

“Media essentials and brand awareness - tips and strategies for maximizing media coverage for your co-operative”

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Introduction

For many co-operatives operating in the current Australian economic climate, gaining access to the media and getting good coverage for your activities and successes represents something of the ‘Holy Grail’.

This workshop will examine some of the proven strategies used by Sommerson Communications to assist co-operatives in gaining media attention and optimising media coverage. We will begin from understanding your business and product to discussing brand identity, the co-op difference, global perspectives and case studies, and give examples of press releases that work. We will also provide a media essentials toolkit, focusing on the most cost effective ways to generate publicity and profile your co-operative in the free press and community media networks.

1. Know your business

Firstly, begin by truly knowing your business and why you exist. Does your mission statement clearly express who you are and what you do?

Go back to basics. Get to know your history, what is unique or new about your business, your product and your people?

2. Know your product

What are you ‘selling’, trading, marketing, or providing as a service?

For example, what does Mercedes Benz sell?



Cars? Or ‘legends of passion’ – are they catering to a dream?

3. Know your brand – the co-op brand ...

And - how to get the most out of it. ‘Co-op’ is a market niche, which translates into market advantage, so use it.

Media essentials and brand awareness

Co-operative Opportunities Conference February 18/19, 2010



What is the co-op brand/identity – what does the research tell us?

More than a quarter of Australians believe co-operatives and other mutual forms of business are the best providers of banking and insurance services, according to the first *Australian Social Attitudes Survey*, published in 2004 by the Australian Centre for Social Research (ACSR). Twenty-two percent also believed them to be the best providers of food retailing. Andrew Passey, former research fellow at the Australian Centre for Co-operative Research and Development (ACCORD), who was involved in the research, commented in a press release that the figures were surprisingly high given the emphasis shareholders place on the market economy in Australia.

What is unique about the co-op brand and what is the co-op difference?

Co-operative business is a people-centred approach to business. What we do well, is to put people before profit; in other words, values-based economic purpose and prosperity.

4. What is the co-operative advantage?

Collectively, people join forces for a common cause - social purpose and values-based economic prosperity.

“The advances of the information age offer new possibilities for maximising the power of the collective voice. Social movement networks must increasingly negotiate new opportunities and constraints in the expression of their values and objectives and in mobilising others in support of their causes.” (Dr Jo Barraket, Third Sector Review, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2001, ‘Third Sector as a Voice’)

It is ... the power of the collective voice ...

5. Applying the ‘co-op difference’



CASE STUDY 1: Dotcoop www.nic.coop/

“.coop” - the only domain name created specifically for the use of co-ops and co-op organisations, was established to capitalise on the co-op brand and to exploit ‘the co-operative difference’.

Dotcoop launched in 2002. It is an inexpensive and effective internet branding tool for the identification of and use by co-operative organisations around the world. Unlike other global top-level domain names such as **.com**, or **.org**, the purchase and use of the **.coop** domain name is restricted only to bona fide co-operatives and co-operative service organisations that ascribe to the Co-operative Principles of the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), such as member ownership and control.

The **.coop** domain allows consumers to identify ethical, community-concerned businesses simply by virtue of the domain.

- Dotcoop provides co-operatives with a distinct competitive advantage. Co-operatives can differentiate their businesses from a sea of **.coms** and add value to their web site
- Co-ops gain from the consumer trust, co-operatives have built over the past 100 years
- Co-ops increase their Internet exposure and website traffic by using multiple names to point to their site



CASE STUDY 2: The cooperative (UK) rebranded in 2007

www.co-operative.coop/

from community projects
to a share of the profits,
we're good for everyone



The Co-operative Group is a United Kingdom consumers' co-operative, and, after the acquisition of Somerfield supermarkets, is the world's largest consumer-owned business.

Last year, at a time when many PLCs were experiencing a downturn in profitability, the co-operative, was posting record highs – over 5% up on the previous year. Members (owners) surged by 4.5% to 11.3 million (1 in 5 of the population). Many other co-ops also posted record profits in the past year including regionally based co-operative societies such as Midlands, East of England and Midcounties (net profit up by 7.2%) - the highest level in recent years.

What did the Co-operative Group do with the increased profit in the last 12 months?

