Michigan Local Government Management Association

Strategic Communications

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Foreword

Working With the Media

The media is an important audience that needs consistent and constant communication. "You've gotta feed them or they'll feed on you," notes former Michigan State Treasurer and CEO of Major League Baseball Advanced Media Bob Bowman.

Reporters, columnists and editorial writers are the gatekeepers of information, and they are important to have on your side, or at least be informed and fair conveyors of your messages and positions. The more information you provide them, the greater the opportunity for quality and fair coverage. Remember, what they know CAN hurt you.

The following tips and guidelines should increase your comfort and confidence in dealing with reporters in routine and crisis situations.

What the Media Wants…

"As a newspaper, we operate under the assumption that a well-informed public is crucial to a well-run and efficient government. We become rightfully suspicious when people try to keep information from the public. Sometimes there are legitimate reasons for doing so — but that should be explained."

— Battle Creek Enquirer, July 10, 2003

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The Eight-Step Approach
To Strategic Communications Planning and Action

Truscott Rossman uses an eight-part approach to strategic communication planning and implementation. Those steps are:

1. Background/Situation Analysis
- What is the issue/organization/department?
- What is the current status?
- What's the time frame?

2. Goals & Objectives
- What are our goals?
- What are our objectives?

3. Research
- What quantitative and qualitative research needs to be done to help us complete and execute the plan and help us achieve the goals and objectives?

4. Target Audiences
- Who are the key internal and external target audiences that must be reached to achieve the goals and objectives?

5. Messages
- What key and secondary messages will best motivate target audiences to take the actions we want them to take?

6. Proof Points
- What anecdotes, statistics and other facts support the key messages and position the client in the best possible way?

7. Communication Tools
- What communications tools or products can best deliver the messages and proof points to the key internal and external target audiences?

8. Evaluation
- What mechanisms can be put in place to measure whether goals and objectives are being achieved?

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The 10 C's of Communication

No matter who you want to reach, make sure you review this checklist before you start your communication strategy.

1.   Credibility
    Is your messenger credible – is he or she a trusted and respected source of information – with your audience?

2.   Context
    Is your message in context with reality and the environment in which your audience is located?

3.   Content
    Is your message relevant to your audience? Are they interested?

4.   Clear, Concise & Compelling
    Is your message simple and straightforward?
    How far will it travel and how long will it last?

5.   Continuity and Consistency
    Repeat your message for audience penetration.

6.   Channels
    What channels/tools of communication are you using?
    What value are they to your audience?

7.   Customer Benefits
    "What's In It For Me?" (WIFM)

8.   Caring, Compassion and Concern
    Does your audience know that you care?

9.   Capability of Audience
    Is your audience capable of understanding the message?
    Will they take the time to listen/read/watch it?

10.   Call to Action
    What is your audience supposed to do now?

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The Credibility Ladder

1. Respected Local Citizens
2. Non-management Employees
3. Educators
4. Healthcare Professionals
5. Media
6. Activist Groups
7. Industry Officials
8. Government Officials
9. Paid Consultants

Source: The Center for Risk Communication, New York, NY – 2013

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Key Messages Worksheet

Key Message #1
The single most important statement I'd like people to remember is:

_____

_____

Talking Points
Here is why this is so important:

_____

_____

Key Message #2
The second most important statement I'd like people to remember is:

_____

_____

Talking Points
Here is why this is so important:

_____

_____

Key Message #3

_____

_____

Talking Points
Here is why this is so important:

_____

_____

Semantics: Good vs. Bad Words

Positives   **Negatives**

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

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Paid Media vs. Earned Media vs. Social Media

Paid Media (aka "Advertising")
- Advantages:
    - Maximum Control
    - Medium
    - Message
    - Messenger
    - Placement
    - Timing
    - Frequency
- Disadvantages:
    - Minimal Credibility
    - Cost
    - Credibility

Earned Media (aka "News Coverage")
- Advantages:
    - Maximum Credibility
    - Credibility
    - Cost
- Disadvantages:
    - Minimal Control
    - One-time hit
    - Messenger
    - Message
    - Timing

Social Media (aka Facebook, YouTube, etc.)
- Advantages:
    - Immediacy
    - Credibility
    - Reach
    - Cost
    - Control
- Disadvantages:
    - Accuracy
    - Credibility
    - Control

Tips For Capturing Media Attention

1.   You've got visuals.

2.   Local impact: access to local members.

3.   Controversial: positions on issues.

4.   Kids and/or animals are part of the story.

5.   Major financial commitment/loss to community.

6.   Easy access.

7.   Good timing and timeliness.

8.   Personal contact. Cultivate relationships.

9.   Unusual or trend setting.

10.   Dignitaries/celebrities with strong appeal.

11.   Piggyback onto a national/statewide story.

12.   Industry trends, perspectives.

13.   Advisories, releases and lots of follow-up.

14.   Be factual and accurate. Be objective.

15.   Nobody else had a crisis during your event.

Who Called This Meeting?

