

Television

Since TV is a member of "The Big Three" (with newspapers and radio stations), you should plan, plan and plan even more to spread your water safety messages with the help of the "tube." Can it be done with little or no money? Sure it can, with "PPI"... prior planning and initiative.

Let's take a look inside the television stations before "attacking." Television stations, like newspapers and radio stations, are not created equal. Meaning, some are very large while others are very small. They must be treated differently in order to obtain airtime.

National coverage of your water safety program is nearly impossible. It would take so much work on your campaign in order to attract the TV folks to your lake. And, is national publicity needed to save lives on your lake? Probably not but, if that's your goal it can be achieved. Yet, realistic thinking says national coverage will not come your way. Stations like CNN, ABC, NBC and CBS air a higher percentage of adverse news, rather than good news.

Next, there are the large metropolitan network affiliates. This is what most people watch around your lake, and with a clear strategy you will be able to get your message on these stations, if your approaches are creative, entertaining and interesting. Remember, there are usually at least three network affiliates in each metro viewing market.

Lately, there are the lower powered Public Broadcast Stations (PBS), the smaller independent stations and public/community access channels. These will be the easiest stations to air your messages, but they will not reach as many households. With the aforementioned levels, you will likely rule out the national audience and concentrate on metro level two and PBS level three. You are successful if you receive any level of TV time.

A glance inside a local public broadcasting station looks something like this. There is a station manager and maybe an assistant manager, a producer, a director or switcher, usually one electronic engineer, three or four part-time camera operators, and a couple of administrative personnel. That's about a dozen employees. These folks are on the lowest rung of the salary ladder. Many college graduates start their careers at a PBS channel; work up to a metro station, then up the metro markets. Normally, there is but one studio at the PBS and the sets roll in and out as the programs change.

If your station is around water where fishing is king, skiing is fit for a queen, and swimming is grand for the kids, there is a good possibility the PBS will have an outdoor type show. Here's a place to start.

While we're on the subject of starting, how should you begin planning for an "assault on the tube?" Here goes.

Step one will be to grab the local TV guide, pen and paper, or computer and start your planning. Jot down every locally produced show, per channel, including PBS, when they air, for how long, who is the host/hostess. Add two more columns to your research data to include if the program is live or taped, shot in studio or outdoors.

They will range from the morning or breakfast "waking crew" to the noon news and talk shows to the largest watched nightly news. Some have a 30-minute weekly Public Affairs time slot. Many will also air specialty programs like outdoor, fishing, hunting, travel, sports, and unique features. All of the latter shows will fit perfectly into your plans. Add the names of all the television personnel, television call letters and affiliate, address, telephone and fax numbers.

Step two is to watch these programs. Jot down everything possible on each show. For example, the hostess might have a nickname and love tacos. The co-host might cheer for the Detroit Red Wings hockey team, the Detroit Tigers baseball team and the Detroit Pistons world champion basketball team. If the camera operator is a car buff, add it to your data bank. Add to your list about the news anchor's little, white dog named Lady and a big, black one named Beauty.

Which one loves jazz, which one listens to country-western and which person plays classical music constantly? Let's say the weather person plays golf, add that, too. If the sports announcer is a fast-pitch softball player jot that down. As you see, any little tidbit of information will help. This will take time, but when you actually start you will be able to "hit" the station rolling.

Step three calls for you to take a tour of the television station. That may sound strange, but it works. Simply call the public relations director at a metro level station or the station manager at a smaller PBS. Tell them who you are, that you have never visited their station and want to take a tour when it is convenient for them. Take a handful of business cards and collect everyone's at the station. You are on a reconnaissance information/contact-collecting mission.

Before leaving the Corps office, read over your data sheet very carefully about each person at the station. Your research in steps one and two will begin to pay dividends. Once at the station, make sure to jot down every contact's name and what that person does, if you do not already have that info. Keep an eagle eye out for ice-breaking clues, like boating enthusiasts, hunters, and which civic, fraternal, military organization they belong to, how many are in the family.

Your initial data might show that you want to be introduced to the host of the outdoor show, the late night sports announcer, and the morning co-host. As you are touring the station, ensure your tour guide points out where each of these people's offices is located. If they are not in the studio you might ask to meet the secretary or sidekick of the individual. Ask that person to show you where they actually work, the ones you really want to meet. Simply poke your head into the empty office and photograph it in your mind. You are searching for ice-breaking clues, to include the university they attended.

