

PR News

Building the bridge between PR and the bottom line.

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Transparency Key to Keeping the Vitriol Out of Political Donations

'Tis the season of giving—political giving, that is. As national candidates jockey for the White House, now is the time for public affairs pros—and PR pros who wear public affairs hats—to get familiar with political contributions and the communications strategies behind them.

(DID YOU KNOW?)

Seven Things You Will Learn in This Week's Issue of PR News

1. As special interest groups shower politicians with money, it's essential that businesses get into the political game. (p. 1)
2. A survey found that one-quarter of respondents were locked out of their house at least once in the past year. (p. 1)
3. Disturbingly, a majority of digital execs worldwide focus on "page views" as a key social media metric. (p. 2)
4. Publix Markets replaced Johnson & Johnson as the top corporate citizen as viewed by the American public. (p. 3).
5. Optimizing a Web site for the iPad is demonstrably different than for a smartphone. (p. 4)
6. PR recently drove the creation and unveiling of a Troy Polamalu wax figure at Madame Tussauds in NYC. (p. 7)
7. One reason not to try social media: when you have reason to fear what employees might say. (p. 8)

But just what are the objectives in giving to politicians? According to John Davies, CEO and founder of Santa Monica, Calif.-based **Davies Public Affairs**, there are two possible reasons to be in the giving mood: First, when a politician is supportive of your organization and/or industry and there are shared values and principles between the two; and second, when an organization wants to get "a moment in time" (as

Davies puts it) with a politician who doesn't necessarily take your stand. "Would you get access to him if you didn't give?" asks Davies. "Maybe, but a donation could help get access more quickly."

Davies goes on to say that today, special interest groups are "pounding" elected officials with money, and therefore businesses need to get in the political game. "Some businesses shy away from giving, but today

there's a lot at stake."

RULES RULE

To effectively handle political contributions within your organizations, the most important rule is to, well, know the rules, says Breanna Olson, manager of political involvement programs at the **Public Affairs Council (PAC)**. Rules for companies, associations and nonprofits are different.

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Advertising

Brand Marketing

The 1-2 Advertising/PR Punch: Integrated, Knockout Comms Strategies Revealed

Back in March 2011, executives at Minneapolis-based PR agency **Carmichael Lynch Spong (CLS)** sat down with an assembled team of advertising, consumer engagement and brand activation experts on behalf of client **Schlage**, the venerable security systems and lock maker. Schlage had a new product to tout—a keyless door lock—and a 360 degree campaign with an in-market launch for October was in the works.

More meetings ensued, and the subject of TV ads were broached. "They give you the broadest awareness the quickest," says Maria Reitan, senior principal of Carmichael Lynch Spong, who has worked on **Ingersoll Rand**—Schlage's parent company—brand

accounts for several years. But what of the PR in concert with the TV spots? "If the ad is the bullhorn, then PR is the big whistle," says Reitan, who adds that the melding of the two platforms is like a 1-2 punch. To learn about the power of PR's punch within an ad campaign—and some secrets to scoring a knockout—*PR News* chronicles two ongoing efforts: CLS and Schlage; and **Marina Maher Communications** and Head & Shoulders.

SURVEY IS A LOCK

In the case of the Schlage campaign, the whistle sounded in the form of a survey about lost keys fielded to 500 home owners. "We wanted it to be fun, but educational and

of interest to the media," says Reitan. The idea of lost keys, and the answers from consumers to questions like "Where do you hide your keys?" and "How often do you lose them?" has created good buzz. A release, launched in concert with the ads the week of Oct. 10, featured factoids like "a quarter of the respondents were locked out of their houses at least once in the past year," and gained considerable media attention, including targeted bloggers.

In concert with CLS' effort, the Schlage communications team, led by brand director Ann Matheis, is using Facebook, Twitter, a blog and Web site (keylessentry.com) to

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Political Giving

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“Understand what those are so you can effectively communicate your efforts to internal and external stakeholders,” says Olson, who served as national finance manager for Rudy Giuliani’s 2008 presidential primary campaign.

