

**Information and Advice for Nonprofit Advertising**

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

Scott Navarro

Howard Snider, Advisor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Howard Snider". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Howard" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Snider".

Ball State University  
Muncie, Indiana

May 1997

Graduation, May 10, 1997

SP  
no  
60  
S-1  
34  
1997  
NBS

## **Purpose of the Thesis**

The research done about nonprofit advertising was designed to give these groups a starting place when developing an advertising/marketing plan. The background research is followed by the results of surveys filled out by nonprofit organizations from all over the nation. Then, three interviews give more detail into how the organizations are run. Finally, advice is given on how the organizations can begin or change their existing plans.

## Information and Advice for Nonprofit Advertising

### The Student Competition

Each year, the American Advertising Federation holds a student advertising competition along with a corporate sponsor. Past sponsors have included Kodak and the Dodge Neon. Sponsors put forth \$100,000 to sponsor the competition which involves schools from all over the nation.

I first became involved during the Dodge Neon case. The job was to target the car to college students. Our campaign involved a credit card with a percentage of purchases going toward a new Neon.

"This is great," I thought. "Where else am I going to get this kind of experience while still in school?" I had it made. By the end of the campaign, I thought I knew everything there was to know about advertising and marketing in general. Then, they had to go and throw me.

The following year's competition threw everything I had learned out the window. The following year's competition was sponsored by the American Red Cross -- a nonprofit group.

The job was to encourage twentysomethings to volunteer for the Red Cross. No money saving was involved. Were people loyal to nonprofits? What did reputation have to do with giving blood and helping hurricane victims?

Did I mention the budget? Did we have a budget? We were allocated an \$85 million advertising budget. Sort of. We were given the budget parameter, but we didn't have the money. Everything had to be donated.

This didn't make any sense to a guy whose only experience was selling cars to college students. How could we plan on getting anything done if

nothing was definite? Production had to be donated. Media had to be donated. Boy, did media have to be donated! We had a make-believe donated media budget of \$20 million. That is, if we could get our ads placed.

The FCC no longer requires the media to place public service announcements. Everything had to be done through their own good will.

### **What about the little guys?**

Well, we got through the campaign. We figured out plans and alternate plans and alternate, alternate plans for our campaign, because nothing could be seen as definite.

When the student competition was done, I got to wondering. If the American Red Cross, this huge, government supported, nationally respected organization would have this much trouble establishing an advertising plan, what about the little guys? How would a small group run by two or three people in their spare time ever get the word out on their organizations?

### **The Plan**

I wanted to know more about how other nonprofits got the word out on their organizations.

I stopped by a local Red Cross chapter to show them our work and to find out more about how nonprofit marketing works in the real world (we weren't allowed to talk with local chapters during the competition). I was proud of my work and wanted to show it off.

To my surprise, they weren't really interested. They were busy running around answering phones, rummaging through filing cabinets, and trying to schedule different training sessions. "If they are busy with all of this, no wonder they have trouble," I thought.

That's when I decided to research the situation further to try to put together a small handbook that they could refer to when they were trying to publicize.

I checked local libraries for information, but there was little. What was there was vague, and was more about the legal tax forms filled out than the actual marketing, publicizing, and advertising of the organizations.

So, I took the little I had learned during the national student competition and applied it to setting up a list of questions that could be used in local interviews with nonprofit directors. From there, I put together a short questionnaire to send out to see where other groups stood on the situation. Over 135 questionnaires were sent out with 68 being returned.

These surveys were separated into different categories. Groups from each category were then selected for more in-depth interviews.

After the nonprofits were interviewed, I contacted media and advertising organizations to find out their stance when it came to dealing with nonprofit groups.

The results, I'm sorry to say, are vague. Some important points and options, however, did arise.

### **A Note**

Several times, both in this paper and in my research, I use the word *advertising*. In school we are taught that advertising is a paid for, non-personal message used to reach a specific audience with a specific message. When it comes to nonprofits, the term changes meaning to me. I always explained to those I worked with, that to me, advertising was any publicity that could come to the organization. Whether it was a PSA aired on national television, a mention of a program on local radio, a flyer that could be

distributed, or a simple word of mouth, to me they all served the same purpose. They were designed to send out a message about the organization or its programs. You may call it Public Relations. Someone else might call it publicity. I call it advertising.

**The Survey**

Organization

Name

Position

Size of organization

Please rate the success of your organization's advertising ventures.

1     2     3     4     5     6     7     8     9     10  
Poor                      Moderate Success                      Successful

Please rate your own competence when it comes to publicizing your organization.

