

The ABCs of CSA's (Community Service Announcements)

Community Service Announcements are the backbone of community radio. They are used to inform listeners Community Service Announcements (CSA's) – should be either 15 sec or 30 sec long. Any more than that and you'll be boring the listener.

- Establish the GOAL – What do you want to accomplish? To get someone to take ACTION. It's NOT about the organisation. You want the audience to ACT. E.g. To stay in school, to stop smoking etc. Get to the point. Quickly.
- Ask yourself "Is this message important enough to be broadcast AND is it relevant to my audience?"
- Speak about the results – Media Releases often talk a lot about the organisation, which makes for boring radio.

e.g. "The Smallville Homeless Shelter is holding its annual food drive from Monday, November 1 until Friday, November 26. If you would like to participate, please bring your canned goods to one of several drop-off points which are located at..."

Whom is that CSA about? The Smallville Homeless Shelter. What is about? Their annual food drive.... But the message is BORING!!

But notice how easy it is to talk about the results of the food drive: "A can of food probably doesn't mean that much to you. You probably have a cupboard full of them. But just a few of those cans will keep a Smallville family from going hungry tonight...."

- Use REAL language. The most important thing in radio is that it sounds as though you are speaking to the listener as opposed to reading to them.

e.g. Instead of "To obtain participation details," you say, "To find out how to participate." Or, even better, "To find out how you can help feed a hungry family."

- Use emotion – people act based on emotional reasoning. Think about it do you go watch a movie based on logic or because you really get excited about going to watch it?
- A CSA is nothing more than a conversation with your audience. Make it personal. Make your message personal to them; make it easy for them to relate to:

30 Sec CSA: “Have you ever been hungry? Not because you’re on a diet or you didn’t have time to eat breakfast, but because you don’t have enough money to buy food? Can you imagine what it’s like for a child to go to bed hungry every night? Unfortunately, that’s not an imaginary situation for 13,000 children in Smallville.

At the Smallville Homeless Shelter, we know you’d like to help. That’s why we’ve made it easy for you to drop off your canned goods at any XYZ Store, all this month.

Please take a look at your shelves and see what you can afford to donate. There’s a child in our community who will go to bed hungry tonight...unless you help.”

A short 15 shout out might be: “Help feed a hungry family this weekend by dropping off any spare canned goods at XYZ store – there are kids who will go hungry without your help so please give them a call on xxx and lend a hand”

Final point: – Who, when, where, why, how and what are great questions to ask yourself when analysing any media release/community service announcements.

Keep in mind “what’s in it for them?”

So in conclusion:

- Identify the organisation...but don’t go on about them.
- Deliver one “core message”. You want the audience to react to ONE thing. One message per break. One point.
- Ensure your message has CLARITY – are you speaking a nice clear voice? Do you understand what is written? Do you comprehend what the message is? If you don’t understand – neither will your audience.
- Attract the attention of your target audience
- Speak to the audience in their own language
- Relate to the audience’s lives and motivate the audience to act.