If you spot one or two of the targeted personalities, make sure you are introduced to them, even if it is only for a short smile, handshake and to exchange business cards.

You want them to remember you when calling back for a possible interview/coverage. Have an idea what you would like someone to do for you even before the first tour. But remember, this is a tour. Keep your eyes and ears open. Know where the TV employees enter the building, where they park, what their office room numbers are, where the rooms are located, what their telephone extensions are and most importantly do they have a separate fax number?

The moment you arrive back at your vehicle write down every small bit of information so you can add it to your research data bank back at the office. You will forget something if you don't jot it down in a hurry.

You have completed the tour and updated the computer. Step four is the actual message. What do you want the TV folks to do for you? Here are a few suggestions.

Do not write anyone at the television station, that archaic method went out when Columbus landed in America. Have your plan in hand, and then telephone the person you met during your first tour. Go to the station with the plan and always keep in mind you can fax material for last minute updates, etc. Let's say it's about three weeks before Memorial Day and you want the news crew to interview a member of the lake water safety family about the boating fatalities from last year and how the creative water safety campaign is planning to reduce that number this boating season. You want this to be aired Thursday or Friday night before the first weekend of summer. Think of the camera's background shots, and where is the best spot for the interview. Even have some proposed questions or a data sheet for the TV folks.

Remember, they do not have time for long research. That's the service you are providing to save them time. Make it easy for the TV person to say "yes." Normally, they like to "shoot" footage and interview in the morning about 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. so they can get back to the station to edit the video and voice over for the nightly news. Taping for future shows may be shot anytime of the day.

When they are out at our lake be as amenable as possible. If they need something, like a rope, a 2 x 4, or a ladder, get them quickly. If possible, have someone else at the filming/interviewing to take photographs/slides of the "shoot" and to run errands. Also, take a new blank VCR tape to give the film crew. Have your business card taped to it. If the taping went grand, and as the crew is about to leave, hand the blank tape to your best crew member contact and ask

him/her to tape the news cast/program and mail it back to you. Many folks own VCRs and ask for a taped copy, so the least you can do is provide them a new blank tape. This is asking them for a favor. They are not required to do this.

After the show is aired, call your contact and if it went like you wanted, thank them personally. If they are not in, tell their sidekick/secretary to pass on the thank you. Then follow up with a short thank you note or card by mail. Here's where the fax could come in handy. You will want them to come back to the lake for another shooting.

News programs will be the hardest to break into at the metro level stations, but keep trying. Talk shows at metro and PBS levels will be the easiest to get on.

One of the easiest ways to attract the TV news crew is with hard news and you will rarely have positive hard news. When a new boating law is enacted, that's hard news and should be covered. Television is great to get the regulation information out to the public.

Here's an example for you. One state wildlife agency worked with the Corps to require the wearing of life jackets below all dams through the state beginning in 1990. The legislature and governor agreed. Therefore, a few weeks before the law took effect, the state's wildlife boating safety officer Ed Carter and the Corps' Old Hickory Lake Manager Al Payne were filmed next to the newly installed "DANGER" sign below the power plant. The Corps Visual Illustration video specialist also "shot" footage. This footage was provided to two PBS teams who could not attend and the CE's Visual Illustration video appeared on both stations. The largest PBS in the state let the two officers appear on the set and talk about the new life jacket law. During their conversation the VI footage was shown.

If you have hard news, and some sad/heroic news you might add them both together at the same time... especially if they are related. In the aforementioned — new life jacket law coverage — another segment was filmed. A few weeks prior to the filming, two good friends were fishing. One

had a life jacket on and the other did not. When the dam's turbines came on the boat capsized. The man with the life jacket was saved and the other drowned. First, it was confirmed with both families and they agreed to have the "saved" man interviewed and shown during the new life jacket law TV show. One station would not air the Corps' footage, but did mention the tragic even and life-saving effort during the new dam law show. Yet, another station used half the 30-minute program with both interviews.

Having a testimonial TV show like this helped ease the new life jacket law into the enforcement stage without adverse comments coming from the public in any medium.

Life-saving attempts and success stories are hard and soft news. About 99 percent of the time you will not be able to obtain video footage or still photographs of the event as it is taking place. So, the pre- and during-coverage is lost. Therefore, all you have to work with is post-coverage. And, work you can.

Just be sure the coverage is consistent with good water safety practices. For example, a swimming rescue by an untrained bystander should not be encouraged because of the high likelihood of a double drowning.