- Gave back to members or owners (shared profits)
- Invested 7% in social programs (compared to less than 1% given in community grants by Australian supermarket retailer – Woolworths)
- Spent £70m pounds on a television rebranding campaign to create high street brand awareness

Take a look at the television commercial featuring Bob Dylan's timeless classic '*Blowin in the Wind*' <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2009/feb/16/bob-dylan-co-op-ad>

Why did Bob Dylan agree to the use of his song for this campaign? Because co-ops globally have an ethical brand name – the word 'co-op' comes with some pretty powerful messages – watch the ad and be moved!

- Bought supermarket group Somerfield creating a powerful fifth player to challenge Britain's big four and maintain co-operative food retailing's position as the country's biggest convenience food retailer.
- Merged two banks into a super mutual – 'The merger ... will create a 'super mutual', capable of attracting customers disillusioned with the country's banks, by promising the fair treatment and ethical policies that Co-operative Financial Services (CFS) is already renowned for.'

Dame Pauline Green, ICA President and former Chief Executive of Co-operativesUK, says: 'Co-operatives are run by people, for people, and our renaissance demonstrates that, in the 21st Century, working together is as strong an economic and personal motivator as it has always been. Instead of blindly chasing profits like businesses controlled by shareholders, we are able to steer our business in a more responsible direction'.

6. Know your sector

'The co-operative advantage' – it's important to understand your sector and exploit your difference.

Did you know? You are part of a global movement that has more than a billion members, has an aggregate turnover of 1.1 trillion – equivalent to the 10th largest economy in the world - and employs 20% more people than all the multinational companies put together?



Find out more by visiting the website of the global peak body for co-operatives, the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) - www.ica.coop

Also visit www.global300.coop for news and data on the world's top 300 co-ops (by annual turnover).

The ICA Digest, a quarterly newsletter; ICA Twitter; and regular RSS feeds are available free of charge from the ICA website.

Shifting consumer expectations and choices means the smart money is on marketing to the 'ethical consumer' – witness the growth in sales of Fairtrade products, the shift to co-operative banks and growth in mutual insurers.

The 2009 International Labour Organisation report titled, "*Resilience of the Cooperative Business Model in Times of Crisis*" (found at www.ica.coop/activities/un/2009-coop-resilience.pdf) confirmed that co-operatives had outperformed many of their 'for-profit' counterparts during the Global Financial Crisis. The report indicated an increase in the numbers of co-operatives formed since the onset of the recession. And, in general, co-operatives outlast other types of businesses.

So, are you missing out on a marketing coup? The GFC has provided a great opportunity to consolidate and grow the brand.

The message is: Know your sector, understand your sector and apply the 7 Co-operative Principles

1. Voluntary and Open Membership
2. Democratic Member Control
3. Member Economic Participation
4. Autonomy and Independence
5. Education, Training and Information
6. Co-operation Among Co-operatives
7. Concern for Community

Find out more at www.ica.coop/coop/principles.html

Know them, stick to them, do not deviate and your co-operative will reap social, economic and promotional benefits for years to come.

Now more so than ever, the GFC has presented a unique opportunity to capitalise on the desire to shift to a values-based economy.

You are custodians of the brand. Imagine yourselves inside the bubble; what can we do together and why do it?

- Opportunity to establish a lasting brand. Longevity is more important than ever.
- You will be educating people and the media in the process.
- Co-ops are not a charity, they are ethical businesses. The ICA is running with the message: "Not just good at business, but the best form of business".



7. Media essentials toolkit - How to get your message out?

CASE STUDY 1: Capturing media attention – high profile campaigns

Or, 'you might just have a big story!'

On the 2/01/2009, ABC TV's 7.30 Report ran a full story on co-operative business in Australia, titled "Co-operative movement weathers economic storm", with the introduction ...

"The worldwide co-operative movement, say that their banks and other businesses are flourishing in the face of the global financial crisis. The co-operative movement whose funding principles put people before profit claim they are a sustainable force in the community."

Read the full transcript www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2008/s2458327.htm

This high profile current affairs slot was a major coup for the co-operative sector. The report came out of media Sommerson Communications managed for the 2008 Co-operative Federation of NSW Conference.

How did we do it? Here are our tactics ...

