

**Handout at Breakout Session
NCMPR 2003 National Conference
Las Vegas, Nevada**

Dealing With the Petulant Media

Placing Positive Stories/Feature Angles/Advocacy

Note: Sandy Golden was part of a panel at the NCMPR National Conference March 14 on “Dealing with the Petulant Media.” Her section of the presentation focused on “Placing Positive Stories/Feature Angles and Advocacy.” The pages that follow contain the following additional background information referenced in this presentation:

Outline of her overall comments on “Placing Positive Stories/Features...”
Dealing with image and news crises
Tips for overall media relations
Using your special events and media to market career programs
PR/advocacy ideas

Placing Positive Stories/Feature Angles/Advocacy

Getting the Positive Stories/ Feature Angles

Media’s job is not to promote our programs. It’s up to us to find the angles that interest them.

Make personal contact, with a list of options. Know who is likely to be interested in what.

Features are a great way to promote individual career programs, as well as the college overall.

Find the angles e.g.

Think visuals for TV and good photo ops

Tie-in with “National-Whatever-Week.” Check www.chases.com for a list of weeks

Monitor key news and supply experts on timely topics

Look for national and local trend stories

Look for interesting “people” stories

Some feature ideas: (See www.sandragolden.com/resources for a more extensive list and descriptions)

Engineering Egg Drop

Physical Therapy Assisting (wheelchair therapy)
 Law Enforcement – Chase Simulator
 Pet Week PSAs – Veterinary Technology
 Grammar Hot Line

Involve the college in helping you find the good stories

Part of your overall marketing plan - have a structured process to have tips turned in
 Presentations at faculty/staff meetings
 Circulate the good stories

Using Media Outlets for Messages of Advocacy and Support

Especially in hard economic times, it is critical to continually send our messages to a broad audience of legislators and business and community leaders in order to gain support and dollars for our college. (See www.sandragolden.com/resources for more details, as well as the January NCMPR Counsel article on “Red Hot Techniques..”

First, develop fact sheets, briefing papers, impact publications that outline your key contributions as a college (e.g. percent of grads who remain in your community, dollar economic impact, future taxes from grads, percent of health care and other professionals.

Then look to your president, board leaders, business and community leaders, alumni, as appropriate to author:

Op-ed pieces – by leaders and supporters on college impact issues, value and return on investment etc. By faculty on timely topics of specific expertise

Letters to the editor

Take your president and leaders to editorial board meetings

“In My Opinion” features on TV, radio

Talk shows

Again, find a springboard for the articles and visits when possible, e.g. Community College Month in April gives a perfect opportunity. Anniversaries, groundbreaking etc. offer other possibilities for a full campaign.

Dealing with Image and News Crises

The potential of crises we face in our jobs is not a matter of whether, but of what and when. The likelihood is high we'll have to deal with one or more of issues involving: negotiations and strike potential, budget cuts, grade disputes, lawsuits -- for discrimination, sexual harassment, -- low performance of students on state exams, questions on student success and transfer, crime, accidents, to the perhaps less typical hurricanes, marches by animal rightists and against offensive art shows, and firing of presidents.

Handling a crisis well, then, has to be considered a part of what we expect to do in our jobs at the college. And while there are things we can do to avoid and lessen the crisis, there are also some that will happen in spite of anything we can do. Our best defense is to have prepared ahead with a crisis communication plan and to know how to act and react appropriately to get through the situation with the least damage -- and perhaps even positive outcomes -- and then move on.

Some points to consider in dealing with image and news crises:

1. Have your house in order. The best defense is, as much as possible, to avoid crisis in the first place by making the right decisions and operating the college in a way it won't be criticized. Make every decision with the assumption it could land on the front page of the paper. Public relations, while very effective, cannot change the truth of what is happening.
2. Expect media scrutiny. We are in times where education is news. This can also be an opportunity to tell the "good" stories, but also anticipate hard questions. Be prepared to show quality, measurable outcomes, fiscal responsibility in difficult times.
3. Have a crisis communications plan and policies in place - preferably in writing. Know who will be a spokesperson, who makes the decisions, how you communicate with each other within and outside the institution, who has to be informed (president, administrators, board, public relations, security, the press). The loop must include communication between the president, board, and chief public relations professional.
4. The spokesperson must then provide information accurately, quickly and consistently. Put a statement in writing for the press and your internal team, so everyone has the same information and the institution speaks with one clear voice. Never lie. Once you've lost your credibility, you've lost your ability to relate to the media. The truth will probably come out elsewhere anyway.
5. Gather the facts and act decisively. Don't be defensive. If you're at fault, act to correct a problem. How you react can be as important as what happened.

