

# How to Get Your PSAs Played on Air

## PSA Basics 101

Public service advertising is used by thousands of media organizations at the national, regional, and local levels. It generates public support for and awareness of a wide range of important social issues that affect individuals, communities, and our nation as a whole. The single factor that these issues have in common is that they must be sponsored by an IRS 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in order to qualify for PSA airtime and space. PSAs cannot promote profit-seeking organizations in any way, nor can their logos or products be shown or mentioned in PSAs. However, PSAs can include information and logos of any nonprofit organization or government agency.

One of the most important things to recognize about PSAs is that *the media are not obligated by law or any other requirement to provide you with free airtime and space.* Although broadcasters must prove they are broadcasting “in the public interest,” there are many ways to achieve that goal that don’t require them to air PSAs. Accordingly, you must find ways to elicit voluntary media support and make a strong case to the broadcast station about why it should air your PSAs.

PSAs do, however, serve an important practical role for broadcasters—they allow schedulers to fill open time slots that they cannot otherwise fill with paid commercials or station promos. There is tremendous competition for PSA airtime, and the supply of PSAs far exceeds the number of “free spots” available.

This section is designed to provide you with tips and strategies to increase the chances that your PSAs not only get played, but get played *repeatedly.*

## Your Key Role in Enhancing PSA Airplay

The majority of PSAs are sent to broadcasters “cold.” In other words, most are simply mass mailed to broadcasters with little or no followup. You have a tremendous opportunity to personally encourage your local broadcaster(s) to pull your PSAs out of the pile and actually put them on the air. Broadcasters are *far* more likely to play a PSA if a local organization personally contacts them with a request to play a specific PSA.

## Localizing PSAs

To convince broadcast stations to air your PSAs, it helps to understand what motivates decisionmakers to engage in public interest activities, such as airing PSAs in the first place. First and foremost, it is the job of the station’s public affairs director to establish a connection with its station’s viewers. They measure every public relations opportunity in terms of its impact on, and relevance to, viewers in their community. They ask: “Is the issue something about which the average viewer cares?” “Will the station’s involvement and association with the issue enhance its reputation and standing as a responsible and caring member of the community, deserving of viewer loyalty?” Remember, viewer loyalty translates into higher ratings, which translates into higher advertising revenues—the livelihood of all broadcast stations.

The first priority of public affairs directors is to sponsor public relations activities that reflect their viewers' issues and concerns. Any successful strategy to convince the station's "gatekeeper" to air your PSAs must, therefore, include a "local angle." Your pitch must convince the decisionmaker that the issue—crime victim assistance—is one that is relevant to the community and one that viewers can relate to and will care about.

There are numerous ways in which you can help create the kind of "local angle" that will help convince the PSA gatekeeper at your local station to play your PSAs, and perhaps even take an active partnership role in your broader public education efforts.

## **Tagging**

The addition of a local tag that can link viewers with programs and services in the community in which a PSA airs is one of the most important ways to increase opportunities for broadcast airing (see the "Local Tagging" section above). Adding local contact information makes the PSAs locally relevant. Equally important is explaining to the gatekeeper—in person or in writing—exactly how airing the PSAs will help *you* help *crime victims*. For example, you can explain that many victims don't seek assistance, simply because they are unaware that help is available. Airing the PSAs will help those victims find the support and assistance they so desperately need by helping them find **your** organization/agency.

## **Making the Case for Local Crime Victims**

To convince a gatekeeper that airing the PSAs will address an important problem in his or her community, you must first define the nature and extent of the local problem. The Broadcaster PSA Kit (distributed to broadcast stations in late March 2005) includes references to ***national*** victimization statistics only. To define the problem as a ***local*** issue, you need to provide data that defines the problem of victimization in your community. Examples of such data might include local crime statistics, your own organization/agency's service statistics, needs assessments, or even anecdotal information such as case studies.

More specifically, you might share the fact that there is a lengthy waiting list for beds at a domestic violence shelter or for sexual assault counseling sessions. You can cite statistics that show the disparity between the number of crimes reported versus the number of crime victims who seek assistance as evidence of underserved or unserved victim populations in your community.

Perhaps most important, think of ways to show the gatekeeper why airing your PSAs will prove to be a "public relations winner" for his or her station. Explain that public concern about crime victims is directly related to the fact that most people have, themselves, been touched by crime, or know someone who has been victimized.

## **Making the Case for Your Local Organization**

You should also view your pitch to your local broadcasters as an opportunity to generate awareness about your own organization. Briefly explain how your organization provides critical assistance to help victims recover from the devastating impact of crime. Offer them real-life examples of victims your organization/agency has helped (*without violating client confidentiality*). Provide them with any promotional materials you have created to

describe your work with crime victims. When you convince the gatekeeper that your organization/agency is well qualified to serve the needs and interests of crime victims, it will likely influence his or her decision to air the PSAs with your organization's tag.

### **Making the Connection with a Local Event**

By connecting the initial release of the PSAs to a local event—such as an NCVRW commemorative event, a major policy initiative, or a high-profile case or crime issue that is already receiving media attention—you can provide an important linkage that may increase your PSAs' air play. And although this PSA Campaign is designed to be used in conjunction with NCVRW, the PSAs can also be used with events you have planned all year long. Often, broadcasters actively seek to offer their viewers "action steps" they can take to positively respond to tragic cases or ongoing issues that threaten the safety of the community. This series of PSAs offers those action steps.