

Event-in-a-Box

Let Radio Work for You

Why radio?

Radio can have broad, personal appeal. “Drive time” — especially from 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. — is when radio generally draws its biggest audience of the day.

Why not?

Radio has undergone drastic changes in the last decade. The vast majority of U.S. stations now are owned by a few large media companies, which have national programming, fed via satellite, that may preclude opportunities for the “local angle.”

Satellite radio services (XM, Sirius) are gaining interest. They allow subscribers to buy a special receiver and subscribe to a lineup of music and public affairs programming.

What can you do?

Familiarize yourself with what’s on the dial in your area. Listen to each station several times **at different times** of the day and week to find out (1) if the radio station has live hosts on weekday mornings, and (2) if there are special programs that promote local events. More importantly, make an effort to find out which stations your target audience listens to on a regular basis as guidance for where you want to target your efforts.

Don’t overlook noncommercial stations, such as public radio and religious radio stations. They usually have a strong commitment to the local community, because they depend on local and area listeners for substantial part of their revenue.

Being familiar with the station’s offerings can be an asset when you call on the station manager or traffic director.

Public service announcements (PSAs) and/or ads:

Broadcasters typically accept PSAs as a service to the community. They also use them to fill empty airtime. For your PSAs to be effective, *your* timing is vital.

- If you hope to appear during a live broadcast, such as a morning show, get the ball rolling 6–8 weeks in advance.
- Submit a written PSA to the station(s) 2–5 weeks ahead of a scheduled event.
- Start even earlier if you plan to write copy for prerecording an audio PSA. Those words must be recorded, edited, possibly mixed with music, and possibly burned to a CD. Allow two months or more. For a June event, contact the radio station in February or March.
- If your organization, project or community collaboration has an ad budget for an event or campaign, purchase air time to supplement PSAs. Buying time is the only way to

ensure that your message will be heard in a few key spots. As a nonprofit organization, the station may offer you a price break on purchasing airtime.

- To begin, contact local and regional stations and ask for the PSA guidelines. **Follow them.**

Tip: Writing a PSA is different than writing a press release. A PSA typically focuses on one event or message, and has a specific time limit — often 30 seconds — to convince listeners that life will be incomplete if they miss the event or opportunity.

To record or not:

Preferences vary from station to station:

- Some like to record their own PSA, reading from a 3- x 5-inch card, paper copy or fax.
- Some may expect you to come in and prerecord messages on their equipment.
- Some may appreciate your providing a timed, pre-recorded message — preferably on a CD — plus a print copy of the text.
- Many radio stations are now using high-quality MP3 audio files (like the compressed files you can download from the Internet and listen on your computer or a hand-held player). If you can record your PSA as an MP3, you can deliver it on a CD, as an email attachment or via a website.

Advantages/disadvantages of their doing the "spot":

- A station may pay more attention and/or give more play time to things that require their personal involvement.
- Their familiarity to their listeners can sometimes lend credibility.
- They may make mistakes when reading it.

Advantages of prerecording:

- You can lock your message into a specific format with a consistent theme music and/or voice used through a series of “spots.”
- You can avoid mistakes made by an announcer unfamiliar with the topic or message.
- Recordings may cost.

Writing for broadcast media:

Your message must fit into a specific amount of time, so write your script and time yourself while reading it out loud at a normal pace. Once you determine how many lines of script you can read in, say, 30 seconds, you'll have a template you can use in the future, assuming your margins and font size remain about the same.

Broadcast writing is conversational in nature, with easy-to-understand words and action verbs. If in reading it out loud the script doesn't sound like something you'd say in normal conversation, change it.

For easy reading — and to allow room to pencil in last-minute changes — double-space the copy. Announcers typically prefer a PSA in all capital letters. And include

pronunciation information for unusual names or places, such as Randall Kowalik (co-WALL-ick).

Show time:

Most stations have a news department with an editor or news director. Contact that person to ask about the station's policies, deadlines for material, and preferred method of receiving submitted material. Ask whether the person might be interested in stories about specific upcoming events, unusual volunteers, etc.

If possible, when providing a PSA, send the editor/director a news story the station could use to support the same subject. For example, a news story about choosing foods that contribute to health will offer support material for an upcoming health fair (the subject of the PSA).

If the station offers to include you as a community personality on a morning or afternoon show, be flexible — and prepared. Be able to speak to Who? What? When? Where? Why? And How much? How will a listener benefit? Why should he or she come? And, are there any extras, such as free or reduced-cost health screenings or door prizes? [Use the Event-in-a-Box News Organizer to simplify this process.]

If you get an invitation to participate in a public issues or community affairs program, which usually is 30 minutes long, take advantage of the opportunity to tell your story and sell your idea. Such programs sometimes air at what may seem to be inconvenient times, such as 6 a.m. on Sunday morning, but usually are well worth the effort.

A live radio broadcast can be like a big roller coaster ride. Listen to and watch the host carefully for cues about when to talk. Smile — listeners will hear it — sit up straight and enjoy yourself.

And, to build enthusiasm for your programs and events, consider inviting media personalities to help host a program or judge a 4-H project or other contest. Personalities generally like to attend events that will attract an audience and offer visibility for their station. Extending an invitation to them also may bring more visibility— or play — for your event.

Getting good coverage requires some effort, but nurturing relationships with news media typically will make pitching events and programs easier. Remember, however, that news drives media broadcasts. A media personality may have accepted an invitation to participate in your event, but at the last-minute, be reassigned to a breaking news story such as a fire or flood.

From “Getting Your Message Over the Airwaves,” by Randall Kowalik