
The ABCs of Grassroots Marketing

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A Ad Specialties

Refrigerator magnets, tee shirts, pencils, pens, post-it notepads, or key chains with a program or agency name, logo or phone number are all considered “ad specialties.” “Ad specialty” is the advertising industry term for the giveaways that organizations use to keep their names out in the public in a direct and personal way. The main problem for nonprofit programs is that even the simplest gifts can be expensive. Used prudently, “ad specialties” can be an excellent tool to create awareness of your program. People will recognize your organization’s name and logo. Your gift becomes a walking advertisement for your organization. Invest wisely.

Annual Reports

Be sure to think of your annual report as a promotional tool and apply a marketing approach when designing it. It can take the place of an overall brochure, especially if your organization experiences a lot of change during a year. Pay close attention to detail and image. Annual reports are a very effective means to convey image and your organization’s priorities.

Attire

Dress sensible and wear appropriate clothing if you are involved in participant contact. Who you are and how you look sends a very powerful message to your program participants. See **Image**.

Attitude

It goes without saying to any community-oriented program person who’s been in the field for more than six months, however, some people fail to remember, that attitude is very important. The manner in which a participant is received the first time he/she enters your organization is critical, because, if he/she is turned off, unnecessarily embarrassed, or intimidated, it will be his/her only visit. Thus, the attitude of the staff is a necessary first step in developing an effective marketing-based approach to participant and volunteer recruitment.

Audio Tapes

Was a staff member recently interviewed on a local radio program? Did a participant give a wonderful testimony at a recent award ceremony? Tape these moments and save them for future use. File the tapes carefully so that they can be easily located in the future. You can provide these quotes to news reporters who are looking for “news hooks” and angles to tell your story in the community.

Audio Visuals

The term “audio visual” describes a whole range of non-print techniques, including video, audio, and PowerPoint. When giving a presentation in the community about your organization, incorporate audio visuals. The key point is the more ways you can tell your story, the more likely: 1) your target audience will see the message 2) the more likely everyone will understand the message (some people better comprehend material when it is presented visually) 3) the more memorable the message will be for those who have seen it in more than one mode (print, visual, audio, etc.)

B Brochures

Brochures are among the most underestimated sales tools in the grassroots marketers’ arsenal. Brochures can be reasonable in cost, can be targeted directly to the target audience with little or no wasted media costs, and can be updated frequently, with minimal cost incurred. You don’t have to use a lot of words. Simple, powerful images are better than hundreds of words of detail. Brochures are visually oriented support pieces that are part of an overall media campaign. They can be used for information, marketing, and promotions. They can be stand-alone pieces, as a supporting document in a press kit, or as a component of direct marketing. The bulk of the information can be included in fact sheets and flyers. Also, remember the font you choose should be easy to read so that people of all ages can understand it (Do not choose a font size smaller than 12 point for a brochure. Do not choose a too flowery of a font. Do not use red ink. All are very difficult for the elderly to read.)

Word of Mouth Advertising

Word of Mouth Advertising has long been called the best kind of advertising. How do you get it? Word of Mouth Advertising is perhaps the most difficult aspect of public relations and marketing to measure and manage, yet it can also be the most effective tool in sharing your message. Remember, generally satisfied individuals tell three/four of their friends and relatives of their satisfaction. The best promotional campaign in the world cannot overcome negative words.

Xmas and Other Holidays

Christmas and other holidays might seem to be the wrong time to talk about the benefits of your programs/services. Holidays generally mean “slow news days,” for both broadcasters and newspapers.

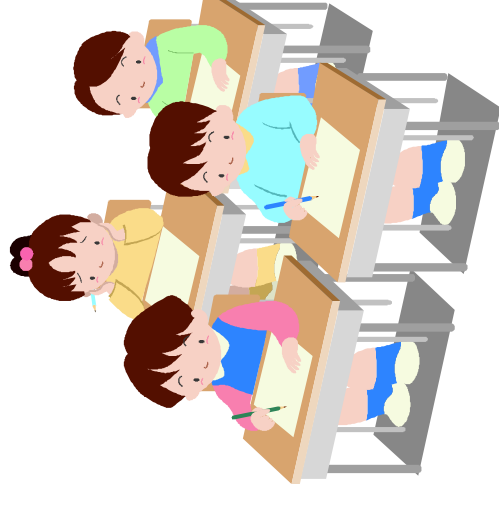
What better time to pitch a feature story? Maybe the story is a human interest feature on a success story at Christmas. Maybe the article is on the commitment of one of your volunteers.