1     2     3     4     5     6     7     8     9     10  
Poor                      Moderate Success                      Successful

What kind of tactics have you used in the past when attempting to publicize your organization or events?

What is your organization's greatest strength when it comes to advertising?

What is your organization's greatest weakness?

Has your organization ever used or considered using outside help in terms of advertising (i.e., corporate sponsorships or student work)?

Who handles your organization's advertising needs?



## The Results

1. *Please rate the success of your organization's advertising ventures.*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Poor</i>		<i>Moderate Success</i>				<i>Successful</i>			

Not surprisingly, most (59 percent) of the surveys came back with a one or two circled on them. None were given the highest rating. Three surveys had either an eight or nine circled. Twenty-five had circled either a 5 or 6.

2. *Please rate your own competence when it comes to publicizing your organization.*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Poor</i>		<i>Moderate Success</i>				<i>Successful</i>			

I don't think that it was any big surprise that the answers to this question mirrored the answers to the first. The only real change is that the middle group rated more as 4s and 5s instead of 5s and 6s.

3. *What kind of tactics have you used in the past when attempting to publicize your organization or events?*

A variety of answers was given to this question. They ranged from using the traditional media to holding elaborately staged events. This question was used mostly to force the organization to review its current tactics and to give ideas for new and creative promotional techniques.

4. *What is your organization's greatest strength when it comes to advertising?*

Oddly enough, this question was the most skipped question on the survey. I don't know if those who skipped the question didn't know how to answer, did not have any strengths, or simply read over the question.

30%: no answer  
10%: no strengths  
1%: luck  
23%: relationships  
16%: creativity  
20%: persistence

5. *What is your organization's greatest weakness?*

Almost every answer to this question had to do with money. Mostly, budgets did not allocate money to buy advertising or to hire a marketing director, or someone to put in charge of this area only.

6. *Has your organization ever used or considered using outside help in terms of advertising (i.e. ,corporate sponsorships or student work)?*

Only a few organizations responded to using outside help in establishing and carrying out their advertising plans. Organizations reported using corporate sponsors in terms of everyday funding, but very little for advertising support.

When it comes to students, even less (about eight percent) had used students, either as interns or simply as volunteers, in this capacity. Others mentioned that they did not have the time or resources to take on a student intern.

7. *Who handles your organization's advertising needs?*

Sixty-four percent of nonprofit directors were also in charge of any advertising or publicity that took place for their organization. Twenty-two percent shared responsibility with others. Nine percent had another person whose duties this fell under. There was five percent who did not answer the question. It makes me wonder if they even knew whose job it was.

## **The Interviews**

The surveys were separated in terms of perceived ability. I will be reporting mostly on three of the interviews. One rated high in terms of both past success and perceived competence. One rated moderate in both, and the other rated poor in both areas.

They were also chosen for interviews in terms of their location and the types of organizations they were.

### **Number One: Poor Self-Rating**

Open Door Community Services, Inc.  
Kimberly Wheat, Care Coordinator  
A community clinic dealing with areas ranging from child care, HIV/AIDS care, and care of the homeless. Over 12 programs altogether serve five counties.

"We don't do much advertising at all," Wheat said. "We had one program that had an advertising budget, but their funding was just cut. We have brochures and we try to make sure that they are out at agencies that people might need the services frequent."

Wheat, who did not have her own office, but rather had to conduct the interview in a clinic room where other employees had to come to get supplies, credits her poor self rating to the organization's limited funds and the lack of advertising know-how of the current staff.

"Budget? We don't have much of one. The only real budget we have is for staff and programming. Fortunately, we live in a town with a university so we can access that."

She noted that although student volunteers have helped in the past, they go through cycles of volunteering and the clinic has not yet found an

adequate way of reaching the students to inform them of volunteer options. She hopes to soon set up an organized program to keep them involved.

"I don't know what works best," she said. "We're searching still. We're still looking for that magic way to bring people in."

She cites *word-of-mouth* as their best form of advertising. But she notes that it is slow and unreliable. Other attempts at advertising also proved to work for the organization. Free advertising to nonprofit groups on the local public access station has brought several people into the clinic.

She also mentioned a local human interest story in a local newspaper as a large contributor to the little success the organization has had. The story just briefly mentioned the services of the clinic, but had telephones ringing for days following publication.

"It was nothing that we solicited," she said, "but was this person wanting to tell his story. If we were to contact the news here locally, they would say 'Yeah, you and everybody else wants an article on your program.' But here, they were able to find a human interest story.

"When we have tried to contact (the newspaper) to do information about our services or support groups, they're not so quick to jump on that. Everybody wants their programs publicized in the paper. We naively thought 'Gee, wouldn't you like to write about this?' And the answer was, 'No, not really.' It is definitely a learning process.