Here are a few examples of near fatal stories one District was able to get television coverage of:

1) A 75-year-old man's boat turned over on the lake during a wind and sleet storm. He says the life jacket saved his life and was willing to be interviewed by the media, to remind others to wear life jackets. The TV crew returned to the area where the incident occurred and filmed from the actual location where he came ashore. After the site filming, the man and his son were interviewed in the studio. The son and daughter-in-law had given the life jacket to him as a Christmas gift. The scene footage was used with voice overs.

2) While driving a Corps vehicle a power plant supervisor was hit by a civilian's car. The crash sent the Corps truck and employee down a long riprap embankment and into the tailrace. Two local anglers saw the truck, cranked their boat motor and arrived just as the truck went under. The fishermen threw their anchor through the window and as the water rushed in they pulled the Corps employee through the window, into the water and up into their boat. The District Commander awarded both fishermen Commander's Award for Public Service medals at the

same power plant site. Newspapers, radio and television representatives covered the medal presentation.

3) At the same Corps lake a few months later, a lone fisherman fell out of his boat. The prop caught his shirt and began twisting and cutting the man's arm. His screams were heard by two campers who jumped into their boat, raced to the scene, turned the motor off, cut his shirt off and took him to shore. An ambulance took the injured man to the local hospital where he was then flown to a larger hospital with surgical specialists. His arm required nearly 200 stitches, but it was saved. Again, the Commander's medals were presented, but this time by Brigadier General Paul Chinen, Ohio River Division commander. Print and television reps covered the presentation.

4) When three young girls saved a man's life by keeping a truck from crushing the man at a Corps recreation area, the Commander's award was presented to the three. Since two of the girls reside in Indiana, the Louisville District Commander did the honor. The other girl, Amber Breedlove, age 9, received the medal at her school, in front of the entire student body. The Nashville District Commander, Colonel James P. King, praised the efforts of Amber as TV cameras rolled, newspaper reporters clicked off flash after flash and radio broadcast journalists jockeyed for position during and after the interview. Two TV stations and two radio stations even provided the Corps their coverage, at no cost. The ceremony made front-page news in half a dozen papers. During the ceremony, the County Executive proclaimed that day in 1990 as Amber Breedlove Day; a congressman sent her a letter to be read in front of her classmates and teachers. The emcee was Frank Massa, the Corps' Dale Hollow Resource Manager. Massa attended the same school in the early 1950s.

Why did this even generate so much coverage? Think for a moment... when is the last time you have heard about three young girls saving a man's life?

5) Months before, at the same Corps

lake, Ranger Sherry Roberts was inspecting an entrance road when she witnessed a pickup truck back over an embankment and flip three times before crashing into the lake, near boat slips. The 76-year-old driver was thrown from the truck and pinned next to the boardwalk with only part of his head above water. Ranger Roberts was the first on the scene. She rushed to aid the driver, keeping him alive by pulling on his arms so his face was out of the water. A tourist came and helped her pull the man to safety. He was flown to a hospital and suffered broken ribs in addition to other injuries. For her action, the Ranger was awarded a medal approved by USACE and presented by Lieutenant General Henry Hatch.

One television station devoted a 25-minute show to the rescue and provided an in-depth interview with Ranger Roberts. Newspapers in the surrounding counties printed the article. A few months after the medal presentation, Ranger Roberts became the Resource Manager of Laurel Lake in Kentucky.

6) Is it news if a professional angler does something stupid? It can be. Here's what happened. A fisherman stayed a little longer fishing than he had planned, and to make an appointment he "flew" across the lake at full throttle. As he made a sharp turn the boat turned over and threw him into the lake. On the way out of his boat his head and ear took out the windshield while his hip jarred the passenger's seat loose. The man was unconscious in 15 feet of water... without a life jacket on. When he "came to" it was dark, he didn't know which was up or down. Suddenly the dip net passed him on the way down as he finally surmised which way was up. He was deathly afraid he would "run out" of air. Somehow he made it to the surface, then his next worry... the boat. Would it circle and turn on him? He had a "kill switch" but it was not hooked up. Lucky for him the motor "died." He swam some 20 feet, hurting and completely exhausted, pulled himself up next to the motor and collapsed into the bottom of the boat. Wet, tired, scared, the man slowly gained his composure and made it to shore.