Yellow Page Advertising

Yellow page advertising is not recommended for non-profits. Phone book listings are costly and they are becoming less effective due to competing books and the declining usefulness of phone books and authoritative guides.

Zeal

As *Webster’s Dictionary* defines it, zeal is “enthusiastic, diligent devotion in pursuit of a cause, ideal, or goal.” This is exactly the right spirit to bring to grassroots marketing. Spread your message with zeal.



T-I-M-E

Timely, Interesting, Meaningful, Entertaining. These are four key elements to review when constructing marketing materials for an upcoming event or activity.

TV Spots

Like radio commercials, the local broadcaster term for a paid message is a “spot.” On TV, the basic unit of advertising is the 30-second spot. One-minute spots are rare. Fifteen and 10-second messages are also common. It’s not likely that your organization can afford paid television. But, it’s worth knowing how they work. It’s also worth knowing that stations like community-oriented promotions and they might consider a joint promotional program where they –the station management-can sponsor your efforts to help prepare people for better jobs, etc.

TV PSAs

TV PSAs work the same as counterpart, Radio PSAs, work. It’s not likely that you’ll have the resources to produce a local spot for TV, much less pay for the air time. However, sometimes you can get TV stations to provide a crew to “shoot” or videotape your message, usually testimonials, in the studio. Remember, scripts have to time out to 30 seconds, not 30.5 or 31.

Ubiquitous Presence

You want to be EVERYWHERE. See **Unconventional Media** below.

Unconventional Media

Unconventional Media can best be defined as Pennysavers, Neighborhood flyers, or church publications. These are all fair game for the shrewd grassroots marketer. Everyone is aware of those ubiquitous, lighted marquee signs we see in front of every volunteer fire company and pretty much everywhere else. Maybe the fire company will let you have the marquee sign for a week or two to promote your organization. Remember, you want to be “ubiquitous.” You want your name and phone number to be everywhere. See **Posters**.

Video Tapes

If ad and news story reprints are good, then how great will video clips be? A good TV feature story can have tremendous shelf life, especially stories where testimonials are offered by successful students. How can you use these clips? You can run them in groups on a single tape in the office waiting room. You can use them to help explain your organization. You can also mount them on your website (be sure to give proper credit to the producing organization).

Web Banner Advertising

Web banner advertising can be a tremendous, low-cost way to get your message out, provided you do some homework about the kinds of people who are signing on to the website where your banners are running. Usually, local newspaper “portals” are good bets. Also, community college and school district web pages are good to advertise on. Try web advertising to see if your audience is ready for it. If, after six weeks, you aren’t getting any hits from the web surfers, move on to a new form of advertising.

Window Displays

See **Unconventional Media** above. Windows of vacant stores are the equivalent of billboard, except they are free. You’ll be doing the landlords a service to give their properties some “curb appeal.” It may not only help you with prospects for your program, but also help the landlords find new tenants.

Bumper Stickers

Honestly, most people hate bumper stickers. They go on easily, however, they are very difficult to remove. People, however, are very supportive of the “window cling.” A “window cling” can go on the side or rear of a window of a vehicle, or window in an office, etc. and come off with ease.

Bus Advertising

The transit agencies in most cities in Pennsylvania carry advertising messages inside and on the outside of their vehicles. The advantage of indoor bus advertising is a definable, captive audience for periods of 15 minutes or more-just enough time to look at and read all of the advertisements more than once. Bus side ads offer low-cost exposure to people on the highways and on public streets. One considerable advantage is targeting buses by routes. This type of advertising is a rolling billboard. You can learn who is the broker for transit by contacting your local transit agency. Bus advertising is typically sold by the month with lower rates for longer contracts.

C

Cable TV Postings on Public Access Television

Most cable systems still offer free message postings for non-profit organizations. Contact your local cable system and ask for the “public access channel” manager or the community service or public affairs manager for the local system operator. The goal is to get the cable system to run your promotional and informational messages as “crawls” across the bottom or top of the screen on the local access channel or as part of the public service messages that “roll” up or down the screen. This service should be free to non-profit organizations.

Circulars

Circulars or flyers are extremely low-cost marketing tools. Often, these can be made in-house. Bulk copies can be left at suitable locations like the YMCA, YWCA, or other community-based organizations. Perhaps a Boy Scout or Girl Scout troop could slip the flyers under the windshield wipers in parking lots or distribute them at a local grocery store.

