

Public Relations on a Shoestring

Presented by

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Public Relations on a Shoestring

Table of Contents

	Page
Table of Contents	1
Public Relations Overview	2
Public Relations = Marketing	3
The Basics	4
Image Review Process	5
Types of Public Relations	6
Media Relations	7 - 9
The News Release	10
News Release Sample	11
Public Events	12 - 13
Newsletters	14
Types of Displays	15
Giveaways and Handouts	16 - 17
Speakers Bureau	18
Public Information Officer	19
Budgeting and Funding	20 - 21
News Release for CT EMS Conference Attendees	
Seminar Evaluation	

Public Relations on a Shoestring

Seminar Learning Objectives. Participants will be able to:

- List five ways to get low or no cost publicity for their organization
- List five things that positive public relations can do for the organization
- List five components of a good public relations or marketing program

This program will cover a variety of public relations activities and concepts. Emphasis is placed on using other people's time and money. We will cover subliminal Public Relations (getting your message across in subtle ways), as well as gorilla Public Relations (using aggressive, generally multi venue tactics), and the pros and cons of each. We will not cover crisis management in depth, as that is a topic unto itself.

A quick overview:

"Public Relations", in its broadest sense, covers all communication with:

- Your membership/employees
- Your community
- Civic and business leaders
- Municipal and legislative bodies
- Other emergency services organizations

"Public Relations", as we have come to think of the term, include every action you take to forge or promote goodwill between your organization and these various groups and individuals.

A well organized Public Relations program includes a plan for ongoing communication using multiple venues, as well as crisis management preplanning.

Public Relations can be:

- One-way: you deliver a message.

Examples: newsletters, newspaper columns, ads, your web-site, billboards....

- Two-way: you provide a forum for two way dialogue.

Examples: press conference, town meeting, your web-site, blood pressure screenings, open houses, public education programs.....

Several factors impact the type, duration, timing, frequency, cost and expected effect of the public relations activity. As part of the planning process, you'll identify each group that you wish to establish a relationship with; then determine which methods of communication best meet that group's needs. The more you know about your audience, the better you can target your message and utilize your resources.

There is no good canned Public Relations program for the emergency services. Your program must be tailored to the needs of your organization, your audience and the changing times.

To be successful, your Public Relations program must be planned, well coordinated, and have specific messages to deliver. Quality and consistency are paramount.

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Public Relations = Marketing

Your organization must be positively presented “24/7” to your constituency, your members, civic leaders, and the media. You are marketing your organization to them. People tend to remember the ‘bad’ much longer than they remember the ‘good’. Therefore, you must constantly remind them of the ‘good’, and reduce the perception of the ‘bad’ as much as possible.

Your public image is one that has been created over many years. It is modified in many ways (sometimes ‘good’, frequently ‘bad’) based on radio, TV, the print media, the internet, the movies, and just plain talk. You can’t change what someone reads or sees once published, but you can have an impact on how they process information about your organization and, potentially, what gets published!

- 1) Consider your Public Relations committee as a marketing firm, hired to coordinate your image presentation.
- 2) All current marketing/Public Relations activities, as well as your current image presentation, need to be reviewed.
- 3) Your organization must be actively and positively promoted by all members in as many ways as possible.
 - Provide clothing to identify them as volunteer members (AND have guidelines for use).
 - Provide member plates for their vehicles (but what to do if they drive rusted wrecks?).
 - All activities of the organization should be well publicized. Banners with the organization name should be highly visible.
 - If you don't already have one, develop a logo which can be used on all marketing materials.
 - Take the time to give your members a Public Relations/Marketing Orientation at one of your meetings.Members will be happy to go along with the program, **if** they know what it is. The orientation should include:
 - The need for a positive organization image
 - Current positive and negative perceptions of the organization
 - How they can help accentuate the positive
 - How they can help minimize the negative
 - Asking for their ideas
 - An image improvement plan and each member’s role in it.
- 4) All organization activities must be considered; how they impact the image of the organization with the membership as well as the community.

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The Basics

Almost all Public Relations material needs to incorporate as many of the 5 W's and an H as possible.
Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How.

Your message must be: short, concise, factual, informative, and easy to read and understand.

