
PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

A public service announcement can be an effective way to get library visibility through television. If you are looking for free airtime, however, you might get stuck with a single showing at 3 a.m. on Sunday. Depending on how important this avenue is to you for getting your message out, you may want to find out what the best rates are for a public service announcement and when your message will reach the audience you want. You won't get prime time but that may not be the best time for your message. All television (and radio) stations keep information on user profiles for each segment of airtime. The audience you are trying to reach may be late Friday night viewers and you may be able to get a favorable rate for that time.

Of course, ensuring that a public service announcement on television is effective requires that you have a very good, eye-catching, announcement. Be sure to have such an announcement professionally produced. A plan to get the library's message out will backfire if your announcement is weak and amateurish. Contact a local public relations firm and work with them to develop an excellent video that effectively communicates your message if you are going to go this route.

Public service announcements for television are expensive—at least they will be if they are going to be effective. There is the cost of professional production and the cost of airtime (don't go to the trouble and expense of production if you are not willing to pay to get a decent time slot). Because of this expense, you may want to consider using television as a communications method only when you are engaged in a targeted campaign for funding or referendum. Plus, you may have a hard time convincing your administration that you need funding if you are producing library commercials for prime time!

While television public service announcements (PSA) may be out of reach, radio is often much more accessible. Professionally produced radio public service announcements are often very inexpensive. Work with a local radio station and disc jockey to design an ad or series of ads that promote your library and its importance and value to the listener. A good radio PSA will be catchy (including sound effects and music). It should be read by a professional radio announcer and should clearly convey what the library has to offer and why that is valuable.

In working with a radio station to develop a PSA be sure to brainstorm about the wide variety of services your library has and let them know what your desired outcome is. For ongoing advocacy, your desired outcome should be a community better educated about the important role your library plays in people's lives. Again, consider your audience. Who are you trying to educate? Who are you trying to influence? Discuss that with the people who are producing the PSA so they make the script appealing to that audience.

If you are developing a series of radio PSAs, be sure that they have a consistent "sound." They should all be read by the same person and have the same music and tag line. The goal for a radio PSA or series of PSAs should be to penetrate, to the best of your financial ability, the airwaves. If you do this, your spots will soon be recognizable and you will have gone a long way to "branding" your library and its value to those listening.

Once you have professionally produced PSAs you must make sure they get played. You might go with one overwhelmingly popular station (the one that produced the PSAs for you?) or you may select several to reach a more diverse audience. Radio stations are often more willing to give free airtime (and at a decent time of day) than television. But, even if you must pay for some time slots, you will find radio much cheaper than television. You may not be able to afford the most active listening times but you may be able to broker a deal to pay for a certain number of slots during the more affordable times in exchange for a few, high-listener slots as well.

In Figure 3.14 are the scripts from radio PSAs that were specially developed for my library. The producer put these together for \$200 as a way of making a contribution to the library. Getting the airtime—both free and inexpensive—was an easy final step. The Friends of the Library can support this kind of promotional campaign and they can even tag on with the phone number for listeners who might want to join the Friends, doubling the value of their investment.

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