

Publicity and Marketing in the Community

Marketing, Promotion, Publicity, Advertising, and Public Relations are all terms used for the various aspects of one thing: communicating information to the media and the public. What you are communicating and how you are doing it tends to determine which of the terms is applied. For example, whether you are buying an ad to sell bubble-bath or to sell tickets to a community event - that's advertising and marketing. If you send out a press release to let the media know about your up-coming event, that's publicity. If the press release is to tell the media about an award you have received, or to clarify a misconception, that would be public relations.

In most organizations, we use a mix of all of these elements.

In the not-for-profit sector we rarely have much money for advertising and the other activities of marketing, so we rely more heavily on other tools like sending press releases and staging events to draw media interest and gain coverage. The upside is that this coverage is inexpensive. The downside is the amount of time involved in planning, and the lack of control we have over the resulting coverage. Many are the times that a publicist has organized and supported a feature interview only to have the journalist write their own angle on the story, or worse yet write nothing at all. You have to pay for an ad, but if you're buying it, then you control the content and timing.

A good way to learn about how to do effective publicity is to go through the process step by step which we will do here. We will cover the various tools available to us in trying to get word out about our ideas, our organizations and our activities.

But first, we need to create a plan of action!

Designing a Communications Campaign

Normally, a communications campaign will involve a number of different activities which you use to promote your organization. For example, you may combine a newsletter and a lecture series. Your organization may put out an annual report and hold a dinner to officially release it. Looking within your organization, you will likely find

that a number of activities already occur. You can build on these as you build your strategy.

To get coverage in the media, you need what is called a “time hook”. Think of this as having your communication anchored to an event in time – for the media, that is what makes it news. Events are newsworthy.

You might:

- hold a contest,
- publish a newsletter,
- put together an exhibition,
- organize an event,
- give a lecture with a guest speaker,
- show a film,
- hold a luncheon and present an award.

These are just a few things that can be done to create newsworthiness for your organization and opportunities to tell people about your work.

Exercise: Choose an activity or project which you feel will highlight your organization and attract the attention of the media and public.

Goals and Objectives.

In order to succeed in a strategy, you need to have goals and objectives which you can achieve, and hopefully even surpass. So the next step in designing a strategy is to determine just what your goals are.

Goals and Objectives are written as statements which could follow the phrase: “our goal is” and therefore they usually begin with “To ...” What follows needs to be specific and whenever possible quantifiable and measurable. At the end of the implementation process you should be able to evaluate how well you achieved the goal and its objectives.

Example: *The National Election on the Rights of the Child* was a joint project between Elections Canada and UNICEF called. The plan was to hold an election in schools across Canada as a means of focussing

interest on the work of the two organizations and on the United Nations Convention on the rights of children.

The goals and objectives were:

- To heighten understanding of and commitment to children's rights among both children and adults;
- To empower of Canadian children in the advancement of their own rights, as citizens of a country which was among the first to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- To increase appreciation for Canada's international leadership on children's rights and in democratic development;
- To increase the profile of UNICEF among Canadian children, educators, parents and the general public as the world's leading children's rights advocate;
- To increase the profile of Elections Canada and its programs among educators and the general public;
- To enhance public awareness and understanding of the electoral process.

In this instance, we would evaluate our success by the number of children who voted in the election, by the number of stories we got into the media, and by some form of survey of the target groups to see if they had in fact become more aware of the role Canada plays in the international development of rights and democracy.

To give you another example, for a learner's guide on Learning Disabilities, the objectives were:

- To increase public and stakeholder awareness of Learning Disabilities, and the techniques for adapting to the needs of students with learning disabilities.
- To develop tools, resources, and materials to communicate our messages including a website providing free, accessible and reliable information.
- To build communications partnerships with NGOs (non-governmental organizations), associations, community groups and the media to help disseminate the content of the materials developed.

Here we would be able to point to the resources and materials that were developed, to the number of visits to the website which provided the reliable usage information, and to the number of groups who partnered with us, to show that we had achieved our goals.

Exercise: Write down three or four objectives that your Publicity plan will try to achieve. Make them as specific as possible.

Key Messages

Key messages reflect the information you want to share. So they are content driven. Like your goals and objectives they need to be specific and well defined. Your goals and your key messages together create a framework for everything you will do.

For the *National Election on the Rights of the Child*, the key messages were specific to different audiences and included:

Generally: Children have rights protected under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
Having studied their rights – this (winning the protection of rights) is what young people believe is most important to them.