Apply the Rules of Engagement:

1. Targeted campaigns – find the right message
2. Short targeted Press release
3. Relevance – what's going on in the wider economy or political discourse that might tie in with your story?
4. Explain the 'brand' – mention that you are a co-op and what that stands for
5. Good quotes – appoint a spokesperson or spokespeople
6. Statistics – *numbers, numbers, numbers* - media, especially the financial press, love them!

Press releases - How to work media magic with your media release:

If you have a budget, even a small one, engage a media specialist to at least write your first draft and open the right doors to media outlets, or point you in the right direction with your 'angle'.



SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE ...how to make the media take notice in a GFC

“Co-ops shout above corporate chorus” *“Find the right message”*

In the midst of a global financial meltdown, capitalist pundits calling for 'business as usual' are missing the point, according to the Co-operative Federation of NSW. Just ask the millions of Australians wondering how they will fund their retirement. Look at the impact of market failures like ABC Learning and the latest decision by St George shareholders to merge their bank with Westpac. Despite the short-term windfalls to the shareholders, the move will lead to increased market concentration, less consumer choice, job losses and branch closures - hardly a socially desirable outcome.

“Relevance”

The co-operative is a long-standing and successful alternative to the public corporation. The co-operative form of business includes mutuals, credit unions and many newer forms of social enterprise. It is a model that is not at the mercy of stock markets. It is controlled by local people for local people with a long-term outlook.

“Branding and educating”

The top 5 co-ops and mutuals in Australia generate more than \$7.6 billion in annual turnover. The co-operative sector in NSW provides almost 10,000 jobs and is owned and controlled by more than 1.5 million members. The top 300 mutual and co-operative organisations in the world have combined assets estimated at US\$40 trillion and an annual turnover of US\$963 billion - almost equivalent to Canada's, the world's 9th largest economy.

“Statistics” - I'm in love!

Rainer Schlüter, Director of Cooperatives Europe, said, “It is no coincidence that the world's most successful and stable economies also happen to have the world's most co-operative economies. It is also no coincidence, that those businesses that have stayed faithful to their co-operative values and principles, are the same businesses that in recent weeks have benefited from the flight of deposits and bank accounts from the failing and collapsing investment houses and banks – an acknowledgement of the continuing trust with which they are endowed by the general public”.

“Quotes and spokespeople”

At the national conference of the Co-operative Federation of NSW, on 26-27 November in Sydney, co-operatives will be urged to shout above the chorus of corporates calling for business as usual.

“Wrap it up” - short, targeted media release

End.



Capturing media attention – free press, community media, social media

Who are you pitching to?

What kind of story is it? – business, economic, community, environment, education, urban affairs, politics, general news?

Local media is hungry for stories. Stories must have a community angle, always provide background, personal examples, human interest, and highlight who's winning and who's losing. Think about where the controversy is – that's what makes news.

Journalists and media contacts – who covers what and for which publication? - develop a relationship with the journalists who write for your local press, and with those who cover news, in your sector, in the big dailies.

ALWAYS, ALWAYS chase the media – they won't chase you, no matter how good you think your story is!

CASE STUDY 2: Turn a short story into a novel

The following story about the Ethnic Child Care, Family and Community Services Co-operative appeared in the Inner West Courier, in November last year.

CO-OP TURNING 30

The Ethnic Child Care, Family & Community Services Co-operative will celebrate its 30th anniversary at the Addison Rd community hall on November 25. NSW Governor Dr Marie Bashir will attend the event and launch a commemorative booklet and DVD. The co-operative runs childcare and disability services for culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The challenge

A local paper is a good place for a short community notice – but what is the bigger story hiding under this piece?

Is there an opportunity for a follow-up story? What might tempt a journalist to turn up and cover the event?

The strategy

What will interest the media?

