

The Sources *Hot*Link

Tips and Practical Ideas to Get Positive News Coverage

Number Twenty-three, Summer 2002

Public Relations Strategy a Valuable Fundraising Tool

BY MARK LAVIGNE APR
& LESLIE HETHERINGTON

The following is a powerful example of how a professional public relations practitioner used strategic communications to greatly enhanced a charitable fundraising program.

Yellow Brick House (YBH) is a non-profit organization in Aurora, Ontario which is committed to providing shelter, support services and counselling for women and their children who are in crisis as a result of abuse or loss of housing.

YBH is dependent on the Ministry of Community and Social Services for most of its funding. The balance of its budget, about \$300,000 annually, must be raised through its own means and resources within the diverse community it serves.

Although many residents in the community are affluent and have been supportive of Yellow Brick House's initiatives, they are inundated by fundraising requests from equally deserving organizations locally and within the greater Toronto area. A few years ago, YBH identified the need for a captivating and creative concept to differentiate it from other fundraising efforts. It also needed an external space to hold media and other public events because of security and privacy concerns.

To meet these needs and provide a unique and sustainable focus, Mark LaVigne, APR, conceived the "Pathway of Peace" on a pro bono basis as a volunteer Board member. Working closely with YBH Executive Director Filomena Williams, LaVigne developed the concept of refurbishing a run-

down public park in downtown Aurora by building a cobblestone path accompanied by a landmark monument. Funds were raised by selling the cobblestones or "bricks" at multi-tier donation levels (individuals, small businesses and corporations).

Williams and LaVigne spent three years developing the project working closely with Town Council and its committees, with key suppliers, the YBH Board, and other stakeholders in the community. In particular, Aurora's Mayor, Tim Jones, has been a great supporter of the project and has officiated at all media events including the launch.

Hilary Weston, as Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, officially launched the Pathway of Peace on June 27, 2000 attracting considerable media and public attention. Various media relations techniques were utilized, including paid wire distribution of media advisories and releases, procurement (at cost or pro bono) of a professional photographer and videographer to create high-resolution digital still images and BETA tape (B-roll) for news media consumption, and the creation of a CD-ROM media kit that included downloadable images and low-resolution video of Hilary Weston's launch

Continued on Page 3

What Makes a Good Story?

BY WILLIAM WRAY CARNEY

The following is an edited excerpt from the recently published book, "In the News: The Practice of Media Relations in Canada" by William Wray Carney.



Reporters — and readers — want a good story. The story should be interesting and relevant to the audience, and it must be written clearly enough that it can be quickly and easily understood. What makes a story interesting is often a combination of the interests of the audience, the interests and abilities of the reporter, and a long history of journalistic tradition.

The question "What is news?" is a primary philosophical issue in media relations. Many people are indifferent to sports, for example, yet it constitutes a major part of mainstream news. Every television and radio station devotes extensive time to weather, even though it is usually straightforward and it all comes from the same place. Nevertheless, without getting into that debate, we can identify a number of elements that characterize a good news story.

Drama and emotion

News is about people. When the driest statistical summary from Stats Can is released, reporters will look for people who either

Continued on Page 2



2002 marks our 25th
year linking journalists
with the experts they need.

From the Editor

Mission Impossible time again. Here's where we squeeze the latest and greatest information on media/public relations into four pages...

This time we turn our attention to the charity/non-profit sector. Successful charity operations, whether it be public education, client support, volunteer recruitment, fundraising or donor recognition, is dependent upon effective and strategic communications with several audiences and stakeholders. Hopefully what we provide is of assistance.

We invite all our readers to get in the habit of visiting our Web site www.hotlink.ca on a regular basis. There's more room in cyberspace, so we're using our presence on the World Wide Web to elaborate on subjects covered in the *Sources Hotlink* newsletter. (more photos, more articles, more advice!) Also, watch for new features and articles that are available only online.

Enjoy our latest effort. We look forward to your comments.

Sincerely,
Lynn Fenske, Editor

SOURCES *HotLink*

Summer 2002

ISSN: 1480-2821

489 College St., Suite 305
Toronto, Ontario M6G 1A5
Phone: (416) 964-7799
Fax: (416) 964-8763

E-mail: sources@sources.com

World Wide Web:

<http://www.sources.com>

Sources HotLink is free to organizations listed with *Sources*. Subscriptions are \$20/year for those not listed with *Sources*. Subscription orders must be prepaid. Visa or MasterCard accepted.

Editor: Lynn Fenske

Typesetting and Design:
Elaine Farragher/AlterLinks

© Sources 2002

Publications Mail Agreement #1715615

What Makes a Good Story?

Continued from Page 1

exemplify the statistics or are affected by them. This is backed up by a survey of 72 media professionals undertaken by Angus Reid in 1993. To the question of newsworthiness — that is, what makes something “news” — the greatest percentage of respondents (44 percent) found it in a subject that “affects people.”

