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TELEVISION PUBLIC SERVICE IN PHILADELPHIA:
A THING OF THE PAST?

by
Jill Flanagan

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May 2003

Approved by _____

Date Approved 5-10-03

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ABSTRACT

Jill Flanagan
TELEVISION PUBLIC SERVICE IN PHILADELPHIA:
A THING OF THE PAST?
2002/03
Dr. Donald Bagin
Master of Arts in Public Relations

The researcher carried out this study to determine if national trends in television public service have influenced decision makers in Philadelphia and to provide public relations practitioners with detailed information about local practices. Online and library searches were conducted to secure information about television public service. In addition, the author interviewed communication experts, surveyed staff at six local channels and reviewed station materials.

The author found that Philadelphia's television stations continue to provide free airtime to charities along with traditional public service campaigns. However, research shows that paid PSA campaigns and third-party advertising agreements have grown in popularity. Public relations professionals employed by non-profit organizations should be aware of these new trends hovering on the horizon so that they are prepared to operate within this new framework.

MINI ABSTRACT

Jill Flanagan
TELEVISION PUBLIC SERVICE IN PHILADELPHIA:
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Nationally, television public service practices have changed. The author analyzed local policies to determine if national trends have affected Philadelphia. Online and library searches provided background. Communication experts and television staff were questioned as well. The investigation revealed that Philadelphia's stations continue to provide free airtime, but now explore alternatives.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my husband Mike for his unwavering patience and encouragement. I could not have completed this project without his love and support.

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Chapter 1

Background

In the early 1940s, an executive who sought to improve the advertising industry's reputation developed the concept of public service ads. James Webb Young envisioned professionals crafting messages to raise awareness about key social issues. His notion became a reality with the creation of The Advertising Council (the Ad Council) and the genesis of public service announcements (PSAs) in 1942.

For the next 45 years, the Ad Council served as the chief producer of PSAs for non-profit organizations and government agencies. The organization also secured airtime, which broadcasters donated to satisfy community service requirements mandated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, non-profit agencies began producing PSAs and soliciting airtime without the assistance of the Ad Council. This increased activity led to a high point in public service advertising's popularity and effectiveness.¹ However, marked changes to the PSA landscape lay just ahead.

Free airtime provided by the major television networks decreased from a peak level of 11 seconds per hour during prime time in 1992 to just four seconds in 1995.² In addition, the White House's Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) funded a

¹ Warren Berger, "Public Service Advertising in America: An Overview," Shouting To Be Heard: Public Service Advertising in a New Media Age 21 Feb. 2002: 2, Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation <<http://kff.org>>.

² Craig LaMay, "Public Service Advertising, Broadcasters, and the Public Interest: Regulatory Background and the Digital Future," Shouting To Be Heard: Public Service Advertising in a New Media Age 21 Feb. 2002: 9, Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation <<http://kff.org>>.

\$1 billion television advertising campaign in 1998 instead of relying on free time from the networks. Widely considered a turning point in the public service arena, ONDCP's paid PSA campaign signaled a significant shift that would continue into the new millennium.

Need

In 2002, the average television station in the United States showed 140 PSAs each week, which equaled \$1.3 billion in donated airtime across the country.³ While this statistic appears positive for non-profit organizations, the future of free airtime remains uncertain.

The FCC requires broadcast television stations "... to make an effort to cover issues of concern to their community" but leaves the specifics to the station, notes David Roberts of the Office of Broadcast License Policy.⁴ In addition, proof of public service is no longer part of the license renewal process. It becomes an issue only when someone lodges a complaint or during a station inspection, Roberts explains.

Reed Hundt, former FCC chair, argues that these imprecise requirements have led to a shaky outlook for public service advertising:

The FCC lacks the will to impose public service regulations and rules that are clear and specific and that apply equally to everyone. Instead, we've continued to rely on an unwritten agreement by broadcasters to run PSAs -

³ A National Report on Local Broadcasters' Community Service, June 2002, <http://www.broadcastpublicservice.org/2001_results/National_Report.pdf>: 5

⁴ David Roberts, telephone interview, 9 Oct. 2002.

and unwritten deals are bound to be broken, especially as the competition for eyeballs becomes more fierce.⁵

A 2002 Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation study supports Hundt's theory. The analysis determined that broadcast and cable networks at present contribute less than one half of one percent of all airtime to public service advertising.⁶

Whether the current television climate results from loose regulations, increased competition or stations' need to generate additional income, evidence shows that conventional public service practices no longer monopolize. For example, local television stations include news coverage of community issues in reports of public service airtime totals. On the national level, some public health agencies now deem the presence of social messages in television shows the most meaningful way to drive home their views.⁷ These practices back up Warren Berger's claim that "...society has debated the very definition of PSAs and broadcasters' responsibility to run them..."⁸

Traditionally, television stations provided PSAs to non-profits in exchange for logo placement on promotional materials, visibility at an event or purely as a public service. Across the country, television management now prefers campaigns that include advertising dollars or the opportunity to promote the station or its talent.⁹ According to a 2002 survey, one in three local television public service directors are more apt to broadcast an organization's PSA if the group also purchases advertising.¹⁰

⁵ Berger 3.

⁶ Berger 1.

⁷ Graeme Browning, "PSAs in a New Media Age," Shouting To Be Heard: Public Service Advertising in a New Media Age 21 Feb. 2002: 18, Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation <<http://kff.org>>.

⁸ Berger 3.

⁹ Tina Hoff and Liberty Greene, "National Survey of Public Service Directors," Shouting To Be Heard: Public Service Advertising in a New Media Age 21 Feb. 2002: 2, Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation <<http://kff.org>>.

¹⁰ Hoff and Greene 5.

The growing popularity of paid PSAs raises several questions. In “Public Service Advertising in America: An Overview” Berger asks: Does a purchased message still qualify as a public service announcement? Does the new model favor charities with more financial resources and take away from unpaid announcements?¹¹ The ability of non-profit organizations to support paid campaigns over the long term must be considered as well, according to Peggy Conlon, president and CEO of the Ad Council.¹² Finally, do supporters approve of charities using funds to pay for PSAs?

