



Tactics to Overcome Declining PSA Usage

By Bill Goodwill

For any organization that closely monitors its public service advertising program it will come as no surprise that PSA usage rates - particularly among television media - have been declining recently. Several dynamics are responsible for this:

Increase in Paid Commercials – In the “old days” TV stations and networks would typically have four commercials per 15-minute break. Today, that number is typically 10, 15 or even 30 paid commercials per break. Since PSA usage is a function of unsold airtime, that obviously leaves much less time for them.

PSA Overload - the sheer number of PSAs received by stations as the non-profit world turns to free methods of getting their message out on a growing number of social causes and issues.

High Turnover of PSDs - at many stations the Public Service Director is an entry-level position with a very high turnover rate. This could mean that the person who received your PSA may not be the one who is being asked to evaluate it, thus the campaign has lost much of its identity. The path of least resistance is not to respond.

Lack of Clearly Defined Value - the Public Service Director, or perhaps more importantly, senior station management, may not be sold on the importance of your campaign and its value to the local community.

Improper Formats/Messaging - use of 900 numbers in tags, overly aggressive fund-raising appeals, improper digital file formats, lack of non-profit certification...all these and more can easily get a PSA rejected with no notice to the sponsoring organization.

Failure to recognize the station/network for PSA usage.
 Media executives are like everyone else; they want to know they are making a difference in their communities, and one way to acknowledge their support is to thank them or perhaps send them a plaque.

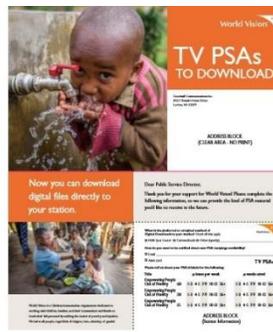


You Don't Understand My Job.
 You Don't Engage My Station in Your Issue.
 You Don't Understand What Matters to My Station.
 You Don't Make Me Look Good to my General Manager.
 You Don't Visit Me.
 You Don't Thank Me When I Use Your PSAs.
 Now What Is It You Want Me To Do For You?

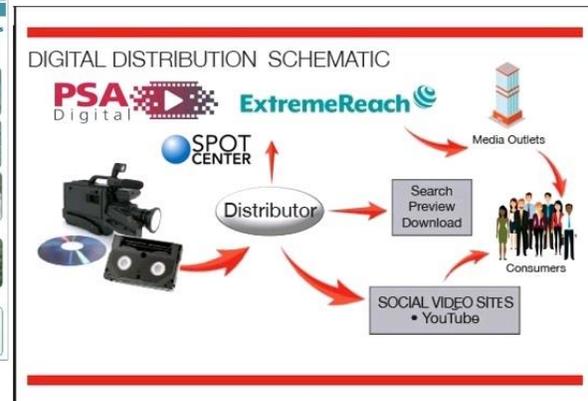
Due to intense competition for scarce airtime, it is more important than ever to inform, educate, and persuade Public Service Directors about the importance of your cause. There are several ways to accomplish this:

Send a pre-campaign alert to stations 30 days before a campaign will be mailed, telling Public Service Directors about the impending campaign. These can be low-cost letters or a full-color direct mail piece to pique the interest of gatekeepers and help cut through the PSA clutter.

Create (or have your distributor do it) a digital platform where your PSAs can be downloaded and let the media know the URL for the site.



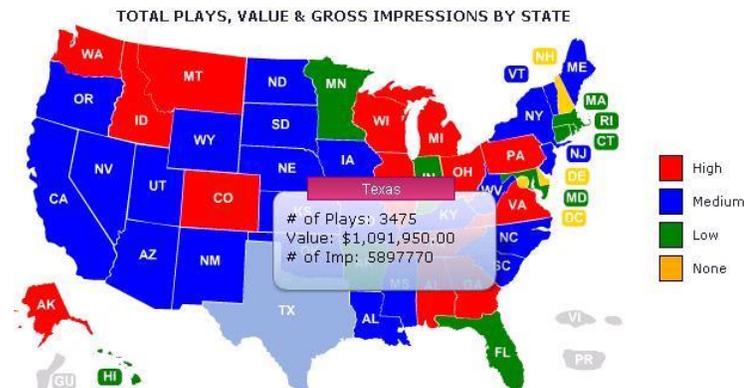
Left: TV PSA blast email. Above: TV PSA alert card.



Use storyboards, blast emails, direct mail and other intrusive tactics to inform the media on your issue.

Send follow-up reminder mailings to Public Service Directors which can be letters, postcards or blast emails.

Track those stations that have not used PSAs and hire a telemarketing firm to call them to pitch your PSAs. One of our evaluation reports is a full-color map showing PSA usage according to four levels which makes it easy to spot where more outreach is needed.



Sell the importance of your issue and try to localize its impact. Using local data, maps, tagging PSAs, supplying stations with news articles, names of local contacts and having field personnel make personal follow-up calls are all ways this can be done.

Finally, all non-government organizations should be listed with the Council of Better Business Bureaus and the National Charities Information Bureau. These are organizations that the media will likely check to ensure the legitimacy of your cause. If you represent a new organization, it may be wise to send a copy of your IRS 501C(3) non-profit certification to the stations, a move that is particularly important with the networks or for those non-profits which are distributing their first national PSA.

(Updated 7/19)