

MARKETING OF RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS INVOLVING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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Abstract: Marketing of resource management programs to the general public often poses problems to information officers. Too often the public is uncaring and apathetic about resource programs unless the programs involve controversial problems. To better educate the public about resource management and to spur interest and participation in such programs, the information staff at Land Between The Lakes has developed a series of guidelines by which activities have been marketed. Staff has been successful in marketing resource programs and in generating interest to attract satisfactory attendance.

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Too often public information officers who deal with resource related programs find themselves faced with what might have once been considered a major dilemma—promoting or marketing resource programs to the general public, a public that is quite frequently apathetic and uncaring about such activities.

Although promotion may not sound difficult, the typical resource program does not always excite the man on the street. Yet, it is general public support that is most often sought after and needed in times of controversy, especially as it relates to resource management programs. It is for this reason the public must be spurred to participate in such programs to gain a better understanding and support for resource management.

In 1973, the Tennessee Valley Authority at Land Between The Lakes observed the first National Hunting & Fishing Day proclaimed by President Richard Nixon as the third Saturday of each September. Attendance the first year was 75 people. Assuming that all of the ingredients of a quality program were present—that speakers and demonstrators were authoritative, interesting, had a broad base of experience, and could relate to the people—then why did so few people attend?

After all, this observance was comprehensive, involving demonstrations of bait and fly casting, deer stalking, turkey and deer management, and even the demonstration of a cannon net used in the trapping of deer. Each part of the 1973 program was conducted by qualified people and, in the stated definition of quality, the program was certainly acceptable.

However, in 1973, 1 news release was sent to the news media in about a 100-mile radius. There were no radio or television releases, no personal contact or invitations were made to the regional media or target audiences, and consequently, no follow-up was made with the media.

Two reporters actually covered the 1973 Hunting and Fishing Day. One of those was this writer who was employed at that time by a local newspaper.

If the evaluation for a successful program is the measure of the quality of the program, then the first observance was indeed a success. Information officers at Land Between the Lakes termed the first observance a moderate success and, in view of the fact that it was a first, this writer might concur.

But how do public information officers who must generate interest in such programs feel when 75 people attend? Well, if their goal was 50 people, they'd probably celebrate with wine and cheese; if their marketing goal was 200 people, they'd quite naturally don the black garb and mourn.

Land Between the Lakes information representatives, in an effort to plan for the success of such programs, designed in 1974 a marketing concept to follow in the dissemination of program information. Take for example the 1974 through 1977 observances of National Hunting and Fishing Day. Working in cooperation with the resource management unit in particular, the Wildlife Management Section and representatives of the recreation and environmental education staff—the information staff at Land Between The Lakes formulated for LBL a comprehensive marketing program for resource management programs involving public participation.

Designing and implementing the marketing program was the responsibility of the information staff in cooperation with the various sections responsible for the National

Hunting and Fishing Day program design. Determining and assigning priorities of program elements were also left to the staff.

Priorities were given these elements as follows: 1) An attendance equal to but preferably greater than the previous year's observance would result in a successful program. It should be noted that no specific attendance figures were set in 1974 through 1977. If attendance projections must be set, they must be rational and obtainable. 2) The quality of experience the participant would engage in—whether it be archery, fly casting, preparation of wild game, or whatever—must be of the highest nature, necessitating qualified, experience instructors who could relate easily to people. 3) Specific target audiences would be personally notified by staff and contact would be maintained over a period of several weeks to assure their participation. Included would be such groups as bass clubs, coonhunters, quail hunters, general sportsmen's groups and such specialty groups as outdoor writers and columnists. 4) Prior information on the program would be disseminated on a set schedule, and the area media including radio and television would be saturated with the information. 5) Above all, the public would be educated about some facet of the resource management program and at the same time would be entertained. To affirm this, post-release material showing the public participating and enjoying themselves would be disseminated to the area media immediately following the activity. This creates a continuing atmosphere of good public relations.

In 1974, 7 news releases and 5 electronic releases including radio tapes and 16 mm public service announcements were issued. In subsequent years slightly higher number of news releases and electronic releases were used to promote the program.

Letters of invitation were sent to each member of the known clubs and organizations interested in outdoor related activity. Letters of invitation, followed by telephone contact, were sent to each member of the press that staff determined had an interest in covering the activity. As a result of this, 131 articles on National Hunting and Fishing Day were prepared by 43 area media representatives from 1974 through 1977. To generate interest among the general populace, special flyers and posters were distributed throughout the region a month prior to the program.