DO:

- double space and leave margins
- type on only one side of the page
- check your facts
- use spell check and have someone else check the grammar, spelling and format
- avoid using acronyms, abbreviations, or catch phrases
- keep it simple
- avoid smearing anyone or any organization (even if it's true)
- prepare your materials for the target media/audience
- respect the people you are dealing with as professionals
- respect deadlines

DO NOT:

- flood the media with too much information
- threaten

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Image Review Process

All organizations have skeletons in their closets. Events or perceptions from the past may have tarnished your image to certain segments of the community. In the same way, past or present activities promote a positive image. The purpose of this exercise is to identify the skeletons as well as the positives.

The activities below can be run concurrently. Most should be done on an on-going basis. Image review is important to keep your organization focused on the positive, and to correct any negatives as soon as you become aware of them.

1) Review local newspapers on a regular basis for articles, press releases, bulletin board items, or any other mentions of your organization, or the emergency services in general. Maintain a scrap book. Use the local library or the newspaper's own archives to review the past year (if a weekly), or the last six months (if a daily) for past mentions. Remember that negative comments about any volunteer emergency services organization could impact yours!

2) Meet with local business and civic leaders, on an informal basis, to get their insight into the image of the organization.

3) Former members are often free with negative comments about the organization. If you've heard them, you can be sure many others have, also.

4) Current members should also be asked for their perceptions of the organization. It is important to get all ideas on the table where they can be addressed. You want to "accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative".

5) Do a "Google™ search" on variations of the organization name and see what comes up.

What to do with what you've learned?

Once you've compiled a list of skeletons and positives:

- determine if you need to make a concerted effort to change your image in the community
- determine how to accentuate the positives

Example...

Perception: All volunteer firemen do all day at the firehouse is sit around and drink.

Actuality: You don't have a bar in your new firehouse and no drinking is allowed in the building!

OR

The bar is only open for social functions when the hall is rented out.

So, how would you address this negative perception?

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Types of Public Relations

Print Media

- Event announcement or calendar placement
- Interview
- Ads: classified or display
- News article
- Public education column

Internet

- Website
- Links
- E-mail broadcast
- Blogs
- Ads

Radio and TV

- Commercial
- Interview
- Feature Coverage
- Public Service Announcement (PSA)
- News report
- Public Education Coverage

Public Events

- Open House
- Community Days
- Public Service Programs: blood pressure screenings, blood mobiles, child seat checks
- Fair/Mall display
- Public Education Courses

Newsletters/mailings

- Your own
- Service/Fraternal Organization
- Community Groups
- Schools
- Corporate/Employee
- Religious
- Unions

Displays

- Sign Boards
- Banners
- Mass Transit
- Posters
- Billboards
- Truck

Giveaways/handouts

- Bags
- Brochures
- Coloring Books
- Clothing: Shirts, Hats
- Bag Stuffers
- Restaurant placemats
- Bumper Stickers

Speakers Bureau

- Your own
- Joining others

Public Relations on a Shoestring

Media Relations

Page 1 of 3

The “Media”, for purposes of our discussion, will be defined as: television, radio, print publications and the internet, per below.

TV:

- Broadcast/network
- Cable

Radio

Print:

- Daily newspapers
- Weekly newspapers
- Local magazines
- Local special interest publications

Corporate:

- Company/organization newsletters

Internet:

- Your web-site
- Other web-sites
- E-mail broadcasts
- Blogs

To be effective in your dealings with the media, you must establish a “media contact file”. Choose a format that you are comfortable maintaining. A computer database facilitates printing customized letters, mailing labels, faxes, e-mails, etc. Regardless of the format you choose, your media contact file should contain at least the following information:

- Name of organization
- Type of media (print, TV, radio, etc.)
- Contact person, title
- Details about them; their position within the organization
- How to contact: phone (including extension), cell phone, pager (including PIN), fax, and e-mail
- Preferred contact method
- Mailing address
- Physical address and directions
- Deadlines
- Affiliated media (one organization may have multiple radio stations)
- Geographic coverage
- Their audience
- Gate keeper information
- Last update date: To be effective your media contact file must be kept up-to-date through frequent verification

See next page for a completed, sample Media Contact File.