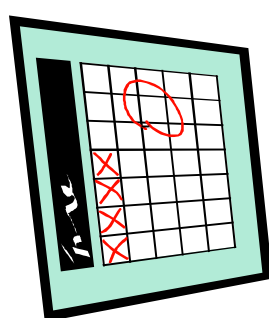
Club and Member Associations

Even if your service club members (Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions, Chamber of Commerce, Junior League, etc.) are not prospects for your organization/agency, they are active in the community and can be excellent referral sources. Clubs are good occasions for networking-for referrals, strategic partnerships, public speaking engagements, and recruiting volunteers. See **Networking** below.

D

Days of Operation

Let your community know your days and hours of operation. The organizations with the most flexible hours of operation are the one most likely to attract the most participants.



Direct Mail Letters

Statistics have shown that the amount of mail a person reads is more a function of economic status than anything else. Direct mail firms and mailing list developers target the prosperous. Are you looking for volunteers? Are you looking for donations? Are you looking for participants? Refer to your past mailing lists. Obtain referrals from other agencies or organizations. The personal touch is very important. In your periodic direct mail letter you have the opportunity to bring your community of interested persons up to date. The more personable you are, the more likely you are to encourage participation, pledges, or volunteering.

Direct Mail Postcards

Are postcards better than letters? This depends on the design of the postcard and the message you want to convey. A personalized letter is the best form of direct mail communication. If you have simple information you need to convey, a “supersized” postcard is the way to go. Use striking photos or images and large type. You want your postcard to stand out from the “junk mail.” See **Junk Mail** below.

Door Hangers

“Ad Specialty” companies offer production of door hangers, mini posters (typically 3-4 inches wide and 6-10 inches long) with cut-out loops to allow for hanging on door knobs. If you choose to design your own door hanger, you can purchase templates through paper companies such as Paper Design (www.paperdesign.com). Also, many print shops stock the die cuts necessary to make flat posters into door hangers. This technique for delivering an important message door-to-door ensures that the homeowner touches and sees the message. Perhaps a Boy Scout or Girl Scout troop or Sunday School youth group could distribute these items door to door. You might target a specific neighborhood or street. A door-to-door canvas can be cost-effective and sometimes the best way to go.

Editorials

Newspaper editors are remarkably accessible and will consider well-researched points of view. Make a phone call first and be prepared to send information right away if you get a positive response. Use of editorials offers high visibility, is an excellent positioning tool for your organization, and makes a real contribution to public debate on important issues.

Educational Broadcasting (Public Radio and TV)

Most public radio and TV stations have very strong local programming commitments and growing interest in a return to their educational TV roots. Get to know the local station managers and the program managers. Maybe the exposure comes in the form of your participation in a local TV magazine show or a radio interview program. Maybe there are even greater opportunities available. The sooner you begin to dialogue with your local public TV licensee, the more likely your organization can be a part of the new public TV programming changes.

E-mail

As technology continues to expand, so does the need for your marketing tools. Obtain your participants' e-mail addresses (more than you think have e-mail). Once you get an e-mail address, initiate a two-way dialogue. It's economical and effective.

Event Sponsorship

A television or radio station or local newspaper can sponsor or co-sponsor either a nonprofit organization or an event, such as a concert or 5K. When these organizations sponsor a non-profit organization or event, the station or newspaper becomes identified with the nonprofit organization or event and contributes time and personnel to promote it. See **Tie-ins with other Organizations** below.

Fairs and Flea Markets

Go where the people are. This is an effective, low-cost way to get your message out. Fairs and flea markets offer great opportunities to reach people in a target market. Tips on tables at these kinds of events: 1) They should be staffed. If people have questions, someone needs to be there to answer the questions. A display is good; a display with human presence for interaction is great! 2) You must have “take home” materials (brochures, flyers, etc.). This is an information-gathering opportunity. 3) “Ad specialties” are even better. Gifts can be as simple as a pencil with your name or logo and phone number.

Feature Stories

Reporters are looking for news. If you have something timely, interesting, meaningful, and entertaining (See **T-I-M-E** below), give it a try. They like a fresh angle. Don't say anything you wouldn't want to hear on the news or read in print tomorrow morning. Think through how to take advantage of the maximum effect of feature coverage.

