

City of Tacoma Public Relations Plan

Introduction

Since its founding the City of Tacoma has competed fiercely with Seattle. This continuing rivalry created a sense of inferiority in Tacoma as Seattle grew to become the largest city in the state. Although today's citizens may not be concerned with these comparisons, many still perceive Tacoma to be a lesser city dwarfed by its neighbor to the north. The perceptions of the city as a blue-collar mill town with environmental problems will take time to fade.

In recent years the city has moved toward developing its own identity not as a rival to Seattle, but as a center for activity in the South Puget Sound region. Tacoma has taken the lead on a number of projects designed to create a regional focus for culture, health, commerce and development and was recognized by *Money* magazine last year as one of the most livable cities in the country.

As we reviewed the information provided by City staff, it became apparent that significant gains have been made in many areas—yet the information about these improvements is not being distributed effectively. The attached proposal focuses on ways to assist the city's efforts to tell its story. The story we propose is not based on promotional hype or a glitzy advertising campaign, but the impressive story of solid development and achievements that provide a strong foundation for future growth.

Goal

To shift attitudes in a positive direction that will generate and sustain the necessary investment and energy for the city to continue its forward momentum.

Objective

Develop an information campaign to "tell Tacoma's story."

Target Audiences

Area residents, businesses, City employees and media representatives. Secondary targets include regional and national audiences.

Research

Conduct attitude surveys of residents, businesses and City employees to establish baseline data.

Conduct media data search to assess regional media coverage, and identify trends by publication or media market.

Analyze market share of regional radio and TV stations, as well as percentage of Tacoma households subscribing to The Morning News Tribune, Times and P-I.

Strategies

1. Develop the Tacoma story.

- ❖ Identify City accomplishments for last ten years and define the vision.
- ❖ Define a set of key messages to be used as basic building blocks for speeches, news releases and publications. Suggested topics include:

Preserving the Environment Preserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the greater Tacoma environment through proactive park and open space development, enforcement of environmental protection laws and the encouragement of environmentally sound land uses.

Managing Growth Providing an atmosphere of compatible growth and smooth transitions among the City's residential, industrial and business communities.

Public Safety Providing a safe living environment for all citizens through effective, prompt and friendly law enforcement and fire service.

Economic Development Encouraging the growth of existing job providers while fostering an environment that will attract new businesses to Tacoma.

Investing in the Community Enhancing the lifestyle of all citizens through investments that result in affordable housing, education and health services, multi-cultural celebrations, cultural arts opportunities and recreation.

- ❖ Compile historical photos and anecdotes to illustrate the city's history and rich architecture while reinforcing that it has moved forward.
- ❖ Apply for awards for City programs to reinforce accomplishments and establish third-party credibility. Suggested awards include:
 - All-American City
 - City Livability
 - Mayor's Awards Program
 - Municipal Achievement
 - National Leadership Forum on Community Service
 - Exemplary State and Local Awards Program

2. Develop a proactive team to tell Tacoma's story.

- ❖ Enlist members of the Public Information Round Table, a group of approximately 12 public information officers from governments and agencies in Pierce County, to help promote the city in their materials.
- ❖ Create a speaking team of the Mayor, Council Members and key staff people to make presentations to civic organizations, service clubs, community groups and schools that reinforce the key messages.
- ❖ Explore joint projects with colleges to provide opportunities for students to become involved with City government while working with staff on communication projects such as attitude, research and advertising programs.
- ❖ Involve key City staff people in developing and implementing the information campaign to ensure the appearance of key messages in all City publications such as the Grapevine.

3. Get the story out.

Change methods/format of existing communication vehicles to utilize them in communicating key messages.