Reactive/Responsive
Advantages
Media perceives you as a credible source.
You have an opportunity to get YOUR message out.
Disadvantages
You're working on someone else's agenda.
You didn't initiate the contact. Your control is limited.

Proactive
Advantages
You initiate the contact.
You work from YOUR agenda.
You maximize control – but it's still limited.
Disadvantages
The media may not jump on your story.
You may increase interest in other aspects of the issue.

Print
Advantages
Likely to devote more time/space to issues.
Likely to spend more time developing a story.
More likely to have "beat" reporters.
Your responses can be more expansive.
Disadvantages
Reporters don't have total control of the story.
Multi-layered editing can change meaning.
Mistakes can be long-term.
Not as memorable as television.

Broadcast
Advantages
Reporters have more control over story and editing.
General assignment reporters can be led more easily.
More people get their news from television.
Mistakes more likely to be short-term.
Disadvantages
Little depth to most stories.
Few "beat" reporters.
Little time devoted to putting story together.
Limited research effort.
What you say is what you get.

Feeding the Bears

Once you've agreed to talk with a reporter, you'll need to do the following:

- Be a source BEFORE you are a subject.

- Respond quickly.

- Anticipate all questions.

- Prepare your responses.

- Know your key messages.

- Know your facts – and stick to them.

- Do not speculate; do not editorialize. Avoid sarcasm.

- Be brief. Get your key messages out early.

- Know when to stop talking.

- Tell the truth.

- Don't take it personally.

- Keep your cool. Act, don't react.

- Be human.

- Think and talk visually.

- Speak simply; avoid technical jargon.

- Repeat your key messages before you conclude.

Handling "Bad" Questions

- **Loaded Question:** Begins with false or misleading statement(s), then asks for response.

  Restate the question, correcting inaccuracies, then answer.

- **Unacceptable Alternatives:** Offers choice between two extremes of false situations.

  Restate question, explain the real situation.

- **Hypothetical Question:** Requests comment on a "what if" situation; reporter is usually fishing for information.

  Respond to real situation only; don't guess, don't speculate, don't offer opinions, and don't answer questions beyond your area of expertise.

- **Commentary:** Requests comment on a statement made by someone else.

  Unless you personally heard the statement and are qualified to respond, don't. Instead, suggest the reporter contact the source directly.

- **Rapid-Fire Questions:** One question fired after another, without an opportunity to respond.

  First, only answer those questions you want to answer. Stop if you are continually interrupted and don't go on until the reporter stops. Then respond to each individual question.

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On/Off The Record:
A Sticky Subject

Although we NEVER recommend going off the record with a reporter, make sure you know the phrases reporters use to make it sound like you'll be off the record.

Off the record: Material may NOT be published or broadcast, period.

Not for Attribution: Information may be published, but the source of the information may not be identified. HOWEVER, make sure you know whether or not this applies to your name only, your organization, or anything else about you. (If you're described as a member of a two-person committee, you're in trouble!)

Background: This usually means the reporter is simply doing some research on a subject BEFORE doing a story and will not use your name for publication, BUT make sure you clear this with the reporter.

Just Between Us: Never use this phrase, or agree to it with a reporter.

Check It With Me Before You Use It: This allows the reporter to go over information or quotes before publication.

Read It To Me Before You Use It: NEVER say this to a reporter. They will rarely read the story before it's published. All you can do is make sure your facts/quotes are accurate (see above).

Your Body Speaks Before You Do

Body language can answer a reporter's questions quicker than you can. Watch for these telltale signs:

Signs of Confidence
- uncross your legs
- move toward to edge of your char
- lean toward the reporter
- loosen your tie, unbutton coat (print or radio only)
- steeple your hands
- thrust your chin slightly upward
- nod your head
- gesture – moderately
- initiate and maintain eye contact
- use a loud, clear voice
- vary your vocal inflections
- vary your positions

Signs of Nervousness
- cover your mouth
- scratch your nose, head, ears
- tug at your clothes, play with your jewelry, pen, paper, etc.
- slump
- look down, avoid eye contact
- make unpleasant or inappropriate facial expressions
- look away
- keep your body rigid
- hunch your shoulders
- verbal pauses (um, ah, uh, etc.)