6. Get all the bad news out quickly and at once; don't answer only part of charge and then dribble information that ends up in several stories -- one story is preferable to three or more -- and show what you are doing to correct a problem. If you've had a problem and corrected it, get the positive information out when appropriate e.g. enrollment turnaround, passage rate for state exams.
7. Determine who will speak in given situations. Usually it will be the chief PR professional, president or others depending on the topic or the situation. Let others, such as trustees, however, know that they could be called by the newspapers regardless of whom the college has decided is the spokesperson, but also know that they may or may not want to respond, or respond immediately. It's acceptable, for example, to have the Board chairman speak for the group, or to call a reporter back after you've checked into a situation. You don't have to answer unprepared. You can refer a reporter to the college-determined spokesperson.
8. Anticipate questions. Make lists of questions and answers you can expect and review these with the spokesperson, perhaps even rehearse. Also pay attention to issues in the national and local news that may raise issues at your college, and be prepared for those, before you get the media inquiry.
9. Don't fight in public through the media. No one wins. Solve any differences as trustees and administrators whenever possible and support the decisions made.
10. As an institution, use "no comment" very rarely. It makes you look like you are hiding something. Usually there is something you can say, although there will be situations and facts you cannot discuss at certain times, e.g. negotiations, litigation.
11. Make sure you respond to the media and meet their deadlines. Any legitimate reporter will contact the college before writing a story about a problem. They are going to write the story with or without your comments and will get comments from others if you don't respond. Having your view expressed in the story has to be the best approach.
12. "Off the record" is also something to be used very sparingly and carefully.
13. Ask what a story is about so you can put your answer in context, gather all the relevant information and position the institution as favorably and fairly as possible.
14. Consider public relations implications upfront as you make key institutional decisions. Know that you will have to answer certain concerns, and be ready to explain hard decisions. Think ahead about how you will communicate decisions both internally and externally. Having the public relations professional as part of the top decision making teams can keep you thinking pro-active.
15. Don't forget your internal audiences - they shouldn't have to read the newspaper to find out what is happening. Keep them informed as well. When possible and

appropriate use personal meetings, communications. Communicate directly also with your key constituencies - alumni, advisory committees etc. -- explaining situations as needed.

16. Have an on-going positive program of media and community relations in place. One of the best ways to be able to ride through a crisis is to have public opinion/media already on the side of your college because you have been doing good, positive PR all along, and they understand and support your institution. Having the public understanding puts the crisis in perspective. The time to make friends with the media and public is not in the middle of a crisis, but in everything you do regularly as an institution.

Your on-going program can include such activities as:

- *Work hard to get the pro-active positive stories out about your institution
- *Use your publications to explain directions, accomplishments
- *Make presentations to alumni groups, through speakers bureau, advisory committees, foundation to keep your friends informed
- *Create special events to bring the public to the campus
- *Have periodic editorial board meetings with the press and your president board chair and public relations officer

Media Relations

Know the Media and Understand Their Needs

Using the media effectively requires:

1. Understanding the goals and priorities of your organization;
2. Understanding the needs and interests of the various media and the individuals in the media; and
3. Finding ways to merge these two so that the media is focusing positively on the stories you want highlighted.

In placing stories of any kind with the media, the following are some tips to help you get maximum exposure:

1. First and foremost, we must understand that the media is in business to gain readers and viewers, not to promote our organization. If we expect coverage, it is up to us to

offer stories and angles that the reporters will see appealing to their particular audiences.

2. Learn about the media. Read the newspapers, listen to radio and watch television, so you know the kind of news each publication is likely to use. Always think visual for television, find the local resident or angle for the neighborhood paper, know the special feature of a publication or station, and pay attention to prominent news topics of the day that you might tie in to. Know what makes news.
3. Make personal contact with reporters and editors. Learn what kinds of stories they like, e.g. are they more interested in human interest personal features or major trends. Find out how they prefer getting information - a phone call, e-mail, a letter, tip sheet, or a full press release. Every reporter is not the same.

Know who is the right person to contact e.g. in broadcast, the producer makes most booking decisions, the assignment editor sends the reporters for news. Keep up to date on who's who at the media. Get lists from published local guides. Call regularly, watch the papers; many positions, particularly in broadcast, change often.

