

Jack Felton Golden Ruler of Measurement Award Submission

Application Information

Entrant's Name: KDPaine & Partners, LLC and ASPCA® (The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals®)

Title of Entry: Defining PR's role in achieving organizational goals for the ASPCA

Time Period of Project: January 2007 – July 2008

Brief Description: The ASPCA has built its PR program based on a solid foundation of research and evaluation, and as a result has dramatically increased, not just its presence in the media, but its desired outcomes as well – specifically increasing the volume of web traffic and on-line donors.

Contact information: Katie Paine, 603-682-0735, kdaine@kdpaine.com

Summary :

Before 2005, the ASPCA had virtually no pro-active external media relations function. With the hiring of its first PR person in 2006, it began to build the communications function relying heavily on research to help guide its growth. In December 2006, the ASPCA® (The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals®) engaged KDPaine & Partners (KDPP) to systematically measure and evaluate its media relations and communications function, and its effectiveness. The ASPCA and KDPP designed a scalable, Web-based dashboard that combined communications research with organizational performance indicators in order to provide leadership with real time information about the relationship between the efforts of the Media & Communications Department. Starting with a traditional media relations measurement program in 2006, they have moved to an analysis of consumer generated media, as well as conducted several traditional survey research studies to guide their actions.

At the same time as they were setting up a strong communications foundation, the ASPCA media and communications team was also presented with a number of opportunities that required fast response and proactive action. They further measured these tactics to determine what worked best in a crisis.

Ultimately, we found that beyond simply helping define and build a successful communications strategy for the ASPCA, this research program provided valuable lessons in best practices that can be applied across the non-profit sector. In fact, Mothers Against Drunk Driving recently launched a similar research program based on the ASPCA model.

Introduction :

Prior to 2005, the ASPCA had virtually no professional public relations staff and relied almost exclusively on advertising, its web site and development activities to achieve organizational objectives. With the arrival in 2006 of a professional full-time media and communications staff, it began to build the communications function relying heavily on research to help guide its growth. In December 2006, the ASPCA® engaged KDPaine & Partners (KDPP) to systematically measure and evaluate its media relations and communications function, and its effectiveness in helping the organization to realize its vision of a nation of humane communities in which all animals are treated with respect and kindness. The ASPCA and KDPP designed a scalable, Web-based dashboard that combined communications research with organizational performance indicators in order to provide leadership with real time information about the relationship between the efforts of the Media & Communications Department. Starting with a traditional media relations measurement program in 2006, it has also integrated an analysis of consumer generated media and several stakeholder surveys in order to guide its actions.

At the same time, the media and communications team was building a strategic plan that included both traditional print, broadcast and web-based media outreach. Additionally it launched a number of programs and activities designed to increase the organization's visibility. Then, in the spring of 2007, the ASPCA's media and communications team was presented with a number of opportunities that required fast response and proactive action, including the nationwide recall of tainted pet food and the investigation of a major football star, Michael Vick, for animal cruelty. Its research program enabled Media & Communications to measure the effectiveness of its response to determine what worked best in a crisis.

The ASPCA's program is unique in its integration of quantitative survey research, traditional media content analysis, consumer generated media content analysis and web analytics. As such, it went far beyond simply helping to define and build a successful communications strategy for the ASPCA. This research program provided valuable lessons in best practices that can be applied across the non-profit sector. For example, Mothers Against Drunk Driving recently launched a similar research program based on the ASPCA model.

Background

Founded in 1866, the ASPCA is the oldest animal welfare organization in the Americas. A privately-funded, 501(c)(3) national not-for-profit corporation, the ASPCA is headquartered in New York City, where it operates its own adoption center and veterinary hospital, and enforces New York City's animal cruelty laws. On a national level, the ASPCA provides financial assistance and support to several of the local and regional humane societies that exist across the U.S.

The ASPCA has one core mission—to prevent harm to animals. This mission is manifest in its programs like ASPCA Mission: Orange™, which works to reduce unnecessary euthanasia, and its Animal Poison Control Center (APCC), which operates out of the ASPCA's Midwest Office in Urbana, Ill. The APCC is the only non-profit, university affiliated, 24-hour, 365-day facility of its kind dedicated solely to helping animals exposed to potentially hazardous substances by providing veterinary diagnostic and treatment recommendations to veterinarians and, where appropriate, pet parents, company and governmental

officials. In 2007, the APCC handled more than 136,000 cases and currently has a staff of nine veterinary assistants, 10 certified veterinary technicians, and 30 veterinarians, 13 of whom are board-certified toxicologists/veterinary toxicologists.

During the time of this research, the ASPCA saw a number of events take place that required fast decision making and proactive crisis communications.

In January of 2007, the organization launched ASPCA Mission: Orange™ – a nationwide effort to reduce the number of unnecessary pet euthanasia and to create seven no-kill cities.