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Looking Good & Other TV Tips
Because all too often we judge a book by its cover

TV Fashion Do's:

Men
- *Suits and sport coats*:
    - Medium (charcoal, for example) and dark tones, not black
    - Natural fabrics – wool, cotton
- *Shirts:*
    - Off-whites, grays and pastels work best
- *Ties:*
    - Medium and dark colors; plain and moderate (unbusy) patterns
- *Shaving:*
    - Shave before on camera interviews – (your stubble means trouble)

Women
- *Suits and dresses:*
    - Simple, tailored. Avoid reflective and shiny, shimmery fabrics
    - Natural fabrics – wool, cotton and linen
- *Blouses:*
    - Off-whites, grays and pastels work best
- *Jewelry:*
    - Minimal – remove any that is large and/or flashy

General Tips:

➢ Avoid small patterns, either milled or printed.
➢ Remove nametags, hats, pens, wallets, notepads — and other non-essential things that will detract and distract — from breast pockets and/or lapels.
➢ Silk ties and blouses will cause static interference with most lavaliere/lapel mics that are clipped to clothing. Avoid them just in case.
➢ Hair: Avoid "comb-overs," "big hair" and hairstyles that draw attention to themselves — and away from your content.
➢ Red, black and white are "OK" to wear on TV — especially red. It's just that the latter two tend to present a monochromatic picture instead of taking advantage of TV's living color. If you wear black and white clothing, and also happen to have very light skin or dark skin, your overall exposure might be compromised. Wear tailored, form-fitting clothing. TV tends to "add weight" to the on-camera person. That's why very skinny models look good on TV and in print.

Social Media "How-To"

Background

- With more than 73 percent of Americans online, it's critical to effectively use every application possible to reach your target audience with your message.
- To ensure an effective social media presence for yourself or your organization, there are a number of tactics out there that will provide your supporters and fans with relevant information about your position, your interests, and upcoming news and events.
- At its best, digital media – and social media in particular – mirrors the efforts of your organization. A good digital media effort could never replace the on-the-ground work, merely supplement and reflect that work. In addition to this, an active digital media presence acts as the "edge of the knife" for rapid-response, constituent/customer concerns and converting non-affiliated users into supporters, donors, volunteers or customers as the case may be.

Objectives

- Your goal for a social media strategy is to position yourself or your organization as a credible and go-to source for information about your issue or industry while establishing and maintaining your digital identity. Your digital identity is an umbrella for the face you present to the public through your website, Facebook, Twitter and associated digital applications.
- This can be accomplished by increasing visibility on the Internet and demonstrating value to those who visit your various digital applications (website, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc).

Research

- Social media is constantly evolving; therefore it's important to gather as much information as possible before implementation of a social media plan.
- To ensure an effective social media presence, the first step will be to monitor who is talking about you, and who could be talking about you.
- The following online resources can help monitor the conversation and help gather information to determine what content will be valuable to your audience:

Social Media Monitoring Tools:

- o **Google Alerts** – Set keywords and send content directly to your email.
- o **Technorat**i – Real-time search engine for user-generated media (including blogs) by tag or keyword.
- o **Twitter** – The search function will allow you to look for keywords and hashtags. Utilizing lists – a feature of Twitter – enables you to put like users into "buckets" and makes tracking their online activities easier. For example, if you're working on a legislative issue creating a list of every lawmaker would be a good way to keep track of what they're saying about your topic.
- o **Social Mention** – Social media search engine that searches user-generated content such as blogs, comments, bookmarks, events, news, and videos.

- o **Meltwater Buzz** – Paid-for service that searches multiple platforms and sources for conversations happening around terms and phrases you choose. In addition to gathering social and digital conversations happening around a given term or phrase, Meltwater will also do a "sentiment" analysis which allows you to gauge whether the conversation is "positive," "negative" or "neutral." This is good for establishing baselines and measuring overall progress.

Messaging
- In every aspect of a social media plan, you should keep your messaging consistent, honest, and relevant to your online audience.

Target Audience
- Social media is not made to reach every target audience. Therefore, it's important to rely on your research to determine how best to utilize the various social media applications out there.
- If your target audience isn't on your digital applications, your message will be lost or irrelevant to your online audience.
- Use your research to determine what social media applications would work best to target your internal and external targets.

Tools & Tactics

Social Media Applications
Specific social media applications should be considered over others for certain content. It is important to remember that social media is a two-way street and engaging with community in an ongoing dialogue is just as important as producing timely and interesting content.

