<u>**Achieving Organizational Objectives Using Active Communications**</u>

By
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There's more to successful communications than news releases. Seems obvious, although you wouldn't know it from checking one of the news databases such as Nexis or Dow Jones. Too often, and unfortunately, a search reveals flurries of news releases accompanied by few, if any, resulting news stories. We're not opposed to news releases at KPC, but we see them as a means to an end, not the end itself.

What, then, is the end point of a successful communications program? It's not the news release or other tactics. It's not even securing placements in certain publications. That, too, is a means to an end. The end point of a successful communications program is getting people who can make a difference in achieving your organization's objectives to act on behalf of those objectives.

Thus, in creating and implementing successful communications programs, our starting point is the organization's end point – its objectives. Initially, we ask: *Whom* do you *persuade* to *act* to achieve *what*? Then, we expand the question with further detail: "Whom (with what needs) do you persuade (with what stories) to act, think, feel….how, when where (with what resources) to achieve what?"

The result is an eleven step communications planning process that we've found to be extremely effective in producing the results our clients seek – that is, *actions by key audiences that advance achievement of organizational objectives.*

The steps are:

1	What	Objectives
2	Whom	Audiences – Internal and External
3	Act, Think Feel	Individual Change, Behavior
4	Need	Audience Objectives, "Pain", Priorities
5	Persuade	Messages
6	Stories	Studies, Case Histories, News, People Profiles
7	How	Strategies
8	How	Tactics
9	When	Timing
10	Where	National, Regional or Local
11	With What	Resources – People, Fund, Time

To expedite the planning process, we have taken these steps and incorporated them into a grid, which has proven very effective in facilitating group planning sessions. During these sessions, we do not insist that participants follow our planning process in a rigid, linear fashion. Ultimately, they get there.

Instead, at the beginning, we ask participants to start wherever they want to start. One participant might say: “We need to issue a news release.” Another might focus on the most important audiences, while yet another may concentrate on the most important messages. Each contribution is recorded on the chart, wherever it fits best.

<u>Public Relations Program Planner</u>

Whom (with what **needs)** do you **persuade** (with what **stories)** to **act, think, feel**, ... **how, when, where** (with what **resources)** to achieve **what**?

Whom *(Step 2)*	**Need** *(Step 4)*	**Persuade** *(Step 5)*	**Stories** *(Step 6)*	**Act, Think, Feel** *(Step 3)*	**How** *(Step 7)*	**How** (Step 8)	**When** *(Step 9)*	**Where** *(Step 10)*	**With What** *(Step 11)*	**What** *(Step 1)*
Audiences – Internal & External	*Audience Objectives, "Pain", Priorities*	*Messages*	*Studies, case histories, news, people profiles*	*Individual Change, Behavior*	*Strategies*	*Tactics*	*Timing*	*National, Regional or Local*	*Resources – People, Funding, Time*	*Objectives*

Once all initial contributions are recorded, the hard work begins. Row by row, the group is pushed to fill in the blank boxes. The questions can be challenging. Whose behavior do you want to change with that news release? Why is that audience relevant to the achievement of your organization’s objectives? How will stimulating a certain action make any difference in the achievement of your organization’s objectives? And so on.

Throughout this interactive process, drawing on our experience with a wide range of clients, we provide participants with further background and perspective on each column or “step” in the planning process. This is some of what we tell them:

<u>1. Objectives</u>

The best starting point for identifying objectives is at the top – with the chief executive officer. What keeps him or her awake at night? What must he or she deliver to the organization’s board of directors? For a moment, imagine the presentation the CEO regularly delivers to the board outlining the organization’s progress toward achieving key goals.

Another excellent starting point is to consult your organization’s strategic plan and, based on the plan, identify your organization’s internal scorekeeper. For most organizations, the chief financial officer keeps score, providing the CEO with data for his or her reports to the board. For other organizations, for example a Washington DC based trade group, the chief lobbyist tracks wins and losses on Capitol Hill. If your organization’s success is especially dependent on workforce issues, like hiring and turnover, the human resources vice president is your source. Each can become and should be viewed as your internal customer.