Public Relations on a Shoestring

Media Relations

Page 2 of 3

Sample Media Contact File

Name of Organization: OurTown Weekly Press

Type of Media: Weekly Newspaper

Contact Person, Title: Jim Newshound, Community Activities Editor

Details about Contact; their position within the organization:

Son of the owner (Bill Newshound), BS in Journalism from Cornell, covers all local organization news, used to be a volunteer firefighter with Othertown Fire Dept., likes the fire service, has two kids (both like soccer)

How to contact:

Office Phone: 555-555-1221 ext. 323; Pager 800-555-3333 PIN 23456; Cell Phone: 555-554-1234;
Fax #: 555-555-1234; e-mail, BNEWSHOUND @OURTOWN.COM

Preferred contact method:

News Releases: e-mail.

If pictures available: fax cover then e-mail; prefers TIFF or JPEG format max 750kb file size

Announcements: Fax or e-mail

Mailing Address: Ourtown Weekly, PO Box 1234, Ourtown, NY 11111-1234

Physical Address and directions: 1422 Main Street, Ourtown (next to the bank building)

Deadlines: Monday 10am for calendar items; Tuesday 10am for news releases;

Affiliated media: WZBM Radio 99.7 FM. Owned by Jeff Newshound, (Bill's brother). Country music.

Geographic coverage: Five Towns

Their audience: Paid circulation: 5200, primarily by mail and rural carrier, minor store sales (5%).

Gate Keeper information: Sally Jo Pita is the receptionist. She also previews all faxes and mail before it gets where it needs to go. Sally's kids are in the local Fire Dept. Explorer Post. If we need to find Jim, Sally knows where he is.

Last update date: 11/03/08- reviewed info with Sally.

Important: You should maintain a separate file with a history/log of all contacts, conversations, clippings, etc. pertinent to each media organization.

Public Relations on a Shoestring

Media Relations

Page 3 of 3

In most areas there are several companies/organizations that should already have a well established media contact file:

- Electric/Gas Companies (Director of Corporate Communications)
- Local Red Cross Chapter (Public Relations Director or Executive Director)
- County Government (County Executive's Office)
- United Way (Public Relations)
- Political Parties (County or Local Chairperson)
- Local Politicians (Office Manager, Chief of Staff)

Make nice to the right individual (title in parenthesis above) and you can save lots of leg work.

You may also be able to engage their assistance in your PR efforts or enlist them as a mentor. In the role of mentor, they can offer you insight on the various media outlets, share sources for PR materials (printing, billboards, giveaways, etc.), review your plans, objectives and budget, as well as materials you develop.

Public Relations on a Shoestring

The News Release

News Releases are the time honored method of providing information to “the media”. There are rules and expectations for the format and presentation of a news release. Following the format increases the probability that your release will be utilized. If you don't follow the format, your release will probably end up in the circular file (unless it's a slow news day, or someone really likes you).

Basic Rules:

- 1) Leave wide margins (1.5") on both sides of your page and double space your lines.
This allows room for notes and editing by the person receiving it.
- 2) Type or computer generate your release. **DO NOT USE FANCY TYPE FACES.**
- 3) Print on one side of the page only.
- 4) If you choose a colored paper to stand out, make sure your copy can still be read.
- 5) If you'd like your information to be released at a specific time/date, be sure to say so.
- 6) Do not send your release more than two weeks in advance of the release date, or it may be lost in action.

Getting It There:

Important: PLAN AHEAD!

- 1) E-Mail: Generally the preferred method for most media. Make sure you know and follow the specific media's guidelines for attachments, photo sizes and formats.
- 2) Hand delivery: Works well, but is time consuming. May provide the opportunity for you to meet your contact and answer questions.
- 3) Faxing: Generally works well, but don't forget a cover page addressed to your contact by name. Make sure your fax header is acceptable. If faxing from a fax machine (versus a computer), make sure it produces an acceptable copy (no smears or lines).
- 4) Mail: The traditional method. Unlike faxing, allows you to include photos, if desired. Mail is sometimes subject to short circuiting by the mailroom or the person opening the mail. Allow 5-7 days, even for local delivery.

Formats: See next two pages.

Public Relations on a Shoestring

SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE FORMAT: On your letterhead

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date:

Contact: Your Chief Officer

Phone:

XYZ Volunteer Fire Department announced today the start of their Spring 2009 Recruitment Drive. The Department is currently looking for volunteers to help them continue to provide 24 hour, 7 day a week volunteer staffing. All positions are part-time and actual hours can be scheduled around your availability. Training is provided and paid for by the Department for all positions.

