

Advocacy: Communicating What Works

POLITICAL:

Initiate law suits against FCC charging abrogation of public interest standard

Citizens suit against CPB for failure to adequately implement the public broadcasting charter

Legal challenge to first amendment shield used by corporations for the exploitation of children and its defense of mal-programming practices

Formulate national lobbying and international planning team based in Washington, D.C. (also WG1)

GRASSROOTS:

Media reform is a marathon, not a sprint. Activists should spend less time criticizing the media at the national level and more time looking for ways to break the lock that major channels have on the public mind by concentrating on local and regional levels.

Identify and stage local, national and international demonstrations and boycotts, a la Greenpeace, to raise consciousness about media imperialism and pierce the disabling veil of media conditioning about media.

Audiotapes, inexpensively produced and distributed subversively by followers of Ayatollah Khomeini, helped overthrow the Shah and powered the fundamentalist revolution in Iran. They also played a role in Hitler's rise. Enlightened radio tapes, revealing the economic realities of the media in the US exist. (Example: David Barsamian, Alternative Radio, P.O. Box 551, Boulder, CO 50306, Phone: 800-444-1977). Determine and implement ways to produce and distribute such tapes directly to individuals and groups, bypassing established radio stations and cable systems.

Peg local newspapers, radio, TV stations and cable outlets to do stories about media reform. Look for a hook that has local or regional interest. Peter Wirth, GW Associates, a public relations consultant at 792 South Beach Street, Syracuse, NY, has demonstrated this strategy successfully. Phone: 315-476-3396.

Focus on local media as well as national. If we can't get a speaker on Larry King Show, let's come up with a plan that will get coverage on the issue the speaker is presenting in local media across the US.

Frame demands as "putting an end to 'censorship'" since media outlets are particularly sensitive to that word

Generate calls and letters to the targeted media outlet from individual media consumers

Buy ad space in mainstream media to expose media maleficence. If ad is refused, get publicity for the fact that you can't even buy your way into the debate.

EDUCATION/LITERACY:

Submit editorials and op eds describing the need to have national dialogue that is not dominated by commercial interests - particularly the interests of those funding politicians (also WG1).

Activist publications such as Z magazine, The Progressive, FAIR, etc. should mention examples of activist media success stories. We need positive examples to learn from and encourage us. I think most activist publications tend to discourage people from using the mainstream media. They drain our energy instead of energizing us.

Contact peace and justice organizations such as Peace Action Now, Pax Christi, American Friends Service Committee and encourage them to make using the mass media a priority instead of giving lip service to it.

CEM/COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES:

Facilitate better working relationships among activists, researchers and journalists

Create a designated week and a focused day where an issue (egs. Contract With America) would get top priority (highlighted by a print investigative article related to the subject) in schools, colleges, evening news, radio talk shows, etc.

Create a print roundtable discussion among a group of experts with

diversity of opinion, possibly to be broadcast either locally or nationally on TV or radio.

Create "how-to" manual to help groups exploit "photo-ops", develop relationships with reporters and think about news from the perspective of people inside the newsroom and change the attitude that activists can't work with the mainstream media. Encourage activist organizations to come up with a P.R. plan to get coverage on their issue and help groups find opening in mass media. Include tips like:

travel to the developing world provides a unique opportunity to arrange extensive media coverage in the community where the individual lives. These types of travel experiences are good feature story material because of the parochial nature of news and provide opportunities to educate the public about the effects of our foreign policy on different parts of the world.

using media success stories

exposing the myth that corporate owned media is inaccessible.

changing notions that:

A small group of dedicated individuals can change society by their actions alone.

Public opinion is not important.

You change the world one person at a time so the focus of our work becomes the individual.

Faithfulness to an issue and personal witness are more important than effectiveness.

It's impossible to work with the corporate owned media.

creating press releases including bio on speaker, follow up phone call, etc. to communicate with community rather than self-selected audience.

Design public relations and marketing skills prototypes.

Solicit how to do it articles based on real life examples of activists who got their story into mass media should appear in alternative publications. The same goes for success stories regarding marketing.

Peter Wirth
Jeff Cohen