4. Know when reporters are on deadline. Call when they are less likely to be busy.
5. Consider every possible angle to a big story and which reporters would be most likely to use each approach so you can get several features from the same story.
6. Do your homework. The easier you make it for the media, the more likely they are to use your story. Provide press kits where appropriate, write background information, set up the interviews. In addition to helping the news person, it helps shape the angle of the story or interview in the direction you want.
7. Be accessible and respond promptly and honestly to inquiries. Be aware of media deadlines, whether it's an hour or less--which it can often be--or a day, and meet those deadlines. You need to respond for the convenience of the media. This can be key. They can't and won't wait until the class you like better is offered tomorrow, if the story deadline is today.
8. Recognize also that you need to respond as willingly to sensitive issues or possible negative press if you want credibility and expect their continued response to your suggested story ideas.
9. Call and write thank you notes when someone's done a good job for you.

Using Special Events and Media to Market Career Programs

While colleges often use special events for such major activities as anniversaries, groundbreaking and dedications, they often overlook the possibilities of creating events around career programs as an extremely effective way to market these programs, both through individuals who actually attend the event, as well as through media relations and follow-up that can result from the activities. Listed below are some possibilities that serve as examples of how to create these events and media hits.

Maritime Technology - A press conference to kick off this new program training engineers and navigators of the Great Lakes ore carriers. The press conference was held on board a ship anchored in the Cuyahoga River. The setting of river, Lake Erie, bridges and Cleveland skyline, along with a signing ceremony involving the Admiral of the Great Lakes Maritime academy, blowing the ship's horns, and having a fire boat spray the length of the ship caused a visual activity, attended by all the TV in town, along with radio and print. Resulting stories led to 400 inquiries for the program and the formation of a first year class.

Engineering Egg Drop - Organize students in engineering classes to compete to create a container to drop an egg from several stories. The competition sees which can drop without breaking and focuses on the engineering program. Consider doing it during Engineering Week.

Pet Week PSAs - Develop tips on caring for dogs and cats and turn these into radio PSAs during Pet Week, sponsored by the college's veterinary technology program.

Automotive Technology - Announce new program with an event including a car driving through a Mylar ribbon curtain. Have some of the new cars, antique cars and newest engines on hand as well.

Fast Food Management - Press conference at co-sponsoring Burger Kings. Include a special croissant sandwich designed and cooked by our gourmet chef who now heads the program.

Health Fairs - hold Health Fairs, giving free blood pressure and other health checks by students in the program. Also information on nutrition, diets.

Early Childhood Education - Taking the Boo Out of Halloween - Our program coordinator explained that pre-school children are afraid of scary costumes. We put together an event with an "unhaunted" house, coloring and pumpkin sculpturing activities etc. that resulting in 10,000 parents and children coming to the campus over a weekend.

Small Business - Hold a free workshop for small business owners with tips related to starting and operating their business. Use this as a basis to promote full courses in the area.

Experts. Monitor the news and consider events and topics where your faculty and staff experts can be interviewed. E.g. accounting professors at tax time, physical education and health care professionals on staying fit, psychology on stress, political science on election and international political issues, early childhood on dealing with children, etc. etc.

PR/Advocacy

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“We could not ask for a more important time and better position, in fact, to send a meaningful, positive media message to today’s world. Our colleges are indeed part of the answer, a major part of the solution to retraining and economic development needs: In these uncertain times, our two-year colleges provide hope for the future.

Our message is strong: Our enrollments are up. We open our doors to individuals who need retraining and upgrading and we then provide trained individuals to the community to impact economic development and growth.”

The article outlines ways we can reach these audiences. Among these are:

Fact sheets, briefing papers, impact publications

Create a fact sheet on the impact of your college. Include such statistics as percent of graduates who remain in your community, percent of health care and other professionals trained, dollar economic impact, future taxes from graduates etc.

Use these same statistics in existing publications, newsletters, for media, and to create briefing papers.

Media –

Organize leaders, alumni etc. that can write op ed pieces, letters.

Also find good feature and human interest angles and facts for trend stories among colleges.

Legislature, community leader events

Invite opinion leaders to campus to see and hear first hand what your college impact is.

Gather statistics for each legislative area e.g. number of students from their area attending

Have students tell their stories in person. Pair students with matching legislators, business areas.

