

Renaissance PR: Reviving Your Public Awareness Efforts



S O R O P T I M I S T

Best for Women

I. What is Public Relations?

Public relations is the management of communication between an organization and its publics. Public relations cannot “create” an image. Rather, public relations efforts communicate an existing image.

Elements of public relations:

- Deliberate, intentional, conscious effort--
- Planned, organized, systematic
- Two-way interaction, involving disseminating information and obtaining feedback
- Serves the public interest

Ultimate goal of PR for Soroptimist clubs:

To increase public awareness of Soroptimist, its mission and its programs; to increase community service capabilities by maintaining a healthy membership.

II. What is Branding?

An organization’s brand is its essence. For a brand to be effective, it must be unique and occupy a place in the public’s mind that no other organization/product/service does. Branding, which involves employing an organization’s name and visual identity, is the strategy used to cement an organization’s brand with the public. According to Brand Aid by Brad VanAuken, branding “is the focal point around which an organization defines how it will uniquely deliver value to the customer...effectively embodying the ‘heart and soul’ of that organization.”

Branding Soroptimist as an organization that improves the lives of women and girls:

To brand Soroptimist successfully, the message that the organization improves the lives of women and girls should be consistently delivered in all internal and external communication, at every level of the organization. Being that Soroptimist is an international organization, people should be able to recognize Soroptimist (and what the organization stands for) anywhere in the world. The following strategies will help to foster Soroptimist’s brand identity:

- Participate in and publicize programs that benefit women and girls to reinforce Soroptimist’s mission to improve the lives of women and girls, in local communities and throughout the world. The Women’s Opportunity Awards program is Soroptimist’s signature project. All clubs should participate in and help increase awareness about this award, as well as other programs that benefit women and girls.

- Be consistent in language to cultivate unity among the federation, regions and clubs. The federation, for example uses Soroptimist, rather than Soroptimist of the Americas or SIA, when talking about the organization to external audiences. Use this description in all external pieces—Soroptimist is an international volunteer service organization for business and professional women that works to improve the lives of women and girls, in local communities and throughout the world.

- Use the new logo, which includes the tagline, “Best for Women” on all materials. If used consistently over time, people will begin to recognize it. Use Soroptimist blue when creating T-shirts and other promotional items. Organizations adopt certain colors as a branding tool to make themselves recognizable to their publics. Soroptimist has chosen blue, PMS 659.

III. The Public Awareness Committee

The public relations function must be a club priority. Small clubs should make sure that at least one person is assigned the important job of serving as public relations coordinator.

Those responsible for carrying out public relations efforts should:

- Understand SIA’s Strategic Plan and SIA’s mission to improve the lives of women and girls, in local communities and throughout the world
- Possess news sense—the ability to understand why and how stories are covered in print, broadcast, etc.
- Read the newspapers, watch the news and listen to the radio
- Know the ins and outs of Soroptimist
- Feel comfortable writing for and speaking to the media
- Be available to accommodate media requests

IV. What is News?

What is considered news greatly depends upon the media in the region. For instance, to a community newspaper, a club installation with women who are prominent in the community might be an entirely appropriate news item. In a large city such as Los Angeles or New York, sending a news release of this type would be ineffective. In general, something is news if it has wide appeal because it’s interesting, unusual or has perceived benefit to the community.

News is:

- New information or accounts of unusual events
- Timely, relevant and contains substance
- Information that audiences want to see, read and hear

Opportunities for making news:

- Major service projects or initiatives
- Major fundraising events

- Women’s Opportunity Awards
- Violet Richardson Award
- Making a Difference for Women Award
- Soroptimist Club Grant for Women and Girls
- Visits from Friendship Links
- Local tie-ins to federation or Soroptimist International projects (Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence, etc.)
- Club tie-in to International Women’s Day/Women’s History Month
- Significant club anniversary
- New officers (send to officer’s alumni publications, professional associations, employee newsletters)
- Disaster Relief contributions and activities

V. Getting PR for the Women’s Opportunity Awards

Good public relations results from telling a story in such a way that is compelling to the public, generally via the media. When choosing a club project consider its public relations potential:

- **Does it fill a community need?**

The Women’s Opportunity Awards program supplies women with the resources they need to get ahead.