"We're very naive on how to advertise our programs. We've never really had the opportunity to say this worked or that didn't, because we've never gotten past the money issues."

Most of those associated with the organization come recommended from other agencies. These recommendations are the kind of word-of-mouth advertising that Wheat speaks about.

"We all know each other. It's the general public who tend to be the last ones to know about us. They are who the services are there for, and they are often the last to know the services exist."

## **Number Two: Medium Self-Rating**

The American Red Cross  
Kathy Blewett, Executive Director  
Nationally affiliated organization which offers a variety of services including disaster relief, blood drives, and other health and youth services. The office has one part-time and three full time staff members.

On a national level, the American Red Cross works with the National Ad Council. They put together special campaigns for the organization, especially when the disaster relief funds need replenishing.

"Nationals really help us with advertising as it directly relates to fundraising," Blewett said. "In my opinion, secondary is the ads for recruiting volunteers. It's there, but not the extent that the fundraising campaigns are."

The national affiliation does provide printed promotional material to the local chapters. These include brochures, posters, and flyers which are easily adapted to the individual chapters. Programs vary from chapter to chapter, so each is able to decide which materials are needed.

"They make them available for the local chapters to have access to, and then it's up to the local chapters to take those tools and use them locally. Nationals typically do not do much marketing on programs.

"They kind of give us this smorgasbord of options here and if the chapter's participating in a particular program, you have the support material there. That is one of the benefits I see of being affiliated with a national

organization. We get the materials and add our own chapter address, name and phone number."

Being part of a national organization doesn't necessarily make everything easier, Blewett added. She said that communication between the local and national levels is sometimes difficult. She calls the affiliation in general a "mixed blessing."

"We're trying to think of new ways to reach people other than just hanging a poster in a grocery store," she said. "I guess what we need to do is look for new ways or creative ways, because the old things are just becoming out dated."

The Red Cross Chapter has begun to do just that. Blewett cited the creation of a new Web page as a way for an old organization to reach a new market. A recent connection at the local public access cable television station has also developed. "They are very eager to allow us to put programs on there," she said.

The chapter also uses some traditional local media with mixed results.

"We try to get press releases to our local media, constantly, regarding chapter services, special events, human interest stories, and national events," she said. "We are at their mercy whether they choose to put them in or not. So sometimes that works for us and sometimes it doesn't. They are the ones who call the shots.

"Sometimes they will print it in its entirety, sometimes it will be so cut up that it's unrecognizable and the real gist of what you were trying to express in the press release wasn't there."

She said that the best luck they have had in getting press releases placed is when names, companies, and numbers were included. Some releases come from the national office, but most are written by Blewett herself. She adds

that most of what goes on at the chapter is so basic, with no real shock value or interest, that they would never get attention in a newspaper.

Blewett said that local radio is also used. A talk format allows them to get the word out on some programs, but she says that it is difficult coming up with interesting topics on a regular basis. She doubts the effectiveness of all of the different media options.

"It's very hard for us to identify what forms of advertising produced a given result. Why does someone come in to donate blood? Did they see an ad in the paper? Did they hear a spot on the radio? Or did you just ask them?"

The plan the chapter has currently been trying to execute is simply covering all the bases, all the time. She says that they do not know the effectiveness of one particular form in order to repeat it.

"Our chapter doesn't have a marketing plan. It's really tough because you get sucked into day-to-day operational things that you're just kind of chasing yourself around. To stop that is difficult."

Other times, when the chapter decides to do some advertising of their own, they often get a mixed reaction. To speak well of the agency, she says, they must do so conservatively.

"When we do splurge and have something printed on our own, if it looks too nice, I'm nailed because I spent donated dollars. If I use glossy paper it's like, 'Where are they getting all their money?' But yet, if it looks like a piece of junk, it negatively represents us and what we are doing. It's a very fine line.

"I think what limits us, it's not because a method did not work. What limits us is our ability to make the right connections. That we aren't talking to the right people, the right department, or the right office. It's very difficult



to establish good connections and to maintain them. Am I really talking to the right people? Who else can help me with this?"

Blewett is trying to make connections in important places. In an effort to solidify relations and cooperation, the chapter has recently asked some media and advertising people to sit on the board of directors. They are also reaching out to students of a local honor society to help produce some informational videos for the public access channel.

The chapter had never really considered corporate sponsorship when it came to advertising. They do, however, have corporate sponsors for the chapter's largest fund-raiser, a golf tournament held every year. They have been reluctant to ask for more money for an advertising budget.

"If we hit them up for X, Y, and Z, are they going to be there for the golf tournament? What do we want the most?"

