

UNIT PUBLICITY



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA
GERALD R. FORD COUNCIL

“How come they never do any news stories about our Pack/Troop/Crew?”

Two answers. The first is because you really *don't* want to be in the news. News is about the weird, sick, and twisted. “Man bites dog.”

But when the paper, TV, and Radio stations are faced with a day full of normality (that is, no news) they look for cute, unusual or uplifting stories to fill the space around the advertising. This is where you want to be, but they have to think about you before they can think to do the story.

What you really want is Unit *Marketing*. Marketing means making your unit a front-of-the-brain idea for people your community, not only making your unit known but also thought-of. Marketing is what each of us does every day personally, showing ourselves in the best light to spouses, employers and acquaintances. It is not manipulative if it is honest.

You will find that Unit Marketing pays off in a bigger unit, more parent volunteers, and more opportunities offered from your community. There are two steps to have people ready to think about your unit --and to think about it in a positive light.

Step #1: Be What You Want Them To Think You Are.

All Scouts learn Community Service, so serve publicly! Cub Scouts Give Good Will. Boy Scouts Do A Good Turn Daily. When you go out to clean the park or do the Adopt-A-Highway, make sure the people who see your Scouts in public know they are Scouts. Encourage full dress uniform for unsloppy events. Encourage a Scout T-shirt for the dirtier jobs. *Always* wear a Scout cap (especially in Michigan when your uniform is covered by a jacket or coat 9 months of the year!).

The National BSA regulations frown on wearing your uniform during fund raising events (except for the popcorn that it endorses). Still, your Scouts will get more cooperation if they are known as Scouts while fund raising. Your Scouts can hand out a separate flyer or have the “sales pitch” start with the phrase “Our Scout group...”. Every order form and every receipt should have the Scout unit name on it.

Scouts are always together. The “buddy system” is basic safety but, beyond that, people expect to see a group of Scouts doing things. Always try to keep your Scouts together in public. They’ll be noticed more and, at the same time, reinforce the public notion of a Scouting team. When Boy Scouts visit public meetings for *Citizenship* and *Communications* merit badges, make sure a group goes together and make sure they wear their uniforms! When traveling, your group will make a good impression at the rest stops, convenience stores and restaurants in uniform.

Every Scout is polite. Make sure the Scouts understand that in public. Always treat other people with extra love and attention. Even Tiger Cubs understand being on display when they go out together.

All Scouts are patriotic. Your Scouts need to be in full uniform at all patriotic events. You will be seen. Go to the Fourth of July fireworks together, in uniform. Attend the Veterans Day services as a group, in uniform. Do a simple flag ceremony for each Township Board meeting. If you can arrange for your local high school to let the Scouts raise the flag at every home game, so much the better!

Scouts are trustworthy and honest. It may sound corny to an adult leader to keep mentioning that to the Scouts themselves, but the first time one of them returns a lost wallet and mentions that he is a Scout, your unit image has taken root!

Scouts are part of the Community, so be sure to use the community's name. Troop 250 and Pack 3136 may be the official designations, but who knows that? On the other hand, everybody locally recognizes the "Byron Center Boy Scout Troop" and the Harrison School Cub Scouts.

Step #2: Let Them Know What You Are Doing!

Included here are some sample news releases showing what might be sent to your local news media. Save the media exposure for your most significant events. You will train the editors to throw your envelopes away unopened if you send a news release for each month's Awards Ceremony. However, they will respond to Five Scouts Receive Eagle Rank Friday Night ... 150 Local Families Learn Snow Safety at Cooperative Cub Scout WinterFest ... 15 Local Boy Scouts Survive New Mexico Mountains.

Whenever your unit does a community service, always get some final report *with numbers* and with *specific information*. Not: Cub Pack Collects Food For Needy. Rather: Sibley School Cubs Gather 750 Pounds For God's Kitchen.

For Boy Scout Troops and Venture Crews, encourage the Scouts themselves to do this publicity. Each Scout Troop should have a Scribe; with a little help, he can write the news releases. A Scout who is working on the *Journalism* merit badge would be a prime candidate for this. A well-written Scout sending home regular letters from an exotic camp (as *Sea Base* or *Philmont*) might find them serialized or gathered into one newspaper article.

Always identify a spokesperson for your unit with phone/e-mail contact info and then (and this does need to be said) --and then *make sure that person can be contacted* (not out-of-town or ill).

Print Probably near the Editorial Page or perhaps on Page-2, every newspaper has a box listing the editors, phone numbers & e-mail addresses. A large newspaper may have several editors, so contact each one of them! The Garden Editor may find inspiration in your event where the Metro Editor does not. Pay close attention to your weekly community (or "shopper") newspapers since they depend on community news for their image.

Call the editor or reporter and ask about photos. Would the paper prefer to take its own or will it accept ones from you? Black'n'white? Color? Electronic .jpg or some other format? Ask about file size and resolution restrictions.

When you take pictures, make sure they show Scouts in uniform doing something active! Pounding the last nail into the Eagle Project is more compelling than a head-and-shoulder shot.

Broadcast Television and Radio will need pictures and sound and likely neither one will accept your recording. Send/e-mail a news invitation before your event with a followup phone call a day or so before. Understand that TV news departments especially want something unique and they want action. 50 Cub Scouts trying to set the record for Michigan's tallest snowman is good. Doing it for a Good Cause is even better. Having the camera crew record it (and the inevitable snowball mischief involved!) is icing on the cake! *Get everyone in uniform!*

Most Radio stations, realistically, are not the least bit interested in community news. Find the one or two in your area that are. Concentrate on them. Radio news reporters will refuse to come to your event if they even suspect it is a "TV photo-op." Most interviews are done on the telephone these days. Have your unit's Chairperson or Cubmaster/Scoutmaster ready to speak. Better yet, use a well-spoken youth leader in a Troop or Crew! Be enthusiastic and assured when speaking.

Signs Do not overlook all those vertical sign spaces in your community. The school or church where your Unit meets might allow you a line or two on their front sign. Perhaps a civic sponsor would lease one of those portable signs at a heavily-traveled corner for your Pancake Breakfast event. Usually, schools will allow Scout posters on bulletinboards. A colorful small poster announcing "{This Business} Is A Proud Sponsor of {community}'s Scout Troop" might be well-received in your community.

The Net World Wide Web pages are easy to write and relatively cheap. Find one person in your unit who can be trusted to keep it up to date. Several big companies such as Yahoo! and GeoCities offer free websites, but usually they bury your "name" inside a complicated address that is hard to remember, much less tell to someone.

You will do so much better if you can find a sponsor to buy your own "address" (URL) for \$35/year. Some area Internet companies (ISP's) may allow you to set up your unique web address with their equipment. That way you get an easier address to include in all news releases and letters. For instance, in Ionia, <http://pack3083.tripod.com> or in Jenison, <http://www.jenisonbsa.org>. It is imperative that a Scout not be identified by last name or have "findable" information (phone, e-mail, address) on a web site. Literally, it is the *world wide* web; publishing opens your information potentially to *6-billion* people.