Besides securing straightforward paid PSA campaigns, some organizations have forged partnerships with for-profit entities willing to purchase airtime on their behalf. These third-party advertising agreements also warrant investigation due to the impact they have on the future of broadcast public service in America.

Purpose and Procedures

In keeping with the changing television environment experienced on a national level, do decision makers at Philadelphia’s stations view partnerships with non-profits within a new framework? What changes have occurred in the city and how do they affect public relations professionals? What prompted the change? What advantages and disadvantages do these new agreements bring? At least two stations in Philadelphia air paid PSAs during newscasts to add perceived credibility to the message. What issues regarding journalistic integrity do such placements present?

Television Public Service in Philadelphia: A Thing of the Past? sought answers by analyzing the practices of six broadcast television stations: KYW-TV (3), WPVI-TV

¹¹ Berger 3.

¹² Peggy Conlon, interview, “A Conversation With Peggy Conlon,” Shouting To Be Heard: Public Service Advertising in a New Media Age 21 Feb. 2002: 32, Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation <<http://kff.org>>.

(6), WCAU-TV (10), WPHL-TV (17), WGTW (48) and WPSG (57). The researcher questioned staff about media partnerships to determine each station's philosophy. The Kaiser Family Foundation advocated local analysis of television trends during its February 2002 National Conference on the Future of Public Service Advertising. Supporting materials distributed at the meeting encouraged charities to examine practices in their communities to gain insight into the availability of airtime for social causes.¹³

In addition to studying the activities of television stations, the author spoke with a representative of the FCC and a professor in Rowan University's Radio/Television/Film Department to uncover professional opinions. Written station materials were also examined.

The thesis employed secondary research sources as well, including trade publications and scholarly journals. Materials from the Ad Council, the FCC, the Kaiser Family Foundation's national conference and the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) proved particularly relevant.

Importance

On any day, at least 50 non-profit organizations approach local broadcast television stations with PSA campaigns.¹⁴ That fact, coupled with recent shifts in the public service advertising world, makes up-to-the-minute information about stations' decisions a must for practitioners.

Television Public Service in Philadelphia: A Thing of the Past? provides professionals in the non-profit sector with guidelines for the new television reality. The

¹³ Hoff and Greene 1.

¹⁴ Getting Your Message on the Air: A Guidebook for Community Nonprofit Organizations (Washington: National Association of Broadcasters) 4.

study examines the prevalence of paid PSA campaigns and other non-traditional television agreements in the city. Since no investigation is complete without a discussion of new technologies, the author also highlights the role Internet advertising, interactive television and other new communication tools will play.

Graeme Browning maintains that public relations professionals must continue to consider the changes tomorrow will bring. "...More and more people interested in getting out a message – be it for a commercial or public service purpose- seem to be acknowledging that they can no longer rely solely on the print and broadcast efforts that were sufficient only a few years ago."¹⁵

Comments by Darren Irby, vice president of external communication for the American Red Cross, further illustrate the need to prepare for the future.

The simple fact is lives would be lost without the important partnership between local broadcasters and the American Red Cross. Through airing disaster preparedness and response messages, promoting blood drives and highlighting health and international issues, people know what to do, where to go and to some extent, how to feel during times of need.¹⁶

Clearly, television's cultural shift requires public relations professionals to re-think PSAs and how they place these messages. It is also evident that the direction television public service takes will prove vitally important to charities and the countless citizens they serve. The results of this study, therefore, have significance for the greater Philadelphia area as a whole. Furthermore, public relations professionals in many cities

¹⁵ Browning 16.

¹⁶ A National Report on Local Broadcasters' Community Service 9.

can benefit from an examination of television practices in the fourth largest media market in the country.

Limitations

The researcher studied broadcast television stations exclusively. The practices of cable systems and radio stations were not analyzed. In addition, the study concentrated on activities that have occurred in Philadelphia; trends in other locales were not investigated. Lastly, the author was unable to secure input from one of the broadcast television stations in the city despite numerous attempts.

Definitions

1. **The Ad Council** – A non-profit organization that creates and distributes public service campaigns for charities and government agencies. The organization relies on communication volunteers and other resources to spread messages to the public.
2. **Cause-Related Marketing** – A for-profit company helps a non-profit organization raise funds or awareness while marketing its product or service. The company hopes to enhance its image by joining with a charity to serve the community.
3. **Federal Communications Commission** – A government agency that oversees television and radio communications.
4. **Group Advocacy Campaign** – A number of companies combine their financial resources to support an extensive television awareness campaign for a charity. For example, 12 sponsors contribute \$5,000 each to develop a comprehensive

\$60,000 advertising campaign. The contributors have the benefit of being part of a four-week campaign for a small investment. In addition, each company's logo and an audio tag appear in the commercials.

5. **Media Partnership** – An agreement between a television station and a non-profit organization whereby the station airs PSAs and/or provides news coverage if advertising is secured.
6. **Media Sponsorship** – An agreement between a television station and a non-profit organization that provides the non-profit with donated airtime and/or news coverage in exchange for station presence on promotional materials, visibility at an event, etc.
7. **National Association of Broadcasters** – A membership organization for professionals in the radio and television industry.
8. **Non-Profit Organization** – An agency or group that performs a community service and does not seek a profit.
9. **Public Affairs Program** – A weekly interview show aired on a broadcast television station featuring a local leader, community member or spokesperson for a non-profit organization.
10. **Public Service Announcement or Advertisement** – A commercial for a non-profit organization that is aired by a television station free of charge.
11. **Third-Party Advertising** – A company pays for television advertising on behalf of a non-profit in exchange for logo and audio recognition in the ad.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

Background

The author used several methods to gather written materials about television public service. First, an Internet search uncovered many useful documents including materials from the Kaiser Family Foundation's 2002 Conference on the Future of Public Service Advertising. Next, the researcher examined the FCC, NAB and Ad Council web sites to further investigate the topic. A review of the Local Broadcasters' National Report provided in-depth information about community efforts. The author also obtained a copy of the NAB's PSA guide for non-profit organizations. Lastly, books, theses and other materials related to television public service were secured from Rowan University's Library.