On March 16, 2007, due to the contamination of at least one of its ingredients, Menu Foods Limited announced a nationwide recall of more than 90 brands of dog and cat food. With experts in veterinary toxicology, pathology and clinical medicine on staff, combined with a unique, proprietary veterinary toxicology database (AnTox®) designed to capture poison center case data and identify trends, the ASPCA was in the unique position of being able to provide the public with credible information and the advice that was so desperately required.

A few months later, the ASPCA was involved in both the investigation of football player Michael Vick and the subsequent rehabilitation of the dogs involved in the Vick scandal.

Intended Audience(s)

The ASPCA's communications outreach was aimed at the 71.1 million pet owning households in America as well as its own core membership of approximately one million pet parents across the United States. Secondary audiences included shelter professionals, breeders, veterinarians, pet food manufacturers and retailers.

Goals and Objectives

As an organization, the ASPCA's goal is to be the primary source of information on the wellbeing of companion animals in the United States by the year 2010.

The purpose of the research was to:

- Provide data from which it can make better, more informed decisions about how to best allocate resources
- Determine the most effective proactive as well as reactive response strategies
- Provide measurable targets for specific programs

The Research Program: An Integrated Approach to Demonstrating the Role of Communications in a Non-Profit Organization

The ASPCA® (The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals®) Communications Research Program included longitudinal news and social media content analysis as well as primary research and measurement of other organizational performance indicators like web traffic, and the open rate of *News Alert*, its weekly e-newsletter.

The program was designed specifically to demonstrate the role of Media & Communications in:

- Setting a national agenda regarding the prevention of animal cruelty and promotion of the human-animal bond;
- Communicating critical, often life-saving information to pet families;
- Building a desirable media reputation for the organization;
- Supporting development efforts by creating an environment conducive to activating latent publics;
- Supporting development efforts by driving traffic to ASPCA.org.

Search features integrated into the ASPCA's dashboard allowed media team members to quickly identify press results related to specific outreach programs and conduct after the fact "what if" scenarios to know the exact impact that the Pet Food Recall or the Michael Vick investigation had on their objectives.

In order to understand the role of Media & Communications related to web-based development and organizational objectives, measurement results were considered in the context of web traffic. Web traffic was included as an outcome as the ASPCA.org property has become a place for publics to learn about issues, receive sometimes life-saving information, and get involved with the ASPCA by becoming a member, adopting a pet, joining lobbying efforts, joining its online community, and making donations.

As an example of the importance of web traffic as a desirable outcome, the pattern of relationships observed during this time between unique monthly visitors and development outcomes like total online donors ($r=.87$) and net online donations ($r=.62$) highlights the role of ASPCA.org in providing an opportunity for publics to become active supporters of the organization's mission to prevent harm to animals.

Using this dashboard, from January 2007 to the present, KDPP has worked with the ASPCA to investigate the ASPCA's reputation in both traditional media and consumer generated media. Traditional media coverage was compared to that of the only other comparable national animal welfare organization, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). It also measured the ASPCA's role in setting the agenda on key issues like pet care and pet safety and animal behavior.

In January of 2008, KDPP designed and implemented an awareness and perception survey of 561 New York City heads of households, a key stakeholder group for the organization's NYC local programs. A

competitive study, it gauged residents' awareness of the ASPCA brand relative to other competing humane organizations in the New York City area and will provide an awareness benchmark against which performance can be measured going forward.

Key Findings

The integration of communications data with other organizational information enabled Media & Communications to demonstrate its value in regards to building and maintaining the organization's reputation and relationships with its publics, positively impacting web traffic and, most importantly, communicating vital information about pet safety, anti-cruelty and the social and legislative work needed to realize its vision to the public via mass media and social media channels.

By examining the results of its research in the context of other performance data, Media & Communications leadership was able to clearly demonstrate its value within the context of the organization's vision. Key findings quantified:

- Impact on the Mass Media Agenda (Outputs)
 - Consistent gains in opportunities to see desirable press about the ASPCA and its programs in the media each quarter, resulting in a 310% increase in exposure from Q1 2007 to Q4 2007.
 - The rapid communication of life-saving information about safe pet food options and the ASPCA's veterinary toxicology resources during the 2007 pet food recall crisis. The ASPCA's information and experts were found in 82% of March coverage of the organization and HSUS regarding the issue, and 53% of coverage in April.
 - A 14% lead over HSUS in pet education topics (a key component of the creation of humane communities), and strong leads over HSUS in positioning as an expert in veterinary care (+283%), animal behavior (+131%), pet care (+116%) and animal toxicology (+26%), despite a media environment that favors HSUS. In addition to supporting its organizational mission by promoting an agenda toward a cruelty-free society, positioning on each of these issues is also critical to a strong reputation for the ASPCA in the media.
- Impact on Awareness (Outtakes)
 - A high awareness of the ASPCA among pet-loving New York City residents (64% unaided), and perceptions of the ASPCA that are more favorable than any of the eight other humane organizations investigated (4.23/5.00).
 - A need to address confusion among New York City residents that the ASPCA still picks up stray cats and dogs, and to increase low awareness among affluent New Yorkers of the ASPCA's Bergh Memorial Animal Hospital (58% not at all aware) and the ASPCA Mission: Orange initiative (70% not at all aware).