Children: It is important to vote and participate in our democracy.

Young people are important and your thoughts should be listened to.

Educators: Participating in this event will help you to educate your students about their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

Parents: Your children are learning important lessons about democracy and about their rights.

“Incidentally, 3 million students voted for the right to a family as the most important right. This surprised everyone. Their reasoning was that if you have a family, the rest, i.e. education, health care, etc., will follow.”

Exercise: Write up your Key Messages. Make sure you clearly state the information you want to get out to the public about your organization.

Evaluate Your Environment

Every community has resources. By community, we mean your geographic area and your stakeholders or target groups. Often we don't really notice what is available to us. Now is the time to step back and make a list of the resources in your community.

Geography

If you compare the city and a rural area there are big differences in the resources available. What follows is a rough example.

In the city, you have:

- daily papers;
- television stations;
- numerous radio stations;
- advertising on public transit;
- posters on telephone poles; and
- locations like parks, malls and bus stations where you can hand out flyers to the many people gathering or passing through.

It isn't all easy though. In a city it is very difficult to get noticed with all the competing activity and noise. There are many restrictions on what you can do and where you can do it. Ads in daily papers are very expensive. You need to really work out exactly how to find your potential audience or target group.

In the country you often find:

- you can hang banners or put up signs easily;
- weekly newspapers are more interested in local stories;
- there are community newsgroups on the internet where you can share news;
- other groups and organizations are more willing to partner with you or support your activities;

- small local radio stations are flexible and interested in participating as sponsors;
- local businesses realize the importance of being seen as active in the community and are interested in creative partnerships.

Stakeholders or Target Audience

Take a look at the community of people you want to reach. Most interest groups and professions can be reached through specialty magazines, such as the *Ontario Teacher's Federation* monthly magazine or the *Canadian Medical Journal*. There are also associations and online newsgroups developed specifically to share information within many groups. These are resources which we can tap into.

Going back to the rights of youth, for example, we find that our stakeholders or interest groups include teachers and parents. There are others too who would be considered stakeholders. For instance people and groups concerned with human rights, citizenship, law and governance. For all of these groups you will find there are associations, websites, and magazines which are targeted specifically at them.

Exercise:

Create a list of the resources available in your specific environment. Think of ways to work with them in partnership.

Publicity Tools

This list is NOT exhaustive. Each of the following tools has strengths and weaknesses when applied to different scenarios. Some tools are more useful in small communities, schools or other organizations, and others will reach across the country.

“When I worked in the theatre we used to count the number of newspaper column inches we got for our advance news features and then work out their value as if we had purchased an ad. You would be surprised how many thousands of dollars you can save with a little planning and creative thinking.”

Partnerships and Community Resources

New and innovative partnerships can be created if you look at your community and the resources it has. Working with partners and sponsors helps to save money and can extend your outreach, especially when email lists and other resources are brought to the table. For example, a TV or radio broadcaster or local newspaper as a media sponsor can offer valuable advertising in return for a presence (signage and other acknowledgements) at your event. Other organizations may provide access to thousands of members by allowing you to piggyback on their existing distribution methods.

“In the village of Wakefield, Quebec, there is a refurbished Locomotive Steam Train that brings tourists from the city every day. Recently the local theatre company arranged to partner with the Steam Train. They have developed a promotion which includes a special package trip by train, dinner en route, and a ticket to a theatrical performance. Both the Steam Train and Theatre Wakefield promote the package on their websites and cross-promote each other in their flyers, advertising, and media announcements.”

It is important to make a list of the ways in which you and the potential sponsor or partner can work together. A sponsorship package typically offers acknowledgement on-site, through signage or other means during the event, featuring organizational logos in all print materials and advertising.

Radio: Consider talking to your local radio station about a partnership. They could do an on-site broadcast from your event, or broadcast a series of interviews with people who are informed and entertaining. For example, if you were holding a concert you would pitch an interview with the band/musicians and another with your CEO, Board Chair or Executive Director. Ticket giveaways and contests are also popular on radio. Offering 4 pairs of tickets means your event will be talked about two to four times.

TV: Morning shows are often locally produced and eager for people to come in and do a live interview. Most broadcasters also have local shows or segments around the national news. It's important to talk to your local television producers early in your planning. As TV is a visual medium, they need good props (cap or t-shirt, poster, book, etc.), video clips, or still photos or images to enhance the interview.

