



TAKE ONE!

@ WACKY PROMOTIONS

FOR WONDERFUL EVENTS

Creatively Publicizing and Promoting Your Next Activity

By **MARISSA McCOURRY**



The annual talent show is fast approaching and you can feel the dread building inside you. Last year, the turnout was less than impressive and you desperately want to help your students make this year's show a success.

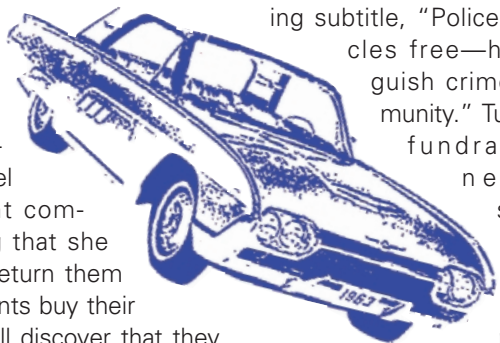
Let's face it, traditional posters just don't draw attention like they used to. Between classes, students navigating through the hallway throng while trying to get the latest social update and make a mad dash for their lockers aren't likely to notice a two-dimensional poster. Students of the new millennium are bombarded with media blasts and marketing ploys from all angles—it's information overload. To get your message through the plethora of distractions, your publicity needs to be unique, eye-catching, multi-faceted, and creative. This sounds like a job for "Super-Adviser," but don't fear—it's not. Putting together an outstanding publicity campaign is in your reach. All you need are a few pointers.

TEASING OUT THE IDEAS

The first step is brainstorming. Advise your students to call out any and all ideas they come up with and record them all on the blackboard or large tablet of paper. Encourage big, pie-in-the-sky thoughts. Discourage nothing—some of the best ideas begin with the ridiculous. Ask, "If we had \$100,000 with which to promote this event, what could we do with it to draw the most attention?" You might get answers like, "To promote the drama club's run of *A Clockwork Orange*, we'd paint the whole school bright orange," or "We'd hire Britney Spears to sing at the homecoming dance."

Now take your long list of ideas and turn them into feasible options. Could you create an orange glow with theatre spotlights during a pep rally? Or pass out orange tinted sunglasses (of the 3-D variety) with flyers that read, "Orange you coming?" Could you inscribe with marker the play dates and times on navel oranges and pass them out in the cafeteria?

What about sending a few of your home-coming dance tickets to Britney's record label or management company requesting that she sign them and return them to you. As students buy their tickets, some will discover that they not only hold an entrance to the dance, but a keepsake as well. Keep your mind and all options open and then find a way to make some of the best ideas, or variations of them, come to fruition.



Create a theme around otherwise blasé events. Don't just have a class of 2003 carwash to benefit the police association—have a carwash in which all the participating members don costumes of their favorite entertainer before pulling out the suds and chamois. Think of the school newspaper headlines you'll generate: "Stars Wash Springfield Cars," with accompanying subtitle, "Police and fire vehicles free—help us extinguish crime in our community." Turn your annual fundraiser for the neighboring senior citizen center into "Beach Blanket Bingo" night. Have an "Emeril & Julia Bake Sale" (Legasse and Childs, that is), or a "T-Birds & Pink Ladies Dance-Off." Be creative with themes that can help you to create more buzz surrounding your event.

shields and windows with white water-based shoe polish. If the event is to attract attendees beyond the school campus, other good places to post signs and flyers are:

- ☉ In the windows of and inside local stores, especially those near the school
 - ☉ On community bulletin boards in supermarkets, churches and synagogues, building lobbies, gyms, the YMCA, and recreation centers
 - ☉ At bus stops, libraries, theaters, and other high-traffic spots
 - ☉ Mounted on a post in front yards of students' homes,
- Other old stand-by techniques that still work include:
- ☉ Paint school windows. Use tempera paint or water-based shoe polish.
 - ☉ Chalk sidewalks or paint with tempera paint.
 - ☉ Write information regarding the event on corners of all classroom chalkboards.
 - ☉ Make table tents for cafeteria tables.
 - ☉ Post "take one" information on club bulletin boards.