- Impact on Web Traffic to ASPCA.org (Outcomes)
 - A strong relationship between media exposure and unique web visitors ($r=.89$) during the initial months of the crisis that developed after the March 2007 recall of pet food by Menu Foods.
 - A strong relationship between media exposure and unique web visitors ($r=.64$) during coverage of National Football League star Michael Vick's dog fighting-related scandal.
 - A strong relationship between desirable discussion in the consumer-generated space and unique monthly visitors ($r=.945$) highlighted these outlets as key elements in the relationship building process with stakeholders. This suggested that discussion in new media channels like blogs could be a predictor of online interest and stakeholder engagement that brings active, quality visitors to ASPCA.org.
 - A relationship between desirable traditional media exposure and consumer-generated discussion ($r=.88$), which supported the role of traditional media relations in the new media environment and in regard to web-based objectives. This reinforced anecdotal observations of intermedia influence and calls for further investigation as to the role of the traditional media in online discussion.
 - The role of issue visibility in web traffic. When examining the relationships between traditional media agendas and web traffic, it was the quantity of discussion, and less so the specific issues involved, that drove traffic. The notable exception, coverage of animal and pet welfare issues had a significant, though slightly weak, correlation with unique monthly visitors to ASPCA.org ($r=.52$, $p<.05$).

Performance Against Objectives for the Pet Food Recall

1. Objective: Increase the open rate for *News Alert*, the organization's weekly e-newsletter that included updates on the issue, by at least 2 percentage points every month (the average open rate being 15 percent), thus measuring the topicality of stories.

Outcome: The average open rate for *News Alert* in February was 15.75 percent. In March and April, when recall-related activity was at its highest, they were as follows: March, 19.37 percent (almost five percentage points higher), and April, 22.76 percent (almost eight percentage points higher).

2. Objective: Double the average click-through rate for *News Alert* (to our Web site) by five percentage points every month, thus measuring member engagement.

Outcome: The average click-through rate for *News Alert* in February was 5.54 percent. This jumped in March and April, when recall-related activity was at its highest, and click-through rates were as follows: March, 8.46 percent (about 3.5 percentage points higher); and April, 12.4 percent (almost 7.5 percentage points higher).

3. Objective: Increase, by at least 10 percent, unique visitors to the ASPCA's Web site, the primary hub of all recall-related information, thus measuring the accuracy and timeliness of our online communications.

Outcome: The ASPCA's Web site had 537,652 unique visitors in March, up from 451,299 in February—a 19 percent increase.

4. Objective: Capture the greatest share of coverage on the pet food recall issue compared to that of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), the only other national animal welfare organization that is similar to the ASPCA in the scope and reach of its work.

Output: The ASPCA's share of coverage on this issue during March was 82.2 percent, compared to 17.78 percent for the HSUS. In April, the ASPCA's share of coverage was 53.4 percent, compared to HSUS' 46.6 percent.

5. Objective: Position the ASPCA as an expert in veterinary toxicology in 70 percent of its media coverage on this issue of the Pet Food Recall.

Output: Almost three-quarters (72%) of the ASPCA's pet food recall-related media coverage positioned the organization as an expert in veterinary toxicology.

Outcome: Call volumes at the APCC saw record highs. In February, total open new cases numbered 8,971. In March this had jumped by almost 25 percent to 11,182 total open new cases, twice the expected monthly increase based on previous years' records.

6. Objective: Place the ASPCA's Dr. Steven Hansen, vice president of the APCC in Urbana, Ill., as the most visible expert in the media on animal toxicology nationally.

Output: With the high level of media coverage surrounding the recall, many "experts" emerged in the press. Of all those quoted in the press, Dr. Hansen led the field with 20 percent more quotes than the second highest quoted expert, Wayne Pacelle, of HSUS. In fact, the ASPCA's Drs. Hansen and Murray were repeatedly featured in media outlets as diverse as CNN's "AC 360" and "American Morning," ABC's "Good Morning America," USA Today and People Magazine.

Implications for Non-Profit Communications Programs

Functioning within a cost-effective budget, this integrated approach to public relations evaluation has helped to align internal understanding of public relations as a vital, strategic management function that has become more, not less, important in the digital age. It contributes to the growing case histories of the intermedia influence between social and traditional media, and provides preliminary correlative evidence to support further investigation into the role that public relations plays in driving web traffic in the non-profit sector. As the web becomes a primary source of information, as well as the place where interaction with a non-profit organization may well begin (e.g. becoming a volunteer or donating), this research is critical to promoting the understanding of public relations as a relationship management function that is independent of medium.