The point is that every communications initiative should have a relationship with a top line goal of the organization. It is not uncommon for a communications team to identify a communications goal as its objective: e.g. achieve certain placements in the media, finish a project, or even achieve a change in public opinion. However, each of these achievements, however praiseworthy, must support the achievement of an organizational goal. It must pass the "so what" test.

In one example, we once had a client that was preparing to endorse a major governmental initiative affecting its business. Initial thinking centered on preparing suitable answers to likely questions from the media and getting a fair share of public visibility. Our advice was to step back and evaluate how the event might contribute to a further strengthening of the company's brand identity. The result was a series of brand building messages consistent with the governmental initiative and the company's endorsement of it. The messages ultimately were reflected in a news release and in responses by the company's senior spokesperson.

2. Audiences

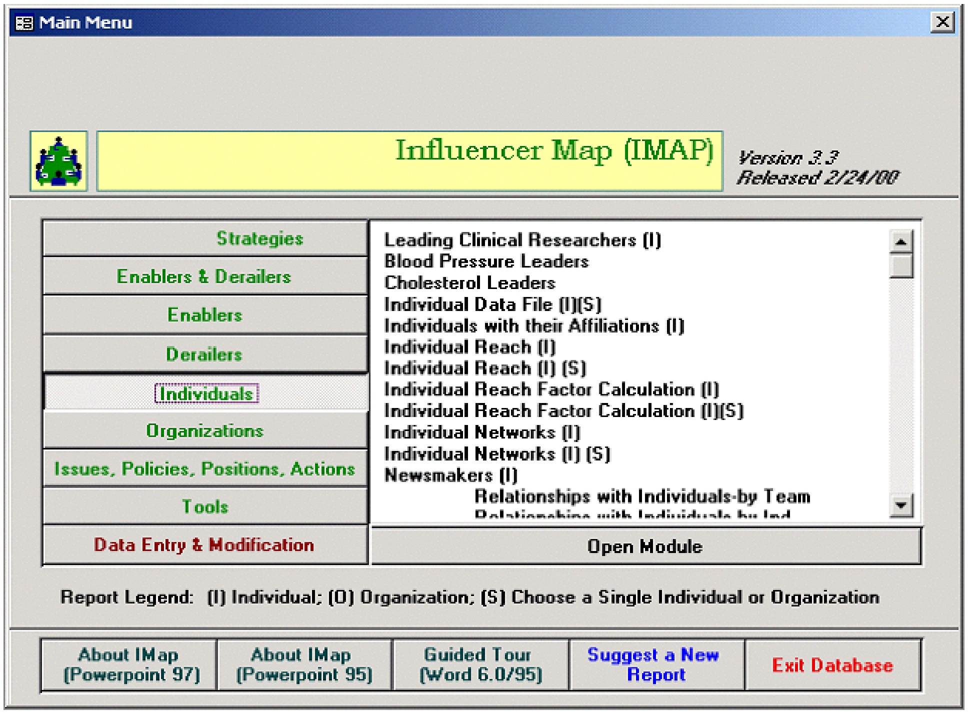
We use the term audiences because it is a standard communications term referring to distinctive groups of people that hear our message – as if we were on a stage or in front of a microphone, camera or a computer hooked to the Internet. However, in defining audiences for a communications program, it is extremely important to step outside of the world of communications.

Instead, start with the organizational objectives and then determine who can have the most influence on the achievement of those objectives through their actions – defining and ranking your audiences accordingly. In fact, you may want to strike the term audiences and use other words such as "influencers" and decision makers.

Accurate and thorough identification of influencers can be one of the most critically important exercises undertaken at the beginning of a product development cycle – especially if your product's ultimate success will depend on actions by policy making governmental and even nongovernmental bodies. For example, the Food and Drug Administration regulates whether and how a wide range of products are sold, while the policy pronouncements of organizations like the American Heart Association can create environments in which your product is well received, or not.

In fact, one client commissioned us to undertake a thorough compilation and evaluation of key influencers in and outside of government whose opinions and actions could impact the planned introduction of a range of new products. We began by identifying organizations, task forces, committees and other bodies operating in the same space into which the products were to be introduced.

Soon after collecting the membership lists for many of these groups, we found that our universe of influencers had grown well beyond a thousand with no end in sight. The challenge was to create a system for managing information on each individual, but also for identifying the most influential among the influential and devising a means of incorporating new information as it became available.