Public service advertising has been a feature of American broadcasting since World War II. However, in recent years, industry leaders and government agencies have questioned if broadcasters are duty bound to advertise non-profit organizations free of charge. Consequently, television management has begun to look for ways to combine station promotion and revenue-generating activities with public service. In addition, the FCC has relaxed certain PSA requirements through the deregulation process.

This new environment has prompted experts to wonder about the future of broadcast public service. It has also forced charities to use innovative ways to disseminate public awareness messages. Accompanying the cultural shift are questions

about the efficacy of PSAs, a communication tool that social agencies have relied upon for more than 60 years.

Communicating With Audiences Using Television PSAs

Making Health Communication Programs Work: A Planner's Guide, published by the National Cancer Institute (NCI), lists the following ways television public service advertisements help non-profits reach their target publics:

- Emotional appeals possible
- Easier to demonstrate a behavior
- Can reach low-income and other audiences
- Public perceives PSAs as important, credible and reliable
- Potential for largest range of audiences
- Passive consumption by viewer¹⁷

In some cases, these broadcast announcements prove extremely important to community groups. An analysis conducted in Michigan found that teenagers named television PSAs as their number one source for drunk driving messages.¹⁸

Conversely, NCI explains that certain obstacles go along with using televised PSAs to raise public awareness and stimulate action. These limitations include:

- Viewers must be present when message is aired; less than full attention likely
- Message may be obscured by commercial "clutter"
- PSAs can be expensive to produce and distribute
- Placement requires contacts and may be time consuming

¹⁷ "Characteristics of Mass Media Channels," Making Health Communication Programs Work: A Planner's Guide: 1, National Cancer Institute <<http://oc.nci.nih.gov/services/HCPW/STAGE2A.HTM>>.

¹⁸ "Characteristics of Mass Media Channels" 5.

- Competition for public service time and space is intense
- Deregulation ended government oversight of stations
- PSAs alone will not cause long-term behavior changes¹⁹

NCI recommends that public relations professionals properly craft a message, clearly define an audience, and establish a realistic and measurable goal for the campaign to maximize reach and effectiveness. Non-profits are also advised to pre test PSAs to gauge their impact on key audiences.²⁰

The Effectiveness of Public Service Campaigns

Examinations into how public service announcements affect viewers do not provide clear answers. Charles Atkin and Laura Schiller found that broadcast campaigns designed to educate the public vary from completely ineffective to moderately effective to very successful.²¹ Charities that use the Internet as the basis of public service efforts have also achieved wide-ranging results. The Benton Foundation in Washington, D.C. saw the number of “Connect for Kids” web site visitors quadruple by working with the Ad Council to place PSAs on line. In contrast, New York’s Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation secured only nine new contributors, despite the fact that its appeal ran 15.5 million times in two months on CNBC.com.²²

Organizations that have a social message to send can have a difficult time defining and measuring success due to the complex nature of the issues, Atkin and Schiller explain. “...Getting people to buy Coke over Pepsi is very different from

¹⁹ “Characteristics of Mass Media Channels” 3.

²⁰ “Characteristics of Mass Media Channels” 4.

²¹ Charles Atkin and Laura Schiller, “The Impact of Public Service Advertising,” Shouting To Be Heard: Public Service Advertising in a New Media Age 21 Feb. 2002: 21, Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation <<http://kff.org>>.

²² Browning 15.

changing their attitudes and behaviors concerning drugs, alcohol, teen pregnancy, and other complicated social problems.”²³

Public service advertisers do not always know who is hearing or seeing their messages. This fact makes it very difficult to influence behaviors or attitudes, which is the fundamental goal of most public service campaigns.²⁴ In addition, measuring the impact of donated messages presents a challenge as does determining which social changes directly result from public service advertising.²⁵ Furthermore, most sponsoring organizations do not have the financial resources needed to evaluate their campaigns through research.²⁶

To clear these hurdles, Atkin and Schiller counsel public service campaigners to set reasonable objectives, carefully designate target audiences and take advantage of the ability of the mass media to raise public awareness. They explain further that asking people to adopt a new habit, such as using a seatbelt, will prove easier than requiring them to stop a current practice. Using a public service message to reinforce a beneficial behavior leads to favorable results as well. Lastly, non-profits can use agenda setting to reach their goals. This practice involves focusing media attention on a topic to influence public policy, and by extension, individual behavior.²⁷

Paid PSA Campaigns

Seeking to improve outcomes, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and other agencies have augmented free television airtime with paid ads to ensure that

²³ Atkin and Schiller 22, and Karen Anne Jess, “Public Service Announcements for Broadcast Television: A Guide for Non-Profit Agencies,” Rowan U, 2000, 33-34.

²⁴ Browning 17 and Conlon 31.

²⁵ Atkin and Schiller 22.

²⁶ Atkin and Schiller 22.

²⁷ Atkin and Schiller 22-23.

messages air repeatedly during times when target audiences are watching. Thanks in part to the paid public service approach, NIDA effected a significant decrease in teen marijuana use in two Kentucky counties.²⁸

This new concept in public service advertising began in the late 1990s when the White House's ONDCP became the first agency to pay for time to guarantee message placement and frequency. The government built into its agreement with the networks a requirement that its purchase be matched with free airtime devoted to similar topics.

Since the government broke this new ground, debates have raged about the impact of the trend on traditional public service. Then FCC Chair Hundt opposed ONDCP's decision saying that the public should not have to "...buy the right to use its own medium..."²⁹ Other critics fear that if well-established organizations pay for time, it lessens fellow charities' chances of securing free time. In addition, agencies with limited financial resources will have little chance to compete if slicker paid announcements become the standard.³⁰

Representing the other side of the argument, The Ad Council maintains that broadcasters continue to supply significant PSA time.³¹ In addition, Ad Council President and CEO Conlon does not believe that the prevalence of paid campaigns signals the end of public service. In fact, she argues that this new approach will not last because non-profit organizations cannot fund advertising buys year after year.³²

²⁸ Kimberly R. Martin, "Television Public Service Announcements Decrease Marijuana Use in Targeted Teens," *NIDA Notes* 16.4 Oct. 2001: 2, 21 Oct. 2002
<http://www.drugabuse.gov/NIDA_Notes/NNVol16N4/PSAs.html>.

