed at the top or bottom of a Web page are a common form of Internet advertising. Although banner ads have lost some popularity, expect them to be around for some time to come. A banner ad can be static (the least interesting format). It can include animation or a short video. Most importantly, with a quick click of a mouse, Internet ads connect visitors to your Web site to learn more, donate money, contact a legislator, sign a petition or take some other action.

Your organization can create basic static ads or simple animation in-house with the help of software that you may purchase or even download free from the Internet. Then you'll also need someone who is skilled at writing short, compelling, action-oriented copy. Finally, keep in mind that the ad must open quickly. Consider the frustration you experience when you click on an item that takes forever to load. Well, that's the way it is with Internet ads. If your ad opens at a snail's pace, the reader will become aggravated and move on. Avoid this scenario by contacting a graphic designer who will tell you how to size your ad so that it opens fast. Once your ads are ready to be launched you can contact the Web sites yourself about costs, or you can hire an agency to make the media buys.

ADVANTAGES OF PAID ADVERTISING

Control: The Main Advantage

When the news media report favorably on your issue, it gains credibility for having passed through the editorial filter or screening process. But paid advertising offers the advantage of control—in terms of timing the ad, targeting the audience, and selecting the ad's content—which is simply lacking in an earned media campaign.

Timing the Ad

A full-page newspaper ad can reach journalists and other opinion leaders on the morning of an important announcement, vote, or other event. You can gain full control of the timing, but you will pay for the privilege.

Targeting the Audience

Advertisers want to know that people of the targeted age, sex, race, or income will see their message. Picking the right station for your radio spot, for example, can reliably deliver a message to specific groups, such as women over age 65.

Selecting the Ad's Content

When you pay for an ad, you dictate what it says and how it says it.

Guidelines When Considering Advertising

The first rule of advertising is to find a good agency. Like a travel agent who receives a commission from the airline, advertising agencies make commissions from the media outlets where the ads are placed. Agents typically receive 15 percent of the gross amount spent, whether the ad appears in a print or broadcast outlet.

Placing ads through an agency will not cost you any more than doing it yourself and it will almost certainly spare you considerable confusion and headaches. If you buy \$10,000 worth of time yourself, you'll get what \$10,000 buys you. If you place it through an agency, you'll still get \$10,000 worth, but your agency will receive \$1,500 from the station for bringing in business and handling the process, and you will receive the benefit of their professional guidance and experience.

When you find an agency, talk to them about whom you want to reach, how long the campaign should run, and how to get people to write or call for information. Remember that radio and TV ads depend on repetition. If you can only afford to run an ad once, choose another medium. Radio is usually more affordable than TV for organizations with little money and can be just as effective. When you start talking with an ad agency, you should know these basic advertising concepts:

- Cost per thousand, or CPM (the M comes from the Latin mille, meaning "thousand"), refers to the dollars-and-cents cost of using a particular time slot to reach a thousand people in a given audience.
- Program rating is the percentage of the entire U.S. audience that was tuned in to a specific program, as determined by the A. C. Nielsen Company. (Ratings are sometimes called Nielsen's.) In 2008, there were 112 million U.S. households with TV sets (out of a total 114 million). So if a show's rating is 15, the viewing audience was 0.15 times 112 million or 16.8 million households.
- Program share is the number of households that watched the program divided by the number that actually had their TVs on at that time. This is a useful calculation that shows the relative strength of programs in a given time slot. The size of the viewing audience swells dramatically during the mid evening hours of 8 to 11 p.m., also known as prime time. An audience share of 15 is much larger at 10 p.m. than at 10 a.m. because more people are watching in the evening. The audience for morning television has increased dramatically over the past decade

with NBC's *Today*, ABC's *Good Morning America*, and CBS's *Early Show* commanding top advertising dollars.

- Fringe time consists of the hours leading up to and just after prime time. This is when most local news programs are aired. Other familiar time slots are daytime, when soap operas and trash or tabloid talk shows rule, and late night, the domain of Jay Leno, David Letterman, *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*.
- In radio, the biggest listening audiences occur during drive time, or the weekday morning and afternoon rush hours, which are known as the a.m. drive and the p.m. drive.

Cross-Media Campaigns

Another important concept is that of an integrated or cross-media advertising campaign. This uses several media, including broadcast outlets like TV and radio stations, print ads in newspapers and magazines, online ads, outdoor ads or billboards, transit ads that go on the sides of buses and inside subway or rail cars, direct mail, and specialty ads or trinkets imprinted with a name or slogan.

A full-scale cross-media promotion may not be suited to a campaign on controversial social issues. Because they relate to policy questions, nonprofit campaigns often focus on politically aware people and other influentials. They may therefore be limited to the Internet or to newspaper advertising and broadcasts during the "news adjacencies," that is, the time slots directly before and after (and sometimes during) news programming on TV and radio.

Using similar targeting to reach influentials, you might want to limit your buy of cable time to an all-news network such as CNN. We may think of CNN as global in reach, but it has locally available time slots, or "avails," which are highly targetable, because they only reach people in the cable system's geographic service areas.