- ❖ Change format of general government utility bill insert to a City Progress Report that promotes one key message every two months. *(Takes advantage of the only print media available that does not require an increase in mailing or production costs.)*
- ❖ Better utilize the municipal channel, City Cable 12, to promote key messages in programming and text information.
- ❖ Increase the audience for CityScope, a monthly video news feature that appears on City Cable 12 *(CityScope is the only television program that focus exclusively on local activities and events. It effectively documents community projects and events by showing and telling the story through interviews and narration. Increasing the audience for this program will increase its ability to stimulate attitude change by providing information that also appeals to people at an emotional level.)*
- ❖ Develop methods for using the CityScope program as a news vehicle for employees of the City, County and related agencies. *(Increases the opportunities for positive interaction between government employees and citizens and reinforces key messages.)*
- ❖ Provide promotional video, similar to "Over Washington," to corporations, news departments, sell to citizens, etc. *(This is a joint project with the County and Port that is currently being developed.)*
- ❖ Develop a list of video programs available from City Cable 12 that staff and council can request for use in public speaking engagements.
- ❖ Aggressively promote the Tacoma story through "City and Schools Together," a City speakers bureau for school presentations.
- ❖ Schedule regular editorial board briefings with The Morning News Tribune regarding progress in key message areas.
- ❖ Develop a short video showing progress being made in key message areas to be aired on City Cable 12 before and after City Council meetings.
- ❖ Place key messages in documentary videos.

3. Get the story out (continued).

Develop additional vehicles to communicate messages.

- ❖ Submit articles to professional publications on key message areas.
- ❖ Prepare guest editorials on key message areas for The Morning News Tribune.
- ❖ Develop a short 30-second promotional video from the promotional video currently in progress. Series of gorgeous scenes, tightly edited with voice-over: "There's a name for a place like this. . ." pause, then voice-over and graphic, "Tacoma."
or, "Take a look at Tacoma."
- ❖ Publish a brief Tacoma Update bulletin for legislators, community leaders and key businesses. This bi-monthly publication would essentially repeat the key messages contained in the utility insert Progress Report, but would be aimed at influential people who might keep copies in their reception areas or share them with others.
- ❖ Develop a community-wide comprehensive mailing list for all promotional publications and news releases to facilitate cross-promotions. (Include editors and special event coordinators, association newsletters, Chamber newsletter, various employee newsletters, Associated Ministries, United Neighborhoods of Tacoma, Daffodil Festival promotions, City Hall at the Mall, etc.)
- ❖ Pool the resources of local government agencies to consolidate efforts that closely parallel each other and use savings to fund additional projects such as a special report on the environment.
- ❖ Pursue changes that would increase the broadcast area for City Cable 12.
- ❖ Investigate ways to establish ties with KPLU and Channel 11.
- ❖ Conduct media training for spokespersons to help them provide information in a way that appeals to media representatives while promoting key messages.
- ❖ Develop activity book about Tacoma for distribution to elementary school students.
- ❖ Develop permanent and portable display kiosks to provide access to city information (through publications and an interactive video terminal). Suggested permanent locations: Tacoma Mall, Tacoma Dome, City Hall, County-City Building. Suggested uses for portable displays: Summer Pops! concerts, events at Tacoma Dome and Broadway Theater District, career days at local schools, etc.

3. Get the story out (continued).

Repeat the messages in various ways over an extended period of time.

- ❖ Identify major events well in advance, such as the demolition of ASARCO smokestack, reopening of the Rialto theater, etc. so that Tacoma can take advantage of every opportunity to reinforce the key messages by targeting stories for various publications.
- ❖ Design invitations to openings and building dedications to reinforce the basic theme -- Tacoma. . .Building the Vision, or Tacoma--Take a Second Look. Each project will be clearly presented as one of the building blocks for the city's future.
- ❖ Actively promote public speaking engagements for City Council Members, department directors, citizen committee chairpersons, etc.
- ❖ Conduct ongoing communication audit of City materials to identify additional ways to communicate key messages.

Evaluation

Conduct follow-up survey of residents to determine attitude shifts.

Conduct follow-up survey of City employees to identify attitude shifts.

Review media coverage annually to identify ratio of positive to negative stories.