Blewett then answered her own question.

"The privilege of saying no belongs to the donor. Sometimes we fail to ask, and in a sense, we are making the decision for them."

### **Number Three: High Self-Rating**

Dayton Society of Natural History  
Chuck Fields, Public Information Director  
The Society is made up of four areas, the Dayton Museum of Natural History, the Children's Museum of Dayton, the Sunwatch Indian Village, and other off-site exhibits.

Chuck Fields' ratings for both himself and his organization were among the highest in the surveys. His placement of ads and the reputation he has built is a testament to his high ratings. He averages television

coverage more than once a week and a newspaper article about once every six days.

"We have events going on all the time," Fields said. "There's usually at least one event a month where we can concentrate that'll stimulate a lot of free publicity."

Although Fields gets a large amount of placement in local media, he has the same problems as other nonprofits.

"The hardest thing is probably that we don't have money to advertise. So where ever we place it, these are valuable dollars. We don't have room to waste advertising. It's not so much as how much it [cost] as how effective it is. You've got to spread your money out and you don't want to spread too thin because you've got to build your reputation, the repetition, the frequency, and the impact."

To make sure the advertising used is effective, Fields makes sure research is done on the effectiveness of different media outlets. Surveys are done at museum exhibits asking patrons how they heard about the particular exhibit. They have found that television and newspapers consistently work the best.

One reason the newspapers have been so willing to work with the organization is the relationships Fields has worked to build with them. He says that a commitment is needed for the relationship to work.

"I ask them what we can do to serve them. I find out exactly what they're looking for and who to contact. There is little waste this way and it makes it easier on everyone. Everyone gets something out of it."

In visitors' surveys, the organization tries to find out what kind of people are filling out the surveys. Of those people, what do they like to do.

"Different coupons are working," he said. "That's been a great way of tracking where people have heard about it. We have limited time and limited resources. This lets us know what is effective. We can see what stands out."

Fields did surveys at the Indian Village during a specific time frame when heavy radio advertising was being used. He found out which radio stations a majority of the visitors listened to. He plans on using these radio stations for the next year's advertising of that particular event.

"Next year, we're going to have the best year ever because we have some really good reports we can rely on. Saves time. Saves money."

Fields believes that building important relationships starts with building a name in the community. Without community support, he says, they are unable to accomplish anything. Credibility with the community is his number one concern. He suggests meeting with community leaders to help establish this credibility.

Some of these community leaders may even wind up being corporate sponsors. Fields believes that local sponsors will help fund a project if they too get something out of it. He works mostly with the media as corporate sponsors.

"We don't have any money to spend, but we want you to be a part of this project. We think it would really benefit your readers, viewers, or listeners. In exchange for you giving publicity on this, you'd be associated with a great institution. We'll do everything we can to make sure your name is a part of it."

Fields calls this system of exchange "bartering." An example would be when the museum held a private Christmas party for a company that printed newsletters for the museum.

Fields has recently found that the work of a student intern can also benefit the organization. Others surveyed said that they were afraid to take on a student intern. They were afraid the training process would get in the way of them doing their everyday jobs. With this thinking comes the habit of using interns as "grunts."

"The purpose of having interns is not to use them as grunts, but to give them a good experience," Fields said. "Doing that the best way you can guarantees that your organization is going to have a great experience too."

He has tried to use his interns' skills, creativity, and knowledge to benefit his organization. Fields thinks of interns as another form of bartering. The student gets experience, the organization gets inexpensive help.

### **Some Successes**

No matter what rating the groups gave themselves, each had some innovative projects, promotions and advertisements of which they were proud.

An important connection Blewett's organization has made lately is with the local movie theater. One event which Blewett considered successful was having tornado safety information available at screenings of the movie *Twister*. She hopes to hold onto this connection for a while to hold similar events. The only cost to her Red Cross chapter was about \$10 for a display board. Information was provided by the national organization and the table was staffed by theater employees and volunteers.

Open Door used one of its biggest supporters, the students of Ball State University, for a major fund-raiser. *Ballapalooza*, a concert featuring local rock bands was put on to raise money for the organization. The concert was entirely student run. The only cost to the organization came from making

copies of brochures of the services offered to hand out to the students. Even those copies were bought at a discounted rate.

And for only \$40, Fields put together a promotional stunt which won coverage on all local media including every television network and newspaper, all within one week.

"The Great Dino Capture" promotion ran the week before opening of the museum's new dinosaur exhibit. A dinosaur started showing up in public places: school cafeterias, shopping malls, and city streets. Soon the city was wondering what the dinosaur was doing. Finally, the day before the exhibit opened, the beast was spotted on a downtown roof-top. The city police had to talk the dinosaur off of the building.