²⁹ La May 10.

³⁰ Berger 3 and Jess 2.

³¹ Victoria Rideout and Tina Hoff, "Executive Summary," *Shouting To Be Heard: Public Service Advertising in a New Media Age* 21 Feb. 2002: 4, Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation <<http://kff.org>>.

³² Conlon 32.

Those who agree with Conlon that paying for time represents a quick fix not a permanent solution cite the negative implications of displaying a willingness to purchase ads. Charities must also recognize the impact corporate partners may have on their name, reputation and dealings with other companies.³³ Moreover, some argue that these partnerships, in the form of cause-marketing agreements, undercut outright financial gifts and encourage non-profits to cater to corporate interests.³⁴

Cause-Marketing Agreements

The Foundation Center defines cause-related marketing as "...the public association of a for-profit company with a non-profit organization, intended to promote the company's product or service and to raise money for the nonprofit."³⁵

This concept first took shape in 1983 when American Express embarked on a project to help refurbish the Statue of Liberty. The company agreed to donate one cent to the restoration effort each time its card was used. Success came to American Express in the form of a 28 percent hike in card usage and a 45 percent increase in new customers.

Over the years, many corporations have embraced agreements with charities in an effort to build brand loyalty and outshine the competition. Studies show that when a company supports a social cause, the results are positive public perception, which translates into sales, and improved employee morale and allegiance.³⁶

A recent article in PRWeek explains that corporations must consider their reputations as a move toward close company examination gains momentum. For

³³ Jess 20 and The Foundation Center, 28 Oct. 2002 <http://fdncenter.org/learn/faqs/cause_marketing.html>.

³⁴ The Foundation Center.

³⁵ The Foundation Center.

³⁶ Boomer Esiason Foundation, 28 Oct. 2002 <http://www.esiason.org/bef_fundraising.html> and The Foundation Center.

example, one group has calculated detailed Reputation Strength Ratings for retail, pharmaceutical and electric power companies. Those that receive the highest ratings enjoy a solid reputation that serves them well in the areas of competition, expansion and crisis management.³⁷

As cause-marketing agreements have expanded since the early days, these partnerships have come to include corporate support for paid television PSA campaigns. Some national policies prohibit charities from purchasing advertising, which makes third-party agreements crucial for television exposure. From the corporation's viewpoint, supporting a social cause in a public way helps ensure that key audiences know about the company's good work, a factor public relations industry leaders consider increasingly important.³⁸

National Conference on the Future of Public Service Advertising

Conflicting reports about how television management categorizes cause-marketing agreements and other new approaches cloud the paid PSA debate. A 2000 survey of decision makers at 50 East Coast stations found that 98 percent would not accept a public service advertisement sponsored by a corporation because they consider these announcements commercials, especially if the corporation's logo figures prominently.³⁹ But, broadcasters may not make a distinction between paid spots and donated time when they calculate public service totals.⁴⁰

³⁷ Sara Calabro, "A Prescription for Reputation: A Corporate PR Focus is Helping Remedy Pharma's Image Woes," PRWeek 18 Nov. 2002: 19.

³⁸ Calabro 19.

³⁹ Jess 40.

⁴⁰ La May 8.

To help shed light on this contentious issue, the Kaiser Family Foundation held a national summit for representatives of non-profit agencies, media outlets, the FCC and universities. At the February 2002 meeting, the foundation distributed Shouting to Be Heard: Public Service Advertising in a New Media Age, which summarized the results of an in-depth study of 10 broadcast and cable channels in seven U.S. markets.

Indiana University researchers Dr. Walter Gantz and Nancy Schwartz analyzed 1,680 hours of programming on ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC, Univision and five cable channels from February through June 2000. Their investigation revealed that while paid advertising and promos represent 25 percent of broadcast and cable television airtime, on average networks allocate less than one half of one percent (15 seconds each hour) to PSAs. Furthermore, 43 percent of this public service time airs between midnight and 6:00 a.m., and only 9 percent airs during prime time.⁴¹

In addition, the major networks devote 25 percent of PSA time to their own campaigns featuring network stars, and one in three public service announcements result from purchased airtime. Charities that bought time received markedly better placement for their messages.⁴²

Since social agencies have voiced concerns about television stations airing shorter PSAs, the researchers also calculated the duration of free announcements. They found that 56 percent were 30 seconds long, 37 percent were 20 seconds or shorter and 7 percent were longer than 30 seconds.⁴³

Some argue that the Kaiser Family Foundation study does not credit broadcasters for service they provide beyond PSAs nor does it recognize their leading role in

⁴¹ Rideout and Hoff 5-6.

⁴² Rideout and Hoff 7-9.

⁴³ Rideout and Hoff 6.

supporting local efforts. Comments from Stan Statham, president and CEO of the California Broadcasters Association, illustrate this position. “California radio and television stations in 1999 contributed free air time that in dollar value added up to \$233,182,482. Kaiser should have studied all media and find [sic] out how dismal print, billboards and other media continue to be compared to the way broadcasters serve their communities.”⁴⁴

National Survey of Public Service Directors

At the conference, the foundation also released results from its National Survey of Public Service Directors, which polled representatives of ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC, UPN and WB affiliates. Administered in the summer of 2001, the examination revealed that 50 percent of the stations saw an increase in PSAs received during the past five years, while the amount of airtime devoted to these advertisements remained static or decreased. This fact leads non-profit organizations to seek creative means to present their PSAs and outdo the competition, Tina Hoff and Liberty Greene explain. However, the use of celebrities, special packages and other attention-getting elements do little to impress decision makers.⁴⁵

What positively influences gatekeepers are messages funded by a local agency or an affiliate’s network and those that enable the station to promote itself or sell advertising. PSAs produced by the Ad Council or sanctioned by the NAB stand a better chance of gaining free airtime as well.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ “Survey: TV Donates 15 Seconds an Hour to Public Service Ads,” Silicon Valley/San Jose BusinessJournal 21 Feb. 2002, 12 Nov. 2002

<<http://sanjose.bizjournals.com/sanjose/stories/2002/02/18/daily53.html>>.

