



Are You a PR Pro?

Test Your Group's Publicity Savvy

By Stephanie R. Reck, editor

Does your group schedule great events? Does anybody know about them? It doesn't matter how great your events are if the student body doesn't get wind of them. Every year, *Florida Leader* magazine chooses the best Student Governments from public universities, private colleges, and community colleges, and all three have something in common—they know how to reach the students they serve.

Whether it's a poster, an information window, or a student newsletter posted in the restroom, top student groups use publicity to ensure that their carefully planned events will have the turnout they want.

Read on for tips from top SGs, and use our diagnostic to make sure you're as savvy as you ought to be about PR.

Share a Sandwich

Santa Fe Community College's SG gets the word out to students via sandwiches—sandwich boards all over campus, that is. The student affairs department invested in a special printer that creates posters detailing upcoming events. They mount the posters on the A-frame boards and position them in high-traffic areas.

"The fact that we can move the A-frames around helps draw attention to them. People tend to get desensitized to the bulletin boards that stay in the same place all the time," says Dug Jones, director of student leadership and activities. "Our poster printer has also given us the capability to create attractive specific directional and informational signs in support of events and activities."

Claire Bakr, SG programming board chair, says the increased number of attendees proves the approach's effectiveness. "Since we starting used the posters, we've gotten more students than ever to our programs," she says.

Curtain Call

In a similar vein, Lake City Community College's SG writes an open invitation to attend events. They publicize their meetings with signs constructed of plastic shower curtains hung from PVC frames, with the current events written on the shower curtains using paint markers. When it's time for a new event, someone just wipes the curtain clean and creates a new message. Once these are strategically placed on campus, SG takes the stage, literally. The senators take their seats at picnic tables at Pine Square, armed with sodas, refreshments, and music playing before and after the meetings.

SG President Tony Hart says there has been a positive change in student participation. "I've had students ask me questions on an almost daily basis about what's going on and when's the next event," Hart says. Since the entire meeting is broadcast over the sound system, students can't help but know how to find their SG.

Everybody's Gotta Go

Three-peat SG winner Rollins College knows everybody's got to go sooner or later, so they publicize events in a popular location—the restroom. *The Toilet Paper* hangs right where it ought to, in the stalls on campus, where students can peruse it at their leisure. Former SG President Stewart Parker says there's also an on-line version, *2-ply*. An e-mail version of the more pliable *Toilet Paper*, it has all of the same information but includes the added comfort of your own stall—if that's where you check your e-mail.

Test Yourself

Use these questions to jump-start your PR process. If you're doing things the way you've always done them, it's probably time to re-evaluate and get some fresh ideas going. Unless you have the turnout you've always dreamed of, test yourself and try out these tips:

1. How many forms of media are you employing to get your message out?

TIP: Get with your campus AV department and see if there are forms of campus media like e-mail newsletters or radio spots you can use.

2. Which campus experts have you contacted for ideas?

TIP: The PR and human resources departments of your school have to promote all the time. Find out what effective methods they're using and adapt them.

3. How far in advance are you promoting events?

TIP: Check with other clubs to make sure events don't conflict, and respect the academic timetable by watching out for exam weeks, etc.

4. Are your methods unique?

TIP: Brainstorm with other groups and see what creative ideas you can devise.

5. Is your material visually appealing?

TIP: Your school has budding artists and graphic designers with time and talent on tap. Get friendly with them.

6. Is the information in places where students have to look?

TIP: Contact high traffic locations like cafeterias, libraries, and labs for their policies about posting promotional materials.