Accordingly, we built a dynamic, relational database that easily expanded as information on each individual became available and permitted us to leverage the information to spot highly influential individuals. For example, we were able to distill from the database the names of individuals who had the greatest number of affiliations with organizations critical to the success of our client's product. And, then, for each of these highly active individuals, we were able to list the names of all other members of those organizations, thereby charting a sphere of influence for each highly active individual.

Other features of the database enabled the tracking of articles written or actions taken by each individual – as they related to the goals and objectives or our client – in addition to appearances in the media. It also incorporated a number of tools for use in communicating with people in the database, including a list maker and email launcher.

Perhaps the most important lesson that we derived from this exercise is that for national or even global communications initiatives, thorough audience identification can identify audiences of one that can exercise as much or more influence as an audience of millions over achievement of your organization's objectives. This, then, opens the way for communications strategies and tactics that range from securing a dinner meeting with that one, key influential during a conference, to gaining national media coverage reaching millions.

<u>3. Action</u>

“Get the word out!” This must be one of the most frequent requests professional communicators receive from their clients – internal or external. The good communicator stops immediately, remembering the “so what” test, and asks: “What are the audiences and what actions do you want them to take as a result of our communications?” And, those actions should be related in some way to the achievement of your organization’s objectives.

One response might be that you want the audiences to change their opinions regarding a particular issue affecting your company. Or, you might want them to feel differently about your organization. However, these are but intermediate steps – important but intermediate. What you want and need is for these audiences to act on those opinions and feelings – from giving voice to their opinion by responding to a poll takers query or testifying before Congress or buying your product, to voting your way on a piece of legislation or policy matter.

It is particularly important to think broadly about the actions that could and should occur as a result of your communications effort. For example, when The *Wall Street Journal* published an opinion article by the CEO of a client, the intent was to influence the outcome of legislation. It may have been successful in that respect, as the legislation, which would have essentially put the company out of business, was not enacted. More immediately, however, the article generated a surprising number of calls from potential customers. Thus, a communications initiative aimed at action in the public policy arena also served as a lead generator, moving potential customers to act by picking up the phone and writing the client.

4. Audience Needs

How do you move an audience to act on your behalf? Not by starting with your product, your policy position, or your organization and then crafting the best possible exposition of positive attributes. Instead, start with the audience, individual by individual. Recognize that any arriving message must pass through an individual, interact with his or her needs – even pain – before emerging as action on your behalf – action that’s taken because the individual perceives a benefit in doing so.

We do a lot of work with clients in health care. When their audience is physicians, we’re careful to focus on what matters most to them – their patients, their time and their wallets -- as validated by surveys and other research. For these and other clients, we are strong proponents of focus groups and other surveys. However, when time is of the essence and budgets are limited, we propose other means of verifying the disposition of an audience.

For one client who wanted to reach and move small-to-medium-size employers and insurance brokers to action, we undertook a quick and relatively inexpensive telephone survey of their sales staff, as well as of state trade associations that served employer groups in various industries. The results were checked against previous, more thorough research, and were used to shape future in-depth research questions. Between these more ambitious studies, the results provided an excellent guide for quick-turnaround message and program development.

5. Messages

Effective messaging is all about the power of words, not the persuasiveness of sentences (plural) or paragraphs. Ideally, your words should connect with your audience; speaking to its needs and evoking related information and images that support action on your behalf. The connection should be intuitive – i.e. your audience "gets" the message almost instantly. If the message has to be explained or elaborated beyond a few word sound bite, then you risk losing both your audience and the chance it may act for you. This is not a deductive process where lawyers marshal evidence as in a courtroom.

Here's an example. We often assist health care organizations and providers communicate effectively in the midst of a clinical crisis such as the occurrence of a medical error. In these circumstances, they are often asked questions about patients which only the patient or his/her family can answer. Typically, the word confidential – as in this information is confidential – is used. The word – long and bureaucratic sounding – has the effect of implying that the organization or provider is withholding information in a self serving way. However, the more accurate and effective word to use is privacy – as in "every patient expects us to fulfill out duty to protect his or her privacy and this situation is no different." By using privacy instead of confidentiality, the provider or organization is heard as defending a public interest rather than its own interest.

