



A Great Idea

communications

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Partner with a Television Station to Produce Segments on Children's Issues

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In February 2004, Connecticut Voices for Children (CT Voices) released "The ABCs of School Readiness", short videos aimed at educating parents and caregivers on topics affecting children in the 0-5 age range. Each video focuses on a letter of the alphabet and a same-letter topic related to getting young children ready for school. CT Voices has produced videos for three letters and is securing financial sponsors to produce the rest.

Background:

The organization was looking for an effective way to educate parents and soon-to-be parents on early childhood issues from health to early education, while also promoting its "Ready, Set, Grow... CT Kids!" community mobilization campaign (www.readysetgrowctkids.org).

The first video, A ("Asking"), encouraged parents to engage their children through questions, and was followed by "B is for Build", promoting playing with toys (such as blocks) to develop kids' spatial/mental capabilities. The third video, "T is for Teeth", discusses early childhood oral health. Each video is 30 seconds, and airs at least 50 times during prime viewing hours over approximately a two-week period. The original plan was to air one per month.

"Think short, tight and powerful. The average person/viewer has a video attention span of less than 12 minutes. The shorter, more powerful the message, the more apt it is to be repeated." -Jim Battaglio, CT Voices for Children

Key Planning Elements

Finding a media partner: CT Voices realized that television was the best medium to reach parents at all socio-economic levels, from the working poor to policy makers, and approached WTNH, a local ABC affiliate with which it had already begun to develop a relationship. WTNH was responsive, but asked that the project expand to include the local child care council, which had also contacted the station for assistance.

Finding funding: The first two videos were funded by CT Voices, using a community foundation grant earmarked for communications work on the Ready, Set, Grow campaign, and WTNH. The third was funded by an oral health nonprofit seeking to promote dental health (hence, the leap to the letter "T"). At the request of the sponsor, the video was produced in both English and Spanish ("D es para Dientes").

After the first videos aired, area businesses contacted CT Voices to fund the segments, and four companies are negotiating to sponsor the rest of the series. (WTNH also assembled a sales kit used by CT Voices in its search for sponsors.) Voices works with the sponsor to choose a topic and to determine who will host the video. The

sponsor agrees to distribute related literature to its employees, and the sponsor's name and logo are shown at the end of the segment.

Finding topics and conveying them effectively: The school readiness council joined the effort, eventually creating a curriculum around every letter of the alphabet for use by child care providers and children's museums. CT Voices is using it to guide the video series, planting the seeds for moving individuals from a personal interest to one that recognizes the broader issues for children in the state and to match a sponsor's interest and perspective with the goals of CT Voices and its partners.

Finding people to host the segments: CT Voices felt that the WTNH news anchors would be familiar to parents and be ideal hosts for the series. The station's evening and morning anchors have both hosted episodes—the third video used cartoons and canned footage. CT Voices also allows sponsors to choose a different host, and many have discussed using their chief executive.

Staff Time

- Initial contact and negotiations with the television station were accomplished by CT Voices' communications staff.
- This project required several weeks of time from one of CT Voices' board members, a senior communications consultant with the Ready, Set, Grow campaign, who wrote the scripts for the early segments. CT Voices' co-President and communications staff were part of the in-house review.
- CT Voices has promoted the series through its website and its early care & education list serve. It is also reaching out to its partners across the state for support in getting local cable access channels to air the videos.
- CT Voices' board was initially involved in building a relationship with the community foundation sponsoring the first two videos.

Costs

- Each video costs \$10,000 to air. The station has donated staff labor and production costs to what is now viewed as a multi-year television project.

Timeline

- Video production time varies, depending on funding, studio time, and host availability. On average, all parties coordinate completion of the script, content research, and production over the course of two weeks.
- Videos are posted on CT Voices' and WTNH's websites with the original files held by WTNH.
- Although the original goal was to produce as many as possible to also influence policy makers before the legislature meets in 2005, it has been tempered by the realities of finding financial sponsors.

Results

- The videos are a valuable resource to parents and CT Voices, and many other children's issues groups as well--other organizations have already contacted CT Voices about using the videos.
- Feedback from viewers has been excellent, both anecdotally and in heightened activity on the website.
- CT Voices is using the videos in a drive to get names on a petition for better early childhood education. CT Voices sponsors the Ready, Set, Grow campaign on school readiness in the state, and its Ready Rabbit mascot is tied into each video. Nearly 2,000 kids and their parents have signed on to the on-line petition since the video series began.