The only cost to the museum was the rental of a dinosaur costume. Other work came from getting cooperation with the city police, building managers, and news crews. Fields himself dressed as the dinosaur.

## **The Advice**

### **A Plan**

One of the most common things holding back most organizations is the lack of a plan. The groups had written financial statements and goals, but no written advertising/promotional/marketing plan.

Plans can start out small, with one or two goals. As they are reached, rewrite the plan to feature new goals. Without them, how can the group know how to concentrate their time and efforts. As the group gets better at achieving the goals, the use of surveys to better understand the effectiveness of the advertising can help to tailor later plans.

## **Relationships**

Once a group has a starting point, talking with media organizations, advertising people, and community leaders is the next important step in creating successful nonprofit advertising.

Chuck Fields credits his success to the relationships he has built over time, and time is an important factor. It will take time to develop these relationships, so don't expect help right away.

Local media are not going to come to nonprofits to help them, but they will try to help if they are approached. Some groups have written policies that they can give organizations to explain their policies and procedures on nonprofit, or gratis advertising. These policies should include deadlines and purposes. Basically, they are written to make it clear what is expected of both organizations in the relationships.

Others will not have a written policy. This does not mean that they do not work with nonprofits. Most still will, but the deals come from relationships that are built. It is primarily the group's responsibility to contact and maintain the relationships, but establishment is the most difficult part.

Different media will ask for different relationships and offer different services. From donated time, to space, to labor, to printing, the basis of the relationship is up to the media group, and may change over the course of the relationship. Timing may be an important factor, so keeping up on the relationships is key to successful cooperation.

Local United Way groups may have contact lists, but it is the responsibility of the organization to take the contact list and follow-up on it.

## Corporate Sponsorships

Most of the same rules involved with developing relationships with the media also apply to developing relationships with corporate sponsors. The main thing to remember is that if you don't ask, you will never know the answer.

Sponsors have been known to pay for advertising, often at a discounted rate that comes with their regular advertising budget. Others can pay printing or mailing costs.

Bartering is an important factor to remember in working with corporate sponsorship. If both organizations gain something out of the agreement, then both will be more likely to continue the relationship.

Fields uses local media as corporate sponsors, mostly local radio stations. The media get their names mentioned at the exhibits, the museum gets mentioned on the radio stations.

Golden Key National Honor Society allows its seven corporate sponsors to search their student databases for recruiting purposes. In return, each sponsor donates over \$50,000 a year to the organization.

Rick Stevens of WWWO Radio, in Muncie, IN, says that trying to get the media to do gratis advertising is becoming more difficult to do. "Warm fuzzies," as he calls gratis advertising, is being taken over by sponsorship where a local business buys air time and donates it to a local group. Both organizations often get mention, and the business can develop a caring reputation by associating itself with a positive organization.

## **Taking Advantage of Students**

"I do think a lot of places do take advantage of students," said Chuck Fields, "because they use interns for grunt work. And yes, that comes with the job, but you have to give a well rounded experience."

But the use of students is not the only way to use their talents and for them to get experience. Some schools have student run television and radio stations which will gladly air, and maybe even produce promotional spots for nonprofit groups. Student-run public relations and advertising agencies will take these groups on as client at a discounted rate.

Another option yet is to make a way into the classroom. Many marketing, public relations, and advertising classes will work on plans and creative work for nonprofit groups as class assignments. All of the work does not have to be used by the organization, but they can often pick to use what is appropriate to their group's needs or adapt some of the ideas to fit their needs.

Again, the bartering process comes into effect, and both groups must be able to benefit from any relationship that is arranged.

## **Creativity**

Some creative ideas have already been given, but the importance of being creative has not. Chuck Fields says that his organization has gained a lot of free publicity just by being fun.

"Very few ideas are original," Fields said. "It's a matter of taking the ideas and making them better, making them yours. You can't get frustrated. It's crazy at times, but you can't expect people to come to you just because you think it is exciting. You have to convince people that what you do is fun and exciting."



## **Use Effectively**

It cannot be mentioned enough that the budget is a factor that can make or break an organization's advertising plan. Waste cannot occur. Find out what advertising works. This may involve extensive research and experimenting, but it will be worth it in the long run.

In determining how effective different media are, the cost to run the advertisements must be taken into consideration. If it is free, great. Its effectiveness may not be as important. But also remember the time put into obtaining that free coverage. It may not be worth it to maintain a relationship if the organization is not getting anything out of it. A combination of paid advertising with free publicity practically guarantees frequent coverage.