One of the biggest challenges faced in developing powerful messages is that they are often composed in a silent office in written, not spoken form. However, the most effective messages are meant to be spoken and, when they appear in written form, are often enclosed in quotation marks, as if they were spoken. Thus, the best advice is simple: Read messages out loud so they actually sound spoken. Even rehearse them with colleagues.

Another challenge is to ensure your messages fit comfortably for those who will be saying them. Once again, too often, the crafter of the message does not always have the opportunity to get inside the heads of the people who will be doing the talking. If the words don't fit, they won't use them regardless of how many scripts and talking points put before them.

We have found that media training sessions provide excellent opportunities to get inside the heads of spokespeople. In fact, at their best, they should serve as message training sessions for both trainers and trainees. For example, with one client, we began the session by putting each participant in front of a video camera and firing questions at them to see how they would answer. Then, we'd put the tape aside, roll up our sleeves and together begin modifying and shortening the message points prepared in advance by the trainers. This give and take usually unlocks useful information as well as strong word combinations. The best way to discover these word combinations is for both trainers and trainees to listen carefully to each other during this give and take, stopping the discussion when a particularly good phrasing seemingly just appears.

Once you have established your key messages it is extremely important for all members of the team to stay on message and to migrate the messages into what the audience sees or hears. Then, every opportunity should be taken to repeat your messages – frequently. If a question is posed, think of a way to relate the answer to one of your key messages. Include messages in news releases and articles. Don't crowd your messages: Include them in your answers but then keep your answers short, thereby improving the chances that your message will appear in a media story. In fact, if you've done your messaging job well, your messages should appear frequently in the news stories read by your audiences.

6. Stories

Messages, by themselves, won't get you very far. You need stories to carry messages to audiences. Stories serve several functions. First, it is always important to remember that the media delivers stories to its readers, listeners and viewers, not messages unless of course you pay for an advertisement. Second, stories get the attention of your audience, which is otherwise inundated with information and other stories. Third, stories help illustrate your message, driving home your points implicitly or with evidence.

That's easily said. The challenge is in finding the right stories within your organization. Consequently, when we begin working with a client, one of our first tasks is to establish a process that unearths and delivers story ideas to us. In fact, to locate stories that would interest a journalist, we often have to act as internal journalists, developing leads, consulting sources and following up on possibilities.

Within most organizations, people "commit news" every day – that is, they are part of stories that are engaging, attention getting and, in their view, routine. Hence, they rarely see the light of day. Thus, for one client, we developed and distributed widely a checklist identifying the kinds of stories we were seeking. It had some limited success. However, we found that the best way to find good stories was to sit and talk with the people in the field, the real people outside of headquarters. Get them talking and you quickly run out of notebook paper.

Still, the best rule of thumb is -- people not only make stories, they are stories. Once when we were publicizing some rather complicated new data on pharmaceutical cost increases for a client, ABC put it to us bluntly: find a senior citizen within the hour who can be interviewed on camera and we'll do the story. The story was done and appeared on World News Tonight with Peter Jennings, including both a senior citizen interview and an interview of our client's chief executive officer.

For another client, whose primary audience is America's physician population, we have developed a database of nearly 100 physicians who are prepared to tell the story of how they use and benefit from our clients online clinical information resource. The database is categorized by region of the country and specialty. Members of the media, after hearing pitches from countless public relations people regarding products for physicians without having any physicians to interview, are usually delighted to interview one of our client's physician customers. The result has been excellent media exposure for our client.

Even the venerable case history is really about people – how they have successfully used your organization's product or have experienced the problems your legislative solution is meant to solve. The point, once again, is that people (your audience) relate to people (your stories) far better than they relate to intellectual or abstract arguments. And, the media is in the business of capturing audiences by producing a product (stories) to which people can easily relate (i.e. buy the paper, watch the show or listen to the program.)

7. Strategies

Frequently, strategies are confused with tactics and, almost as often, the question arises, why bother with the difference between strategies and tactics? Clear up the confusion and answer the question simply by thinking of a strategy, in the singular, as the "direction" you have chosen to take in achieving your objects. On the other hand, tactics – in the plural – are the steps you take as you follow a direction, or strategy. To stay on strategy is to use tactics, i.e. take steps, consistent with that direction. Accordingly, your strategy can help you think of and choose the tactics you employ.