ROS Placements and Other Cost Savers

When timing is not a main consideration, many nonprofits have found they can save considerable money by opting for a placement that is guaranteed only within a given window of ten days or so, or one that is plugged into a TV or radio station as slots become available. On the broadcast side, this is known as a run-of-station (ROS) placement. It can represent savings of 50 percent or more over time-specific placements.

Some outlets have special rates for advocacy advertising, as well as special protocols and staff just to handle them. Local groups might be charged less than national organizations. Be sure that your agency inquires about discounts for local nonprofits or political ads. For example, TV and radio stations are required to offer the same rate to political ads as they give to their heaviest advertisers. This is sometimes called the lowest unit rate. Your spots may fit under the station's own definition of a political ad, even if you have not produced it with that intention.

Clearance Challenges

Clearance is a challenge with most issue advertising. Each radio and TV station has different standards for accepting an ad. For hard-edged ads that attack a company for polluting or that mention condoms, for example, expect a 30 to 50 percent turndown rate among TV stations, with little chance of appeal. Network-affiliated stations frequently rely on advice from the network's Office of Standards and Practices for clearance, which may require scripts or storyboards to be submitted in advance of placement.

Therefore, if your goal is to purchase significant airtime, you will need advance clearance from the networks. Also be prepared to verify any statements, facts or figures you include in the ad.

You may also plan a purposefully controversial campaign, which you know will be turned down by many stations. This strategy is aimed at attaining news coverage about the spot rather than extensive placement of it. The progressive Internet-based advocacy group, MoveOn.org produced such a spot and attempted to buy time during CBS's 2004 Super Bowl football game. The ad, entitled, "Child's Play," shows children performing menial task to pay off what MoveOn.org claimed to be "President Bush's \$1 trillion deficit." CBS rejected that ad, but clips of the spot appeared as a news story on several news programs.

You must decide in advance which path to take with a controversial spot. If you want to avoid turndowns, you may have to choose between a message that can "clear" the networks and a message you would like to send. Local radio stations, even network-affiliated stations, are generally more relaxed in their approach to issue advertising.

Because radio can be more easily targeted, issue advertising through radio is also an excellent way to reach key constituencies. A good issue-advertising media plan will have significant radio placements built into the budget, either to reach selected audiences or to use if TV is unavailable. Often, issue

advertising has an “action” associated with the spot, such as a toll-free number a website address or an email for people to send in responses. It is good to remember that TV elicits a much better response than radio. Here again, when you make placement considerations, you must weigh radio’s easier clearance against the higher response levels and higher viewership that TV offers.

PSA’s

PSA’s are effective ways of raising public awareness about an issue, recruiting volunteers, and informing the public of an upcoming event. PSA’s are messages “in the public interest” that are usually run for nonprofit organizations about programs and services that will benefit a community. PSA’s may appear as print or broadcast ads, Internet ads, or as donated billboards. However, PSA’s are more prevalent in broadcast media than in newspapers, because stations have licensing requirements to serve the public interest, whereas print and online media do not share this obligation.

Over the years, many nonprofit organizations grew disenchanted with PSA’s because they became increasingly difficult to get placed. That is no longer the case, according to Howard Benenson, chairman of Benenson and Jansen, a Los Angeles-based branding agency that specializes in working with the nonprofit sector. According to Benenson, “in general, it is easier to place PSA’s today than ten years ago. There are more outlets available due in large measure to the growth of the cable networks.” “Plus,” added Benenson, “the Internet has opened up to be a great PSA resource.” Benenson believes that the corporate trends have also created more opportunities to place PSA’s. “Fortunately, we are in a mindset today where more and more media management executives and corporations are recognizing the opportunities associated with connecting to causes,” he noted.

PSA’s for broadcast on either radio or TV are generally fifteen- or thirty-second spots. Stations donate the time and determine when the spots will air. More and more often, PSA’s are presented as a joint effort of the sponsoring agency and the station. Stations encourage PSA’s to include a phone number or Web site so that their audience can obtain more information.

PSA’s are submitted on paper, audiotape, videotape, or digital files as required by the station. Print ads vary in size, depending on the publication’s layout and available space. If your ads are produced digitally using a common graphics program, the publication can easily reformat the ad to fit the space available. Do not pass up free community newspapers and

shopping guides when considering PSA's; they get read, and people tend to keep them around for a long time, unlike a daily newspaper.

Although the space and time for PSA's are free, production is not, and the cost can vary, depending on whether you pay an advertising agency to produce the PSA's for you, whether you get them to do it pro bono, or whether you have the radio station produce the spot.

Whatever route you choose, you should have clear objectives for your PSA campaign and a specific audience in mind. Ads should be memorable, relevant, and believable, and they should provide information that audiences can act on, rather than simply generate name recognition and nothing else.