Staff participated for 2 weeks prior to the activity in radio and television appearances involving some 8 stations covering a 300-mile radius. Staff, in each interview stressed public involvement in the programs; that is, "Come out and learn to fly cast, obedience train your dog, prepare and cook wild game, or brush up on your wildlife photography."

In the planning of each year's observance, care was taken to show all elements of the resource management program at Land Between The Lakes, again, an opportunity to provide a positive outlet for a sometimes controversial topic. Items about selective timber harvest, deer and turkey management, and open land management were introduced to the public through displays, slide programs and movies. Special care was taken by staff to assure that qualified biologists and foresters were present to answer questions. Staff also utilized professionals that related easily to the public.

Each year, special attention was taken in planning to assure that the casual observer at the activity would be entertained as well as informed. For example, one year's observance stressed a wildlife arts and crafts show. Duck decoy carvings, wildlife photography and paintings were on display. Another observance highlighted outdoor clothing for all ages of men and women through an outdoor fashion show, another first for Land Between the Lakes. Still another year's observance centered around a flea market featuring fishing, hunting, boating, camping, and hiking equipment.

Each of these activities offered the general public an entertaining as well as an educational experience. Of course, the outdoor enthusiast was naturally complimentary of the activity as well.

But, how about those programs that were participatory, not merely spectator events? Those, too, were offered, and frequently were used in the leads of news releases to promote the observance. Such activities as archery, BB gun target shooting, competition in the turkey calling contest, all attracted not only the target audiences but the general public as well.

Attendance at the observance from 1974 through 1977 averaged 2100 people per year, the highest year being 1975 with 2500 people and the lowest being 1977 with 1500 people.

To assure an adequate foundation on which to market future programs, on-site coverage of each observance was conducted by the information staff. News and feature

photography, both black and white and color, and 16 mm footage for future public service announcement use were generated.

Post-release material emphasized local people in the region. Post-coverage release from 1974 through 1977 by staff consisted of 6 news releases and 80 photos.

Each year, following the observance, an assessment was made by staff of the marketing program. Subsequent revisions were made in regard to pre- and post-release material on a subjective determination as to what the media would bear.

Assessments of the program quality and utility were also made by the resource management staff and other members, with information staff input, and adjustments were made in the coordination and preparation of next year's activities.

Following the establishment of the marketing program in 1974, the same basic concept has been applied to numerous other activities that have been sponsored or cosponsored by the Tennessee Valley Authority. With these techniques, the first bass symposium ever held in the state, in 1975, attracted 300 people. The program featured experts from 5 different states. Well-attended programs involving turkey management were conducted in 1976-77. Combined attendance totaled 600.

Using the same concept, staff successfully marketed a clean-up program in 1977 and 1978 entitled "Bag It" Day. For the 2 years, more than 800 people collected 22 tons of litter. This was the first major clean-up campaign ever conducted at Land Between The Lakes.

The same basic plan has been modified and applied to the marketing of other activities at Land Between The Lakes, including arts and crafts festivals, fishing rodeos, and open houses.

Very basically the Land Between The Lakes marketing information concept involves the following points:

1. Establish the overall goal of the program that is to be marketed. Remember the selling of that program must be approached from a positive public relations standpoint irrespective of how controversial the program might appear, or how apathetic the public might appear to be toward the program.
2. Determine an obtainable and rational attendance criterion. If the program is a first, do not be overzealous in your estimation.
3. Utilize all forms of the media—print and electronic—to their fullest potential in both pre- and post-coverage. Again keep in mind the idea is to constantly seek positive public relations.
4. Work personally, and preferably one on one, with media on the day of the activity for maximum positive exposure. Be sure to contact each member of the media personally prior to the event by letter and then by telephone. Then followup on coverage and maintain continuing contact.
5. Use all available tools to market the program to specific target audiences for a solid audience foundation, that is, such tools as flyers, posters, and letters to specific target audiences. And finally, plan well ahead on any and all problems whether they be media or general public concerns. Through the LBL experience we've learned it's better to be overly prepared than to be unpleasantly surprised.

Although modification of this concept will be necessary if it is to be applied to other programs, if the basic premises are followed the work of any information staff in marketing such programs will be greatly relieved.