Magazines and Newspapers: Many of the following tools are designed for print media, especially the press release and publicity photos. In smaller communities the weekly paper often has a rule of not providing free ad space as they are dependent on local ad placements to survive. Consider ways to offer interesting or unique access to an event – let a photographer come backstage, or have a journalist follow one of your organizers for the day. Contests and challenges often work well, too.

Other Tools

Posters – Large and small posters announcing events can be printed or emailed. They provide the *what, when, where, and how much*, but they must first and foremost engage the casual viewer. (A study found that you have two seconds to capture a viewer’s attention.)

Depending on your geographic location, posters are useful outside on lamp posts, and inside in public buildings and stores with bulletin boards.

They should be designed to be noticeable. If you are sending them out to contacts asking that they be printed and posted, they should take little time to download, and print equally well in colour or black and white.

Posters should go up three or four weeks ahead of the event. Often it is necessary to replenish posters at least once after the initial posting, as others may put their poster up over yours, or people will take them (especially if they like them!).

Flyers – Small versions of posters, they can also be inserted into carry bags, used in displays and left on counters where they may be picked up. They can carry more information than posters. You can even print them four up on an 8.5 x 11” page to save on the costs.

Like posters they should be easy to email, print well in both colour or black and white and draw attention quickly. Often they can be used as the basis for ads as well.

Internet – You can use networking groups or access other groups through their email list (*Twitter, FaceBook, MySpace* are all recent examples of outreach tools on the internet). Many communities now

have e-mail lists for community events. Individuals connected to your group may also have large mailing lists and can use them to do outreach with flyers, letters and other information. This is a very effective method.

You will reach a surprising number of people by simply asking all of the members of your group or organization to use their email lists and list serve connections to help distribute information in the form of flyers or text announcements.

Websites – Websites can be effective tools for the exchange of ideas, for marketing, for outreach, but remember that they require regular updates. Of course, you can also provide lots of factual information and general help as well. The more websites that have links to your site, the higher you will be on the list when someone uses a search engine to find you. Links can be emailed or embedded in the text of other websites.

On a website you can post your newsletter, offer a video clip or pictures, write a blog, sell tickets through PayPal, and provide a means of contacting you.

Website design and technology is changing rapidly. It is important to get an idea of what can be done and what other groups with similar interests are doing. A few hours spent visiting other sites through Google or another search engine will familiarize you with the possibilities and is a very useful investment of time.

Community Calendar Announcement and Event Listings – Almost all newspapers and radio stations have community calendars and event listings. The announcement should be brief and include *who, what, when, where*, and a 50-word description of a community need or activity. Many media outlets including CBC and daily papers now have places on their websites for entering your event announcement directly. Before sending it to a radio station make sure you read it out loud to yourself and time it. It should not be more than 60 seconds long and should be very easy to read, as most announcers will not have the opportunity to rehearse it.

The deadline on receiving copy for Community Calendar listings and Event listings is usually two or three weeks in advance of the event.

However, magazines and newsletters have much longer timelines and sometimes need as much as two months lead time.

Public Service Announcement (PSA) - A free broadcast announcement that promotes the programs, activities, or services of a government agency, not-for-profit organization, or any other group that serves community interests. Information for PSAs can be prepared in point form, as a script, or pre-recorded on tape. All are submitted to the broadcaster's PSA director.

Some broadcasters will accept PSAs in video format. Before investing in a video PSA be sure to talk to your television station so you don't throw a lot of time and other resources at something that won't be seen. Sometimes they offer to help with the preparation of the PSA. You can also put short videos up on YouTube to reach a wider audience.

Donated Ad - Advertising time or space donated by the medium or someone else, including a regular advertiser in that medium, a corporate sponsor, or community business. A donated ad, paid for by several sponsors, may include a box at the bottom identifying the business donors. This is often part of a partnership deal. In rural areas advertising space in the weekly papers tends to be fairly inexpensive, so it is usually possible to get local businesses, such as real estate agencies or other locally-known services to donate an ad.

Sometimes businesses will allow you to have your ad in their newsletters or include you in their regular marketing mailings.

