



QUALITY EDUCATIONAL DESIGN OF SAN DIEGO
A hypothetical Corporation

*Initial Analysis of
Problems and Opportunities*

Public Relations Training for Managers of Nonprofit Organizations

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Initial Analysis

Public Relations Training for Non-Profit Organizations

Introduction

Many worthwhile nonprofit organizations struggle for attention with limited resources for promotion without realizing that an inexpensive public relations program can be one of the most cost effective ways to promote an organization's services or products. While basic public relations is relatively simple and requires only modest tools — such as a common word processor, fax, phone and Internet connection — it is often misunderstood and viewed as costly or superficial.

Analysis of Problems and Opportunities

Educational Context

According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics (nccsdataweb.urban.org), there are more than 1.2 million nonprofit organizations in the United States, with over 10 million paid employees and roughly 100 million volunteers. As a group, "nonprofit organizations" cover a wide spectrum of size, scope and sophistication, but the overwhelming majority are small, with fewer than fifty staff, and have a mission focused on service.

Learners

Clearly, with numbers like these, target learners have a broad range of skill and knowledge. This instructional product would be directed at managers at small and medium-sized nonprofits with promotion, communications or fundraising responsibilities. Many have the need to promote their organizations and events, educate the public, raise funds, recruit volunteers, advocate causes and communicate ideals. Typically, individuals in these positions have adequate to excellent language skills and, as managers, a majority have at least the ability to use a computer for e-mail, composing simple documents and basic web research.

Appropriateness of Instruction for Nonprofit PR Training

Instruction can serve as a cost-effective way to help these managers and their staffs, paid or volunteer, develop publicity skills that will help them achieve their goals. However, for the same reason that these organizations have limited funds for promotion, training budgets are also restricted. Using an Internet or CD-based instructional product will give them an economical, flexible and interactive way to study at convenient times and places, without travel expenses. These media also facilitate distribution of reference materials including templates and links to useful websites.

Justification for Using an Instructional Product

Because nonprofits have limited budgets for marketing, knowledge of getting the most impact with the least expenditure is critical. A small investment in targeted instruction about crafting a simple press release, working with the media, assembling a press kit and coordinating a press event can pay for itself many times over.

Development of these skills will enable nonprofit managers to accomplish key goals of increased awareness for fundraising events, volunteer opportunities and organizational programs, products or services. Because the subject matter is relatively straightforward, does not require specialized equipment or programming, it can be produced without high development costs. Much of the material could also be repurposed for a broader audience in the small business community.

Sources and Methods of Data Collection

Sources of data for this analysis come from a typical small nonprofit organization, Polaris Education & Guidance Services, Inc., a Berkeley-based group that provides specialized training for teachers to address behavior problems as well as adventure-based mentoring programs for at-risk youth. The potential learners perform day-to-day operations as well as management, fundraising and public outreach duties. Specific information sources include:

- the organization's founder and president who as likely learners;
- the Behavior Specialist for the Oakland City School District which uses the services of Polaris;
- two high school students who could be constituents of the Polaris Adventure Mentoring program;
- a member of the Polaris Board of Directors who is involved with budgetary guidance for the organization;
- and extant data from websites about nonprofit organizations.

I gathered most of the data via telephone, e-mail and in person using informal interviews based loosely on a list of questions listed in the reference section of this document. Extant data about the more general nature and needs of nonprofit organizations is based on published data found on the Internet.

Findings

PR Implementation Problem and Opportunities

Many small and medium-sized nonprofit organizations are so focused on their mission and details related to starting and running a nonprofit that they forget about the need to promote their organization just like any other business. Because they are funded by donations and grants, they must be especially cautious with money spent on non-program activities. A well-crafted public relations program can address promotional requirements as well as budgetary constraints.

Learner Attitudes Towards Implementing a PR Program

"We are educators who provide programs for kids and teachers. We admittedly don't know anything about marketing and have taken the attitude of 'if we build it, they will come.' But it's becoming obvious that you have to do more to reach more people as volunteers, to let teachers and at-risk youth know about our programs and to maximize fundraising," observed Martin Muller, president of Polaris. He and other staff noted that they didn't really even realize what activities PR entailed and thought it might involve an expensive agency. On the other hand they also expressed reservations about having time to take on more work and learn new skills.

Learner Knowledge and Skills

While potential learners at Polaris had only basic computer literacy skills, they are excellent writers and actually have considerable source material that they didn't even realize could be used for promotional activities. This is typical of many nonprofit staffers as they are usually adept at grant writing and have managed to jump through many bureaucratic hoops necessary to start a nonprofit.

