

**Marilyn Sandifur remarks – “Assessing your resources, money, personnel and time”
AAPA PR Seminar, Detroit, June 2009**

Good morning everyone! I'm going to be sharing with you some thoughts about assessing your resources, money, personnel and time. My hope is that they will serve as friendly reminders about things you already know and strengthen your options when you have to make those difficult decisions on how you will move forward with your communications plan with minimal resources.

Within this illustrious group of public relations experts, we have those who have a staff of one and those who have a team of more than 20. I'm going to give you a little background on where I'm from and the changing landscape of resources. I'm from the Port of Oakland where we own and operate Oakland International Airport, function as a landlord seaport, and oversee 19 miles of waterfront including commercial real estate and hundreds of acres of parks and conservation areas.

When I started working at the Port of Oakland 9 years ago there was a Communications Division. There was no real Media/PR department. I began as a consultant at a time when the Port was expanding its facilities and doubling capacity at the Oakland seaport. The airport passenger activity was consistently growing and we had commercial real estate projects under construction.

At that time we had over \$2.5 billion (B) in Capitol Improvement Projects (CIP) on the table for our three lines of businesses. It was an exciting time and it made sense to establish a Media/PR Department within the Communications Division which already included a Government Affairs department and Community Relations department.

I headed the new Media/PR department of one! Over the years we grew to a team of five with as many as 4 consultants at the peak of our projects and resources. At that time I worked on maritime advertising, our overall port messaging, produced a 32 page – 4 color port magazine 2-3 times a year, helped produce major events including our annual one-day public waterfront event that drew 35,000 visitors, and worked on crisis communications, video productions, and TV and radio spots...and then the business climate started changing.

There was 9/11, the dotcom bust, the ripple effect of the dot.com bust, the Enron corruption and other financial disasters, the burst of the US housing bubble and the ensuing US recession and global volatility that we are experiencing today. Fortunately, some of the ports represented here are doing alright and even growing – our port has not been so lucky. Last year we eliminated 100 positions from 675 to 575 authorized positions. That may seem like a lot of people to those of you who come from smaller ports, but a port that was focused as a design/build public agency needed a major engineering staff to support the CIP.

So where are we now? We are moving away from being a solely design/build organization to pursuing more public/private partnerships as we move forward. We are becoming a leaner organization not only because of a changing agency structure but also because of the economic downturn that is impacting our business.

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We have eliminated the executive position –Deputy Director of External Affairs. We subsequently eliminated the Public Affairs (Communications) Division and therefore eliminated the Director of Public Affairs position. Our Media/PR Department is now part of Corporate Administrative Services, and is essentially two people plus one graphic artist. Government Affairs was a team of five and is now two people who report directly to the executive director. Community Relations was 4-5 people and is now 1 person who is part of the Social Responsibility Division.

So as we've moved to this smaller team over the years, we have adjusted as needed in Media/PR. We have eliminated our annual waterfront event called PortFest and we have cut back on other events – those being budget driven decisions, but practical since we no longer have enough staff to produce large-scale events. We have reduced the size and scope of remaining events and have been careful to be conservative on spending relative to food and giveaways.

We used to mail out thousands of copies of our port magazine to our community members with a glossy local popular magazine (Oakland magazine). As our resources shrank we decided to produce fewer hard copies and post the magazine online. Eventually we decided that the magazine was not a priority and we wanted to shift our focus to internal communications. We created a beautiful internal newsletter for our employees that is posted on our intranet and therefore has no printed costs associated with the publication. Now we are reworking that material as needed to create a customer newsletter that will be in electronic format. We can send it in an email blast for easy distribution, at no cost (no printing costs; there is the cost of staff time of course for writing and designing the piece). This will improve our communication with customers by being more timely with information sharing and making it easy for them to access.

We are more issue oriented and are beginning to move toward social media as a way to inexpensively but effectively communicate externally.

We have transitioned from joint departmental meetings on projects when our staff was larger, to another level – joint interdepartmental/division meetings on strategy. This brings the employees closer together, creating a more effective but leaner team; it keeps everyone on the same page; and you are working toward a common goal that can become an exciting opportunity for success.

A good example was when the Cosco Busan vessel struck the SF/Oakland Bay Bridge and caused an oil spill. We brought together an emergency strategy team that included colleagues from our harbor facilities, environmental, legal, social responsibility, Media/PR, finance and maritime divisions. We also from time to time had external partners as needed. We jointly strategized on how to move forward to handle all the various aspects of the incident. Our job was to protect the port's sensitive shallow water habitat and other shore areas from contamination, track our expenses, follow the law carefully so that we could be reimbursed for our expenses, and protect the reputation of the port. This interdivisional team was extremely effective; the process engendered camaraderie among the team members; and at the end of the "event" (two months or so) there was a deep sense of personal satisfaction with what had been achieved and how we had worked together to make it happen.