- **Is it unique (i.e. nobody else does it)?**

The Women’s Opportunity Awards program is not just another awards program because, unlike a traditional scholarship, it helps women offset any costs associated with getting an education, such as books, carfare and supplies.

- **Does it speak to the organization’s mission?**

The Women’s Opportunity Awards program truly underscores the Soroptimist mission of improving the lives of women and girls.

- **Does it speak to who Soroptimists are?**

The Women’s Opportunity Awards seek to advance the economic status of its recipients through improved job opportunities; therefore, the program speaks to who Soroptimists are—business and professional women.

The Women’s Opportunity Awards program helps Soroptimist carve out an identity that the public will recognize. In order for Soroptimist and its major service project to gain international recognition, however, the word must get out at the community level through participation in the program, and strong, consistent public relations efforts. This can be accomplished in several ways by:

- **September:** publicizing when applications are available
- **December:** selecting non-Soroptimists to serve on the judging panel
- **March:** holding a special event (preferably in conjunction with International Women’s Day and/or Women’s History Month) to recognize the winner(s)
- **March:** publicizing the program and the club’s winner to the local media
- **Ongoing:** providing information about club participation in the program on the club website

VI. Tips for Getting Coverage

- Undertake a unique project, initiative, or event. Look for the human angle
- Hire local news anchors to serve as emcees for events
- Hire local newspaper photographers to cover events
- Invite dignitaries or celebrities to events
- Ask dignitaries or celebrities to serve as judges for awards and grants
- Partner with another (perhaps better-known) community service organization or company in exchange for “guaranteed” publicity.

VII. Building Media Relationships

To create trust and respect, one must always think one step ahead and go the extra mile to respond to the media’s needs. In other words, make the media person’s job as easy as possible by:

- Becoming familiar with the style, content and target audience of the medium to see if these meet the needs of the club and vice versa
- Creating professional-looking materials with newsworthy information (or use materials created by SIA headquarters)
- Acknowledging media’s tight deadlines and schedules by calling at convenient times and returning phone calls right away
- Providing media with one point-of-contact, preferably the club public relations chair, to prevent possible confusion and conflict
- Keeping the club president abreast of all activities so she can effectively serve as a spokesperson
- Giving the media as much assistance as they need to fill in gaps on a story and/or facilitate their understanding of the issue or topic
- Suggesting additional sources of information to make an even better story

VIII. Tools for Generating Publicity

The practice of public relations is conducted through the following tools to get the word out:

Advertising

Print ads in newspapers, event booklets, and newsletters. Print ads can be very expensive in large newspapers, but can be very effective because the message is controlled. Community newspapers are less expensive than large newspapers and just as effective since Soroptimist's membership pool comes from the local community.

Club Website

If a club chooses to have a website, it should function as a "virtual brochure" where members, prospective members, local media and others in the community can visit to learn more about club projects, news, fundraisers, etc. Clubs should try to replicate the look (but not the content) of the federation website at <www.soroptimist.org> and provide a link to that site.

Fact Sheet

A club fact sheet is a document that summarizes the organization with background information. Send the fact sheet with a news release for additional information. A fact sheet contains an organization's mission, history, services, programs, vision, contact information, etc. A fact sheet can also be used to tell the who, what, where, when and why of a special club project or event and be included in media kits.

Flier

Fliers are designed paper or poster announcements that can be hung on bulletin boards and other places, usually for free.

Gift Subscriptions to *The Soroptimist of the Americas Magazine*

The magazine not only serves as a valuable resource to members, it also should serve as an important tool in club public relations efforts. By providing gift subscriptions to Women's Opportunity, Violet Richardson and Making a Difference for Women award recipients; local libraries; dentists' and doctors' offices; businesses; hospitals; schools; domestic violence shelters and women's centers; community officials; and guest speakers—the federation magazine educates and informs other audiences about Soroptimist.

Informational Brochure

An informational brochure is a promotional piece that offers information about the club and can be sent to the media or anyone inquiring about the organization.

Letter to the Editor/Op-ed Article

This publicity tool advocates about community issues the club is interested in. It may also be a reaction to news events reported by the newspaper.

Media Advisory, Media Alert or Request for Coverage

This is an invitation to the media to cover an event.