In this case, linking into the childcare debate that has been raging since the collapse of ABC Learning Centres in 2008, could pose some interesting media angles -

- Was this centre ever in danger of closing, or is it thriving and why?
- Do they have to turn people away because demand is growing?
- Can someone comment on the strength of the co-operative structure in this economic climate and why the centre has survived for a quarter of a century? Compare this track record with how many years ABC Learning Centres lasted.
- What's the back story? Who started the co-op and why?
- Statistics – grab some stats off the internet about the decline in childcare places and rising costs and put together a little story (Bureau of Statistics can help out too)
- Follow-up with the 'right' journalists - could be writers who cover education, urban affairs, or columnists who write about family affairs
- And, remember to mention the photo opportunity with the VIP!
- If you can swing it – get your VIP to comment on what's so great about your enterprise and why they have chosen to celebrate with you

CASE STUDY 3: Unleash your hidden agenda

The following article appeared on page 7 of the SMH on 9 November 2009 - While it is good news to see a co-operative featured in the Herald, could it have been better if they had mentioned it was about a co-operative?

Media release

Trash to treasure - recycling warehouse pulls in the crowds

By JESSICA MAHAR, SMH: November 9, 2009

CIRCUIT board lamps, reams of fabric and a sofa made from a 44-gallon drum are just a few of the reused items at Reverse Garbage, a Marrickville warehouse attracting increasing numbers of people on tight budgets.

The warehouse sells discarded odds and ends and is popular with people looking for art-and-craft supplies or items for do-it-yourself home projects.

But the financial crisis and a focus on sustainability has led others on tight budgets to the second-hand emporium, said its public relations co-ordinator, Christine Harris-Smyth.

"A lot of what we do is driven by women who hold the household purse strings and kids who are learning about sustainability at school. They think it's cool," she said.

Reverse Garbage diverts 12,000 cubic metres of product each year from landfill to reusable resources. Stock varies from week to week - this week there are mugs, a purple vinyl bean bag and leather piano stools.

Belinda Grist, a design student, picked up sunglass lenses, fabric, cushions and some garlands for her daughter's birthday next week. She likes that whatever she buys helps the environment.



This week is National Recycling Week, and organisers want to encourage people to increase their knowledge of the second step in the "three-R's" campaign of reducing consumption, reusing and recycling.

Planet Ark's campaigns manager, Brad Gray, said the idea of reusing was sometimes foreign in a society of consumerism. "We've got to get people used to the idea of reusing again like our grandparents and parents used to do," he said.

"It's about getting people out of that mindset of having to buy something new."

The Big Aussie Swap being held across the country this week allows people to bring items to swap at locations in their community.

"The environmental cost of swapping something is less than buying it new," Mr Gray said.

National Recycling Week runs from today until Sunday.

End.

The analysis

Yes, the focus is on recycling, but was there a way to combine the co-op and the sustainability message? What about explaining the way the co-operative structure of the business, serves the 'sustainability' needs of the members?

Reverse Garbage is catering to the needs of their members not just the needs of others – The member benefits for the people that are active in Reverse Garbage are about making a difference in society and seeing waste being reused. Their benefits come from the outcomes of others facilitated by RG – was this view articulated through the media release or during an interview with the journalist? What would be the market benefits to RG from promoting the co-op brand? More members, more trade?

- Opportunity to increase your market through a news story – RG could attract not only 'environmentally minded' consumers but also those attracted to businesses that trade ethically.
- Understanding the Co-operative Principle of 'co-operation among co-operatives', is about the need to strengthen co-operative solidarity more generally. All this goes back to better co-operative education among co-ops.

CASE STUDY 4: Getting the message right

At the 2008 Living Co-operatively Symposium (www.mercury.org.au/lc/), we worked with councils, government agencies, co-operatives, academics and community organisers to get a broad message to the general public about the need to examine co-operative solutions to housing for Australians.

By picking up on a topical issue of hot debate in the media – i.e. the crisis in affordable housing – the press release and news of the Symposium was picked up by a huge array of media outlets from local and national radio, to local press, industry publications, daily broadsheets and overseas media.

Step 1: The right message

Find a great hook.

"The co-operative solution to reviving the Australian dream"



Step 2: Relevance

Make it topical.

“With Australia being named the least affordable nation for housing in a recent international survey, a UTS-led consortium is raising the flag for co-operative housing as a viable, but virtually ignored, solution for those priced out of the market.”

Step 3: Who, What, Why, Where?

Short, targeted press release.

UTS and two Sydney councils, Marrickville and Parramatta, backed by several organisations that promote and support co-operatives, have joined forces to put co-operative housing back on the agenda at the Living Co-operatively Symposium to be held on 13 and 14 February at Petersham Town Hall in Sydney’s inner west.