Community College Month

April is Community College Month. NCMPR and AACC publish a kit full of good ideas. Use the month to highlight impact, get proclamations, springboard media coverage etc. etc.

Internal advocacy on importance of keeping key PR/marketing activities

We need to keep the momentum or we end up back at square one, taking too long to rebuild.

Our marketing and overall public relations messages are *interrelated* and should create a *shared* image and branding. The same ad or news story that features successful alumni, for example, not only attracts potential students, but also helps create an image for legislators, business leaders and the public that highlights our value as providing trained workers for economic development. And with today's tight budgets, the need to reach legislators and community leaders with the critical importance of our work is greater than ever.

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Red Hot PR/Marketing Techniques for an Ice-Cold Economy

Sandra Golden

President, Sandra Golden & Associates, Inc.

Areas to consider:

Track, evaluate and eliminate
Promotional ideas – cuts and low or no cost ideas
Create a marketing planning process
Other marketing areas - low cost ideas
Develop and implement an on-going PR/advocacy plan

I. Track, evaluate and eliminate

Log phone (and e-mail) inquiries. Ask what made you call today and where else have you seen or heard about the college. Eliminate least effective approaches.

Simple surveys at registration, in specific classes

Regular surveys - (every 2-3 years) provide a baseline and monitor changes so you can use limited dollars most effectively

II. Promotional ideas – Cuts and Low or No Cost Ideas

Schedule book - This is a major marketing tool produced and widely distributed by most colleges. The marketing sections need to be kept (or added if they don't exist). Other sections, however, can be evaluated for cuts to save room and dollars e.g.

- Eliminate course descriptions and run them on the web or just have them available in limited quantities in the library, admissions and other key offices.
- Options to a full household mailing:
 - Mail to targets: e.g. only households between ages of 17-39 or 45
zip code areas where you get the majority of enrollees
(price the various options to see if the savings is worth narrowing the mailing)
 - Send a postcard or tabloid with a return card and phone number to request a schedule book. Keep the names in a database then for follow-up and tracking.
 - Use as a newspaper insert. This can be less expensive, but it is also likely to get less attention than direct mail and limits distribution to those who read the newspaper.
 - Have your schedule (and/or catalogue) on the web, refer people to it and reduce printing and mailing costs

“Quarterly” community newsletter/magazine

Reduce frequency to 2 or 3 times, or even annually as an annual report

Combine your newsletters to community leaders, donors, alumni and even internal. There are advantages to this even beyond cost – you can have a stronger piece and donors need to hear about what’s happening at the institution through the other stories; and community leaders can become donors.

Create a family look, graphic branding for all materials and create templates that are easily available and can be easily applied to materials.

Again, this has advantages beyond saving time and money once the initial template is developed. It makes it easier and faster to create pieces, guarantees a level of quality, and gives the recognition and awareness that you are trying to create for the college.

Check options for saving printing costs

Templates can be pre-printed in quantity as skeleton forms

Groups of publications using similar formats can be “gang” printed e.g. program brochures, can be printed together, saving money on design, paper, “plates” etc.

Similar paper can be ordered in quantity for the year

Color graphics and photos can be used on more than one publication, saving color separation costs

Use electronic transfers

Bid out all publications

I’ve sometimes seen the lowest bid come in at half the cost of the highest

Make sure your specifications are tight, however, so you’re getting the bid on exactly what you need

Design for longer shelf life

e.g. Don’t put actual course sequence in program brochures. It can be an insert, but as courses change the main brochure doesn’t need reprinting

Review advertising and other expenses that don't have a major impact on recruitment building

This is a good time to legitimately eliminate or radically reduce ads that may have been placed in all area newspapers or radio, or for community events etc. While many of these have some PR value, they aren't justified on return for dollar in recruitment or even awareness. There may be ways to keep limited involvement or show some visible support without the current dollar expenditure.

Partner with relevant business, industry to create promotion and promotional dollars

e.g. With area hospitals to provide dollars for a recruiter and advertising to fill shortage in nursing;
With technology or machine shop industry where there are shortages of skilled workers

Look for feature story ideas, especially in program areas

A good feature story is far more valuable than a one-time small ad for a program anyway. This is a good time to brainstorm and place these stories or create simple events

e.g. "Egg drops" for engineering week

Tips for taking care of dogs and cats (from Vet Tech programs) to create PSAs during Pet Week

Early Childhood – creating a non-scary Halloween for toddlers

e.g. **Experts List around news items, special weeks** - Consider: accounting professors at tax time; psychology for holiday depression, stress; dietetic technology and hospitality management for holiday foods, healthy foods; science professors on weather disasters; politics on elections, world political events; physical education for fitness

Make these experts available for talk shows, newspaper, op ed articles etc.

