



PUBLIC RELATIONS FOR AMATEUR RADIO

Guideline for Clubs

PRESENTED BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN RADIO LEAGUE
The National Society for Amateur Radio



Definition

There are many definitions of public relations. Perhaps the most universal and practical one is: Public Relations is a planned, deliberate and sustained programme that will influence the target market and result in a positive response.

Target Market

In defining the target market, one should start at home. If the programme can positively influence the members of a club and Radio Amateurs and short-wave listeners at large, we are creating a larger team who believe in Amateur Radio's mission and have the mindset to carry out and support the messages.

If Radio Amateurs are negative about their club, and the club negative about the South African Radio League, how can we expect anyone else to believe in Amateur Radio? Least of all the public at large and the regulatory authorities! If for example the Department of Environmental Affairs has a negative image of Amateur Radio how can we expect their support when drawing up guidelines and regulations controlling antenna structures?

Let us first consider the "internal target market", they are

- Members of your club
- Member's families
- Radio Amateurs
- Other Clubs
- Short-wave Listeners

It is logical to include Short-wave listeners in our internal target group because they already have an interest in radio, and can make up an important lobby group.

MEDIA

What media can be used to reach our internal target market?

1. Club bulletins on the air
2. Discussion nets
3. Club Newsletters
4. WebPages
5. Radio ZS
6. Amateur Radio Mirror International

Club Bulletins

Club “on the air” bulletins reach a wide audience, often much wider than the specific target group.

It is one of most powerful communication channels, which is often not utilised to its full advantage. Here are some examples. Listen around and you will experience it:

- “I have not had time to prepare a bulletin, so I will talk from memory.” What follows is usually a 15 minutes waffle with no substance, wrong dates and information.
- The SARL bulletin is read unprepared, the reader stumbles through it.
- “I have no bulletin! Does anyone have any news?”
- “Who’s doing the bulletin today? It’s John! John are you on frequency? Silence. O, well!”
- For satellite news we call in Gavin... silence. O! Well Gavin must have forgotten!

What kind of image do we create?

If your club has a bulletin, pay attention to its structure, content and delivery. It is, in many instances, your main communication medium with members and not to forget prospective members.

There are commercial organisations that continually scan the bands to gather information about band usage. This information is put to good use in support of claims for reallocation of frequency spectrum in their favour. What opinion do they form about the Amateur Radio service?

Some pointers to smarten your on the air delivery:

Design a format that can be followed by committee members responsible for bulletins and nets. It will become like a signature for your club.

Bulletins should be positive, always building the image of your club, the SARL and Amateur Radio. Bulletins are not the media to vent your frustrations or irritations with members. Club meetings are the correct place for that.

Do not emphasise the negative. If a good lecture was poorly supported, don't make it worse. Turn it around to make those who did not attend realise how much they missed, for example:

“Last week John Green presented an interesting lecture on PSK at the club's monthly meeting. He highlighted the advantages of PSK and demonstrated how easy it is to set it up without having to make any investment. The software is readily available from various websites. He also handed out a printed guide and offered to make disks with the necessary software available to those members who do not have access to the Internet.

At next months meeting Gavin Blocks will be talking about how simple it is to create an electronic logbook. More in next week's bulletin.”

Get the drift?

Get out of the mode “We are just amateurs”! We are not! We are Radio Amateurs who are professional in what they do.

If you have contributors to your bulletin or net, call them in before you start so that you know they are there. It also ensures that they listen to what is being said before it is their turn. It cuts out embarrassing duplication and often contradictions.

Say what you mean. Don't use silly expressions like ‘the man in white’, ‘It costs 1200 coupons’, ‘ John is in the White House’, ‘ I have just come home from the big House’ etc. Who are we kidding, least the regulator!

Use the correct phonetic. Don't use funny ones!

When you are reporting about someone, or quoting a person, use his or her full name and callsign. There are many Johns and Allan's, even in your club.

Don't use derogatory expressions, nobody appreciates to be called an affirmative, hairy back or Curry Muncher etc. There is no place for that in Amateur Radio.

Use your on the air activity to create a positive image for the amateur service, the SARL and your Club, after all that is why you are making the effort and making available the time.

Add soundbytes to your bulletins. There are many sites on the world-wide web that offer short recordings of interesting amateur radio and technology subjects. The SARL web will soon offer short recordings of a South African nature, (expected from September 2001).

DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

Dealing with the media is difficult at the best of times. Journalists and editors are not exactly waiting for a story on Amateur Radio. They are looking for hard news that sells papers.

Amateur Radio is to the average reader not the most exciting subject, so we have to make it exciting and newsworthy. We must keep at it.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN WRITING A MEDIA RELEASE?

First of all your story must be newsworthy. 'Amateur Radio is providing communications for the Roof of Africa Rally' will not turn on a reporter or Editor. Perhaps one needs to turn the story around: 'Radio Amateurs add to the safety of the Roof of Africa Rally participants'

Feature how last year it was Amateur Radio communication that saved the life of a competitor when ham operators were able to direct the rescue helicopter to the crash site in record time.'

Question what you write. Will the non-radio amateur reader understand, will it attract his or her attention.

An announcement of a lecture at a club meeting can be made interesting. Give a taste what the lecture is about, what can be learned, how it can provide value to the individual. Supply the information to local radio stations and the event editor of your local newspapers. Ensure you give details of the date, the time and venue. Not everyone in your community knows where the scout hall or library is. Always provide a contact number where more details can be obtained.

You must write a media release ready for publication- in other words the whole story.

GET TO KNOW THE LOCAL REPORTER AND NEWS EDITOR

Don't wait till you have a story that you want published. Get to know the local reporter and editor. Invite them to your shack. Line up some interesting contact or on the air event. Have them over for a braai, have breakfast or lunch with them.

Talk to them about Amateur Radio and what it does for your community. Invite them to a school event or a DF hunt. Don't just send a press release and expect it to be published.

Make friends with the radio station manager. Visit the local community station, record some on the air activity (for example, emergency communications, a rally event).

Offer these soundbytes (short sound recording) for use in their programmes. Together with an interview with you, it will make for interesting listening.

NEWSLETTERS

The same principles as discussed for media releases apply to newsletters and web pages. Be positive! Project a good image.

DEALING WITH CONTENTIOUS ISSUES

At some time or another there will be a contentious issue that you may like to communicate to members. Do it in a letter from the Chairman or Committee. Don't use the newsletter or bulletin.

NETS

Nets and on the air discussions are a wonderful ways to build loyalty to your club. Keep the discussion professional. Use the correct callsign procedure. Do not over do the callsign bit, you will loose participants fast.

A good net controller recognises every caller and keeps the discussion flowing.

SPREADING THE WORD

There are many organisations that are always looking for speakers to fill a slot at their meetings. Give a talk or better still a PowerPoint presentation about amateur radio. Organisations to target include Rotary, Lions Clubs, woman groups, church groups, scouts and girl guides, Institute of Electrical Engineers etc.

The SARL will soon be making scripts available together with PowerPoint presentations that can be used with a data projector or turned into transparencies. Details will be published on the SARL Web: www.sarl.org.za.

LIVING DOCUMENT

The South African Radio League has produced this guideline as a service to its members and the Amateur Radio Community. It may be freely distributed provided acknowledgement is given to the South African Radio League.

Comments, suggestions and additions are invited. Please send it to the Author, Hans van de Groenendaal, by email to hans@intekom.co.za or fax 012 991 4662.