

Building Department Public Relations

**Communicating Building Safety
Effectively Through Public Relations**

Building Department Public Relations

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- The level of compliance with building codes in a jurisdiction is often a reflection of how effectively code compliance is communicated
- How well you get the word out about code changes and your department performance directly affects both public and central administration's perception of your staff

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Your Message Has Two Audiences

- External
 - Your Boss
 - Your Peers in other Departments
 - Senior Administration
 - Elected Officials
 - Public

- Internal
 - Permit Techs
 - Plans Examiners
 - Inspectors
 - Licensing

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Choose Your Message Deliberately

- *Words Mean Things*--proper grammar, correct spelling, and simple sentences make the message understandable
- *Brand Your Department*--define your message with a clear and consistent tone, font standard, and delivery method...and stick with it

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Developing a Message

- Proactive Public Relations

You create the message, or

- Reactive Public Relations

The message seeks you out

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The Proactive Message

What information would help improve building code compliance?

- Is it procedural?, or
- Is it technical?, or
- Both

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The Reactive Message

- Responding well to an emergency situation
- Taking a negative situation and turning it into a positive

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Communication Methods

- Print

 - Newsletters

 - Press Releases

 - Brochures, and Posters

 - Newspapers:

 - Article Placement, Op-Ed Pieces, Letters to the Editor

 - Reports

 - Correction Notice Comments

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Communication Methods

- Verbal

 - Training Sessions -- Internal

 - Training Sessions -- External

 - One-on-One Interaction

 - Media Interviews/PSA's

 - On-Air Opportunities

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Communication Methods

- Website
 - Local Amendments
 - Fee Schedule
 - Policies & Procedures
 - Forms
 - Checklists
 - Permit Tracking
 - Brochures

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Developing a Message

- Message will continually change as conditions and requirements change
- Every Building Department has a message

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Developing a Brand

- Your Brand Image...should be recognizable
- Your Brand Image...should be consistent
- Your Brand Image...should relate to all communication methods

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Delivering the Message

- The responsibility for creating the message belongs to the building official
- The building official should delegate some or all of the individual tasks that he or she is not comfortable performing

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Delivering the Message

- Everyone in your Department must buy into -- and help deliver -- the message
- The size of your Department will determine how the message gets delivered

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Cultivating Media Contacts

- Local news outlets are constantly looking for stories – the size of your market will determine the response
- Create an e-mail list of every news media outlet in your jurisdiction
- Target your message to the audience you are trying to reach, and contact the appropriate media outlets to help you reach that specific group

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Cultivating Media Contacts

- Pitching stories is a proactive approach to get your message out
- Pitching a story is better than being a target of a story

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Training and Outreach Programs

- Positive contact with customers is experienced with each session
- Training Department staff and local area contractors together is both efficient and good public relations

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Case History:

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- Public Information Specialist position added in FY 2005/06 budget
- Objectives:
 - Improve communications with public
 - Enhance profile with jurisdiction's decision-makers
 - Increase awareness throughout the Department

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Benefits:

Improved Building Code Compliance

Improved Public Image

Improved Understanding of Mission by

Elected Officials and Administration

Improved Communication with Customers

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Education: Classes and Workshops

Two Forms of Outreach
With Very Different Audiences

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Education: CEU Class Offerings for Your Local Building Community

- Your customers hear the same thing your staff does
- You can offer training locally, free of charge, in a setting your customers know

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Education: Workshops

Your chance to reach owner/builders, related industries, and non-certified staff (permit runners, office managers) working for and with contractors

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Brochures: What Does Your Customer Need Help With?

Technical

Legislative/Administrative

Department Policies

- a. Develop as Needed – determined by your customer's needs

Remember -- Brand Consistency!

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Developing the Customer Experience

Your first chance at “positive PR” happens when your customer first walks in the door:

What does your customer see?

- Outdated forms, posters
- Old pizza coupons
- Mismatched signage

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Making Your Website Work for You

Interactive Component:

- E-mail defaults on several screens
- Make all contact info available for all staff
- Ask your customers to critique their experience on a regular basis

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Website Presence

You 'drive' traffic to your site for scheduling inspections and permit look-up, so.....keep them there!

- Update links regularly

- Change photos

- Add content: links to related news stories, links to homebuilder's association schedule of events, etc.

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Website Presence

Make Your Website “One-Stop Shopping” for
All Aspects of Building Information in
Your Municipality!

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Website Presence

Increase the information available online:

Forms

Brochures

Code links

“How To’s”

Added Value Everytime:

Make your customer's online visit worthwhile

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Questions ?