Follow Up

Once you obtain someone's name, address, and phone number (maybe even an e-mail address), you need to keep in contact. It pays to follow up with prospects at reasonable intervals, because it can shorten the adoption process. It also demonstrates caring and interest on the part of the program.

Shopping Malls

What better place to tell people about the fantastic, free programs available at your organization than at the local mall or shopping plaza? Malls offer high visibility locations sheltered from the weather where you can talk to prospective participants. Usually, malls offer tables or display space for free to public service organizations. Points to remember: 1) Staff the table. A static display is very easily by-passed unless it is extremely bright, colorful, and interactive. 2) Be sure to provide adequate take-home materials (brochures, informational sheets, etc.). 3) Make the display colorful and interesting. Include photos. If you can, incorporate a videotape and a monitor or a laptop computer with a simple PowerPoint program hooked up to a big screen monitor. 4) Provide “ad specialties.”

Special Events

If you can put up a display table at a special event and can get staff or volunteers to work it, do it. If you are coordinating a special event, decide what you want out of the event, then put the elements together accordingly. A good way to renew or maintain personal contacts on a large scale. Remember the invitation itself is a promotional tool. Be careful of special events as fundraising schemes. Expect a sense of let down when it's all over.

Telephone Etiquette

The image of your organization is vital in serving the people of your community and in helping the general public understand your mission. Your image starts with simple interactions, such as telephone calls.

How are callers connected with your organization, how are they greeted? The way callers are greeted will greatly affect the image you project of your agency. Telephone etiquette is indeed critical, as many contacts with your agency are never in person or in writing, but rather limited to the telephone. Telephone etiquette may seem simple and without need of discussion. It is, however, a major issue in American business today. A good check of your system might be to have a friend place a call to your agency, make notes about the call, and provide you with the information, such as feelings about the agency based upon the greeting and manner of call handling.

Television

Television is a wonderful medium for presenting your message because it affects your sight, hearing, and brain for thinking. It can arouse passion, fear, joy, or sorrow and deals with many feelings and senses. TV is a colored medium and can present a message or image in real life or surreal. Most importantly, television reaches many people in a fast and accurate manner. The problem is the cost. The cost of television advertising depends upon the time of airing and audience reached. An example of using television advertising effectively would be to develop a multimedia campaign around a given issue. Added to print and radio, you could have a solid campaign. Remember, people must see, hear, and feel your message several times for the message to be received and understood.

Testimonials

Every once in a while, you get one of those phenomenal letters or phone calls that makes all the work you do worthwhile. You get an unsolicited testimonial from one of your participants or volunteers. The program works! A goal has been achieved! It makes you feel good. It makes everyone around you feel good. Save the letter. Transcribe the call. Ask the person offering the praise for permission to share their comments with others, either with or without name and background. Usually, individuals will say yes. Perhaps over the course of a year you will have a dozen success stories to share with prospective participants, volunteers, and the media.

Tie-ins with other Organizations

The Lions Club focuses on sight impairment issues. The Kiwanis and Shriners focus on children who have disabilities. Find a service organization whose interest mirrors your programs and services. Work with radio or television stations and newspapers to raise awareness and partner for worthwhile causes. This is a good, lost-cost way to multiply your impact and increase exposure in your community. See **Event Sponsorship**.

Quality versus Quantity

What kind of marketing does your agency currently do? Do you focus on quantity or quality? It is more important to have a quality, well planned, well executed marketing campaign than to have a mass quantity of poorly designed, photocopied materials. What would be more appealing to you?

Radio Spots

Radio “spots” is the term used to describe paid commercials on local radio stations. Spots generally run in increments of one minute or less. While 60-second spots are still the norm on local radio, 30-second spots are becoming more common, as are 15 and 10-second messages, generally called announcements or tags. Because the “minute spot” is the basic unit, expect the best buys to come in that category. Thirty-second spots, although only half as long, typically cost 60-75% of a full one-minute spot. Ten and 15-second spots offer similar, non-proportional cost savings. The idea behind the premium price for shorter spots is the concept that the message frequency is king. You are buying the number of exposures more than the length of those exposures. Sixty-second spots, when well-produced, offer impact advantages over the 30-second spot. You can tell the whole story in a 60-second spot. You can target the population you wish to reach by finding the local radio station that fits your profile of your target audience. It is also best to pick specific drive times in cities and early mornings in rural areas. Test your results with co-workers prior to air time to be sure your ad is effective.