⁴⁵ Hoff and Greene 6.

⁴⁶ Hoff and Greene 2.

Health, family and community concerns, and substance abuse make it to the top of the PSA pile because many stations (77 percent) consider them “priority” issues. On the other hand, 58 percent of respondents explained that policies prohibit them from airing religious, political, “controversial” or “disturbing” themes.⁴⁷

Regardless of the tone of the message, control over airtime rests in the hands of local television executives, the survey’s authors maintain. Therefore, non-profit organizations must look to stations in their own backyard to gain a clear picture of airtime availability. “While networks have the power to make decisions about messages that will get national exposure, much of the decision-making about what gets on the air happens at the local level.”⁴⁸

The questionnaire also revealed that 83 percent of local stations create PSAs themselves and another 66 percent partner with charities and others to generate “co-branded” announcements. Despite the growing trend toward new kinds of PSA campaigns, the vast majority of public service directors (80 percent) said emerging models do not threaten donated airtime. Still, one in three respondents divulged that they are more apt to broadcast an organization’s PSA pro bono if the group also purchases advertising.⁴⁹

Additionally, one in six local public service directors explained that airtime that can be sold to an advertiser would not be donated to free messages. In other words, these stations will not devote sellable time to PSAs; instead those announcements are relegated

⁴⁷ Hoff and Greene 2.

⁴⁸ Hoff and Greene 1.

⁴⁹ Hoff and Greene 4-5.

to time that is unlikely to sell. The poll also found that local affiliates broadcast the PSAs that their networks provide in most cases.⁵⁰

Lastly, on the subject of tracking time dedicated to PSAs, 71 percent reported that station management requires them to record totals. Most of the public service directors in this category exclude purchased announcements from their tally.⁵¹

Local Broadcasters and Public Service

In June 2002, the NAB and Local Broadcasters published A National Report on Local Broadcasters' Community Service, which details how radio and television stations serve the public. The information was gathered through a survey of 5,342 radio stations and 712 television stations.

Across the country, local television stations donated \$1.3 billion worth of airtime during 2002, the report found. In addition, stations provided "off air" community service by appearing at events, producing PSAs and telethons, and covering local issues on newscasts and public affairs shows.⁵²

Other ways television supported charities are described as well. WFOR-TV in Miami/Fort Lauderdale, Florida aired "Ask the Experts," a two hour, call-in show that provided viewers with a monthly opportunity to speak with physicians. Burlington, Vermont's WCAX-TV raised money for the Make-A-Wish Foundation through softball games that pitted the station's talent against employees of local businesses. WGAL-TV helped secure donated jackets for those in need in Lancaster, Pennsylvania through its annual "Coats for Kids" campaign.

⁵⁰ Hoff and Greene 6.

⁵¹ Hoff and Greene 5.

⁵² A National Report on Local Broadcasters' Community Service 2.

A unique approach to public service was taken by WTVY-TV in Dothan, Alabama in support of the United Way. The station devoted one newscast entirely to stories about the charity and its local affiliated agencies. Similarly, in response to a school shooting, a channel in San Diego, California focused on preventing youth violence by preempting an hour of programming during prime time. KGTV-TV's "Talk to Your Kids" segment encouraged adults to communicate with their children and seek support from local agencies.

When it comes to natural disasters, broadcast television stations play a key role by preparing local residents and providing information and help to those directly affected, the national report explains.⁵³ Staff from Houston, Texas' KTRK-TV went so far as to transport bone marrow to a local cancer center via a news helicopter when flood waters reached un-passable levels.

These examples of public service, and the many others included in the national report, "...show broadcasters doing what they do best: identifying problems and challenges facing their communities and lending their visibility, their trust and reputation in the community, and their hard work to the cause at hand," the authors maintain.⁵⁴

Public Service Through Newscasts and Television Programs

A project undertaken by a Louisville, Kentucky television station, an area hospital and a drugstore chain shows how stations combine public service with news programming. WHAS-TV News aired a 15-part series that advertised colorectal cancer screenings and publicized the health center and the store. Larry Smith, the station's news

⁵³ A National Report on Local Broadcasters' Community Service 26.

⁵⁴ A National Report on Local Broadcasters' Community Service 16.

director, maintained that the coverage qualified as public service because the screenings help save lives.⁵⁵

Ethicists Philip Meyer from the University of North Carolina and Dr. Tom Cooper from Emerson College considered the larger implications. Meyer argued that ethical problems did not exist in this case because the public received vital health information and was not deceived. In contrast, Cooper pointed to the risk that advertising presented as news becomes acceptable as it becomes more prevalent.⁵⁶

Conveying public service messages through television programming remains trendy among national non-profit agencies. To support its \$100 million National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, ONDCP asked film and television writers to help spread anti-marijuana messages through storylines.⁵⁷ Public health organizations also advocate this method and have achieved success using it. When NBC's ER included discussion of a venereal disease in an episode, audience knowledge of the virus immediately tripled.⁵⁸

In "The Impact of Public Service Advertising," Atkin and Schiller explain that the education-through-entertainment method provides an extremely inexpensive way for charities to disseminate their messages. In addition, many believe that audiences will listen more closely to characters on a television show, with whom they have developed a relationship, than to a no-name talking head. However, to achieve long-lasting results, messages must be repeated over time through several channels.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Jill Johnson Keeney, "Public Service...or 'News-Mericals': The Blending of Television News and Advertising": 2, <<http://www.journalism.indiana.edu/Ethics/newsmerc.html>>.

⁵⁶ Keeney 2.