EMPHASIZE THE FUN IN FUN-CTION

Now that you've brainstormed some ideas, it's time to have a good time with them. First and foremost, the publicity must be fun for the event to be fantastic. Think of how many hours students squat in hallways after school, pouring over the creation of posters and banners. Much of this time could be more effectively spent creating something wild and wacky, and really having fun promoting the function. If your student promoters are enjoying the actual promotions campaign, they'll be genuinely excited about the event and that enthusiasm will spread quickly to other students. Whether it's the junior prom or a National Honor Society membership drive, the build-up to the event should be an event in and of itself.

TWEAKING THE TRADITIONAL

That is not to say, however, that the traditional methods of promotion and publicity should be abandoned; they just need to have a little excitement added to them. Rather than taping posters to the walls above lockers, tie them to helium balloons (inflated just enough to keep the posters afloat at eye level) and leave them to bob along in the hallways. Find new spots to place posters—some teachers may allow you to put posters on the ceilings in their classrooms. There's nothing like a captive audience—tape posters to the backs of stall doors in the restrooms. After receiving the custodian's permission, tape posters to the hallway floors. Have members of the sponsoring organization create "traveling signs" by writing the event details on their car rear wind-

DRAMATIC FLAIR

Enlist the assistance of the drama club or thespian troupe at your school in producing a live commercial for your event. Tap into their creativity to write a 60-second spot to be acted out before the opening act of their next play, or at intermission. You can also "interrupt this pep rally with a word from our sponsor" with one of these clever spots. Some fearless actors may be willing to act out a spontaneous outburst in a crowded area like the cafeteria. Imagine... a mini, mock soap opera in which the heroine's plan to ask her dream beau to the Sadie Hawkins dance is thwarted by her evil twin from a rival high school. The narrator's voice looms, "Have you secured your date yet?"

Compose comedic twists for the



Photo provided by Maris Aldrich

Publicize an upcoming event by having group members wear hats they have decorated to correspond with the theme of the event. The hats are sure to gain attention.

morning or afternoon announcements on the loudspeaker. Get a Madrigal to parody a popular song to market the NHS school beautification day. Cajole a speech or forensics student to create a “Barry White-esque” announcement with background music to boost attendance at the post-football game dance.

CREATIVE COLLABORATIONS

The school’s dramatics aren’t the only ones you can partner with to pull off some great effects. Some of the culturally based clubs may harbor talents that could be tapped. Why not ask the Latino Club to teach salsa or meringue lessons for a few days the week before a dance? Or ask the woodworking class to help you build some of the props needed for various functions. These smaller organizations may not have the member resources to put together a large school-wide event during the year, and they may jump at the chance to add their name to a list of cocurricular sponsors.

PUBLIC RELATIONS WITH PIZZAZZ

Don’t forget to use media channels to inform both your internal and external publics (if the event is to be promoted to the general public). Your school and local newspapers can help you by including your event in the calendar sections and enhancing your marketing reach by writing longer articles about the event. Tips on getting your event in print include:

- ☉ Two weeks prior to your event, prepare a press release and fax or mail it to your local newspaper, then call the paper to make sure they got it. Ask if they have any questions and request that your event be included in the calendar section. Mention that it would be great if they sent a reporter to the event.
- ☉ Triple space the text and use wide margins in the press release. Place the most important information first. Editors who may shorten your release will usually do so from the bottom. See www.pressflash.com/anatomy.html for directions on

how to write a press release.

- ☉ One week prior to the event call to remind the paper about it.

Public Service Announcements (PSAs) are free “ads” on radio and television broadcasts. While most schools don’t have their own frequency for broadcasting, there’s no reason why you can’t incorporate elements of a PSA into your morning or afternoon announcements or videotape your PSA and have it running in loop on televisions in the cafeteria. Don’t forget that local cable access stations and college stations are good targets for your PSAs as well. Tips for getting your event on the air are:

- ☉ Write everything just as it would be spoken. Acronyms should be hyphenated (N-A-S-C) to avoid having them pronounced as a single word. When in doubt—spell it out!
- ☉ Keep it short.
- ☉ See www.uakron.edu/wzip/wzip_psa.html for directions on how to write a PSA, and several examples.
- ☉ PSAs are typically rotated through the broadcasting cycle. If there are 10 PSAs at any given time, and the on-air personality announces two per hour, then you can calculate how many mentions you’re receiving per day.