Media Kit

A media kit consists of collection of materials that help the media accurately assemble a story. When appropriate, media kits should accompany a news release and include photos, organizational brochure, fact sheet, event schedule, etc.

Media List

A media list includes local media outlets, with names of key contacts. It should be updated at least yearly.

News Conference

A news conference can be set up to announce major news or kick off an event.

News Release

A news release should be used to announce major projects, initiatives, special events, etc. to media outlets.

Pitch letter

A pitch letter is designed to interest/convince a media outlet to write a story about a worthwhile project, conduct an interview or cover a special event.

Proclamation

Clubs can receive this official governmental document as a public acknowledgement of their good works.

Public Relations Calendar

A PR calendar should be devised at the beginning of the club year and identify potential avenues for public relations.

Public Service Announcement (PSA)

A PSA is a visual and/or audio announcement about projects, initiatives or special events that are broadcast by TV and radio stations, which are obligated to provide free time for information in the community's interest.

Radio/TV Appearance

Clubs can coordinate appearances where the president or other member discusses a club project or advocates for a specific issue.

Special Events

Special events involve many activities and provide excellent public relations exposure.

Speakers Bureau

A speakers bureau offers the expertise of certain members who are available to speak on a variety of topics (women's health, legal rights for women, etc.) at community engagements. Another way to create public awareness is by giving presentations about Soroptimist and its mission to improve the lives of women and girls, in local communities and throughout the world.

Visibility Aid

Visibility aids include resources such as a phone book, local chamber of commerce, or library that may provide information and contact details about the club.

IX. Federation Resources

The communications department at Soroptimist headquarters has developed numerous resources to aid clubs in carrying out public relations activities within their communities. For more information, contact the communications department at 215-893-9000 or <kamali@soroptimist.org>.

Sample Publicity Materials

SIA's members-only website contains samples publicity materials (fact sheets, PSAs, news releases, media alerts, pitch letters, sample advertisements) for all of the federation programs. Materials may be downloaded and customized with club information.

The Soroptimist of the Americas Magazine

The Soroptimist of the Americas magazine serves as SIA's official publication and the primary internal communication vehicle for members. The award-winning magazine, published in various forms since 1931, is sent to members four times annually. Contents include feature stories pertaining to women's issues and SIA's Strategic Plan, updates on Soroptimist efforts, and recognition of Soroptimist accomplishments. Submissions about members and worthwhile club service projects are encouraged.

Public Relations Modules

SIA's members-only site contains public relations modules to help clubs communicate the Soroptimist mission, promote club projects and activities within the community, and effectively reach the media. The materials were designed to be comprehensive so that clubs could use those items that best suit their needs.

Graphic Identity and Style Manual

This manual (found on the members-only website) helps to foster federation-wide unity and accuracy with regard to writing and design. Soroptimist members should refer to the guidelines in the manual to understand how to implement Soroptimist's new visual identity; communicate effectively through proper design; and reach target audiences through a club website.

PR FaxBack Service

This service enables club and region public relations chairs and committees to receive instant advice and suggestions on time-sensitive media materials, such as news releases, letters to the editor, public service announcements, fact sheets, brochures, etc. Members can fax materials to (215) 893-5200 for review. The materials will be faxed back with any changes or comments noted. This service is available in English only.

Federation Website

The federation's official presence on the Web at www.soroptimist.org includes comprehensive information that regions, clubs and members—as well as non-Soroptimists—can use. Currently the site is undergoing a major redesign so that the external site will be more helpful and attractive to the public at large. The internal, members-only site contains a wealth of materials to help clubs accomplish the Soroptimist mission of improving the lives of women and girls, in local communities and throughout the world.

"PRofile" Magazine Article

In every issue of the magazine, the "PRofile" article highlights the public relations implications of federation activities. The article is meant to educate members about what public relations entails and how it benefits the organization as a whole. The article also helps clubs realize the public relations potential of their own activities.

New Club Publicity

This service allows new clubs to receive publicity about their chartering by filling out a special form and sending it back to the public relations coordinator at SIA headquarters. A news release announcing the news will then be sent to the club's local media.

Logotype

The new Soroptimist logotype is available for free from SIA's members-only website for use on stationery, websites or other promotional materials. Soroptimist letterhead, envelope and business card templates are also available. These templates were designed to be provided to a professional printer and customized with the club name and contact information.