Step 4: Spokespeople and quotes

Great spokespeople, interesting quotes.

The symposium's keynote address will be given by visiting Swedish co-operative housing expert Gun-Britt Mårtensson.

Mårtensson says that in Sweden everyone from doctors to teachers, lawyers to widows choose co-operative housing, and there is high status attached to membership of a co-operative.

However, the definition of co-operative housing in NSW needs to be updated for the Scandinavian model to apply here, according to Jenny Onyx, Professor of Community Management in the Faculty of Business, University of Technology Sydney (UTS).

"We have anecdotal evidence from several co-op housing projects in Australia which suggests that they have enormous potential for both the marginal income earner and the relatively affluent”.

Step 5: Distribution

Circulate it as widely as possible.

With affordable housing in the media, we knew this story had wide appeal. Our targets were:

- Free press, daily broadsheets – urban affairs, housing and environment writers
- Local press
- Industry magazines and periodicals wanting longer features
- Community organisations – many have newsletters and calendars on their websites
- Community blogs and websites like ‘Community Builders’
- National, regional and local radio
- Community radio
- TV and current affairs

Think laterally about which media outlets will have an interest. We targeted media in other regions as well. This example is from the Parramatta Advertiser, which picked up the story because the Lord Mayor of Parramatta was speaking.



Media release

Parra leads housing talkfest

A SYMPOSIUM on Australia's affordable-housing crisis will be held by Parramatta and Marrickville councils at Petersham town hall today and tomorrow. The Living Co-operatively: Affordable Housing - Sustainable Communities Symposium brings together urban planners, state and national housing politicians and social thinkers to explore policy options for local government. Parramatta Lord Mayor Paul Barber will attend and speak on how Parramatta Council is tackling the housing crisis. International housing specialist, Gun- Britt Martensson, will discuss the Scandinavian model for affordable housing.

End

Parramatta Advertiser

13/02/2008

Page: 25

General News

Region: Sydney Circulation: 83143

Type: Suburban

8. Conclusion - Review your co-operative's media skill-set

Do you have a budget?

"Yes?" Seek professional advice on a targeted PR campaign. If you have a small budget, ask the media company what they can provide. Engaging a media specialist to write the first draft of a press release at least, can have great results.

"No budget?" Then apply the 'Rules of Engagement' and follow-up!

Amazing results can be obtained from good stories, 'on the smell of an oily rag'. In your co-operative, discuss how to get your message out and what you think will grab media attention.

Fundamentals

Positive media coverage gives your co-operative credibility, sales and supporters. This is why companies employ PR professionals to write press releases, conduct media campaigns and build strong relationships with journalists.

Mainstream media is a powerful publicity tool, but with the rapid growth of social media other avenues have opened as well.

RSS Feeds

Anyone can use online tools to request the content they want, using "RSS" (Really Simple Syndication) news feeds and other news filtering services, emailed straight to their inbox.

Free Publicity

Internet-based communication has boundless potential. The benefits of combining traditional public relations with web or social media are clear: Your co-operative can gain visibility, build a strong, credible brand and measure the outcomes.

Other communications activities

- Lobbying financial editors for regular column space on the wider social economy in one of the major dailies
- Sourcing the advertising commitment to back up your features

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- Preparing story leads which use controversy as a springboard for 'good news' stories about co-ops
- Produce a newsletter which acts as a clearing house for national and international news

9. Advocacy

Remember, in changing perceptions and seizing opportunities:

- Timing is important
- Pushing the stories is critical
- Believing in your 'brand' is essential

10. Resources and links

Keep abreast of developments, network and get to know your sector. Some links:

www.ica.coop

www.global300.coop

www.nic.coop/

www.australia.coop/

www.coopsnsw.coop/

www.socialtraders.com.au

www.capricorn.coop

www.socialbusiness.coop

www.mercury.org.au

www.ncba.coop

www.coopscanada.coop/

www.cooperatives-uk.coop

www.nz.coop

www.co-op.ac.uk/

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Sommerson 'thoughts for the day'

"Never waste a serious crisis"

"Don't hide your light under a bushel"