Available Positions include:

- Clerical assistant(s) to assist with filing, typing and computer data entry.
- Emergency Medical Technicians (especially for day time hours). We'll teach you how to save lives.
- Drivers: Do you have a clean license? We can use you.
- Public Education Assistants: Do you like kids? Are you comfortable in front of groups? We're looking for 5-10 people to help us with our new kids' fire safety and basic aid training programs. Day time availability a must.
- CPR Instructor Aides: Have you taken a CPR course? Would you like to help us reach more of the community? We're looking for all hours, all days.

To learn more about these, or any other open volunteer positions, please:

- call our 24 hour volunteer hotline at 203-xxx-xxxx. Just leave your name, number, and when we will get back to you OR
- go online to our web-site at XYZFD.org and click on the Volunteer Opportunities tab.

Public Relations on a Shoestring

Public Events

Page 1 of 2

Open House

A Community Open House allows the community to come and visit your organization. This is ideal for public education and general "feel good" PR/Image boosting. It is very time consuming to do properly. Open Houses are frequently held in conjunction with Fire Prevention Week in October, or EMS week in May (or both). Planning should start a minimum of 6-9 months in advance.

A Recruitment Open House is designed to welcome new prospects in a controlled environment. These can be held several times during the year. It allows prospects to meet with current members, ask questions, and potentially start the interview process. These are generally low key, and with limited "family" involvement. Still very time consuming.

Fair/Mall Displays

Community, county, and fire department fairs are ideal places to spread the good word about your organization, to educate the public, and to make initial contact with prospective members. Many malls will also allow not-for-profit organizations to set up information booths during certain events or times of the year. Everyone working the booth should receive an orientation, including the purpose of the display. Certain rules apply:

- No eating or drinking in the booth, especially no alcohol
- Dress neatly, wear uniform or organization shirt
- Always have one more staff member than you need for each time block. That way one person can be on break as needed.
- Have both education materials and recruitment materials available
- All staff should know the process for taking initial information from prospects, **INCLUDING THOSE OUTSIDE YOUR DISTRICT**
- Have a professional backdrop with pictures and graphics

Additional ideas:

- Share manning the booth with volunteers from other local departments
- Consider giveaways for the kids
- Show your equipment
- Ideal for fire training trailer, ambulance and fire truck robots
- Consider asking local stores to donate fire extinguishers and smoke detectors that you can use in a drawing

Public Education Courses

These run the gamut from first aid and CPR courses, PET first aid courses, Operation EDITH and school programs, to water safety courses, baby sitting programs, senior driving courses and license point reduction courses. Whenever possible, function as the host/sponsor, but either use outside instructors or personnel who will not be overwhelmed with the additional work load. Several goals apply to each program you offer:

- 1) To provide a quality educational experience to the participants
- 2) To present information on your organization, including volunteer opportunities as well as related public education materials
- 3) To reach segments of your population that might not otherwise be exposed to your organization. PET first aid and senior driving programs both reach segments of the community that might not normally take a first aid or CPR course.

Hint: You don't need to be a firefighter or an EMT to teach a first aid or CPR course.

Public Relations on a Shoestring

Public Events

Page 2 of 2

Public Service Programs:

These programs provide services to your community while raising the public's awareness of your organization. Some of the better programs include:

- Blood pressure screenings. These can be done at your facility or at other community facilities.
- Blood Mobiles, organ and tissue donor recruitment programs
- Flu shot clinics. Work with your local department of health and Visiting Nurses Association.
- Child Safety Seat: Several programs are available. Consider...
 - Child safety seat inspection program
 - Child safety seat loaner program. This is ideal for visiting relatives.
- Smoke Detector programs:
 - Giveaway and install programs
 - Battery replacement programs for senior citizens and low income
- Tot FinderTM: <http://www.totfinder.com/>
- Vial of Life: <http://www.vialoflife.com/>
- MedicAlert® application distribution: <https://medicalert.org/Forms/Proedapp.aspx>

Public Relations on a Shoestring

Newsletters

Newsletters are a classic means of communication. They can be fancy or they can be low key. This section will address two methods of utilizing newsletters in your PR program.

- Publishing your own newsletter(s)
- Acquiring space in other organization's newsletters.

Publishing Your Own Newsletter(s):

- Membership newsletters: You have information that everyone in your organization should be getting. People hate going to meetings. Many of your members can't attend the meetings you do have. A membership newsletter fills the void. Publish it as frequently as you'd like (monthly usually works well, but be consistent). Include information on courses, volunteer opportunities, social activities, member updates, announce new members and member milestones. Make it something your members want to read. Include family information as well. If you have a membership discount card, this is also a good place to recognize the vendors who are supporting you.