Create lists for e-mail, permission marketing through the web

Create e-mail lists of interested inquiries, current students, alumni, businesses etc. and send information on new and upcoming programs. Have faculty maintain these lists by programs.

You can literally contact people then with only a push of a button.

III. Create a Marketing Planning Process;

Other marketing areas – Cuts and Low or No Cost Ideas

Consider broad areas of marketing. Go beyond promotion and involve the entire college by viewing marketing to encompass research, curriculum delivery, services, recruitment, inquiry follow-up and retention.

Involve a broad cross-section of the institution -- from faculty to staff --for input and buy-in.

Use a workshop to do a gap analysis (between where you are and want to be, and then identify the activities to get you there) and develop marketing action plans for these activities.

The marketing planning process described above leads to ideas for action steps to improve marketing. Interestingly, many of these ideas (which have been generated from workshops at dozens of colleges) are low cost or no cost. What they require is the process to create the ideas across departmental lines and then a structure to help them happen. Listed below are a few of these ideas in areas beyond promotion.

Services: Internal communication

Develop a list of the 10 most frequently asked questions (and their answers). Put these on a simple card for each desk and/or on an easily accessible computer screen. Update the information as needed, e.g. dates for start of classes, finals.

Services: Employee recognition

Create a simple card: “Catch Me At My Best” for individuals to commend someone who’s given great service. Post and communicate all these recommendations.

Student Ambassadors

Good, well-trained students can indeed be your best ambassadors. Stretch employee resources by using students (even if you need some dollars to pay them) for tours, telemarketing, staffing booths etc.

Inquiry follow-up

Create a system to capture inquiry information. Use students to contact them. Such telemarketing can be extremely effective.

Get inquiry information by program to faculty to make direct phone contacts as well. This is an area where faculty can be extremely effective, and many are willing to be involved.

Curriculum

Coordinate scheduling across departments so courses likely to be taken together are scheduled back to back e.g. business and computer, rather than at the same time or widely apart. This makes it easier for students to take both and adds to FTE.

Retention – Lucy Booth

Have volunteer counselors, advisors, others in an information booth in a high traffic area at the beginning and end of semesters to answer student questions.

Retention – announce in classes

Have faculty announce new courses, related courses, next in sequence, as the registration period is starting.

IV. PR/Advocacy

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**Getting Faculty Involved in the Marketing Effort -
A Faculty Perspective
Lawrence Golden
Executive Vice President & Director of Research
Sandra Golden & Associates**

- I. Expectations
- II. What Do You Want – And What Don't You Want
 - A. What you do want
 - 1. Marketing perspective
 - 2. One-on-one contacts
 - 3. Communication
 - B. What you don't want
 - 1. Brochure designing
 - 2. Lack of communication
- III. “It's Not My Job”
 - A. A lack of understanding of the marketing process
 - B. No clear definition of their role
 - C. Support from the top
 - D. Union versus non-union
- IV. Where do you start?
 - A. Attending a faculty meeting
 - B. The marketing cycle – and where faculty fit in
 - C. Good teaching
 - D. Importance of two-way communication
- V. Some things that they can – and will – do
 - A. Feeding stories
 - 1. Ads versus PR
 - 2. Reporting form for PR
 - B. Talking with prospects vs. the cold call
 - C. Letters
 - 1. Get emails → develop prospect lists
 - a. Alumni
 - b. Current students
 - c. Inquiries
 - 2. Send material about new courses, programs, etc.
 - 3. Who writes the letters/contact pieces – the use of templates
 - D. Identifying target markets

1. The “new majority”
 2. Businesses
 3. Professional organizations
- E. The “next class” handout
- F. Class scheduling – proper sequencing
- G. A marketing committee – good or bad idea?
1. Objectives of the committee
 2. Your level of involvement
 3. Budget issues
- H. Relations with high schools
1. General speaking – trained people
 2. High school counter-parts
- I. The college fair – good or bad?
- J. PACs – Professional Advisory Committees & Professional Organizations
1. Program improvement
 2. Placement
 3. College promotions