

# Airing our message



**Philip  
Dine**

**W**ith some regularity, calls requesting advice come in from NALC members who are about to go on radio or television—they're perhaps driving to a radio station as we speak or awaiting a TV reporter for an on-camera interview—or who are considering doing so in the near future.

Dealing with the electronic media obviously presents different challenges than dealing with a print reporter. Many of the questions reflect this difference in venue: How should I try to come across on air? Should I be calm or aggressive? What if I'm asked something I'm not sure of? In general, how can I most effectively deliver our message?

These are valid questions—and important ones, because making use of radio and TV is key to our effort to spread the message and influence public (and political) opinion.

While print offers a chance for thoughtful discussion of issues as well as a more lasting vehicle for that discussion, TV and radio provide immediacy and a chance to connect personally with the audience.

Unlike print, you control what you say, because there's little or no filter between you and the audience. The audience hears from you directly—maybe even live—with your inflections and demeanor part of the mix.

That can be powerful, but it also requires some preparation.

And so it seems like a good idea to encapsulate some of the suggestions we discuss in those phone calls. Here, then, are some guidelines:

- Keep it simple.
- Keep it positive.
- Reassure your audience.

**Simple:** We want to be disciplined, focused and minimalist. We don't want to make eight points or 12 points, get bogged down in details, engage in debates, roam all over the lot. We want to get across two basic themes.

Set the context with the big picture—that the conventional wisdom people have heard (about a Postal Service losing billions of dollars a quarter because everyone's on the Internet, taxpayers are on the hook and so cuts need to be made) is false. That'll get them listening. Then fill them in on the actual situation—that in terms of delivering the mail, the USPS is doing relatively well financially (\$100 million profit in the first quarter of this fiscal year, for example), and that almost all the red ink stems from an unfair and unnecessary congressional mandate, the pre-funding requirement that applies to

no other agency or company in the country. Oh, and by the way, taxpayers haven't paid a dime for more than 30 years to the Postal Service, which funds itself by the sale of stamps.

You get across this information, buttressed by some of the figures we use (and which we can provide to you if you'd like), and you'll have your listeners or viewers paying rapt attention and wondering why they didn't know this before. Remember: less is more in this venue. Help them follow—and remember—what you say, by keeping it simple.

**Positive:** We don't win by criticizing the USPS or its management, or by slamming politicians we think are out to destroy the public sector or unions or the Postal Service. That turns your opportunity to inform your audience into a fruitless political debate.

Be upbeat, both in terms of demeanor and what you say. Talk about the improving performance of the USPS in terms of operational finances (better this year than last, and better last year than in 2011) as the economy gradually improves, and note that the Postal Service itself cites two factors—record worker productivity and a sharp increase in package deliveries. The latter, of course, reflects the upside of the Internet, which presents challenges (online bill-paying) but also offers opportunities (online ordering of items that need to be delivered). This bodes well for the future.

By the way, if you're asked a question you find negative or overly complex, simply do what any smart politician does—ignore the question and respond with whatever you'd like to get across.

**Reassuring:** Remember, the things you say will startle much of the audience. So emphasize that this isn't a battle of dueling facts; these are not our figures but rather official figures from the Postal Service that too rarely are reported. And tell your listeners or viewers that they can verify everything you're saying in five minutes on the Internet. Few if any will actually do that, but merely saying it will reassure folks that you're not making this stuff up or engaging in self-serving spin.

Remember too, that you start with built-in respect and credibility. You don't need to dazzle anyone. Just stick to the basic themes, repeat them, speak slowly—and your audience will leave surprised, informed and maybe ready to act on our behalf.

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