- Community newsletters: You want your community to know what you are doing. Newsletters increase fund raising success because the public (including local business) is more likely to contribute to an organization they know is having a positive impact on the community. Four times per year seems to work well. Include timely public education information, volunteer opportunities, course information, a community calendar for the next four months (allowing a one month overlap is helpful), profiles of volunteers, what you are doing with their donations, current legislation that may need support, etc.

Feel free to solicit advertising from local business. A community newsletter should be, at worst, a break-even proposition for you. Ideally, your ad income will cover other Public Relations expenses as well.

Hint: If you use a professional fund raising company for your direct mail fund raising campaign, work sets of labels for your newsletter into your contract.

Other Organization's Newsletters:

You may be able to get your messages inserted in newsletters or "other" publications that are already established. "Other" publications include sales flyers (lumber yards and hardware stores regularly do these), church bulletins, and meeting minutes.

Your job is to find out who is responsible for deciding the contents of each publication, and how you can get your information included. In most cases, if your information will be of general interest to the readership, all you have to do is ask. Ideal topics include seasonal public education materials, volunteer opportunities, and announcements for programs or events. Some organizations may also offer to distribute your brochure or handouts as part of their mailings.

Don't overlook: Fraternal and service organizations, Chambers of Commerce, corporations, utilities, banks, insurance agents and unions.

Be sure to say 'THANK YOU' for any message inserts.

Public Relations on a Shoestring

Types of Displays

Displays are used to get your message across to a large number of people.

In all cases you want to attract attention. Therefore, remember KISMIF: Keep It Simple, Make It Fun. Some basic rules:

- Color is good as long as it doesn't hide your message
- Spelling is important: Proof and Proof and Proof again!
- Space and layout are important. If you cram your words together, they can't be read!
- Keep your message short
- People must be able to read your message in the time window available (traffic signal, checkout lane, drive by, etc.)

Posters:

The least expensive display is a poster. Posters can be commercially printed or produced as a kid's school project. Posters can be distributed for posting to schools, stores, businesses, and churches. Consider a poster anyplace there is a wall, window or bulletin board that people pass by. Consider several size posters with the same theme for different size spaces and maximum impact. Don't forget public bathrooms above the urinals, above the sink and on the back of the stall doors.

Sign Boards:

Many businesses and organizations have sign boards, both lighted and plain, where messages can easily be changed. Some are electronic; others have simple, removable letter units. To effectively utilize sign boards, take an inventory in your area; note the location, whether it is lighted or not, and the owner. Once you decide the messages you would like to present; make contact with the sign board owners to determine if they would be willing to display your message for a defined time frame. Let them know you have volunteers willing to assist in the set up of the sign.

Banners:

Banners can be used across highways, hanging from buildings, at sporting events, or hanging from stationary vehicles. They are generally for temporary (less than a month) exposure, and usually for specific events. Whenever possible, make them generic so they can be reused. Work with your banner vendor to design them so dates can easily be changed. Be sure to dry them well between uses. The hardware for hanging across roads or on buildings can be set up so changing banners is easily accommodated. Banners can be co-oped by sponsors of specific events. Banners and the mounting hardware are expensive.

Billboards:

Highway billboards are one of the most expensive forms of advertising. Best to use in conjunction with a sponsored project; the corporate sponsors pay for the billboard as part of the sponsorship commitment. Use billboards as part of a county or regional plan, as they reach a large percentage of viewers from out of your area.

Mass Transit, Trucks:

Many trucking companies and mass transit operators have programs whereby informational posters can be placed on their vehicles or in mass transit stations.

Where to start: If you have local companies with truck fleets, approach the fleet manager or the owner. For mass transit, approach the advertising, public relations, or communications department.

Public Relations on a Shoestring

Giveaways/Handouts

Page 1 of 2

These can be at no-cost, low cost or high cost to you. Positive repetition and display are the keys to giveaways. They can be designed for your direct distribution or for distribution by others. In most cases, the cost should be co-oped by other companies as an advertising outlet.

Bags

Several bag concepts are available. For each bag, the key is to share the space on the outside with your sponsor's message.

