



# Chapter 6

## Marketing and Public Relations

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## Marketing and Public Relations

### **6.1 Introduction**

Most successful programs begin and prosper with the support of their community. Ensuring your program's visibility through self-promotion and skillful use of the media can enhance this support. Developing a marketing and public relations plan will help position your program as a prominent feature of your community.

Developing printed materials, videos, and other collateral material resources will help to provide the groundwork for communications and public relations (PR) activities. Detailed below are examples of components that can be used to increase your program's public profile. The suggestions below will help you creatively gain and hold the attention of key members of your community and the public at large.

Depending on the type and size of your program, marketing and communications may be the responsibilities of a separate department or even an outside agency. Based on the type organization your program belongs to, the PR department may have little experience promoting sports and recreation for individuals with physical disability, which is where your expertise is essential.

### **6.2 Building Media Awareness and Visibility**

The starting point for a successful awareness campaign is the development of a media database. This would include newspapers, radio, and TV contacts in your local community and, if the size of your program warrants it, in your region. No media contact is too small. Include the high school newspaper editor, local public libraries, company/organizational employee's bulletins newsletters, and any other medium that will help you get the word out. You never know who will read what publication, so even small publications can garner attention from potential volunteers, sponsors, and athletes. This list should include contact names and positions, addresses, phone and fax numbers, and e-mail addresses. Note any special areas of interest, such as children's sports, tennis, human interest, the Paralympics, etc.

Keep the media informed on your program throughout the year by sending them story ideas and pitches, releases on program activities, the starting of new sport teams, successes of the athletes, and other newsworthy information. Provide photos with identifying cut lines (captions under photos) from events and activities. Provide all these contacts with some type of regular exposure to the program. Include media contacts when distributing monthly or quarterly newsletters. However, not everything you will do will warrant a press release and a big media blitz. If you contact them too frequently, you risk becoming white noise. It is important to choose which of your activities warrant media attention and which do not. Overall, your goal should be to make your program the go-to program in the community when it comes to disability sports and recreation.

### **6.3 Marketing through Special Events and Press Releases**

Prepare and distribute eye-catching and informative announcements for your events. A press kit—which includes a press release, printed materials, program schedule, and other relevant materials—can be very useful.

Meet or call key contacts in advance of your program's kick-off or other events. When possible provide a thorough review of the program. Make sure the media and key



community leaders know why it is important and what it will mean to the community and participants. Making a strong first impression is vitally important, so it can be helpful to create a strategy and a list of talking points to emphasize during your special event.

Provide a media sign-up sheet at the event's entrance. It is recommended that a person be designated to assist the media with any requests throughout the event. The media's first impression of the program is integral to the future of the program's relationship with the media.

You should know in advance the "hooks" that journalists can use to hang a story about your program. These can include local Paralympian(s), nationally ranked and/or high profile athletes, specific program components, events, local sponsors, etc. Use the aforementioned contact sheet to conduct follow-up phone calls to each media representative who attended the event.

They say timing is everything, and this is especially true when it comes to the media. Plan press conferences or special events before 5:00 pm. Any later than that and journalists will likely be too busy meeting story deadlines to attend.

#### ***6.4 Using Media to Send Your Message***

Television can be very helpful in telling your story and giving a face to your program. Plan all program kick-off activity with the media in mind. Prepare and rehearse talking points, the key messages the media and the public need to know about the program. Get in touch with local television producers and journalists to arrange opportunities for news and feature stories. Emphasize the good your program is doing on a local level. Local talk shows are often open to new community offerings. Include local cable providers in your media plans. These companies often have "local origin" programming and may be looking for new ideas.

#### ***6.5 Options for Media Exposure***

As a program grows, there will be a greater variety of options for media exposure. Articles in various professional newsletters, websites, and publications provide programs with an outlet to tell their stories and to promote special events.

Annual award opportunities should be considered as a way to generate good publicity for a program. Most professional organizations and many volunteer organizations offer both state and national awards. As your program grows and collects more experience and accomplishments, it will be possible to compete for such awards. Regardless of the results, the nomination process alone can be something to publicize.

#### ***6.6 Using Social Media***

Social media is an increasingly important means for your organization to reach out to your supporters and constituents. In this day and age, every organization should have its own Facebook page. This allows you to post news and updates in a medium that people check multiple times each day. After establishing your Facebook account, send out an email blast requesting that people "Like" your organization. Be sure this email includes a link. You should cast your net wide here. Anyone who might possibly have an interest in your organization should be made aware of the Facebook page. The more "Likes" you get, the more credible your programs will seem and the greater the number of people who will see your updates. Further, Facebook can be used to answer questions from the public regarding your events and programming.



Twitter is another useful tool. It can be used to announce events and stay in touch with your constituency. As with Facebook, it is important that you make sure people know about your Twitter feed as a high number of followers will give your organization credibility. It can be a good idea to make the Twitter and Facebook accounts the responsibility of a single employee. Though it is possible to have multiple people who update the accounts, such a diffusion of responsibility often means that things fall through the cracks and no one can be held accountable.

As your organization grows, you might find it worthwhile to start a blog. Blogs are a good place to post announcements, event recaps and results, pictures, and other information. However, it is crucial that your blog is updated regularly. Nothing makes an organization look ineffectual or small-time than a blog that hasn't been updated in months. If you don't think you have enough programming to post a fresh entry at least 1-2 times per week, it is better not to have a blog at all. If you do choose to start a blog, it is a good strategy to post a link to each new entry to your organization's Twitter and Facebook accounts. Not only does this increase traffic to your blog, but it also makes your Twitter and Facebook accounts more active and therefore keeps your organization and programming fresh in the minds of your followers.

### ***6.7 Building a Marketing Foundation***

The building blocks of a good marketing and public relations program will include program photos, videos, copies of media coverage, a dynamic website, athlete profiles, program brochures, and a media kit. In addition with the rise of social networking, Facebook, blogs, and Twitter are growing sources for not only media exposure but also for the general public and future donors/funders.

New programs will need to build this foundation as they build their program. It is important to build a photo database through all phases of the program, creating your program's archives and keeping track of its history. Keep copies of all media, marketing, and special event materials. Tape your TV spots and use them to generate sponsors.

Consider a central theme or look for the program. Approach a PR firm for pro-bono work to develop a logo. Brand all your material with the logo or theme. In time the foundation will be built and the program will benefit from the attention you have given to establishing a strong and recognizable brand.