Feature - A story that gives detailed information on an issue, a trend, a situation, an industry, a company or organization, or a person. A feature often focuses on the human element. It is designed to enlighten, entertain, and/or educate readers. Ideas for features can be pitched to various media, keeping in mind their own audience and preference for news slant. Be sure to consider possible visuals to enhance the story. If you can ensure it is written by an expert or other high-profile person, magazines, newsletters, or other media will sometimes allow you to provide the copy for a feature story. The person to present your idea or "pitch" to at a newspaper is the Editor or department head. At a television or radio station, you would ask for the News Director or assignment desk.

Guest Editorial - An analysis of, or commentary on, news events or public concerns, written by someone whose credibility is based on his or her knowledge of a particular subject or his or her position in an organization. This is a great tool if your subject is in the news and is suitable for print media.

Letter to the Editor - A letter written for and sent to a newspaper or magazine to present an organization's position, make a correction, or respond to another story or letter. A great way to get coverage when there is a public misconception or some new information to offer to a debate. The letter must be signed and the writer must be prepared to be identified as the author.

Press Release - Announces information about an event you hope the media will cover. Press releases are an effective way to interest the media in your story or event and can be distributed on paper, by email, by a PR newswire, or posted on a website or a disk. A Press release is flagged with the words - ***For Immediate Release*** in large type near the top of the page.

In the first paragraph, include all the crucial information about your announcement or event. In the second paragraph, give the background information as effectively as possible. In the third paragraph, place a quote from your director or spokesperson using your key messages as content. Then close with a repetition of *who, what, when, where* and **For More Information Contact:** *name and number*

"In the days before the internet and email, we used to signal the end of the press release or the end of the copy by using "-30-" but it is not longer common. Much has changed with the growth of technology"

Promotional prop or symbol - Inexpensive but interesting and relevant items sent with "soft" publicity materials to attract media attention and also serve as a prop for the visual media, particularly television. You might include a copy of the music CD for the artist who will perform at your concert, or a piece of cake in a decorated box with the press release for your fund-raising dinner. If you are talking about safety, you could bring a life jacket to your interview. The more

surprising the prop, the more effective it will be and the more air time you will get.

One year a Toronto theatre company used watercolour paint to spray hearts around the theatre on Valentines Day. Then they delivered valentines to the media. In a very different use of the same technique, Ban the Bomb activists painted the outlines of people as they look in a crime scene on the sidewalks at night, so that the population woke up to find a very strong visual reminder of death accosting them in the morning. The activists got many minutes of news time and discussion of their issue by generating public attention this way.

Publicity Photos - Photographs taken for publicity purposes and submitted electronically or in hard copy to the print media. Photos may be accompanied by a news release, fact sheet, or other publicity material. On the back of the photo or on the text of the email be sure to include the "cutline" which includes the name of the company or organization, the date, event or location in which the picture was taken and the names of all the people in the photo starting from left to right. Be careful to give each media outlet a different photo – they are very competitive and will remember if you fail to provide unique materials.

"In the theatre, I used to put 15 or so black and white photos with cut lines into a binder and offer them to the theatre reviewers and photo editors. Once one had been chosen, I didn't put any new copies of that particular photo back into the binder, just to be sure I wasn't going to make that mistake."

Signage – Large signs which draw the attention of passers-by. Banners and bulletin displays are very useful for building a presence in a community or neighbourhood. They are re-usable and can be made by painting on wood or fabric. Cloth banners can be draped on the sides of buildings or even across streets. Don't forget the sandwich board – an A-shaped two-sided board that can be put out on the sidewalk. Rural communities and areas with a strong local traffic are ideal for these signs.

Exercise:

Draft a Publicity Plan using the your event description, key messages, local resources and the list of Publicity Tools. Make sure you work out your budget and brainstorm opportunities for in-kind donations and

sponsor support. Create a timeline for completion of each activity or element in the plan.

Implementation and Evaluation

As in any strategy, it's important to remain flexible and responsive to developments. Your strategy is a jumping-off point, not strictly a road map. Involve as many people as you can in your outreach and in the creation of your campaign. Good publicists can never do on their own everything that they can think up, so be sure to recruit help along the way.

You started this process by setting your goals and objectives. To continue to improve, it's important to take time at the end of the activity to evaluate your success. Count up the news column inches you managed to get from your press release and interviews. Do an exit survey of people as they leave your event to see if they feel they learned something or enjoyed themselves. Gather whatever information you can about what worked and what didn't, so that the next time you and your group can do even better. Then send out a report on your success to all the people who helped you. That way they will feel their efforts were meaningful, and the next time you ask for their help they'll be there for you again!