



Tips for Creating Effective Public Service Announcements

Purpose:

The following is one in a series of tip sheets you might use as a guide for preparing cost-effective voiceover scripts with impact.

Outcome:

No matter the type of script you're preparing, you can reduce recording and talent costs by consistently sticking to a few basic rules in preparing your voiceover copy for the engineer and talent.

Really know your audience.

You need to be crystal clear as to exactly who it is that your message is intended to reach. This knowledge will be the single largest determining factor as to where and when you air it. Consider age range, gender and geographic area. You might want to create more than one version of your PSA and test-market it to see which one generates the best response; or create slightly different PSAs for various demographics.

What's it all about?

Think of this as your "elevator pitch". If you ran into Donald Trump or a major philanthropic donor in an elevator and had only ten seconds to describe your organization, could you convey it concisely and leave an impression with impact? If *you* don't know what you stand for, neither will your audience. Your PSA will only be as sharp as your focus.

Back to basics.

Make sure that your PSA concludes with a clear way to contact your organization for more information. Repeat the telephone number and/or have a concise web address that's easy to remember. But don't drop the ball here - it's critical that you have the telephones covered by knowledgeable, charismatic people once you start getting calls. Connect those dots! Further, does your web site make it easy to find how to contact you or donate?

I'm all ears.

Writing for the ear and for the eye are two very different writing styles, and many people don't consider this when composing their copy. Use a professional copywriter whenever possible (listen to the attached sample of a PSA recorded for the Red Cross).

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Timing is everything.

PSAs are generally 30 to 60 seconds in length (some may be 15 seconds, so remember your “elevator pitch”). Think who, what, when, where and why or how. If you use music at the open and/or close of your piece you’ll have even less time to get your message across. Make sure you time the piece with a stopwatch. Read it out loud at a leisurely pace. This will give you a better sense of length and save you time and money once you’re ready to record. Studio time can be expensive and you don’t want to spend your money editing on the fly.

Reach out and touch.

It can be extremely compelling to include a quote from an actual person’s account of their experience with your company and how it helped them. For example, a PSA for a physical therapy treatment facility should include a “success story” with a quote from a grateful patient (listen to the attached example of a PSA for Rehabilitation Institute at Santa Barbara). People are drawn in to stories that move them, excite them or inspire them and they’ll be more likely to remember you. You need copy that will compel your listener to stay with you and convert from listening to buying, donating, or calling.

Look who’s talking.

This makes the difference between being heard and being ignored. If you’ve ever changed a TV or radio station because of stilted, artificial or over-wrought reading of commercial copy or because the voice itself irritated you, it will be clear to you how quickly your audience can be lost. Grab your listeners from the first syllable with the right tone, professional reading and great copy.

*Did you find this information useful? Find other tips in the **Making Impact Series** at www.panright.com on the **ARTICLES** page.*

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