Your own school website may be a great place for you to place a description of your event, both on your organization’s homepage and on the general school calendar. The Student Council Association of George Mason HS in Fairfax, VA, (www.fccps.k12.va.us/gm/indexhs.htm) is a good example of effective use of a school’s homepage for event promotion. Similarly, Mentor (OH) HS keeps an updated calendar and log of morning announcements (www.mentorhigh.com).

THE PERSONAL TOUCH

Never underestimate the power of persuasion and word-of-mouth. Some students who are unlikely to attend a social or fundraising event

might just need a personal invitation.

Enlarge students' photos from the school yearbook and create "Wanted" posters for your event, making certain to use a random selection of students rather than cliques. Inform your school staff and parents about upcoming events through announcements at faculty meetings and PTA meetings and encourage their involvement in the promotions. Costuming is great for the personal outreach method; before the annual blood drive, have faculty and students dress as vampires with signs that read, "I want your blood." Other ways to promote the event face-to-face include:

- ☉ Hang posters that say "Ask someone who knows." Sponsoring group members wear stickers that read, "I know." When anyone asks them what it means, the member tells them about the upcoming event, then brands them with an "I know" sticker to wear, too.
- ☉ Pass out stickers that say "I'm going to (event)."

UTILIZE YOUR COMMUNITY NETWORK

Contact local establishments for donations of supplies and materials needed. Many parents within the school may be willing to donate markers, address labels for the creation of stickers, and other office supplies. Will the local grocer donate some of the oranges used for the promotion of *A Clockwork Orange*? Can a nearby copy center relinquish its bin of recycled paper so flyers can be printed on the blank side for the restroom stalls?

If the event invites community attendance, list the details on the community board calendar by contacting the person who maintains the calendar a month in advance. Announce your event at meetings of the school board and its committees. You can usually show up at least 15



minutes ahead of time and put your name on a speakers list, but check first to see what your local policy is. Always bring something (flyers, newsletters) to hand out. Elected officials and their staff also can help you publicize an event by including your flyers in one of their regular mailings or announcing your event at the many community meetings they attend.

UNIQUE TECHNIQUES

Try some of these ideas for a memorable impression:

- ☉ Stand pink flamingos in front of the school holding signs promoting the event.
- ☉ Place a mannequin in a location in your school holding a sign advertising events. Dress up the mannequin in various outfits, changing them frequently. Students will come just to see how the mannequin is dressed. Have a "Name the Mannequin" contest with entries turned in at each event. The mannequin could be on loan from a department store, and the prize for the best name could be a gift certificate (donated) from the department store.
- ☉ Print events (or calendar) on paper to be used as placemats in the cafeteria.
- ☉ Have a special event at the beginning of the semester to promote upcoming events.
- ☉ On the day of the event, have group members wash all the car windshields in the parking lot, leaving behind a flyer that says, "Have the rest scrubbed at the senior car-wash on Saturday!" or "Hope you'll see your way clearly to the dance tonight!"
- ☉ Wear "sandwich boards" (two posters tied together at the top and worn over shoulders).
- ☉ Place stickers promoting the event on soda cans and candy bars before they're loaded in the vending machines. Stickers can be made with address labels and a laser printer and should be placed on cans at room

temperature. Use on cups and trays in the cafeteria, too.

- ☉ Place messages in bottles.
- ☉ Have members wear "Event Tonight" T-shirts.
- ☉ Have a contest in which students must attend events to enter. Give out coupon books that advertise the event and serve as tickets. With each event students attend, they write their name on the back of the ticket to enter the contest. Have an event at the end of the semester to give away CDs, T-shirts, and gift certificates. Or, have a card that must be stamped at each event—those who attended three out of five are in a drawing for a particular prize, those who attended four out of five, or five out of five, are in their own separate drawings.
- ☉ Place "parking tickets" on windshields to promote the event.
- ☉ Place flyers with a hole punched in the corner over car antennas in the parking lot.
- ☉ Place toothpick flags with a promotion written on the flag in cafeteria food, such as "Toys for Tots" flags in the Wednesday tater tots.
- ☉ Use teaser promotions like banners with a crossword puzzle or hangman theme where one letter is added daily. The "Berma Shave" style can be used cleverly to build suspense in this way, too (www.fiftiesweb.com/burma.htm).

The bottom line is: have fun exploiting your event and it's bound to be a success! ■

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