Remember, too, that hundreds of new PSA's are distributed to radio and TV stations each month and that many just sit on a shelf. Competition for public service time and space is very intense. Although neither radio nor TV stations are now required to donate a specific amount of time to PSA's, stations are obligated (as a condition of their FCC licenses) to determine local needs and to respond to the communities they serve. Their airing of PSA's provides concrete evidence that they take that job seriously.

There are ways to make yours stand out from the rest and improve its chances of airing. Here are a few simple steps to follow:

Watch, read, and listen to local media. Become a student of PSA's. Watch for them on your local TV and cable stations and in your newspapers. Listen for them on the radio. Knowing what types of spots your local media use gives you an opening when working to place PSA's.

Make a call, or conduct research on the Internet. To ensure that PSA's receive regular airtime and print space in your community, make personal contact with the public service manager responsible for PSA placement. Call the station or newspaper, and ask whom you should contact about placing a PSA (often that person's title is public service director). Knowing the right person to contact is important, as these gatekeepers decide which PSA's will be awarded time and space, as well as when they will appear. TV and radio stations may post PSA information on their Web sites.

After you have found the name of the person in charge of PSA's, set up a meeting with that person. Personal contact is the best way to have PSA's placed, because it gives public service managers a local connection to your issue.

Be prepared. Preparation for a face-to-face meeting can mean the difference between enjoying success and having your PSA sit on the shelf. Here's a basic list of questions you should ask yourself before every meeting:

- What are the key points I want to make?
- What specific action do I want from the media organization?
- Have I identified the right decision maker?
- Do I have enough material to show that the PSA responds to a community need?
- Should I bring a community leader to the meeting to show that my issue has support?

During your meeting, make sure to do the following:

- Discuss your issue. Give the facts, using local, state, and national data.
- Highlight programs going on in your area, and show how support can reinforce the station's favorable public image.
- Explain why the issue is a priority in your community. Personalize the issue as much as possible. Being able to tell stories as you share facts will help you communicate with public service managers. But be clear that your interest is in raising awareness of the larger issue, not just in one case.
- Highlight the ads' relevance for area residents, the audience that both you and your media partner want to reach. Talk about the difference that running the PSA's will make in your community.
- Remember to leave pertinent materials with the media outlet. These materials can include samples of response mechanisms or fulfillment brochures and lists of relevant contacts and programs in your community.
- Determine whether any follow-up, such as providing additional information, is needed, particularly if questions arise that cannot be fully resolved during the meeting.

Verify your next steps. If the media outlet agrees to run the PSA, ask the manager to send you a list of airtimes or print times. Confirm that the station will run a local tag line with your organization's name, phone number, and Web site address. If the station has agreed to produce an original spot, then work to develop a script that highlights your message.

Do not take no for an answer. If you cannot get a commitment to run the PSA, find out why. Are they committed to a rival project? Ask what you can do to help them perform a better public affairs job for their station and their community. Many stations may not refuse flat out, but there may be other reasons that they are unable to commit. If they currently have too many PSA's running, ask if you can wait in line until they rotate some of the existing PSA's off of their schedule. If you are having problems setting up a meeting, you may want to send a letter outlining your ideas.

Try bartering time. Piggyback on the giants. Sometimes, a major advertiser can use its strength to negotiate special rates or extra spots for the time it has reserved for commercial ads. It can then convert these paid spots into, or barter them for, PSA's. You may want to consider contacting advertisers in your area to see if they are willing to barter paid spots for PSA's in their local buys. If there are companies in your community that regularly advertise on TV and in newspapers, ask them if your organization's PSA's can be included as a "barter" arrangement in their media placements. Be creative and open to ideas. A local grocery store may be willing to put your organization's phone number on their bags or pass out information at checkout counters. Restaurants may put your information on tray inserts. A utility company may include an insert in the bills they send their customers. The possibilities are endless.

Say thank you. Express your appreciation for the exposure that the station or paper has provided by sending a thank-you note. Continue to stay in contact with public service managers, and keep monitoring PSA placements.

Advertise on billboards and transit systems. Local outdoor advertisers often provide free billboard space if you pay for the artwork and installation. The same is true for transit ads. For additional information, contact your public transportation system's public affairs office or the community affairs offices of the local outdoor advertising company listed on the billboard. When placing the ads, follow the same steps as outlined above.

Do-it-yourself placement saves money, but it requires a substantial investment of time. If you are trying to place ads in four, five or maybe six outlets, consider a company that specializes in PSA placement. You are likely to get better results, and save yourself a lot of time. Companies that

specialize in placing PSA's have relationships with the people responsible for accepting the ads. They stay abreast of the topics that interest the publications or stations. It is easier to track the performance of your PSA's when you hire a company to handle your placement. In fact, in most cases you can get daily reports by going to the company's website.

ADVERTISING MENTORS

If your organization decides to develop an advertising campaign, look for a leading professional in your community to help guide the process on a volunteer basis. Invite a local advertising "guru" to sit on your board of directors, especially if you can find someone with a direct connection to your organization's mission. A community college may offer a quick course on advertising techniques. Many cities have advertising clubs that promote the use of advertising to businesses attempting to get a sizeable number of outlets, to print or air your PSA's.