Radio PSAs

“PSAs” are Public Service Announcements. They generally are offered by radio stations at no cost to non-profits. The offer of such free time is completely at the discretion of the local station management. Although the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) once required that broadcasters devote a substantial portion of their time to public service, the Regan Era broadcast deregulation brought an end to that practice for non-profit organizations. Most stations still continue to practice this public service in order to maintain good will within the community. Expect a two-week lag time before your PSA airs. Radio stations use “unsold inventory” when they air a PSA. “Unsold inventory” are blocks of air time that have not been sold to commercial advertisers in any given hour of the day. You can also include your programs and services on radio in a “community bulletin board.” This type of program will mention your upcoming events and may even offer a staff member an interview at the radio station to discuss the programs/services.

Reprints of Ads/Publicity

Good news need not fade away. Stories in newspapers and magazines about your programs, volunteers, or participants take on added impact and credibility from the implied endorsement of the publication in which the story is carried. This is known as “third party endorsement.” A good way to capitalize on this reflected support, this implied endorsement, is to produce plenty of reprints of any favorable news story or ad. You can use them for publicity as well as recruiting new participants.

Samples

If you are working at a mall booth or a county fair show booth, why not offer the perspective participant a taste of what your programs/services are like. Have mini-demonstrations. Entice the audience. It can take the form of free advice to a small group activity.

Frequency of Advertising

Frequency of Advertising is more important than any other factor, however, “message” is a close second. A powerful ad message, if it is not delivered and delivered often enough, is a wasted effort. Thus, you should strive in your marketing program to create as many “impressions” as possible on your target audience. A good rule of thumb is that the typical person must see or hear a message three to five times to be able to recall any part of it. Repetition is especially important in “call to action” advertising where we want the target audience to remember a phone number, address, and name. Frequency can be built up by using various mediums in a total program: paid radio spots or public service announcements (PSAs) plus display ads which run at least once a month in weekly papers or shoppers. Flyers, posters, and brochures also should be counted when calculating advertising frequency.

Grassroots Marketing

Grassroots Marketing means you do not have the number of staff and other resources of large programs and agencies, therefore, you make up for it with mobility and opportunism. Be committed and motivated. Be prepared to make do with the supplies you have on hand. Take advantage of every low-cost opportunity to get your name and message out to the public.



Hours of Operation

See **Days of Operations**. Flexible hours attract more individuals.

Human Advertisements

People love “logo products.” A sharp logo will look great on a tee shirt, baseball cap, or tote bag. Be sure to add your name and phone number to the logo. The key is to create “human advertisements.” When your participants and volunteers become “walking ads,” you will have achieved a new status in the community.

Identify

Who are you? What do you do? Where do you live? How can I get in touch with you? These are basic questions we ask each other every day. In our personal lives, we may be uncomfortable sharing this information with strangers. In the non-profit world, it’s critical that every encounter with a potential participant offer that needed information. That means putting your organization’s name, address, phone number, website, etc. on virtually everything.

Image

Image is the essence of your agency, it is encompassed by the good work that you do. If your image is poor and your agency is unknown, you cannot be effective in serving all those who may desire your services. Image is primarily associated with “word of mouth” advertising. Present a positive, effective presence in the community in order to achieve the best image of your agency. See **Word of Mouth Advertising**.

Inserts

Sometimes the easiest and most economical way to get lots of information into the hands of potential participants or referral source is to insert it into an existing publication (newspaper, Pennysaver, shopper, or regional magazine). Because you have paid the cost of the paper and the printing, the publication’s fee to “stuff” or insert the document or sheet into the regular publication is less than the equivalent number of square inches of ad space. Check with other non-profit organizations to learn if they publish newsletters in which you could “advertise.”

Internet

Internet use is growing rapidly across all age, income, and education strata. It's also an economical way for organizations to get reams of information distributed to people for access. Incorporate visuals and graphics and choose easy-to-read language. Make sure individuals can navigate through your website without any challenges.

J

Junk Mail

Mail is deemed as "junk" by the beholder. The majority of individuals classify "junk mail" as that mail you do not want to receive. You fill in the blank to suit your own tastes and needs. For more details, see **Direct Mail** and **Direct Mail Post Cards**.

K

Keeping in Touch

Two points to remember about keeping in touch: 1) The process of adopting occurs over time, not as a single event. Simply stated, people take their time in deciding whether or not to participate in programs or services. 2) Successful program participants are walking advertisements; they can be your best referral. They will be better referral sources if they know you have not forgotten them. See **Direct Mail**.

