

Media Success Requires Patience, Planning

If a journey of 1,000 miles begins with one step, the overall success of a local media plan begins with careful planning and the expectation of eventual - rather than immediate - success.

It is possible to be very successful with your local media right away, but for the most part, it takes time to build mutual trust and understanding between the person responsible for securing coverage and the local media.

The first step is to find out whom in the media to talk to. At radio stations it might be the news director or public service director. These two might be the same; in some smaller markets, it might be only a part-time job.

At TV stations with local news director or public service director, the contacts are probably the assignment editor and the person responsible for public affairs programming.

Because the Legion has a great many events on weekends, you should find out if there is a weekend assignment editor. Knowing something as simple as that can determine the success of your efforts.

Newspapers - daily and weekly ones - may be the key to the overall success of your programs.

For one thing, newspapers are able to discuss news and features in greater detail. A Legion-sponsored scout troop or baseball team involves people from across the community, and a newspaper feature can focus on some of them.

And, news directors at the electronic media read the paper every morning. While there is less pressure for stations to focus on local issues and concerns, a local angle always makes a story better.

There is a lot of competition for space in print and media. The key to getting your share is knowing how to fashion a story or an event that is hard to ignore.

First, read and listen to the kinds of stories carried by your local media. See if you can find out what interests the local editors have, and try to tailor our stories to their needs.

These people are very busy. They have short attention spans, and they might focus in one day on the number of events the rest of us consider in a week. And, at any point in a day, a story they are working on can be bumped aside by more compelling breaking news.

Newspapers editors are not likely to add pages to the daily paper without advertising to support them, and radio and TV producers can't make a five minute newscast any longer than five minutes. So, if they seem rude to you,, it's only because their job depends on

their performance. Their success, though, depends upon people buying their product, and you might have something that will help them. The next step is ask them or their assistants what kinds of stories interest them, and - this might be the most important of all - how they want them delivered. Your chance of success are much greater if you meet all deadlines and format demands.

Also, understand the difference between what's news and what's merely information. The fact that your post is raising money to construct a facility for Boy Scouts is a legitimate news item. The fact that your post is having a bean supper open only to members is not.

Learn from your successes and your failures, and address weaknesses you can identify. If you consistently send meaningful information to editors, you will continue to succeed. If you merely "paper" news offices with unimportant information, even your legitimate news may find its way into the trash can.

If you prove to local editors that you respect their time, and if they learn over time that they can trust what you send them, you will have won a major battle to gain attention for The American Legion.