

**A PRIMER ON**  
**PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS**  
**FOR THE**



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**for**  
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# Public Service Announcements

## What is a Public Service Announcement?

A **Public Service Announcement (PSA)** is **FREE** advertising that promotes some public cause or informs the community about important information. The media donates space or air time on behalf of organizations or causes they perceive will be of benefit to their local community or their audience constituency. Some notable PSAs deal with drug addiction, AIDS, and other issues of public concern. The objective generally is to provide useful, beneficial information to the community served by the media.

## Who will provide Public Service Announcements?

**Public Service Announcements (PSAs)** are available in all media, both locally and nationally. The media most commonly providing the service are **Radio** and **Television**, the broadcast media. The media is not required by law to provide free advertising. Thus, PSAs are literally provided by the media out of a sense of support for worthwhile causes.

Because radio and television stations are licensed by the FCC and their licenses are subject to periodic renewal, there is a broad misconception that radio and TV stations are obliged to provide PSAs free. The fact is, there is no statutory or regulatory requirement for any media to provide free service to any cause or purpose. All media elements will generally provide some level of Public Service Announcements. The specific quantity of PSAs is generally a function of the media management's commitment to the community and the amount of unsold, available advertising space or time.

## What Criteria is Used to Select PSAs?

There are no hard and firm rules governing the acceptance or placement of PSAs. The media determines the commitment to PSAs on a case by case basis. In larger media markets, the media, most likely, will have a Public Service Directors, to screen and evaluate the many requests for free space or air-time. National broadcast media and many cable networks will generally designate full time directors. Local broadcast and other media may delegate this responsibility to some key employee who will probably have other responsibilities.

The media director may receive many requests per day for PSAs. The director is challenged to identify the PSAs that are genuinely in need of support and for which there is an identifiable and direct benefit to the Community they serve. The challenge to any potential PSA promoter is to demonstrate why they should be favored over some other organization or cause. Certainly, priority will be given to the tax-exempt or non-profit status of the promoter. Organizations that have purchased advertising to support their causes in the past may have unintentionally convinced the media that they do not need FREE public service support. Be prepared to furnish the media representative factual fiscal information about your unit to justify your need for such PSA support.

## CAN THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PSAs BE TRACKED ?

Yes. The quality of the tracking is entirely dependent upon the feedback the Auxiliary receives relative to its public service program and efforts expended. Accurate records of PSAs playtime must be checked against phone calls and other consumer communications relative to the PSAs. This will also require some cooperation with the media in obtaining information about the PSA program of your organization.

## CAN THE AUXILIARY REALLY INFLUENCE THE QUANTITY OF PSAs IN ITS AREA?

YES! But, it is important that the Auxiliarist establish and maintain a working relationship with the media public service directors in his or her community. If you have three TV broadcast stations, five radio broadcast stations, a cable network, one daily newspaper and three weekly newspapers and an outdoor advertising (billboard) company, it means you have a minimum of fourteen (14) media representatives to get to know. Remember, they will normally not seek you out. Unless you take the initiative to contact them, you can not influence the quantity or quality of PSAs in your market area.

Because of the possibility of being confused with the various military branches, you must be absolutely clear about your role. Explain to them, if necessary, your relationship with the Coast Guard. If your organization has a mug or some other premium item such as key chains, pencils or pens, leave a sample for their personal enjoyment. Some hints on how to be effective:

- 1 Visit the Public Service Director wearing your uniform. Try to establish a face to face meeting. It is best to schedule an appointment for the meeting in advance of your visit. Keep the meeting as brief as possible, remembering that the director is usually a very busy person. At this meeting, attempt to have the media director identify the format they prefer to make use of your PSA. If you furnish them a PSA in a format they are not prepared to use, the probability that your program will be found unacceptable is increased.
- 2 Maintain a regular communication with the directors. This is important, particularly after you have sent them a PSA for their use. A regular call to the media director is important. They may give you some valuable information regarding the possibility of improvement or they might even arrange for additional publication of your PSA.
- 3 Keep a record of your successes. Try to get the media representative to furnish you a written report of the times they publish your PSA. For those with whom you are successful, provide your District DSO-PA with a complete list of media names, addresses, telephone numbers and the public service director with whom you have worked.
- 4 Encourage members who may see a PSA to communicate with the media in a positive manner by expressing their personal appreciation of the publication of the PSA. Also take advantage of any local news broadcasts that highlight the role of the Auxiliary within the community. Let the station know of your appreciation of their support and the benefits the Auxiliary brings to the community.
- 5 Be alert for other Public Affairs opportunities with the media. As you get to know them, be alert for other opportunities to contribute such as interviews or special media events or promotions. Explain to them the missions of the Auxiliary and its relationship to the Coast Guard. Let them know that you have members who are experienced boaters who may be helpful to them in evaluating local events relating to boating safety.

