

Writing Television PSAs

TV Spots or PSAs can be effective in creating general awareness of your marriage education initiative over time.

Public Service Announcements (PSAs) or on-air TV spots are a great way to get the word out regarding your healthy marriage initiative. You can visually show people examples of a workshop and what marriage education “looks like.” However, television advertising is expensive. There are costs to produce an advertising campaign and to purchase air time. Depending on your resources and the size of your local media market, television can be the least cost effective medium for promoting your initiative and/or event. This Tip Sheet will help you understand the dynamics associated with producing PSAs or spots for TV.

1. Have Realistic Expectations

The airing of TV spots is not going to make your phone ring off the hook

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through multiple means before they are likely to act. Therefore it’s important to have realistic expectations regarding the impact of your television campaign. A TV campaign is great for creating general awareness of your initiative over time, but it may not be the most effective recruitment strategy for your marriage workshops. If it is immediate action you desire, TV may not be the best medium.

Your target audience will be more general

TV spots reach a broad and general audience. Gender and age are the main demographics you can target. For example, if your target is stay-at-home moms, airing during daytime television shows should be your approach. If your goal is to communicate to men, air your PSA on the weekend during or around sporting events. Reaching both men and women requires a mutually appealing creative message and

the most logical, yet expensive, time to advertise is weeknights during prime time.

Know your budget

The adage, “You cannot have champagne taste on a beer income,” holds true for TV campaigns. Your approved TV production/advertising budget will determine the level of creativity and production quality for your spot campaign. Often, budget line items do not distinguish between television spot production and the purchase of airtime, so you will need to choose how to balance the two based on your goals. For example, if you are producing a spot that you know you will use again and again, you may want to spend more on production and less on airtime. Then the next time you use it you may be able to spend more on airtime.

2. Shop around for a production company

View the company’s media reels

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will give you a sense for their creativity, production quality and overall effectiveness. In viewing the video pieces, be sure to ask for projects that targeted the same or similar audience as yours. Also, check their references. A production company’s output may be impressive, but if they are difficult to work with, you may want to disqualify them from consideration.

The Producer’s Role

A quality working relationship with your producer is critical. Do not be afraid to ask the producer if his/her workload with other clients is such that he/she can give your project the time and attention it requires. A good producer will find a way to deliver a quality project at a reasonable price in a reasonable turn-around time.

Have a few different ideas to share as a starting point

Any skilled producer can take the main elements from your initial creative ideas and build on them. While

the approach may ultimately change, these elements will remain the foundation of your campaign and the outcome will be a spot that works. For example, you might envision a couple having a heated exchange in the kitchen when their 4-year old daughter suddenly appears and asks, “Is this how grown-ups show their love?” Then deliver

a message about how spouses can learn to talk without arguing. Include workshop information as appropriate.

Another initial concept might show two young children hesitantly saying “bye” to one parent, while toting their overnight bags to the car of the other parent. The

scene stops and the narrator comments: "It doesn't have to come to this!" Then deliver a message that couples can learn skills to strengthen their marriage. Include workshop information as appropriate.

It is also helpful to leave the viewer with a healthy marriage tip such as, "Remember, communication is the key to relationship success!" Even if your TV spot does not get a person to your workshop, you can still deliver a very important message.

TV spots also provide a great opportunity to thank your program's funding sources and/or donors.

3. Producing Your Spot

Production

Making the script come alive is the next step. Your script dictates whether there will be on-location filming, in-house filming, and use of on-camera talent. In some cases, stock photos and video may be low cost options that will complement your script.

Use on-camera/voice-over talent that works

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Choose the right music, graphics and sound effects

Production companies will have a wide selection of music, graphics and sound effects from which to choose. Your choices for these should reflect the demographic of your target audience.

4. Airing Your Spot

Negotiate for some one-for-one slots in your spot schedule

A "one-for-one" advertising schedule means that every time you purchase air time, the station will match it with additional airtime for free. This is a very common practice, but you will need to ask your account executive about it. Negotiating this type of schedule will help you get a bigger bang for your buck.

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Confirm that your schedule is appropriate for your commercial

If your ad targets men and is set to air during a weekday before 5:00 p.m. then you will want to request a different placement that targets a male demo. If, on the other hand, your ad addresses both men and women equally, a well-rounded schedule may be appropriate. Don't be afraid to ask for specific times for your ad to air.

5. Maximize Your Investment

Low cost production options and “free” airtime are often available for a TV PSA. The ad will likely consist of a voice-over and canned images, and airtime can be coordinated through your local cable television outlet. Sometimes airtime on broadcast stations may also be available at little to no cost if you have a contact or champion on staff at the station. Otherwise you may find your PSA airing during the wee hours of the morning when most PSAs run.

To learn more, refer to the “Getting Free/Low Cost Media Coverage” Tip Sheet.

Related Resources:

Special Collections and Resource Pages –

Violence against Women Resource Center

http://new.vawnet.org/category/index_pages.php?category_id=698

New Study Finds Television Stations Donate an Average of 17 Seconds an Hour to Public Service Advertising – Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation

<http://www.kff.org/entmedia/entmedia012408nr.cfm>

Ten Tips for More Effective TV PSA Campaigns – PSA Research

<http://www.psaresearch.com/bib4105.html>

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