⁵⁷ Douglas Quenqua, "ONDCP Targets Teens With its \$100m Anti-Marijuana Push," PR Week 2 Dec. 2002: 1.

⁵⁸ Browning 18.

⁵⁹ Atkin and Schiller 26-27.

The Role of New Technologies

New communication tools help non-profit organizations use other tactics to develop comprehensive public awareness campaigns with expanded scope. The December 2, 2002 issue of PR Week highlights ONDCP's Drugstory.org, a web site that reinforces anti-drug messages delivered through schools, publications and television.⁶⁰ ONDCP is certainly not alone in cyberspace as evidenced by a 500 percent increase in the Ad Council's placement of Internet banner ads from 1999 to 2000.⁶¹

Browning highlights the increasing role technology plays across the public service spectrum in her article "PSAs in a New Media Age." She explains that non-profit agencies have begun to base awareness campaigns around web sites and banner ads because the Internet provides the following advantages:

- Better audience targeting
- The ability to place controversial messages that broadcast outlets avoid
- Audiences can immediately get detailed information
- A cost-effective alternative to television and radio
- Significant amounts of unsold space available⁶²

On the other hand, challenges peculiar to web communication must be overcome including:

- Online entities are not required to serve the public
- Underserved groups still do not use the Internet in significant numbers
- Quantifying the effect of online ads

⁶⁰ Quenqua 1.

⁶¹ Conlon 31.

⁶² Browning 15-18.

- The nature of banner ads limits design options and creativity
- The web does not reach mass audiences the way television can
- Computer users can block PSAs using free software ⁶³

Interactive television (ITV) and digital video recorders may impact the future of public service advertising as well, Browning argues. In the years to come, PSAs may be loaded onto the hard drive of an ITV set or messages may appear on the screen when the TV is not in use.⁶⁴ Viewers can pass over advertisements using these new technologies. Therefore, non-profits may concentrate on placing social messages in movies or television programs, a practice gaining popularity among national public health organizations.⁶⁵

Her article also questions how public service will fare in the world of tomorrow that will be ruled by a few media empires. Will this power structure mean messages can be delivered through the many channels the conglomerate controls? Or will focused decision making hurt charities that tackle controversial issues and those that do not have the influence needed to secure donated time?⁶⁶

Answers to these questions and the full impact of burgeoning technology have yet to come to light. However, Browning asserts that clearly "...the media environment within which PSAs must exist has changed dramatically," and those who want to reach the public should take heed.⁶⁷

⁶³ Browning 15-18.

⁶⁴ Browning 19.

⁶⁵ Browning 18.

⁶⁶ Browning 19.

⁶⁷ Browning 16.

Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters

The 1934 Communications Act requires broadcasters to serve “the public interest, convenience and necessity” in exchange for free use of the public’s electromagnetic spectrum. FCC deregulation, specifically the 1996 Telecommunications Act, may have relaxed public service requirements, but the spirit of the 1934 rule remains intact, Craig La May explains.⁶⁸

Perhaps it was this spirit coupled with up-and-coming digital technology that led Bill Clinton to form the President’s Advisory Committee on the Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters (PIAC) in 1997. Because digital technology allows stations to expand their programming and profits, leaders questioned if public service would increase in kind.⁶⁹ The group, also known as the Gore Commission, considered broadcasters’ current duty to air public service announcements, marking only the second time the United States has formally explored this topic.⁷⁰

In 1978, the initial study began at the urging of the Public Media Center. The California group lobbied the FCC to create a measurable requirement regarding PSAs mainly so that broadcasters could no longer banish these messages to off-peak times and select national announcements over local ones. After two years of analysis, the agency closed the inquiry without developing a PSA rule.

Clinton’s Gore Commission was more successful in terms of specific suggestions. The group concluded that digital television broadcasters should view PSAs as a higher priority. To that end, they should air social messages in all day parts and use locally produced messages and a consistent report to document public service efforts. The group

⁶⁸ La May 7.

⁶⁹ La May 8.

⁷⁰ La May 8.

also advised stations to close caption PSAs and asked the FCC to once again require broadcasters to proactively identify the key concerns of their local audiences (needs-ascertainment rule).⁷¹ A review of PIAC's recommendations remains tabled in the Notice of Proposed Rule Making process. In September 2002, Commissioner Michael Copps urged the FCC to revisit this topic so that direction for the digital future can be established.

La May argues that the regulatory outlook for PSAs will take one of two forms. Either the FCC will adopt PIAC's suggestions for needs ascertainment and PSA reporting or the public service world will remain static. In the second case, non-profits will continue to rely on broadcasters to run free messages or pay to guarantee airtime for their cause.⁷²

Gore Commission Chairman Norman Ornstein expressed his take on how broadcasters will view public service advertising in the years ahead. "...Most of what you see with broadcasters and PSAs is if they can do it in a way that doesn't cost them a dime in ad revenue and if they can use it to promote their self-interest and self-image they'll do it."⁷³

Alternatives to Broadcast Public Service Requirements

Countless broadcasters and lawmakers have argued the role of public service since the Federal Radio Act became law in 1927. Because this topic has been a continual source of controversy, some advocate alternatives to broadcast public service requirements.

⁷¹ La May 10.

⁷² La May 12.

⁷³ La May 12.

Former FCC Chair Mark Fowler and broadcast lawyer Henry Geller favor charging a spectrum fee broadcasters pay in lieu of serving the community. The rate, calculated as a percentage of the outlet's gross profits, would be used to support public broadcasting. Similarly, the suggested "pay or play" method would allow television management to decide if they want to air public service advertisements or pay to circumvent this responsibility.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ La May 11.

Chapter 3

Procedures

To uncover answers to the questions posed in this study, the researcher surveyed television representatives and interviewed communication experts. The Internet, educational databases and Rowan University's Library provided secondary research materials.