Finally, inform your DSO-PA of any feedback you may receive. This would include any comments from the media representative as well as favorable or unfavorable comments from the public. You, the FSO-PA or the SO-PA can greatly influence the quality and quantity of Auxiliary PSAs in your community.

### What Are the Value of PSAs to the Auxiliary?

The PSA is an extremely valuable source of **FREE ADVERTISING**. The Auxiliary has no specific, general advertising budget with which it can target important recreational boating groups. An effective PSA program will reach boaters and those who influence boaters about the Auxiliary's boating safety programs. It can promote our Public Education program, our Courtesy Marine Examination program, our safety patrol and search and rescue program and our support of environmental conservation programs thereby enhancing the probability of success of those programs. In one documented instance, a cable TV broadcaster contributed some 478 PSAs with a market value in excess of \$5,000. This **FREE ADVERTISING** enhances the success of Auxiliary programs.

### What are the Disadvantages of PSAs ?

There is one major disadvantage in the sense that there is no control over the times or editions of the media in which the PSA will appear. Remember, the use of PSAs in part is strongly determined by available advertising space or time. PSAs appear in all time segments. Their publication, in part, depends upon the available time or space and the quality of the PSA relative to the PSA Director's perception of the value of your mission to the community.

### Where do we get PSAs and How Are PSAs Distributed?

At this time, we are attempting to develop a production and distribution system for several national PSA releases per year. At the present time, we do not have an inventory of "approved" PSAs. Each unit PAO is encouraged to work with his or her local media PSA Director. This is why we encourage you to track results and report your efforts and feedback back through the Division PAO. This data will be evaluated and used to help develop "official" PSAs that can readily be used by nearly all local media.

In the future, we hope to produce and distribute PSA tapes and slicks to member units for distribution to the local media. These PSA materials will explain our value to the community with our services such as Public Education, Courtesy Marine Examinations and Safety Patrols in appropriate advertising lengths for TV and radio as well as effective newspaper advertisements.

Local Flotillas will play a major role in the success of the PSA program by developing and maintaining contacts with the local media in their area and making them aware of the importance of the Auxiliary and its missions and finally, verifying that the media has, in fact, received the PSAs. If they haven't received them, let your Division PAO know right away.

## TYPES OF MEDIA USING PSAs.

### NEWSPAPERS.

- Dailies:

Almost every community has a daily newspaper. It is generally the primary news and information source in a given market area. Most daily newspapers have a classified section as well as illustrated ads. People looking for jobs, career information or educational opportunities will look to these ads.

resources first for the information they are seeking. It is usually the Sunday edition of the daily newspaper that enjoys the greatest advertising activity. The Sunday edition also has the highest readership during the week.

- **Weeklies**

Most metropolitan areas also have weekly newspapers that may cover specific neighborhoods or communities within the metropolitan area. Because weekly newspapers perceive themselves as community based papers, they are often more receptive to supporting local community based organizations. These papers generally will be more receptive to provide coverage of news releases and will often accept and publish PSAs on a fairly regular basis.

- **Shoppers or Penny Savers**

Shoppers or Penny Savers are very similar to the weekly newspaper except they have minimal news and possibly no editorial content. They are very much like the weekly paper when it comes to community affiliation or identification. Again for service organizations serving the community, they, like the weeklies will provide support for occasional PSAs and news releases.