However, you don’t have to be a lawyer to understand the different regulations. For example, federal contractors and corporations (for profit or nonprofit) may not contribute to federal campaigns.

What you can do is establish a Political Action Committee (PAC, not to be confused with the aforementioned Public Affairs Council). There are different designations of PACs—they include:

- **Connected PACs:** These are the most common PACs, established by businesses, labor unions, trade groups or health organizations.

These PACs receive and raise money from a “restricted class,” generally consisting of managers and shareholders in the case of a corporation and members in the case of a union or other interest group.

- **Non-connected PACs:** Usually groups with an ideological mission, single-issue groups and members of Congress and other political leaders that can accept funds from any individual, business PAC or organization.
- **Super PACs:** The newest political committee can raise unlimited sums from corporations, unions and other groups, as well as individuals. Notably, in summer 2011, comedian Stephen Colbert formed his own Super PAC.

BE TRANSPARENT

Of course, political giving is full of potential pitfalls, many communications related, says

Olson. Stakeholders often look at contributions with skepticism, which makes the PR side of giving critical. “More and more organizations are becoming more transparent in communicating their giving,” she says. “They are listing contribution criteria on their Web sites, and naming individuals who sit on PAC boards.”

Jonathan Collegio, communications director at conservative political organization **American Crossroads**, says transparency is necessary, particularly as shareholder groups demand more information from companies. “They are asking for a high degree of disclosure,” says Collegio. “And companies are taking them up on it.” Besides, adds Collegio, you might just as well be transparent, because donations are by law available to the public anyway.

Scott Reiter, managing director of RPAC and political programs at the **National Association of Realtors**, definitely believes in transparency, especially in this political climate filled with much skepticism and vitriol. Thus, Reiter makes certain that giving policies and criteria are in place and spelled out for stakeholders. “Our contributions are posted on our Web site, and we send an election report out to donors giving our rationale on where the money is going,” says Reiter.

GO STATE & LOCAL

Where can your organization’s donation have the most impact? Davies suggests looking at state and local elections. “There’s just a lot more initiatives going on in both of those levels,” says Davies. While federal politicians may focus on five or six big issues a year, the amount of state and local actions are just about endless.

But beware: State and local contributions laws vary widely, so Davies recommends calling their respective elections boards to learn the details. Davies’ other tips for smooth political giving include:

1. **Put together a comprehensive giving plan.** This covers potential candidates, who will be giving (executives, employees) and how the money will get to him/her.
2. **Understand your candidates’ positions.** “Supporting one that doesn’t have your organization’s values is dangerous,” says Davies.
3. **Vet the candidate** for prior scandals or transgressions.
4. **Make sure your candidate accepts contributions.** Some candidates don’t.
5. **Consider asking for a face-to-face** with your chosen candidates. You’re better able to get things done with them.
6. **Get employees involved in local elections,** particularly if an initiative is a make or break for your company. If your company cares about the candidate, get employees involved in the election.

While many people are disgusted with politics, Davis explains that it is part of business, and if you look at it as distasteful, you’ll be in trouble. As a rule, he says, “good people give money to good people.” Not a bad thing to remember when cutting the company check. **PRN**

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How Are Fed PACs Communicated?

Communication Tools	% of Respondents
PAC newsletter	71%
Intranet site	67%
Get-out-the-vote education	39%
Annual report	38%
Live issue or candidate forums	34%
Webinars or teleconferences	22%
Company newsletter	16%
Employee orientations/training sessions	15%
External Web site	16%
Other (please specify)	9%
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	1%

In its 2011 PAC Benchmarking study, the Public Affairs Council quizzed execs on how they create awareness around their PACs. As you can see, social media has a ways to go as a PAC mouthpiece.

Source: Public Affairs Council