Secondary Research

A key word search of "television stations public service," "television public service" and "cause marketing" was conducted using the public Internet search engines google.com and Yahoo.com. These explorations produced 2.5 million hits resulting in dozens of useful documents. Several pertinent web links were identified as well including www.psaresearch.com, www.tvrundown.com and www.nonprofits.org. In addition, the researcher discovered four useful sources in Rowan University Library's holdings including Public Service Announcements for Broadcast Television: A Guide for Non-Profit Agencies by Karen Anne Jess. However, the educational database www.askeric.org and La Salle University's Library did not contain any relevant information.

Web sites maintained by the FCC (www.fcc.gov), the NAB (www.nab.org) and The Ad Council (www.adcouncil.org) supplied further information about television public service. A review of www.broadcastpublicservice.org and the 2002 National

Report on Local Broadcasters' Community Service provided particulars about campaigns conducted by television stations. Finally, the researcher explored materials from the Kaiser Family Foundation's 2002 Conference on the Future of Public Service Advertising and the NAB's Getting Your Message on the Air: A Guidebook for Community Nonprofit Organizations.

Primary Research

Questionnaires completed by staff members from KYW-TV, WPVI-TV, WCAU-TV, WPHL-TV, WGTW-TV and WPSG-TV yielded details about each station's work with non-profit organizations. The author also spoke with a representative of the FCC's Office of Broadcast License Policy and a professor at Rowan University to gain background information. Chapter four contains the results of this primary research.

Conclusions and recommendations regarding television public service campaigns appear at the end of this study. The researcher developed these suggestions from a survey of television decision makers, a review of media partnership guides and secondary research sources.

Chapter 4

Results of Primary Research

The researcher surveyed public affairs directors from six stations via e-mail and reviewed media partnership guides to investigate the current state of television public service in Philadelphia. In addition, a representative from the FCC and from Rowan University's School of Communication were interviewed for their expertise on the subject.

David Roberts of the FCC's Office of Broadcast License Policy explains that television stations are expected to devote time to topics that affect their communities. However, the FCC does not mandate how and when stations provide this airtime nor does it outline a specific hour requirement.⁷⁵

To serve the public interest, most small, independent stations across the country air public service announcements. Network affiliates usually cover local topics through news or issue programs, according to Roberts. Under the ascertainment process, the FCC provides an Issues/Program List to broadcast television stations every three months. The station must file a report by the tenth day of the next quarter to prove when issues of concern to the community received coverage. This report sits in a public inspection file available to local citizens upon request.⁷⁶

While the federal government charges television stations with serving the community, representatives no longer have to detail their public service efforts to secure

⁷⁵ Roberts, telephone interview.

⁷⁶ Roberts, telephone interview.

license renewal. Generally, a review of station activities occurs only when a person complains or during a station inspection, Roberts explains.⁷⁷

Locally, Professor Michael Donovan from the Radio/Television/Film Department at Rowan University finds that most of the PSAs aired by television stations do not originate from local charities. Instead, these announcements come from the Pennsylvania Association of Broadcasters or the Ad Council.⁷⁸

After seeking professional opinions, the author polled staff from six Philadelphia broadcast outlets to determine firsthand television public service practices in the city. Findings from the electronic survey responses follow.

1. Does your station provide free airtime to local charities?

100 percent answered, "Yes."

2. Does the network or your station's parent company play a role in determining which non-profit agencies you support with free airtime?

67 percent answered, "No."

A respondent who answered, "Yes," explained that a "corporate mandate" to air a national public service message favored by the parent company "would supersede local charities."

⁷⁷ Roberts, telephone interview.

⁷⁸ Michael Donovan, telephone interview, 19 Nov. 2002.

3. *During the past two years, has your station aired traditional PSA campaigns for local non-profits? (Messages were broadcast as a public service or in exchange for logo placement on promotional materials or visibility at an event)*

100 percent responded, “Yes.”

4. *Has your station’s policy toward free announcements changed during the past two years?*

83 percent said their station’s policy has not changed.

At one station, “It has changed slightly in the sense that we run PSAs during peak TV watching hours, and we also assist some non-profits in producing PSAs if they cannot afford the production costs.”

5. *If a charity purchases advertisements, does that influence the decision to air additional announcements for the group for free?*

67 percent of station representatives answered, “Yes.”

33 percent answered, “No.”

Two respondents explained that PSAs would not air at the same time as purchased announcements.

6. *Does your station air paid public service messages during newscasts to add credibility to the messages?*

83 percent answered, “No.”

17 percent answered, “Yes.”

One respondent commented, “All public service messages must be credible in order to air at any time.”

At one station, public affairs staff does not schedule PSA airtime. It is the traffic department’s responsibility.

7. *Does management ask you to track the amount of airtime your station provides to non-profit organizations? If so, what do you generally include in this report? Do you include purchased public service announcements?*

67 percent are not asked to track airtime.

33 percent must track airtime.

50 percent do not include purchased PSAs in their reports.

One public affairs director noted that management previously required a monthly report. Now that the information is not mandatory, the quality of the tracking suffers.

8. *What do you see as the advantages of paid public service campaigns and other non-traditional agreements? What are the disadvantages?*

Station representatives listed the ability to broadcast more messages in more advantageous time slots, reach a specific audience, and “increase message continuity and frequency” as advantages to paid public service campaigns.

Two respondents pointed to an “unfair advantage” that paid public service campaigns give to organizations that can afford to buy time. Conversely, another public affairs director believes paid PSAs present no disadvantages.

Lastly, one respondent wrote, “PSAs are run at the discretion of the television station; therefore, if you have a TV station that is not committed to serving its customers, you run the risk of not having your message broadcast at appropriate hours.”

Media Partnership Materials

Besides surveying public affairs directors, the researcher examined media partnership materials supplied by Philadelphia television station sales representatives. These resources outline how some outlets make PSA campaigns available to non-profit organizations through third-party advertising agreements.

One such approach, a group advocacy campaign, involves a number of non-competing companies combining their financial resources to support an extensive television awareness campaign for a charity. For example, twelve corporate sponsors agree to contribute \$5,000 each to develop a comprehensive \$60,000 advertising campaign. The contributors reap the benefits of participating in a four-week campaign for a small investment. In addition, each company’s logo and an audio tag appear in the commercials.