### **Television:**

Television is a very strong and powerful advertising medium. Because of this, its advertising costs are more expensive than other media. Most commercial TV broadcasters generally will not provide free advertising to persons or entities they perceive may have the ability to pay. Also, because of the broad scope of the market area covered by TV, it is probably a less cost effective way to reach a select market or audience group. Because most Auxiliary units lack the financial resources required to purchase advertising, it is generally not a good selection. This does not mean that the Auxiliary should ignore broadcast TV. We must be selective as to the times and issues for which we are seeking assistance. If we target our requests to specific times or events such as National Safe Boating Week or some other local safety promotion effort, the probability of getting a free PSA is greatly enhanced. Also, many broadcast TV stations will send a camera crew to cover a newsworthy event such as the CME program, the PE program or the Operations program, especially around holiday activities involving the use of boating. This is especially true if there has been a notorious boating accident involving serious injury or death. The local Auxiliary unit must always remain alert to opportunities.

### **CABLE TELEVISION:**

Today, most major TV markets are served by cable TV even when there may be several broadcast TV stations in an area. These systems may deliver as many as 50 channels or more to each viewer. Because the viewer of cable TV has a greater selection of programs over many more channels, individual shows may reach much smaller audiences than broadcast stations. They are also much less costly, but because of the number of stations and programs carried, it may be much more difficult to target specific audiences. With cable TV, it may be useful to know the program schedules so you may identify programming, including sports channels, that may carry a nautical or boating theme. Also, there is a greater probability of getting free PSAs on cable than on broadcast TV. Also, most cable TV systems have a community access channel or bulletin board that may permit free "advertising" to non-profit, community organizations.

## RADIO:

Most market areas have an abundance of radio stations providing a variety of programming from all music, all news or all talk, all sports or some combination thereof. Radio, because of its success in fragmenting the listeners into so many interest groups may also be an expensive way to advertise. However, radio does have its potentials. In some areas Auxiliarists have succeeded in having the station host a “boat talk show”. This is more easily accomplished if some local boat dealer, marina or marine outfitter is willing to purchase advertising to support the show. In such an instance, extreme care must be taken to eliminate any possibility of a perception that the Auxiliary directly or indirectly endorses or otherwise supports the sponsors or the products are being promoted. This can be accomplished with the help of your district legal officer in drafting an appropriate disclaimer to be read at the beginning and end of each broadcast. Also, it may be possible, by pre-arrangement to have a talk show host agree to periodically do a program targeted to safe boating issues, especially if there has been some local accident or tragedy.

## OUTDOOR SIGNS

Large outdoor signs can be very visually attractive. They can also be very expensive and may not be efficient in targeting your intended audience. Outdoor signs must have a very short message. This is because those to whom the sign is directed or targeted are whizzing by in a motor vehicle at 50 MPH or more. Some sign advertising companies will do PSA signs at a very nominal cost of the “art-work”, of between \$75 and \$150 per sign. They will erect signs at selected locations chosen by them for unspecified periods of time. The sites selected, more often than not, are those that are less desirable commercially. That does not mean they are worthless, only that they may be less effective.

Public transit companies also provide a form of “billboard” advertising on their buses and transit cars and other passenger vehicles. These can be highly visible and very effective if you can select the routes of the vehicles on which they will be displayed. These would be less costly than large outdoor type signs. There may also be a possibility of getting a free PSA provided your proposal is not too ambitious in terms of colors and artwork.

## DIRECT MAIL:

Direct mail can be a very cost effective way of reaching prospects for PE courses and for CME's. The value of direct mail is dependent on the quality of the prospect list you develop and the quality of the letter soliciting participation.

### The List:

There may be several sources of boat owners available to you. 1.) The State Boating Law Enforcement or Administering Agency. Ask them if they could furnish you a list of registered boat owners for the State or by specific postal zone areas. Some may not be willing to cooperate, others may only be able to sell them to the Auxiliary. 2.) Watercraft dealers, new and used, may be willing to share the names of customers with the Auxiliary on a controlled basis.

3.) Insurance Agents that write a substantial amount of boat or marine insurance may some times work with the Auxiliary and mail letters to their clients urging them to seek a PE course or CME in order to obtain a discount on their boat insurance premiums.

In any event, it is necessary to have good lists. By that, we mean lists that are current and which are not more than one year old.