Conclusion

It is clear after reviewing the information from the City that Tacoma has an important story to tell, a story that could be instrumental in shifting dated perceptions. It is also clear that currently this story is not being told. Like many government agencies, the City is so busy working on the projects and priorities competing for attention that there is little time left over for the actual promotion of what has been done.

We recognize the urgency of the work at hand and the budget constraints with which the City must operate. This plan utilizes existing resources as much as possible in ways that will heighten their impact and effectiveness without major budget impacts. It is important to recognize that changing attitudes and perceptions may require years, yet these perceptions must be changed. This program will be sustainable over the long term and will help the city continue its strong movement into the future.

Attachment A

Suggestions on carrying out public relations plan submitted by John Steen, Public Relations student, University of Washington, fall 1991.

Pretty Pictures

I am very impressed with the quality of video production created in-house for use on City Cable 12. When I was employed in the production department of KOMO-TV, a very successful and long-running campaign was called, simply, Pretty Pictures.

Basically the campaign was based around 60-second video productions that featured scenic and picturesque scenes of Seattle. For example, one of the day scenes was of a fireboat in Elliott Bay spraying a graceful arc of water. A night scene consisted of city lights and skyline photographed from a helicopter.

There was no voice-over on these videos, and that's what kept them fresh and easy to look at over time. Instead, there was simply a music bed of light, jazzy tunes. During the last five seconds, graphics over the picture stated, . . . just some scenes of Seattle. . .

These 60-second videos were nice to look at and scored very high in recall from focus groups. They could be a good way to remind viewers of the unique and lovely aspects of Tacoma. The videos would be very effective in shifting attitudes to a positive focus.

They would be very useful played on occasion between programs on City Cable 12 (on the half-hour and hour). I'm sure other ways of utilizing these videos would become evident.

Tacoma: Now and Then

Tacoma has a rich and colorful past that has been documented in word and picture. I suggest searching through the archives of Tacoma's past for interesting photographs of the early stages of the city.

Borrowing and enhancing the Paul Dorpat feature, NOW AND THEN, (Sunday Seattle Times, Pacific section), an historical photograph of Tacoma would be printed, and right below the old photo would be a contemporary scene, photographed (if possible) from the same vantage point. Perhaps this feature could become an ongoing series in The Morning News Tribune.

If not using print media, this could be a dramatic video feature. Begin video with close-up on historical photograph (black-and-white or sepia), then cross-fade to contemporary scene that comes to life with color, movement and the passage of many decades.

Attachment B

Suggestions on carrying out public relations plan submitted by Don Brady, Public Relations student, University of Washington, fall 1991.

Annual tribute to Tacoma theatre

With the upcoming reopening of the Rialto Theatre, the future opening of the Tacoma Actor's Guild Theatre, combined with the excellent Pantages Theatre, Tacoma has the opportunity to establish itself as the South Puget Sound center for the performing arts.

In order to maximize this message I suggest the City of Tacoma sponsor a Tribute to Tacoma Theatre, an annual event held in the Broadway Theatre District showcasing the three theatres.

What would be accomplished by this event?

- Residents of the area will have the opportunity to visit the theatres without buying a ticket.
- Theatres will receive benefits of promotion i.e., ticket sales, recognition, a chance to show off.
- Local businesses will have an opportunity to show support for the arts.
- The Broadway Theatre District will create its own identity.
- Tacoma will be seen as a strong cultural center.

A few of the activities suggested for the Tacoma Tribute to Theatre are listed below:

- Closing down one or two city blocks connecting the theaters to create a festival atmosphere.
- Inviting food vendors, street artists, and craft vendors to fill the area with activity.
- Erecting a bandstand with scheduled performances from local theatre groups, choral groups, high school performance groups, comedians, etc.
- Holding open houses at each theatre for acting, directing, technical and improvisational workshops open to the public.
- Staging pay-what-you-will performances in each theater. The theatres would not be expected to put on full-length shows, but possibly scenes from the previous season, musical tributes, etc.

City officials would work directly with the theatre's administrative staffs to create an event unique to the City of Tacoma, while ensuring strong support for Tacoma theatre at the local, regional and national levels.