To gather a pool of potential advertisers, the station’s sales staff asks non-profit organizations to identify companies that already support the charity and may be willing to

fund a public service campaign. Companies that the station works with on a regular basis are solicited as well.

Another scenario has sales staff taking sole responsibility for securing advertising dollars from corporate sponsors. Generally, the station identifies three to five companies that will contribute funds to support a month-long, multi-faceted awareness effort for a charity. The campaign includes announcements produced by the station and starring its talent, and a segment on public affairs programs. Community billboards and an on-line presence are included as well. If the media outlet does not meet its sales goal for the awareness project, it carries out fewer of the campaign components.

Collectively, corporate sponsors receive audio and video mention on the announcements and community billboards. The companies' logos and a link to their sites appear on the web site as well. Contributors may also have the chance to publicize their involvement in a 30-second advertisement featuring their company's spokesperson. The advantage of this kind of promotion, according to the sales kit, is the opportunity the company receives to promote its good work supporting a local charity.

The researcher uncovered still other ways television stations work with local non-profits. One Philadelphia channel offers a unique community program supported by its national parent company. The outlet accepts grant applications from local 501(c)(3) organizations that provide services to children and teenagers. The chosen applicants embark on an event partnership with the station. The non-profit helps raise money for the parent company's charitable fund in exchange for a grant provided at the conclusion of the fundraiser. The amount of the endowment is determined by the net proceeds of the event.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Primary research findings indicate that broadcast television stations in Philadelphia continue to provide free airtime to local non-profit organizations. They also support charities by scheduling talent to appear at community events, producing PSAs for those with financial limitations and providing grants to charities in need.

Most of the stations' official public service policies have not changed in recent years. However, survey responses show that television outlets consider new ways to work with charities in the area. For example, at half the stations polled, traditional PSA campaigns have been joined by third-party advertising agreements or paid messages.

At four local outlets, management does not ask public affairs staff to document airtime they provide to local charities free of charge. This shift may have a negative impact on how stations measure their public service commitments. One station representative lamented the absence of a regular report maintaining that the quality of tracking declined since management relaxed the rule.

Station policy at most Philadelphia television outlets promotes a clear division between advertising, news and public service. To that end, outlets do not air purchased messages and free announcements concurrently. Reports that detail airtime provided to charities do not include paid PSAs. In addition, 83 percent of stations endeavor to separate PSAs from the influence of news by not airing these messages during newscasts.

Research also shows that the presence of paid campaigns does not necessarily mean public service no longer exists in the Philadelphia market. One survey respondent explained, “[A paid public service campaign] doesn’t enhance the decision to air a message. If I feel it’s an important topic, I will air it.” Another public affairs director echoed the sentiment by asserting that paid public service ads do not compete with free announcements. Lastly, one-third of survey respondents strive to fulfill requests from the community and consider audiences’ needs.

At one-third of the stations, public service staff recognizes that not all charities have advertising funds, so they support these groups with free airtime or PSA production assistance when possible. The fact that station representatives acknowledge the “unfair advantage” well-funded charities have over less financially secure ones, supports the argument that paid public service will leave fiscally weak charities in the dust.⁷⁹

The researcher also found that 67 percent of Philadelphia stations enjoy autonomy from the network and their parent company when it comes to deciding which local non-profits to support. This finding highlights the importance of establishing rapport between charities and local television decision makers. These relationships may enable a non-profit to secure an ongoing public service campaign with a station. One-third of the survey respondents pointed out how they partner with the same charity year after year to promote their initiatives.

Recommendations

Most importantly, the local television survey shows that despite similarities, public service guidelines can and do vary from outlet to outlet. These station-specific

⁷⁹ Berger 3 and Jess 2.

decisions limit the ability to draw concrete conclusions or set hard-and-fast rules. Therefore, public relations professionals should meet with each television outlet individually to fully explore policies and ultimately chose a partner that will provide the campaign they seek.

Before approaching a station to solicit public service support, non-profit organizations should prepare internally. Working within the organization first will help the charity pinpoint its purpose and determine the desired goals of the media partnership. Upon completion of the initial planning phase, the public relations staff stands ready to uncover opportunities with stations in their market and secure the best match.

The author also advises non-profits to explore emerging public service advertising trends. In "PSAs in a New Media Age," Browning shows how the move toward Internet public service has paid dividends for some charities. Web-based awareness campaigns allow for more specific targeting and delivery of detailed information. They also provide a cost-effective alternative to mass media outlets.⁸⁰

Further, Browning stresses that public service times have changed and non-profits must take care not to miss the train. Public relations professionals should prepare for a future that includes increased use of interactive television and digital recorders. These new technologies promise to greatly impact the way PSAs are delivered and received by the consumer.⁸¹

Besides staying in step with burgeoning technology, the researcher recommends that local agencies affiliated with a national organization explore partnerships with the Ad Council or the NAB to secure airtime. Hoff and Greene, in their National Survey of

⁸⁰ Browning 15-18.

⁸¹ Browning 19.

Public Service Directors, found that local charities benefit from association with these two groups.⁸²

Lastly, public relations practitioners who work for non-profit agencies must remember that television public service advertising cannot serve as the exclusive method of communication used to effect social change. As Atkin and Schiller explain, the effectiveness of PSAs can vary widely, a reality that clearly affects those organizations striving to influence audience behavior.⁸³

Recommendations for Further Study

Since the author limited research to broadcast television stations, it is suggested that public service practices in cable television, radio and print media be studied. Anecdotal evidence indicates that these outlets favor paid PSA campaigns and other non-traditional agreements with charities.

In addition, corporate-sponsored public service warrants deeper examination due to the implications this practice has for the operation of non-profits. Also, as corporate involvement in reputation management gains in importance, more companies will look for ways to strengthen their image.⁸⁴ Third-party television advertising presents businesses with a unique opportunity to position themselves as caring community partners.

⁸² Hoff and Greene 2.

⁸³ Atkin and Schiller 21-23.

⁸⁴ Calabro 19.

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