For example, one of your strategies might be to concentrate on finding and publicizing news within your organization as a way of conveying your messages to key audiences, and ultimately to persuade those audiences to act on your behalf. News, by the way, often involves events occurring at specific times, which are noteworthy enough in and of themselves to be of interest to your audiences, and editors who serve as intermediaries to those audiences.

Thus, your tactics could include a systematic internal process for finding news, using email, mailings or questionnaires. Once found and developed into stories, the news can then be distributed through a series of news releases or exclusively placed stories. For some organizations, such a "news" strategy may have a purpose more subtle than getting maximum visibility for your organization in the media. It might serve as a way of conveying message, too, if one of your key messages is that your organization is a vibrant and active, in pace with the latest trends, a source of new and interesting information or developments, and positioned at the "cutting edge."

Several years ago, a small client sought to influence the outcome of the national health care debate by ensuring the continued survival of health benefit self funding by employers. Self funding involves paying for health costs directly, rather than paying premiums on an insurance policy, with a health insurance company in turn paying the doctor and hospital bills. However, most self-funded health plans do buy some insurance, to cover catastrophic or extraordinary expenses.

Our strategy was to monitor the legislative debate and other related developments, looking for opportunities to issue news releases providing the client's comment on those events. Most important, these news releases were distinctive. Although single-spaced, none was longer than one page. They were faxed to a carefully selected list of reporters. And, most important, each was written tightly, like a news story, and included useful information. In time, because the releases possessed their own distinctive signature, they helped in raising the client's profile, thereby supporting the lobbying effort. In fact, the releases were so well regarded that we began sending them to legislative staffers. Later, as the client's lobbyists made the rounds of Capitol Hill, they're client was remembered amidst the babble, and they were favorably received – largely due to the releases.

You might ask, what makes this a strategy instead of a tactic? Shouldn't a news release be considered a tactic? Yes, a news release is a tactic. However, it is a strategy to decide to issue a series of distinctively written news releases, with the objective of getting attention for a small client in a space dominated by large players.

Here are two other examples of strategies:

Each year, one of our health care clients holds a conference for its clients at which it releases number of in depth studies. Undertaking such studies sets the client apart from its competitors and helps reinforce its brand positioning as a thought leader. The experience of several years, during which we issued multiple releases on different studies over several days, prompted us to change course. Reporters typically only were interested the first day, resulting in subsequent stories securing little attention. So, one year, we rolled all the news into one release, which we "led" with the most engaging, attention getting study. The result was a long release that broke the rule that news releases should be short and simple. However, we achieved our desired result, which was to sustain coverage of the client beyond the first day. That's because reporters "mined" the release for several stories that appeared over the course of a week. One health wire service moved four different stories expanding on most elements of the supposedly too complicated release.

Another common strategy, used with great effect, is to place an exclusive story with a publication that does an excellent job of reaching your key audiences. For example, we once decided to provide a story to a leading national financial publication on an exclusive basis, working closely with a reporter recommended by an editor as likely to be most interested. Once the story appeared, we then issued a news release, which helped secure coverage in the trade media – coverage that was reinforced by the story's appearance in the national publication. Our strategic choice was to forego broad national coverage, which would have doubtful in any event, in order to secure placement in at least one very prime national publication accompanied by broad trade coverage.

8. Tactics

Another way to think of tactics is as "tricks of the trade." Here's an example involving a small dot com company at the height of the dot com frenzy when thousands of pr people were inundating hundreds of reporters at the once thick bibles, such as Red Herring, Industry Standard, Business 2.0, etc. Getting a reporter's attention was half the battle. The other half was persuading the reporter that your client had more than vaporware to sell.

We cracked that nut by successfully placing a story about our client with an online news service like FOX news – when FOX separately produced its online news service. Then, we vigorously merchandised the story to print reporters at the bibles. The result: A host of prominent placements in the bibles. How were we able to pull this off? In the past, it might have been considered "bad form" to circulate one reporter's story to other reporters. However, in the challenging dot com public relations environment, these circulated stories said quite convincingly to other reporters that one of their fraternity had taken the time to determine that this company was real and, in fact, worthy of their time, too. It also meant that, by covering our client, now that another reporter had written a story, they were assured that the risk of embarrassing themselves was low or non-existent. They would not be "out there" with a story that might be discredited.