Moreover, utilizing your organization's website as the central clearinghouse for your digital identity is essential to securing and maintaining a strong online brand. For example, posts to Facebook and twitter — whenever possible — should link back to your website. This familiarizes users with your website, brand and what you have to offer. The following describes specific social media applications with content recommendations:

Facebook

Facebook is a social utility that connects people with friends and others who work, study, and live around them. Facebook is the largest social network on the Internet today with more than 175 million users, including artists, politicians, and organizations. Best utilized for community building and engagement through posting content, Facebook is also good at generating a buzz with your audience. Content recommendations include:

- Links to your website
- Action alerts
- News releases
- Upcoming events
- Legislative updates
- Links to positive news articles
- Testimonials from supporters
- Commentary
- Relevant videos
- Breaking new

Twitter

Twitter is a real-time information network (micro-blog) powered by people all around the world. It is best utilized for creating a buzz with your audience, but can also build your community and is ideal for engagement. One-fifth of adults who go online use Twitter. Content recommendations include:

- Links to your website
- Action alerts
- Upcoming events
- Legislative updates
- Links to positive news articles
- Commentary
- Breaking News

Instagram

Instagram is a photo sharing website ideal for organizations with a lot of photo-centric content.

- "Flyers" for upcoming events
- Events happening now
- Events that have already happened
- Photos from your office
- Photos from the on-the-ground work you're doing

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YouTube
YouTube is a video sharing website on which users can upload and share videos. This application is best utilized for generating a buzz, video blogging and can help build your community through posting videos of testimonials or informational videos; can be linked with other social media applications. Content recommendations include:

- Upcoming events
- Past events
- Video blogging
- Testimonials
- Commentary
- Relevant videos

Blog
A blog is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries. A blog is best utilized for commentary, but can help build your community and allow you to engage or generate a buzz with your online community. Guest bloggers on your blog allow you to expand content and validity. By allowing comments you can create a two-way communication stream with your audience. Content recommendations include:

- Links to your website
- Action alerts
- News releases
- Upcoming events
- Legislative updates
- Links to positive news articles
- Testimonials from supporters
- Commentary

Execution

Establishing Applications
After you have identified your social media applications, the next step is to establish them by setting up accounts and incorporating your messaging and branding.

Once all applications are up and generating content at a reasonable volume, you should focus on engaging your target audience.

Remember to be positive and transparent when engaging anyone online. We also recommend an ongoing evaluation of applications to ensure you continue to use the most effective applications to help demonstrate value to your audience and meet the demand for content.

Content Generation

Once you have a vision for your, or your organization's online personality, we recommend updating all applications at a rate that provides the highest value to your audience.

Use your research to determine how often other are updating content on each application and be sure to update content at a socially acceptable rate.

Growing Our Online Audience
- To grow your online audience, reach out to your internal target audience first to invite them to join your newly established online community.
- Once you have a solid base of followers, research to determine what other individuals or organizations might be interested in your content and invite them to join in on the conversation.

Evaluation
We strongly recommend evaluating the success of your social media plan daily. Some other measurables that can help you evaluate your success are webpage hits, number of fans or followers, and your ranking on Google. Here are a few additional tools for evaluating your digital media efforts:

- **Google Analytics** – Google Analytics is free and can help track where users are coming from, how they're interacting with your site, and whether or not they return. Moreover, Google Analytics will track which social channel users come through (Facebook, Twitter etc).
- **Hootsuite** – Hootsuite comes in free and paid versions with a built-in suite of reporting tools for every single major social network. This is the easiest and most cost-efficient way to house all social applications under one roof while tracking and evaluating your efforts.
- **Radian 6** – Radian 6 by Salesforce is a much more robust solution for managing and tracking activity across social media applications. While similar to Hootsuite, Radian 6 is much more expensive and is most useful in enterprise contexts.
- **Meltwater Buzz** – Paid-for service that searches multiple platforms and sources for conversations happening around terms and phrases you choose. In addition to gathering social and digital conversations happening around a given term or phrase, Meltwater will also do a "sentiment" analysis which allows you to gauge whether the conversation is "positive," "negative" or "neutral." This is good for establishing baselines and measuring overall progress.

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It Ain't Over 'Til It's Over

Don't expect to bat 1,000.

Monitor coverage.

Critique your performance: Liked best/next time.

Check your quotes for accuracy.

Make corrections, if necessary.

Commend accuracy.

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Evaluating Your Success

Liked Best:

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Next Time:

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