How would you have worked this scenario into a television show? First, the man was contacted and was a little embarrassed. He did not want to appear on TV since he had written a fishing guide years and years ago and had fished on the lake for more than 30 years. With a little persuasion he said "yes." Here's close to what the persuasion chat sounded like: "Your near fatal accident might help save a life on the water. Wouldn't that be wonderful? Just think you could take this experience and tell people how important it is to hook up their kill switches, fish with a friend, drive at

a responsible speed and wear a life jacket. People know you and will believe you. A person might relate to a situation if it came from someone who has experienced fear. How about it? Let's save a life or two."

The man agreed and the TV program was received extremely well. No Corps of Engineers employee appeared on the show, two people drowned shortly after the interview, which was reported on the show. The filming did appear in the local paper and it announced when the program would air.

Have you worked with statewide educational television? In Kentucky it is called the Kentucky Education Network (KET). Each Tuesday evening the Kentucky Game and Fish Department has a 30-minute program, "Kentucky Afield." The host, David Shuffett, is a state employee. He also has a cameraman. Shuffett is constantly looking for good water and wildlife, related news tips. In addition, he has and will gladly use Corps footage.

Jimmy Holt is employed by the Tennessee Department of Conservation. Holt has a weekly outdoor column in the second largest newspaper in the state. He always ends each column with, "When you're on the lake always wear your life jacket." The friendly fisherman is also the host of a syndicated weekly TV program called, "Tennessee Outdoors." This widely viewed PBS show has Corps representatives on it from time to time... for the asking.

David Dow, Jr., lives next to a Corps lake. He hosted of a PBS 30-minute weekly program entitled "Sportsman's Trail." Dow has videoed many fishing, water and wildlife stories. Here are a couple of examples.

When a bass boat crashed into a houseboat during a fishing tournament on a Corps lake, killing one, Dow was contacted. He interviewed the Corps' resource manager, the Deputy District Engineer and the Area Supervisor for the state fish and game agency. The program was filmed at a boat dock and shown just before and during the Labor Day weekend. Half-dozen newspapers printed articles about the TV filming and informed

the public when the program was to air.

When Dow's station needed people to answer telethon pledge phones - at a Public Broadcast Station — the Corps personnel were invited. During the telethon the two Corps reps chatted about safety on the lakes and what the upcoming water safety campaign consisted of. At the conclusion of Dow's show, he often shows a fishing boat going by with the message, "When you are on the lake make sure to wear your life jacket at all times."

Ranger Bob, a retired businessman and avid fisherman, appears on a morning show in a metro market every Friday and provides the weekend fishing report. He stops by the District Office on Thursday to get the information for his show. Each Christmas he shows a photograph of the Corps staff who helps him. Also, during the year if the Corps needs to know who to contact, ol' Ranger Bob provides the best person. Many times he intercedes to get the story covered and introduces Corps employees to TV reps. A good example is getting the Corps TV spots played during prime time.

A one-hour TV talk show in North Carolina airs every Monday from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. The host has it divided into four 15-minute guest slots. Once you have proven your "salt" with one 15-minuter, it will be easier to get another quarter-hour show. Remember to use slides, video, photographs, models and guests for these in-studio programs. Also, a rule of thumb when it rains, snows or sleets, be prepared to take another guests' 15-minute time slot. Once this happens, the host will be indebted to you "for life."

Noon guest/news shows are fairly easy to get on, but make sure you plan ahead before appearing on these programs. Have some suggested questions drafted for the host. They will love you for them. Always arrive before your appointment time. First, to survey the situation. Second, you may need to "patty cake" your face so it doesn't shine on-camera. Thirdly, briefly meet with the host and co-host and go over what you have brought, in the way of exhibits to show and what questions could be asked.

If possible have someone take photographs of every television show filming, at the site, in the studio and on camera. Remember, do not use flash during the on-camera segment.

Lastly, if you should spot something like the two dogs with Pooch Pal life jackets, stop! This could be your lucky day. This is a wonderful, soft sell, custom made for a TV ending feature just before one of the three "killing weekends." The news crew should film it and maybe the Visual Illustration person might come along, too, just in case a TV station didn't make it for some reason, then you might be able to provide the dogs and their life jackets footage to them anyway... or to another station.

Television is fun. It's enjoyable and if used properly you will be able to get the Corps' water safety campaign to the public constantly. Always remember, keep your story antenna up and turning 24-hours-a-day.

Good luck with the big red eye atop the camera.