



CHALLENGE



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A Herff Jones IMPACT Resource for Students

Planning Effective Publicity

Has your student organization ever had an event coming up—let's say a dance—when you put up posters all over school advertising it, made lots of announcements about it, and you still had people the Monday after the dance saying “there was a dance this weekend? How come I didn't know about it?” In today's media-saturated society, students have become very good at tuning out many of the messages they are bombarded with each day. To be effective, your publicity campaign needs to be unique, eye-catching, multifaceted, and creative. If that sounds like an unachievable goal, don't worry—all you need are a few pointers!

Start with brainstorming, the no-holds barred kind that generates new ideas. If your group members' idea of creative publicity is to use blue paper instead of white for your posters, it can be hard to get them to be really creative. One technique that can stimulate some creative thinking is to ask your group members or publicity committee to imagine they have \$100,000 to spend on publicity for the event. What would they do if they had that much money to spend? Lots of outlandish ideas will be

generated while discussing answers to that question.

The trick then is to take those impractical ideas and see if there is a way they can be adapted into something practical. For example, if someone had the idea of getting an airplane to fly overhead with a message banner, could



you make it a radio-controlled plane pulling a mini message around the parking lot as students are arriving or leaving one day? Or, take the idea of having a

famous person come to campus and make it a famous person look-alike contest or rent a costume and have someone wear it to make an appearance in the lunchroom? Apply this process to all the ideas generated during the brainstorming session.

It's important to have fun with the publicity. The build-up to the event should be an event in and of itself. Create some buzz; get people talking. If the publicity effort is low-key and lackluster, so will be the turnout for the event. If your student promoters will go out on a limb and get a little crazy with the promotion, they'll be genuinely excited about the event and that excitement will spread.

Plan a multifaceted campaign.

Determine what types of publicity you will undertake and plan to make use of several different media. Hanging posters and making announcements is usually not enough. The most effective publicity campaigns reach people in a multitude of ways, not just one or two. Students need to see or hear about the event in at least six ways for it to really sink in.

Tweak the traditional. Being creative with your publicity doesn't mean you have to abandon the traditional techniques that have served well in the past. See if there's a way you can tweak them to make them more effective.

- Is there a popular slogan on a TV commercial that can be borrowed? The old “got milk?” campaign has often been used, but look around to see what current methods could be adapted. Take the iPod commercials with the silhouettes dancing on a neon background—how could you use a similar style for your posters and fliers?
- Hang signs in novel places: on the backs of stall doors in the restroom, on the ceiling, taped to the floor, in school buses. Paint signs on school windows with water-based tempera paint or window chalk.
- Collaborate with drama or speech students to create novel PA

announcements or commercials for in-school television.

Try something new and different. There are many unique ideas that can help you promote your activity. Try different ones each time so that they don't lose their novelty. Choose from among the following ideas or brainstorm your own:

- Pass out stickers that say "I'm going to [event]" and have all your group members wear them.
- Print sheets of address labels with information about your event and stick the labels to cans of soft drinks in the soda machines. Be sure to do this before the cans are cold so the labels will stick.
- Print mini posters using a computer program and ask the cafeteria workers to use them as tray liners for school lunch trays.
- Place fliers with a hole punched in the corner on the antennas of all the cars in the parking lot.
- Place toothpick flags with the information on them in cafeteria food, such as "Donate to Toys for Tots" in the tater tots or "Come to an event with pizzazz" in the slices of pizza.
- Consider ways you can use technology. Can members text message or IM students with the information? Use evites (www.evite.com) to invite everyone to attend an event, send e-mails, or use the school's Web site.

Take the time to plan a creative, multifaceted publicity campaign and you'll be amazed at the increased participation in your group's activities.

General Checklist for Publicity Planning

The steps involved in publicizing an activity will vary depending on the type of activity. Review the following list and check the items needed for your publicity campaign:

- Create a list with all the basic information that needs to be communicated about the event: date, time, place, price, etc.
- Brainstorm a list of all the groups you should target with the publicity: students, parents, community members, etc.
- Design creative posters, fliers, table tents, etc., including all necessary information targeted to the different groups you want to reach.
- Send group members into classrooms before school to write basic information about the event in the corners of chalkboards.
- Write a short item for the school Web site and give it to the appropriate person for posting.
- Post the information on the school marquee or electronic message board.
- Create a bulletin board or hallway display about the event.
- Get some artistic members to create sidewalk chalk posters.
- Send e-mails to the target audience with the pertinent information.
- Create PA announcements; pre-record clever announcements if possible.
- Create a TV commercial about the event to play on in-school television or set up a TV to play it during lunch.
- Use a computer graphics program to design locker signs to hang around school and yard signs to post in members' yards.
- Draft a news release and deliver it to local media.
- Write Public Service Announcements for local radio stations.
- Send personalized invitations to special guests.
- Alert yearbook/newspaper staff to have a photographer at the event.
- Work with community access cable to broadcast the event on local cable.
- Brainstorm other creative publicity methods that might be applicable for your event.