Learner Goals for PR Training and Implementation

Although they expressed concern about time constraints, Polaris staff members were enthusiastic about the possible results of a PR program. Their primary goals did not relate so much to acquiring new skills as they did to reaping benefits that those skills might afford, including media coverage that could increase everything from program participation to contributions. As Polaris co-founder, Nina Ziskin, pointed out, "grant applications often ask for press clippings and we've never had any."

Additional concerns and goals came from policy makers and constituents who are peripherally involved with Polaris. A Polaris board member wanted to ensure that promotional undertakings or training would not be expensive. A local school administrator expressed interest in seeing favorable press about the district's proactive activities with at-risk youth. Teens who might be candidates for the Polaris mentoring programs indicated that they were unaware of programs of this nature and suggested that they don't read newspapers, but found out about activities from teachers, friends and the Internet.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on input from my interviews, motivation will be a key factor in the success of this instructional product. Target learners are spread very thin and any new activity must enable them to produce results quickly. Once they begin the instruction, benefits will quickly become apparent, but this must be conveyed to potential learners immediately. In my research, I found several books; two online tutorials that listed theories, benefits and components of a PR program; many web sites containing PR tips and hints; and a few regional classes and workshops about PR for nonprofits, but could find no comprehensive instructional product that would position the learners to immediately launch their own PR program.

Because the learners are not interested in the PR process, instructional goals should closely align with the user's desired end result. Learners will be more motivated if the products of their instruction were also materials that could be used in their organization's PR efforts, making the instructional product serve as a workshop tool as well. If, in learning to write a press release, they actually produce a release about their organization's next event, the learning will not just produce general skills, but a useful tool for their organization at the same time.

Goals

User Goals

1. We want to produce press releases that will get coverage of program activities to increase interest and participation.
2. We would like to be able to get local media announcements and calendars to list volunteer recruitment events that might encourage new people to participate in our programs.
3. We would like to obtain feature coverage in newspapers and magazines that could aid in fundraising efforts.
4. We would like to have more content to add for our web site.

Instructional Goals

1. Learners will use a provided MS Word template to draft a brief (<600 word) 6-point PR plan for their organization that outlines their objectives, measurable results, target audience, schedule of activities, delivery methods (e.g. Press releases, contributed articles, media events, TV coverage, etc.) and how the results would be tracked.
2. Learners will use a provided MS Word template to create a short (≈300 word) press release about an upcoming organizational activity that incorporates an attention-grabbing headline; a lead paragraph that addresses the who, what, when, where, why and how questions about the event; is concisely written; and follows conventional standards for grammar and syntax.
3. Learners will write a “boilerplate” paragraph (<150 words) that will be consistently used as a description of their organization in press releases, web listings and other directories.
4. Learners will use the Internet, local newspapers and other sources to start a media list that they will ultimately use to send releases and announcements. The list will include specific reporters, editors, policy makers and web sites that cover their organization’s topics along with personal contact information that can include a street address, phone, fax or e-mail address from at least five different organizations.
5. Learners will list five documents that could be included in a press kit for their organization and note why they might be of interest to a constituent.

References

Clark, R.C. (1999). *Developing technical training*. Silver Spring, MD: International society for Performance Improvement.

Idealist.org. (retrieved February 16, 2004). <http://www.idealist.org/>

National Center for Charitable Statistics. (Retrieved February 7, 2004)
<http://nccsdataweb.urban.org/NCCS/Public/>

Appendix A — Interview Questions

Questions for Learners

What type of promotional activities do you do?

Have you ever used public relations or issued a press release? If not, Why?

What is your budget for promotional activities?

Who decides how much you can spend?

Are you getting as much participation as you would like in your programs, from volunteers and with fundraising?

How do people currently hear about your programs and activities?

If you could find a way to get publicity for your organization without spending a lot of money, would you be interested in pursuing it?

Describe your computer skills.

Questions for Constituents (i.e. Potential Participants, Volunteers, Contributors)

How do you hear about activities in which you might like to participate?

What would make a program or event seem more appealing?

What prompts you to donate money or time to a charitable cause?

What might inspire you to volunteer for an organization?

Questions for Policy Makers (i.e. Board Members)

Do you see a need for attracting more participants, volunteers and donors?

What types of non-program activities do you find worthwhile for allocating funds?

What value do you see in having more publicity for the organization's activities?

Appendix B — Subject Matter Resources

Levine, M. (2002). *Guerrilla P.R. wired*. New York: McGraw-Hil.

Schneider, L. (2004). Six steps to developing your public relations and media plan.
<http://marketing.about.com/cs/publicrelations/a/prplan6steps.htm>

Yaverbaum, E. (2001). *Public relations kit for dummies*. New York: Wiley Publishing, Inc.