The second most important element is an **effective** letter, preferably personalized as a “form” letter in the computer or word processor. If possible, make some favorable reference to their being a boat owner and your availability to meet with the prospect to answer any questions. If you do not have adequate computer resources available, you may want to explore the possibility of working with a local letter or print shop to execute a mailing. Also, explore the possibility of obtaining a bulk mail permit if your list is sufficiently large. Choose the least expensive postage option. Work through that with your material officer and local postmaster.

### **MISCELLANEOUS HINTS TO INCREASE EFFECTIVENESS:**

- **Learn from Competitive Advertising :**

Pay attention to competitive advertising appearing in the print media, TV and radio. Try to recognize and understand the strategy they are using to target their audience. Note the frequency, size and classification of the advertisement. If the advertiser is known to be successful, you may want to emulate his program in developing yours.

- **Local Advertising:**

The objectives of a local advertising program, whether it is paid or public service, are the same. They are to identify your services and to generate interest among the public in the programs offered by the Auxiliary. All advertising is used to target persons with a potential interest in what it is we are doing. It is important that the message(s) we are attempting to communicate to them on a local, regional or national basis be consistent and possibly even repetitive, if it is to be effective.

In developing your ads, you should emphasize the following characteristics or strategies:

- Be **impactful** to gain attention in a highly cluttered environment
- Address **those areas of interest to the boater** the Auxiliary can offer
- **Accentuate** those Auxiliary Slogan(s) applicable to the activity you are promoting.  
Know before you go! may be appropriate for a PE course solicitation.
- Utilize a **visual symbol or icon** which is uniquely Coast Guard Auxiliary to enhance recognition and memorability of your program.
- **Be consistent in appearance.** This includes layout, type font, logo presentation, etc.
- **Be alert to new opportunities.** There are always changes taking place, ownership, changes in operating policies, new radio stations, new newspapers, etc. Stay tuned in to what is happening in your area, be creative and take advantage of circumstances that will enhance the effectiveness of your program and help you reach your objectives.
- **Determine what is working for you and do more of it.** Discontinue strategy or programs that do not work for you. Always be alert to ways you may update your programs and make it work better for the Auxiliary.

### **Tracking Results of Advertising Efforts:**

**The activities of any advertising program must be tracked.** You should keep a record of

the calls and letters received in response to your advertising effort. Keep a log of the calls and letters.

Give each response a number. Note the time of day it was received, the name address and phone number of the respondent and where they saw or heard the ad, or what motivated them to call.

Also indicate what action was taken, including any of the following:

- Sent literature
- Scheduled appointment or other activity
- Had discussion and arrangement for follow-up call within two weeks
- Poor or no prospect - no follow-up needed.

The log will help you determine how many people are responding to a particular advertisement or media promotion. Soon you'll not only learn what works and what doesn't, you will learn just how much it costs to generate a qualified lead and how much it costs per inquiry response. You can use the log as a follow-up tool to call prospects who requested information, or with whom you had a good, but inconclusive conversation.

Keep a separate section of the log for each prospect who signs up for a course or CME or whatever. Identify them with their lead number so that you can trace back just how the lead came in. Keep all subsequent updated information relative to this prospect in this section. You'll be amazed at the information it will provide and just how it will help motivate you in doing even more.

### **Flotilla Advertising Responsibilities:**

#### **Plan local advertising or PSA placements**

to most efficiently utilize any local advertising budget.

#### **Verify that the ad or PSA ran correctly.**

notify your Division PAO of any problems.

#### **Track the results**

ask your new prospects how they heard about the Auxiliary or Auxiliary program being promoted. Keep a file of results to enable documentation of effectiveness of various publications, issue dates, ads, and PSAs. Share this information with the Division PAO.

#### **Maintain contact with PSA Directors at TV and radio stations in your area.**

— **Be alert for opportunities to gain PSA or publicity from all TV, including cable, and radio**

— **Always remain accessible to local media, TV, radio and print.**

news developments in your community can provide valuable free exposure of the Auxiliary and its programs in action.

#### **Provide feedback of your efforts to the Division PAO**

regarding what is working in your market, along with your observations of competitive activities.