L

Letterhead

Your letterhead is no place to hold back on spending. You need high quality, printed (**not copied**) letterhead. It is best to use bold letters in dark blue or black. Make it clear and easy to read. Use your logo (See **Logo** above). Be sure that every piece of paper contains your full program name (no acronyms), address, phone and fax numbers, and e-mail address.

Letters to the Editor

When timely, well thought out, and well-written, letters to the editor are very often published. If you have a strong opinion or your position is being attacked, undermined, or misrepresented by others, get in there and write. Like feature coverage (See **Feature Stories** above), think through how to take advantage of the maximum effect.

Logo

A logo is a letter, symbol, or sign that is used to represent your organization. Community members will associate your logo with your organization's name and mission. Use your logo wisely and well and it will return value to you manifold by helping to tell your story with a strong visual.

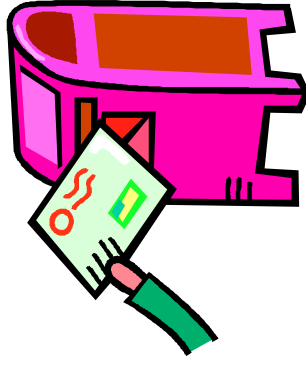
Location

The best thing you have going for you is your location. You are the hometown program to help individuals in your community. Ideally, you'll have an actual, physical location that stands out in the community that you serve.

M

Mailing List

Your mailing list is your best friend. You should try to capture names and interests of those on your list whenever you can. If you can get a table at a shopping mall (See **Shopping Malls**), arrange for a merchant to give you gifts to give away at a drawing. The names and addresses on the drawing entries can be used to enhance your mailing list.



N

Names Make News

Local publications build readers by including the names of those readers, their friends, and relatives. People love to see their picture/name in the paper. News releases to hometown newspapers promote the program while rewarding your success stories. Reward your volunteers with the same kinds of recognition. Also, don't forget to give each person named in the article a copy of the document.

Networking

"Networking" is a hot term in the private sector. In the non-profit and public sector, it's been the way to go for years. Advertising, and even public relations, cannot replace it. Get out and become more interconnected with your community...get your name out and your face known!

News Conferences

News conferences are generally only held for a very big, controversial, or out-of-the-ordinary event. If there is anything you can do to make it visually interesting, it will help extend the coverage. Prepare your message carefully.

News Release/Press Release

News Releases, or Press Releases, can announce anything at all and will often run if they get to the right person in time. Know your local media's deadlines for publication and know to whom to address releases. Review the news release format. It's very good to announce any classes, special events or activities, workshops, or conferences to the media. Sending news releases regularly to media outlets raises your visibility with them. Later, when your agency does something newsworthy, they are more likely to cover your story. Also, if a news outlet is preparing a story and is looking for an expert or a quote, they may call on you.

Newsletters

Newsletters make people aware of your presence in the community. When well written, they can produce loyal readers and a positive community response. Produce the newsletters regularly. Many people scan newsletters. Use lots of photos, headlines, sub-headlines, pull-out quotes, and white space. For the cost, this direct mail piece can bring you considerable goodwill.

O

Outdoor Billboards

Billboards serve as a good reinforcement to your current campaign when combined with other mediums. Get a good design. It is said that a billboard should never have more than seven words on it. Billboards reach a tremendous potential audience at a very low-cost-per "impression." They sell every day, 24 hours a day. They require little time input from you. How can you pay for billboard advertising? Consider "sponsorship snipes." Ask businesses that support your program already to underwrite the cost of one or more billboards in return for a line at the bottom of the billboard in foot-tall type saying, "This message brought to you by XYZ Insurance." One thing to remember, choose your billboard location carefully.

P

Posters

Posters are a useful grassroots tool because of the variety of places they can be posted: school bulletin boards, stores, shops, diners, restaurants, shopping malls, churches, and laundromats. Well designed, well-printed posters are worth the extra cost because they have the impact to stop the busy eye and to make a memorable impression.

Public Speaking

Prepare a 20-minute talk about something service clubs or high school students need to know. Develop some visuals. Come up with two or three examples or success stories. Next, prepare a letter of solicitation to mail to area service club presidents. Present. Learn from your presentations. Refine your presentations. Check the community newspaper for a listing of club meeting times and locations. Public speaking is a good positioning tool and way to mix media. Have some kind of handout to reinforce your message.