Odd or unusual

Second on the Angus Reid survey of newsworthiness, at 37 percent, was the “unusual/unexpected.” This is the classic category of “man bites dog” journalism. That a plane landed safely is routine and expected; a plane crash is news. Third in the poll, at 33 percent, was “important”, a concept that is difficult to describe. What is important to one person may not be to another.

Local angle

Local news ranked next in the survey, at 17 percent, which reflects the media's concern with its own audience and the issues that affect the audience directly. This angle, combined with an issue that affects people, makes front-page news. A plant closure that lays off thousands in Wichita, Kansas, for example, isn't newsworthy in St. John's; but if it happens in St. John's, it's front page.

Topical, timely

When you're looking to get your story in the news, you must consider topicality and timeliness. Examples abound at every holiday season: Thanksgiving news comes complete with instructions on how to cook your turkey safely; Christmas comes with safety warnings regarding the dangers of Christmas tree fires. But local events, whether annual or irregular, can also lead to topical hooks. For example, a reporter might prepare a sidebar on fire insurance for rural homes to run alongside a story about a major forest fire; might interview a local cowboy poet during the Calgary Stampede; or might write a profile of a well-known local personality who has multiple sclerosis the weekend before the Super Cities Walk for MS.

Conflict

Disagreement is generally more newsworthy than agreement. This is why politics and sports make easy news: it is easy to find disagreement. As a practitioner, you need to give some thought to whether you want to expose yourself or your client to this phenomenon. Because the reporter wants a balanced story, he or she will often look for someone to disagree with the point of view you express, or at least to offer a different perspective.

Relevance to audience

Although stories sometimes run because of their sheer oddity, more times than not they run because editors know what their audience is interested in. A human-rights ruling extending retirement age, for example, will be of more interest to senior's media than to YTV or MuchMusic. Many media outlets have finely targeted audiences. Being sensitive to the market they are trying to reach, and demonstrating that your story idea is relevant to that audience, will increase your chances of getting coverage.

Universal appeal

Stories that affect, or have the potential to affect, everyone are also newsworthy. A story about a child with a rare disease is interesting because it is unusual. But it is also effective because all parents worry about the health of their children and are interested in children's health generally. Reporters like stories that their audience can relate to, no matter how unusual the topic may be. Universality is closely related to relevance to the audience.

To read the unedited excerpt, go to www.hotlink.ca

For more tips and practical ideas on getting media coverage, visit our Web site www.hotlink.ca.

The Sources *HotLink* – Summer 2002 Phone: (416) 964-7799

Public Relations Strategy a Valuable Fundraising Tool

Continued from Page 1

speech. Several events have been held since to sustain the momentum.

In addition to the launch event, other promotional activities have included a teaser photo-op event of monument arrival for engraving, as well as several commemoration events, where plaques listing new donor names, were unveiled. Public relations industry suppliers, who donated their services in kind or at cost, have also been honoured with their names placed on the initial plaque unveiled in June, 2000.

The Pathway of Peace has also been used for other events, including "Take Back the Night" marches in 2000 and 2001, and a memorial vigil for a woman found murdered in her Woodbridge home in late April, 2002. Flowers are frequently laid at the base of the monument to honour slain women across the GTA and province.

More than six million first impressions have been generated in news media during the Pathway's two-year history, including local media, such as *CKVR-TV, Shaw Cable, Rogers Cable, the Era Banner, Town Crier, the Liberal* and the *Auroran*, as well as Toronto-based *Global TV, and CBC Radio* (five minute documentary).

To date, Yellow Brick House's Pathway of Peace has generated close to \$50,000 in revenue and some 300 bricks have been sold. The Pathway itself, utilizing goods and services worth well over \$100,000, was built for just under \$33,000. That hard cost was paid for in six months after the official opening.

This project met all of its objectives. To this day Pathway to Peace continues to generate awareness of Yellow Brick House and abuse/homeless issues through media coverage, to raise funds through brick sales, to foster community involvement through its central proximity and urban renewal value, to offer a place that the abused and troubled can use for solace, to remember those who lost their lives due to violence, and to provide a public venue for YBH media and special events.

A dream since its inception, the Pathway of Peace concept is spreading internationally, hopefully one day creat-



Lt. Gov. Hilary Weston with YBH Executive Director Filomena Williams at the unveiling of Pathway to Peace, June 2000.

ing a virtual Pathway of Peace spanning the globe. Women's shelters or similar-minded groups in Toronto, Thunder Bay, Oshawa, Kingston, Vermont and London, England, have all expressed interest in creating their own "Pathway of Peace."



Mark LaVigne, APR, owns and operates Hunter LaVigne Communications Inc. He is also Co-Chair of the Board of Directors at Yellow Brick House, and President of the Canadian Public

Relations Society (Toronto).



Leslie Hetherington is a media relations specialist who works with Hunter LaVigne Communications Inc. and is Chair of Marketing and Promotion for CPRS (Toronto).

To contact Hunter LaVigne Communications Inc. telephone (905) 841-2017 or E-mail mark.lavigne@sympatico.ca.