- Literature bag with your message on the outside: stuff with your public education materials. Ideal for school programs, fairs, etc.
- Door knob bag: designed to leave behind during door-to-door campaigns with 'sorry we missed you' materials. Serves a second life as an auto litter bag.
- Grocery store brown bag with a message: also works well with pharmacies, video rental stores, etc., with your message on the outside, on one or two sides. Get them to print it for you.

Bag Stuffers

Concept: Shoppers carry their purchases home in bags. You gain access to them by providing a piece of literature, flyer, announcement, or something else to stuff in the bag. This is ideal for an on-going public education campaign where you change the topics on a monthly basis.

Your Job: Identify stores willing to participate and the quantity they will need for an agreed period of time. Identify sponsor(s) for the printing (get a printer to donate the printing in return for an ad on the copy). Arrange for distribution. Send a thank you!

Hint: avoid time sensitive materials whenever possible. That way you can use left over materials at other events.

Brochures

Brochures or flyers fall into several categories:

- Organization descriptive

EVERY organization should have a simple, professional brochure or flyer describing itself, what it does and the volunteer opportunities available. It does not have to be color (but color doesn't hurt). Key ingredients: Who are we; what do we do; who are our members; what does it take to join; what opportunities are available; how much time it will take; how do I get trained; how do I get in touch with someone to find out more?

- Fund Raising

- Always ask for specific amounts
- Always tell what you will do with the money
- Always tell what you did with money received in the past
- Consider offering a menu of options for things you need

-Public Education

- Public Education brochures that you can stamp or label with your organization name are available from many sources.
- Brochures can also be designed to convey a specific educational message while emphasizing the organization and volunteer opportunities.

Public Relations on a Shoestring

Giveaways/Handouts

Page 2 of 2

Restaurant Place Mats

Concept: you provide free place mats with your message on them to local restaurants.

Your job: get restaurants to commit to the program and determine the number of mats used in a specific time frame. Sell the ad space around the outside of the mat paying for the program, leaving room for your message in the center.

Hint: DO NOT sell ad space to other restaurants.

Themed Coloring Books

Concept: kids need things to do. Mom and Dad look at what they've done (hopefully). Your message gets through to the kids and their parents.

While generic coloring books for public education are available, the cost to do a customized book is not great.

One of the leaders in this field is "Colorfully Yours", 800-230-9661, www.colorfullyyours.com.

Ok to sell ad space or get sponsors.

Bumper Stickers

Concept: People sit in traffic all the time. If your message is on the bumper or back of the car in front of you, it's going to be read. Options include paper, vinyl and magnetic. Have you ever heard of South of the Border? IMPORTANT: Do not apply bumper stickers to vehicles. Let people do it for themselves.

Clothing

Concept: Most people wear clothes, most of the time. Clothing is a walking billboard for your message. Keep the message clear and professional. (Co-Ed Naked Firefighter not the best image).

Provide your members with identifying clothing for all seasons.

Consider T-shirts with "I'm an Emergency Services Volunteer.. ask me how you can become one too".

Or, "I volunteer to save lives... Ask me how you can help". Clothing can also be used for kids at the completion of specific education programs. Get sponsors.

Aprons: If you are doing a placemat program for a specific time frame, find out if the restaurants would allow their wait staff to wear your message aprons.

Hats: generally too small for any message other than your organization name, though they can be a nice freebie for your membership.

Consider a 'trade-in' program to get the old ratty department shirts off the street!

Public Relations on a Shoestring

Speakers Bureau

Concept: Numerous organizations look for someone to come to their meetings and give a presentation. This is an ideal way to show your organization in its best light while, at the same time, presenting a message and making contacts for other outreach.

What's involved?

- Identify individuals in your organization interested and willing to give presentations (those who are presentable, well spoken and professional in their demeanor).
- Develop presentations with handouts and appropriate audiovisuals that are easily modified for various presentation times and different audiences.
- Identify organizations that allow outside speakers. Make contact with them and offer your services.
- Consider developing a brochure/flyer listing the possible presentations.
- Consider having a logo golf shirt or other identifying attire for each of the presenters.

NOTE: being a speaker often involves receiving a free meal at the event.