One of the most critically important tactics in a communications professional's arsenal is pitching, i.e. the work of contacting reporters to draw their attention to your story and, hopefully, engage their interest. Begin first by understanding that reporters, despite their protestations, rely on pitch calls. What they detest are calls that take too much in getting to the point, and callers who are incapable of answering basic follow up questions.

So, rule number one of pitching is to learn your story and prepare answers to the most common, likely questions. Rule number two is to boil your story down to a one sentence concept that conveys solid information and, ideally, ties your story to a bigger trend or story in the news. Depending on what makes you most comfortable, say your name and organization at the beginning or end of your pitch. Here's an example: "I've got a cancer story about positive results appearing in Science magazine from the first ever human trial of new drug for liver cancer conducted at prestige university. I'm (Name) calling on behalf of XYZ pharmaceutical company." Don't test the reporter's patience by saying, instead: "Hi, I'm John Smith at ABC public relations firm representing XYZ pharmaceutical company. I'm wondering whether you may be interested in a story I've got. Did you get my fax? Well, I can send it again. The story is about……"

If the long-winded alternative had been a voicemail message, most reporters would have sailed right past it, hitting the delete button instantly, if not sooner. The fact is, most pitching is done to voicemail and not to real live people. This puts an even greater premium on quickly getting to the point. The same rule applies to email. Compose a punchy, fact based subject line to attract attention. At the top of the email, quickly insert your pitch – i.e. tell the reporter why the story matters to him or her. Doing so will help in the event the recipient previews the first part of emails before deciding which to open. If you can offer interviews with usually hard to get people, be sure to let the reporter know at the top. Do not attach news releases as attachments; paste them in the body of the email as text. If you have illustrations, provide a web link to them instead of sending them with the email. Over time, observe which reporters respond best to email, fax, phone, voicemail, overnight delivery or regular mail. For example, reporters at USA Today appear to be most easily reached via email.

One of the biggest challenges is to use tactics that have the best chance of reaching key audiences most directly, leaving your core messages and stories as intact as possible. Consequently, do not automatically depend on the media, e.g. your local newspaper, to serve as the gatekeeper for your audiences. Always consider how the Internet and/or email can be used to reach audiences more directly, on your terms. One rule to keep in mind is that if the audience is relatively small enough and the names are knowable, there's likely a list available or easily created at a reasonable cost. If you are attempting to reach "influential" people in your community, build a list and then communicate regularly and directly via mail, fax, or email, depending on the recipient's preference.

In another case, a hospital client was confronted with a dual challenge of promoting positive information to repair its reputation, and of dealing with a local media that objected to board meetings that went in to executive session soon after the start of meetings. We suggested expanding the public part of the meeting by including reports by members of the hospital staff on recent achievements or other significant programs. This not only provided the media with news for the next day's paper, but it also resulted in positive stories for the hospital.

9. Timing

Timing can be both strategic and tactical. Strategically, you can shape your stories and news so that they dovetail with certain seasons, other predictable events like sports playoffs or elections. For example, if your goal is to promote responsible drinking, the best times for stories are adjacent to holidays and other events where drinking is common and responsibility needs to be encouraged.

Another approach, which is part strategy and part tactic, involves watching the news flow carefully by monitoring wires and other "leading indicator" sources for stories and event to which you can link your story. For example, with one client, we monitored Congressional hearings, issuing advisories alert the media to the availability of expert interviews. Often we did not get an interview but, more importantly, we engaged a reporter's interest with the result often being a story at some later date.

On a tactical level, the dawn of Internet publishing often means that releases should be issued soon after midnight and pitching should commence no later than 6 am Eastern Time if your goal is to secure national broadcast coverage, particularly if your goal is to secure an interview on financial shows: CNBC, FOX CNNfn. We have found that initial placements in the Wall Street Journal and Reuters can play a major role in driving broadcast coverage.