Hotlink Resource Shelf

The Art of Cause Marketing: How to Use Advertising to Change Personal Behavior and Public Policy

By Richard Earle

McGraw-Hill, 2000, 322 pp.,
ISBN 0-07-138702-1

REVIEWED BY LYNN FENSKE

Public service announcements are the property of the non-profit sector. Is your organization capitalizing on their power? Are they included in your arsenal of public education, fundraising and volunteer recruitment tools? If not, you need to read this book.

Its author, Richard Earle, knows how to craft a powerful public service campaign. He helped create the Keep America Beautiful "Crying Indian" series for which he won an award. He kept Johnson & Johnson from the brink of ruin as creative director during the Tylenol tampering crisis. Thankfully he's made his vast knowledge and experience readily available in an easy to read, inspiring "hey, I can do that" guidebook.

Earle's writing is succinct. He explains how to pitch, plan and execute a cause related advertising campaign in just over 300 pages, complete with television storyboards, radio scripts and case studies to illustrate cause marketing in action. Earle also includes his top ten list of the best cause marketing campaigns and why (in his estimation) they worked.

I encourage you to study and learn from Earle's examples of some of the advertising industry's brightest and most creative efforts. Albeit American in content and context, the principles of targeting audiences, conducting research, writing advertising copy to suit different media, testing and measuring effectiveness are universal in application. Earle's assessment of the media includes the traditional (print, radio and television) as well as alternatives — direct mail, the Internet and public relations, or as Earle calls it, earned media.

In his conclusion, Earle makes a poignant observation. If advertising is the most fun you can have with your clothes on (as someone once remarked), then cause marketing is the most fun you can have with your brain on.

His final advice — go on! Make a difference!

Top Ten List of Media Relations

BY LYNN FENSKE

David Letterman has his top ten lists, and now so does *The Sources Hotlink*.

We begin by offering our top ten recommendations for becoming (and remaining) media friendly:

- 1 Treat media representatives equally. Don't play favourites.
- 2 Treat media deadlines as your own.
- 3 Address a person, not a title.
- 4 Know the media's requirements.
- 5 Be accurate.
- 6 Be accessible.
- 7 Be consistent.
- 8 Be helpful and polite.
- 9 Don't speculate or "pretend" to know the answer.
- 10 Be professional.

For more explanation of our top ten recommendations and how to implement them, visit our Web site www.hotlink.ca.

Alert the media...

Sources has all the resources necessary to write your news release and distribute it to your selected audience quickly, effectively, and very affordably.

For information about Sources comprehensive news release service or to place an order, call Lynn at (416) 964-7799 or E-mail sources@sources.com

In Print: Maximizing Coverage of Charity Activities in Community Newspapers

BY LYNN FENSKE

Charities are primarily community-based organizations providing services to members/clients, recruiting volunteers, running special events and soliciting donors in ways that are relevant to local chapters. To do this effectively requires skill and experience in targeting external communications to specific audiences. Much of what is communicated is newsworthy (of interest to or affecting the community) and thereby is of interest to the local, community newspaper.

As with all communications, how you present your point of view is most important. When it comes to getting coverage in the local newspaper, presentation is paramount. The newspaper needs all the help it can get since staff members are always pushed to the limit. Even when student interns are available to help out, there is never enough manpower or time to follow up on every story lead or to attend every special event. So to maximize your profile and get your story or event covered, give the newspaper what it wants, when it wants it.

Here's how:

- Always submit information in writing following a news release or media advisory format. If you lack the necessary expertise, then acquire it through volunteer resources or contracting a professional. (*Sources* is an excellent place to start.)
- Answer all the key questions of who, what, when, where and why.
- Whenever possible, submit the information electronically. If submitting information by fax, always telephone afterwards to make sure it was received.
- Follow the newspaper's instructions on where to submit information. When in doubt, send it to the editor.
- Honour the geographical boundaries of the newspaper. Remember, they

are serving a specific community. Anything taking place beyond their "territory" will not receive coverage.

- Be aware of deadlines. Most importantly, is the newspaper published daily, weekly or monthly? For calendar listings, get the information in as early as possible — up to four weeks in advance of your event. (Calendar space is limited and items usually get listed on a first come, first served basis.)
- Always describe any opportunities that exist for taking photographs and be specific about the time. Photographers often have to cover several events in one day. If you do not specify the time of presentations, ribbon cuttings, ceremonies, etc. then the photographer may inadvertently arrive too late.
- Maintain a positive attitude and be trustworthy, accurate and timely in your delivery of information. In other words, be someone the editors can look forward to working with and can depend on.
- Be sensitive to the pressures and deadlines of publishing. Don't make demands on the editors. They have enough pressure to deal with, often being responsible for several editions per week.
- Establish a good working relationship with editors knowing that they rely on people like you to help them stay informed of all that is happening in the community.

Now go get those headlines.

"If you want to be successful, know what you are doing, love what you are doing, and believe in what you are doing."

Will Rogers

The Sources *HotLink* – Summer 2002 Phone: (416) 964-7799