Important:

Before you commit to doing a presentation:

- make sure the dates are clear on your calendar
- make sure the time provided is enough for what they/you want covered
- determine the audience
- determine the topic and how it is of interest to the audience
- determine the "usual" format for presentations at that meeting

Once you've committed:

- request a confirmation in writing
- get the approximate number attending
- reserve your audiovisuals and handouts

The week/day before the event:

- confirm with your contact
- pretest your audiovisuals, prepare your handouts
- prepare a news release regarding the presentation to provide to the host
- prepare a brief introductory speaker's bio

The day of the event:

- arrive early
- set up your audiovisuals
- provide the news release to the host
- provide the introductory bio to the host
- give your presentation: keep within the time frame allowed
- distribute the handouts
- thank the group for the opportunity
- consider giving the host a token "thank you" (department hat, shirt ???) or inexpensive giveaways to all (bumper stickers, magnets, etc.)

Within a week after the event:

- send a thank you letter to the host. Offer your services for a future event.

Public Relations on a Shoestring

Public Information Officer (PIO)

This individual will be your primary contact with the media for all presentations, interviews, and press conferences.

Things to look for in a PIO:

- Ideally lives and works in the community. When something happens and you need your PIO, you don't want them at a job 60 miles away.
- Must be level headed, able to handle stress, and be comfortable speaking to groups.
- Must have very good verbal communication skills.
- Helpful to have a working knowledge of your organization.
- Must be presentable (be sure they have a uniform for formal presentations, and a PIO Incident Vest).

Important: The PIO probably should not be the chairperson of your Public Relations committee. The chairperson does not necessarily need to have all of the presentation skills of the PIO; and the PIO doesn't need the organizational skills of the chairperson. The chairperson, with the support of the rest of the committee, needs to be able to work behind the scenes coordinating the entire Public Relations process. They support the PIO as necessary, especially when "incidents" occur.

Always have at least one Assistant PIO.

Murphy's Law says the week your PIO goes on vacation is when the train filled with toxic chemicals and diplomats from the UN will hit your fire truck while it is out on a pizza run for the bingo game. Of course, the accident will occur directly behind the high school filled to the rafters with 2000 students and guests for the basketball finals.

Train and Inform Your PIO (and assistant):

- Make sure they know your organization inside and out.
- Public speaking courses and "dealing with the media" courses are a must (check your local community college).
- Both the State and National Fire Academies run an excellent PIO course.
- Get them organized: provide a laptop computer with all possible department resources (consider having member profiles available), as well as a copy of your media files.
- Include them in disaster planning meetings with local, county and state officials.
- Introduce them to the media. Don't wait until the disaster happens.
- Get together with other PIO's in your area and practice press conferences.

Use Them:

Your PIO and Assistant PIO should be used regularly for press conferences, interviews, and local presentations.

Your PIO will be the voice of your organization.

Make sure it is a voice that you want heard.

Public Relations on a Shoestring

Budgeting and Funding

Page 1 of 2

There are basically three ways to fund your Public Relations activities:

- Establish a yearly budget for Public Relations as part of your organization budget
- Get a grant
- Fund Public Relations through sponsorships/barter

90% of Public Relations for volunteer organizations can be done on a no cost, low cost, barter, or sponsored basis.

Most of your activities are high profile and positive. Therefore, you are in a prime position to use other people's money to fund your activities.

You have the ability to reach, inexpensively, segments of the population that most companies can't. Examples: Senior citizens at a blood pressure screening, kids in school (and their parents) at presentations. Businesses want that positive access, too. Your goal, therefore, should be to put together a comprehensive package of public relations, marketing, and public education activities; then arrange for sponsorships. (Build in sufficient cost to sponsorships to help fund other activities that may not have the sponsor's name associated.)

What is a Sponsor?

A sponsor uses their money, name, resources, and perhaps time, to do something for you.

The most common sponsorships seen today are corporate sponsorships of sporting events and fund raising activities. Corporations support these activities for many reasons, but two stand out:

- It's good corporate citizenship to do so
- Lots of people see their name associated with a good activity = good advertising

In most communities, the fire department has one of the largest, if not the largest, membership of any volunteer organization. The political and buying clout of the organization, its members and their families, is considerable. Leverage this power for the good of the organization. As an example, don't hesitate to barter ad space exposure to your membership through your newsletter in return for goods or services. Don't hesitate to ask businesses to support your membership discount program.

