

How to write a Public Service Announcement

Objective

Unlike a press release, a public service announcement (PSA) is usually transmitted electronically, via radio or television in a short spot of ten to sixty seconds. A requirement of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is that stations donate a certain amount of airtime to serve the public and the community. Most public radio and TV stations have a community calendar for which they will announce events to the public.

A public service announcement typically indicates a community event, usually, but not always, for a non-profit organization. Commercial groups can also announce non-profit events or services. If you just want a pre-event plug, the community calendar is where you should direct your PSA. Many local newspapers also have community calendars so PSA's are not limited to electronic media.

Although the PSA covers less material than the typical press release, it requires the same "who, what, where, when and why" information. You have several choices when deciding what type of coverage you'd like to have. You may not always get your preferred coverage, but you can at least try to obtain it. For example, you can aim for just the pre-event announcement which would go to the Calendar; you can try for an on-air interview to have yourself or a personal representative announce the event; you can request an audio taping of the actual event to be aired later on the news or at a future date of significance such as in advance of the event or at any other time.

How To Do It

Follow these steps when you want to use PSAs to publicize an event:

The procedures of writing a PSA differ somewhat from media outlet to media outlet. But if you use the following basics as your guide, you won't go wrong:

Step 1 (Four weeks before event):

- 1) Contact area radio stations on which you wish to air your PSA.
 - Confirm the format for submitting the PSA, including their preferred length in words or seconds.
 - Determine the cost, if any (most public stations and some private stations will air community announcements for free, as long as the events are open to the general public).
 - Determine when you can expect the PSA to air after the station receives it, and ask how far in advance of airing the PSA the station needs to receive it.

Note: You need to plan ahead so that you can send your PSA to the proper person or department. Personal contact, of course, is the best approach. This means that you or someone you know who has a personal contact or influence at the media outlet personally contacts the person. In that case, it is full steam ahead and you write it the way that person wants it. Otherwise, you must proceed in the same way as the average person, by directing your PSA to the target point.

For a single-mailing PSA, call the station and get the proper name of the Department head and address it to her or him.

If you are doing a mass mailing or faxing to several media outlets, the only way to address your PSA is to the Public Service Director at the different addresses to which you are sending them. Next, add "Community Calendar" or "Program Director" or "On Air Interviews," depending upon which coverage you seek. Stations don't necessarily use these titles but common sense says it will increase your chances of getting your PSA to the proper department.

Step 2 (Three weeks before event-or earlier, if the station requires more lead-time):

1) Write your PSA.

- Instead of putting "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" on the top left hand side of the page as you do for a press release; you put "PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT" at the top middle of the single sheet of paper followed by a few spaces and then the date that you'd like your announcement to air. If you have stationary with your organization's logo, you can work your format around that.
- Briefly describe your target audience (the people you want to reach with your message).
- List the dates your PSA should begin and end running on the air.
- List a contact person (you?) and a phone number. Include an email address, if you have one. This information allows the radio or television station to contact you regarding your PSA.
- It is customary to write the PSA in all CAPS.
- Be sure to include the length of your PSA.

2) Make sure releases are legible and on 8 1/2 X 11" paper. You could include two versions: a short one (maybe 30 seconds) and a longer version (45 seconds or 1 minute). This will give you a choice for your final submission. Note: There should be no more than 75 words for a 30-second PSA.

3) Read it out loud and listen to how it sounds when spoken. Stick to the facts. Avoid superlatives, over-enthusiasm and acronyms or nicknames the general public may not be familiar with. Read it aloud to see how long your PSA will be and adjust your text as needed to fit the time slot.

4) At the end, write '-end-' or '# # #,' as you do in a press release.

Step 3 (Two and a half weeks before event)

- Submit PSA to the station and ask when it will start to be aired.

Step 4 (Two weeks before event until event)

- Listen for PSA at intended air time or call station periodically to ask when the PSA aired. If the PSA does not seem to have been aired (or is obviously aired at odd hours when no one will hear it), contact the radio station to inquire.

Tips

- Keep your PSAs legible and use sentences that flow well and allow easy interpretation by the reader.
- Consider submitting two or three different versions of PSAs that contain essentially the same information-most radio stations like a few options with different lengths!
- Use a catchy opening sentence that poses an important question related to the subject or which states a relevant and intriguing fact.
- Don't include too much date, time, and place information that listeners won't retain.
- Provide a contact phone number and repeat it at the end of the announcement.

Sample

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

**_____ CHAPTER OF IAAP®
(INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE
PROFESSIONALS®)
ADDRESS
CITY, STATE ZIP**

BEGINNING DATE: APRIL 21, 2006 ENDING DATE: APRIL 28, 2006

**TARGET AUDIENCE: ADMINISTRATIVE/OFFICE PROFESSIONALS,
EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, CORPORATIONS**

**CONTACT PERSON: _____
PHONE: _____ EMAIL: _____**

30 SECONDS, 71 WORDS

ENSURE YOUR FUTURE SUCCESS AS AN ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONAL. START NOW TO *TURN YOUR JOB INTO A CAREER!* THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS INVITES YOU TO SUPPORT ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS WEEK BY ATTENDING A LOCAL EVENT IN YOUR AREA DURING THE WEEK OF APRIL 23RD - APRIL 29TH. MEET PROFESSIONALS FROM VARIOUS OFFICE SUPPORT FIELDS, LEARN NEW TECHNOLOGY TRICKS, PARTICIPATE IN WORKSHOPS AND SEMINARS! VISIT WWW.IAAP-OHIO.ORG TO FIND A CHAPTER NEAR YOU.

-END-

30 SECONDS, 71 WORDS

ENSURE YOUR FUTURE SUCCESS AS AN ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONAL. START NOW TO *TURN YOUR JOB INTO A CAREER!* THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS INVITES YOU TO SUPPORT ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS WEEK BY ATTENDING A LOCAL EVENT IN YOUR AREA DURING THE WEEK OF APRIL 23RD - APRIL 29TH. MEET PROFESSIONALS FROM VARIOUS OFFICE SUPPORT FIELDS, LEARN NEW TECHNOLOGY TRICKS, PARTICIPATE IN WORKSHOPS AND SEMINARS! FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT JOAN SMITH AT 555-123-4567.

-END-

Sample

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT
CHAPTER OF IAAP®
(INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS)
ADDRESS
CITY, STATE ZIP

BEGINNING DATE: APRIL 21, 2006 ENDING DATE: APRIL 28, 2006

TARGET AUDIENCE: ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS, EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, STUDENTS, CORPORATIONS

CONTACT PERSON: _____ PHONE: _____
EMAIL: _____

45 SECONDS, 107 WORDS

THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT FOR TODAY'S ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONAL! APRIL 23RD - APRIL 29TH IS ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS WEEK – A TIME TO JOIN MEMBERS OF AN ORGANIZATION THAT CAN *TURN YOUR JOB INTO A CAREER*. SURVEYS SHOW CAREERS IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONAL FIELD WILL BECOME INCREASINGLY COMPLEX AND SPECIALIZED IN THE OFFICE OF THE FUTURE. CONTACT A LOCAL CHAPTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS TO LEARN HOW IAAP CAN HELP YOU KEEP PACE WITH NEW TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENTS. MEET PROFESSIONALS FROM VARIOUS OFFICE SUPPORT FIELDS, LEARN NEW TECHNOLOGY TRICKS, AND PARTICIPATE IN WORKSHOPS AND SEMINARS! VISIT WWW.IAAP-OHIO.ORG TO FIND A CHAPTER NEAR YOU.

-END-

or, change the last sentence to read –

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT JOAN SMITH AT 555-123-4567.