Usually, Monday is an excellent day on which to release news. Increasingly, as news organizations cut staff and reduce reporters' ranks, reporters have very little flexibility to drop what they are doing and cover your story on any given day. The usual response when a good story is pitched is: "Do I have to cover this today?" Consequently and especially for complex stories, reporters have come to depend on stories being given to them in advance, on embargo. This gives them the ability to schedule their time more sanely while permitting them to write your story. Due to the constraints of the securities laws, providing a story to a reporter on embargo may not be possible. However, in health, science and technology venues it is a common practice.

10. National, Regional or Local

Even when you have a national story, it is not uncommon to start at the local level. At minimum, taking this route provides you with a clip that you can merchandise to reporters at the regional and national level. At best, your local paper may be affiliated with a news service like Knight Ridder, which takes local generated stories and shares them nationally via their wire. Similarly, a story appearing in one business journal, if it is owned by American City Newspapers, will be available on the American City website and might even appear in other papers in the chain. Another approach is to work with the local AP bureau. When the story appears on the state wire, put a call through to the national desk to encourage national distribution.

One of the biggest challenges of migrating a local story to the national level is that local stories, by definition, require a local angle, sometimes depriving them of their national significance. For example, for one client, we placed a story locally about the election of new board members that focused on one new member whose name was instantly recognizable on the local level. However, arguably the biggest national news was the concurrent appointment of a Nobel Prize winner to the board.

There are several routes toward securing national coverage for your story. First, you must assess whether your story actually has national significance. See if it relates to an ongoing national story, which you can determine by scanning the AP and Reuters wires, as well as checking out the New York Times, USA Today and the Washington Post. Alternatively, see if you can link it to a political trend for the Washington DC media, or a financial trend for New York City based media.

Then, you must be sure to write your news releases so that the lead immediately connects your story to ongoing, significant national coverage. Stories that pivot off a particular, time specific event, such as the publication of a study, the release of a report, or testimony before a Congressional committee, have the best chance for wide pickup via the wires. On the other hand, if your story does not have such a "must be covered today" hook, then consider placing it exclusively with a major national publication. Consider, especially, USA Today because it has stepped up the original reporting of stories, some at great length. That means reporters there are constantly looking for new material.

We have also had success in securing national coverage, city-by-city, state-by-state, through national stories that have strong local or regional angles. One example was client study that reported results on a state-by-state basis. We supplied maps and full data to newspapers in major markets. For television, we made a b-roll (video footage) available via satellite, in addition. Then we called stations in major markets. The results were substantial.

11. Resources

More often than not, organizations believe they possess limited resources to accomplish big things. However, when big things are accomplished through communications, the benefits often dwarf the initial cost. The problem is, there is no way to predict with certainty what the results will and whether you spent too little or too much.

Consequently, here are several ideas for saving money that should have little impact on the overall result:

- Use PRNewswire and BusinessWire sparingly, usually only when you need to fulfill a legal public notification requirement. However, distributing a release only on the New York circuit is one of the best deals around. You reach the media epicenter while also ensuring distribution throughout the Internet – and the cost is manageable.

- Instead of using outside services to fax your releases, do so using your computer or organization's server in the evening hours. If you already have a low cost long distance provider for your telephone service, this should also keep costs low.

- Wherever possible, identify reporters and editors that prefer to receive information via email. Use it and take them off your fax and snail mail lists.

- Instead of mailing or using an overnight delivery service for press packets, eliminate the press packet and make the materials available via a simple web site. This will save not only on mailing costs but also on printing expenses.

- Substitute creativity for cash by developing compelling stories, engaging leads and well written news releases. The better the basic information and pitch, the more likely the story will sell itself, requiring less time and money in faxing, pitching and other distribution.

- On an ongoing basis, always be as responsive as possible to reporter's inquiries. Those you've helped will be more receptive to listening to your pitch at some later time. Remember, getting a busy reporter's attention costs money in materials development and pitching. Once you are viewed as a helpful source, you will always have their attention.

- Read the newspaper and follow the news on the Internet and on television. Spot opportunities to place your stories and then go directly to the reporter, after you have read their story.

Conclusion

Nothing is ever completely certain in the communications business. However, there is much you can do to improve your chances of success – as defined by helping your organization meets its objectives. The planning process outlined in this chapter at minimum should help you clarify and expand your thinking. At best, it can play a major role in getting the results you seek. Good luck!