Things you may need for your Public Relations activities:

- Printing: letterhead, envelopes, brochures, posters, business cards
- Food: to feed your members when they work through meal times, on projects or at meetings
- Graphic Art services: logo, artwork, brochure and poster design, billboard art
- Legal services: review of contracts
- Office supplies
- Computers, printers, scanners, fax, copiers and other office equipment
- Audiovisual equipment: cameras, projectors, PA systems
- Clothing: for members and to give away
- Communications: for special events
- Giveaways
- Ad Space/time: radio, TV, print media.

Public Relations on a Shoestring

Budgeting and Funding

Page 2 of 2

Sample Sponsorships:

- One of the easiest sponsorships is a page in your local paper. Buy it (or better yet, get it donated), and then sell space around the outside. Your message goes in the center and your sponsors get the affiliation with your organization through their support. This can actually be a fund raiser for your public relations budget, if done right. Ad space can be a nice barter item, as well. If you can't get the space donated, consider going for a multiple time insertion. Your cost per page will be less. Look to businesses that are not normally advertisers in the paper. This helps the paper (they might get more advertisers) and it helps the businesses (your ad space can be priced by you less than a standard ad space of the same size through the paper). **MAKE SURE THE PAPER ALLOWS YOU TO SELL THE SURROUNDING AD SPACE BEFORE YOU SIGN THE AD CONTRACT!!!!**

- Food sponsorship for your blood pressure screenings or blood mobiles. Get a local store to donate the food, and in return you put up a sign recognizing their assistance. You can even put out flyers for them.

- Banner sponsorships. Road banners are expensive. Beer and soda distributors will frequently have deals with local banner companies, due to their volume purchasing. They put their logo on your banner; you get it free, or at little cost. Beer distributors may not be the best choice....

Public Relations on a Shoestring

Sample News Release for attending this conference

Type on your letterhead. Fill in the appropriate areas that are in parenthesis with the course particulars and your organization's information. Be sure to double space the copy!

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: () Contact: (Your Chief Officer) Phone: ()

(# of volunteers) volunteers from (name of your organization), attended the 13th Annual, Emergency Medical Services “A Challenged System” educational seminar March 20 and 21 at the Crowne Plaza Hartford/Cromwell, CT. Members attended several patient care seminars including (name seminars here). On-going training is important to maintain the excellence of care provided by our all volunteer organization.

Members also attended several management related seminars including (name management seminars here), To increase efficiency of our organization in these trying economic times.

We need your help, too! After (# of years in business) years we, like most of the emergency services organizations in our area, are having problems staffing ambulances and providing sufficient fire fighting manpower. We are also looking for support members to assist us with community education programs, paperwork, fund raising and other non direct patient care activities. Anyone interested in finding out about volunteer opportunities in the fire and/or ambulance services in (your town) should call xxx-xxxx or visit our web-site at (WWW.yourorgwebsite.org).

Remember: not everyone can be an EMT or firefighter, but everyone CAN be a Volunteer!

Public Relations on a Shoestring

Seminar Evaluation Form

Please complete this form and turn it in before you leave or drop it at our booth in the exhibit area. Your feedback is helpful in improving this program for future presentations. Your name and organization are optional, unless you wish to be on our mailing list. Thank you for your time!

Are you currently involved in Public Relations at your organization? ___ Yes ___ No.

Was the program what you expected? ___ Yes ___ No.

Please explain:

Please identify three ideas you got from the program that you would like to implement with your organization:

1)

2)

3)

Please rate the following: 1 is unacceptable 3 is average 5 is excellent

Presentation: 1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

Presenter's Knowledge
of the topic: 1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

Handout Packet: 1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

Audiovisuals: 1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

Course Content: 1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

Facility: 1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

Please see over for completion of Evaluation Form

Public Relations on a Shoestring

Seminar Evaluation Form

General Comments:

Would you recommend this program to other members of your organization?

Yes No. Please explain:

How did you hear about this program?

How much lead time do you need to have on seminar announcements?

What is the best time for you for seminars like this one:

Weeknights Weekdays Saturday Day

Saturday Evening Sunday Day Sunday Evening

Would you take any of the following courses, if offered:

Public Education

Purchasing & Inventory Control

Recruitment, Recognition & Retention

Legal/Liability Issues

Financial Basics

Train the Training Officer

Early Defibrillation: Making Your Program Work Other: _____

Please put me on your mailing list for future seminars:

Name: _____ e-mail: _____

Title: _____

Organization: _____

Phone Day: (_____) _____ Phone Evening: (_____) _____

Address: _____ home__ organization __

City: _____ zip

Please see over for Page One of survey