

The Power of Media Sponsorship

You need to solicit ad space just as you solicit money. Here's how.

By Deborah Morris

You know how to write a press release. You've seen your events listed in a dozen daily papers under the community section. Maybe you've even put together a public service announcement that runs when a station can't sell the time slot, which is, coincidentally, when no one's watching.

Nonprofit organizations have mastered the art of soliciting donations from corporations, individuals, and board members. But one of the most powerful tools that nonprofits all too often overlook is the media.

No longer is it enough to e-mail a few paragraphs about your organization to your local paper. Television stations, radio stations, and newspapers are usually owned by big companies that place many demands on the amount of time they can donate to community organizations. You can't simply mail out a one pager about your fundraiser and expect the message to see the light of day (or even night for that matter). The only way to secure your standing among the media's top advertisers is to solicit ad space the way you solicit money.

When?

Before a single letter goes out to a potential donor about your fundraising campaign or event.

Signing on with a media outlet is as important, if not more, than hooking your first major benefactor. It should be done long before your campaign ever begins (think 8-12 months out).

That's not to say you should approach your local TV affiliate before you've decided whether to throw a black-tie gala or host a golf tournament. Just think of it as the very first corporation you're hitting up for a donation; only instead of asking for money, you're asking for *time*.



Why?

Because the media will help you raise funds. No, it doesn't mean the morning crew on KISS FM will stand on Elm Street with buckets in their hands (although, if the exposure is good, they *might* consider that). What it *does* mean is that any major contributor to your cause will receive free advertising just for making a donation.

How?

Using these simple steps.

There are some simple steps in how to approach the media.

- **Decide whom you want to approach.** Though not mandatory, it's in your best interest to target a TV station, radio station, *and* newspaper. You must do a little research here. It's not enough that you're a faithful Channel 10 watcher. You *and* your donors must be Channel 10's target audience. Don't query every TV station, radio station, or newspaper; that's a sure way to have your request denied.
- **Put together a sponsorship package** that includes background on your organization, what you hope to achieve with your campaign, history on your other fundraising efforts, and any brochures, press clippings, and testimonials you can find.
- **Create a very clear list of what you will give them for their sponsorship.** Don't panic! It's no different from what you would offer any major donor. Putting a station's logo on your T-shirts, invitations, stationery, or Web site is a huge selling point. Throw in a free ad in your program book and the opportunity for one of their on-air personalities to emcee an event, and you've got yourself a great package. Also consider perks like a table for 10 at your fundraiser or a chance to interview the actor you're bringing in to kick off your event. Don't forget to include the fact that your newspaper sponsor will put your radio sponsor's logo in the paper and vice-versa.
- **Define what you want from them.** Never ask for money; ad space is far more valuable than any monetary donation. Be direct, but flexible. Every outlet operates differently; some have more leeway than others. Ask for public service announcements, public appearances, and the chance to have someone from your organization be interviewed on the air or for a feature article. Make sure they'll track your success as your campaign continues and cover any kind of fundraiser you host. A radio station might be open to more creative ideas, but keep in mind that these are professional companies that don't want to be associated with any gimmicks.
- **Put together a persuasive cover letter** that lets the station or paper know you're targeting them specifically –

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because it would be a mutually beneficial partnership. Make sure you get the name of the public affairs director and current information on the station or paper, including address phone, format, and Web site.

- **Send your letter via mail, but shoot off an e-mail or leave a voice message** telling the person that a proposal is on the way. Mention that you'll be contacting them in a week or so to discuss. Then, do it! Getting an appointment might be difficult, but be persistent. If you get no response after several tries, move on to another media outlet. If you get rejected outright, ask them why. Their answer may help when you hit up your second choice.

Money?

You give them money?

Sure, it may not be possible, or even practical; but if you can possibly budget some money for paid advertising, you'll secure more visible spots. You may also be able to negotiate a dollar-for-dollar match with free time.

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The process.

Once you've gotten a commitment from one or more sponsors, include them in every part of your campaign by staying in touch.

- **If you've secured a major corporation as a donor, let your media sponsors know.** Chances are, the company may be an advertiser, or a potential one, which encourages the station or paper to make a positive report about their benevolence.
- **Find out what kind of advertising the media outlet will provide.** Be certain you give input to any script, graphic design, or layout. Ask for a general idea of when to look for your ads. When creating public service announcements, make it clear what your goals are. Ultimately, you're looking for donations, but the vehicle you use (event or awareness campaign, for example) to get those funds is what you want to promote.
- **Give the media everything they'll need to promote your organization, event, or capital campaign.** Providing logos (yours and your donors'), professional photographs, and copy points makes their jobs much easier and ensures your message will be portrayed accurately.
- **Make sure you get everything you need from your media sponsors** so that you can fulfill any promises you've made.
- **Get monthly affidavits to show when and how often your ad ran.** Keep tabs on this so you can bring it to their attention if you're not receiving enough exposure.

The results.

Tally your results at the end of the campaign

- **Were you successful** in getting more awareness for your cause?



- **Did you meet** your fundraising goals?

If you and your media sponsors are happy with the outcome, then secure them for your next big event right away. Most likely, they're just as interested in a relationship as you are.

Building an identity with a reputable paper or station gives your cause credibility, and entices others to jump on the bandwagon. If things didn't go as well as expected, and you're sure it has something to do with your media choice, then thank them and target someone else next time around.

Getting the media excited about your cause can be the fastest way to gain exposure and (directly or indirectly) raise funds. You don't need to host a 72-hour telethon or 30-minute infomercial to make it work. With a lot of preparation and a little creativity, aligning yourself with a media outfit can mean the difference between a successful event for 500 people or an empty room with a dozen very bored volunteers. **S**

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Media Musts

For more on cementing bonds with the media, see these articles at NonprofitWorld.org/members:

Let the World Know: Make Your Cause News (Vol. 15, No. 1)

Measure Twice, Cut Once: The Anatomy of a Creative Brief (Vol. 22, No. 2)

PSAs: Free But Not Easy (Vol. 8, No. 3)

When Reality Becomes Image: Dealing with the Media (Vol. 12, No. 5)

You Have a Story to Tell (Vol. 25, No. 1)