What we are really talking about here is encouraging collaboration internally and externally especially during these challenging economic times. Jointly producing events, news conferences,

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co-managing crisis and building depth within the organization are all ways to “expand your team” without added costs and meet your goals and objectives. By building depth, I’m talking about training your co-workers in other departments to participate with you in some of the day-to-day Media/PR activities so that when an incident or special event arises, you have support from those in another department or division who can temporarily expand your team to meet the need.

This is the time to promote the positive. News reporters are tired of the negative news about the economy right now and are looking for good news stories. Even though you may have fewer resources, ask your colleagues about the great things they are doing. Rather than you interviewing them and researching a topic, save time and have your internal expert write a draft press release. Then you can use your talent efficiently and effectively to put the final editing touches on it and distribute.

Promote creativity whenever possible as you or a co-worker may come up with a faster; better way to do something, a more effective solution to a communications issue, or a new brand for your organization. “Divide and conquer” – Delegate tasks internally to other divisions and departments. Maximize your internal experts as a talent pool for communications content.

Unify internal divisions, departments, and individual co-workers for creating a communications plan around a particular issue, challenge, or opportunity. Keep in mind that interdepartmental meetings can save you time, spread the workload, and help ensure that you are all on the same page moving forward and we certainly all understand why that’s so important.

Don’t be afraid to say “no” to requests or ideas that are nice but are not really aligned with your communications plan or don’t have that much impact! If your resources are stretched it’s better to say “no” if a request is going to jeopardize something of greater importance that will deliver more value to your port and community.

Pick your impactful projects and then prioritize them. That is absolutely essential because if you are faced with an unexpected situation, which is all too common in our business, you may have to make a quick decision on where to put your resources and that means something else will not get done. Again prioritize so that you know what is always at the top of your list to be the most effective.

Also, keep an on-going watch over what you’re doing and evaluate whether continuing certain projects or tasks warrant enough benefits to justify the resources in that area.

Don’t be afraid to dump a project if it’s not working or no longer makes sense because the situation has changed. Weigh the benefits with the efforts to determine if continuing is worth it.

If you decide to “let something go” just be sure you know exactly why you are changing course so that you can clearly explain it to your boss, commissioners, co-workers – so that the decision is clearly understood and accepted.

When you have fewer resources, it’s even more important to meet with senior management early on for initial development and buy-in on your communications plan. You want to identify the

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desired outcomes up front so that you are choosing the best tools for implementation and success.

Be sure to identify your resources up front and associated costs; determine who takes responsibility for what parts of the project and which budgets will be tapped. Establish a timeline and milestones.

Here is an example of shrinking resources - we once had an advertising budget of \$300,000 a year and now we have no advertising budget but we are still advertising!

What we are doing is offering advertising opportunities to our internal customers or responding to their requests. However we make it clear that they will have to pull from their respective budgets to pay for the ads. So if they consider it a priority they will find a way to make it happen.

Repurpose your work product: Take a speech on accomplishments and turn those talking points into an annual report. Take a press release and reshape it into an article, archive your work so that you can re-use rather than reinvent!

Relative to community relations, we are using yahoo groups (a hybrid between an electronic mailing list and an internet forum) as a way to monitor community concerns and perceptions about the port, issues, and projects. It's also a way to share port information rapidly with your community groups. This can really help with community outreach when you have a small staff and just don't have the resources to hold numerous community meetings.

And keep in mind that interns can be a great resource for short-term project assistance – and at the same time afford you the satisfying opportunity to provide a real-world work experience and mentoring. I had the good fortune to have a college intern from Denmark. She spoke fluent English, was in an internship program financed by her school, and was a quick learner. She completed a successful archiving project that saved me a great deal of time and resources, and we provided her with a terrific business-setting learning experience, exposure to decision makers, and participation in division meetings.

To wrap this up, when we try to do our best with fewer resources, it's important to get back to basics. The tools that we use now, such as facebook and linked in, may have changed, but the fundamentals of what we do are the same.

Share your communications plan up front, be proactive, and poll your community – that can save you a significant amount of time by not putting your resources in the wrong place.

Encourage collaboration and promote creativity.

Everything I've talked about you may know instinctively or through previous experience. My hope is that today you've heard it a little differently so that it strengthens your awareness of options when resources and time are tight, and you have to deliver. Thank you.

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