



# 2025 Essential Guide to Broadcast PSA Success

for nonprofits, professional associations &  
government agencies with vital public interest  
messages to share

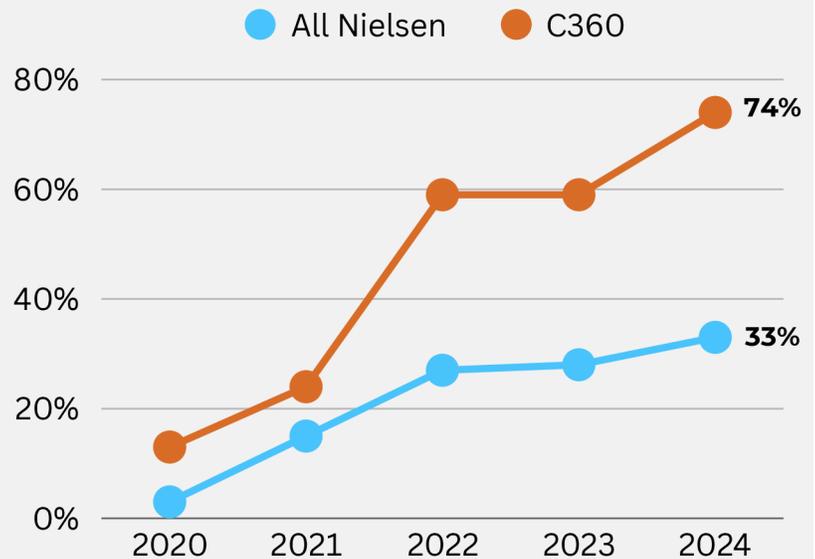


# Executive Summary

Broadcast TV stations donated more free ad time to nonprofits in 2024 than in any previous year. While overall TV PSA airings experienced impressive growth over the last five years, airings for Connect360 campaigns grew even faster. Today 1 in every 5 non-Ad Council PSAs detected by Nielsen is for a campaign managed by Connect360.

Public service announcements are a chance to reach large audiences and share essential information, yet many nonprofits are still missing out on this opportunity. Some don't know how to get started, others may still be carrying some old ideas about how PSAs work. That's why we created this guide.

## Growth in Total TV PSA Airings Since 2020



Source: Nielsen

**Reading this guide is the first step toward seizing a valuable opportunity.**

Based on Nielsen data and decades of industry experience, we'll give you the inside look at why broadcast PSAs are essential for organizations that want to educate the public and make a lasting impact.

We will explore:

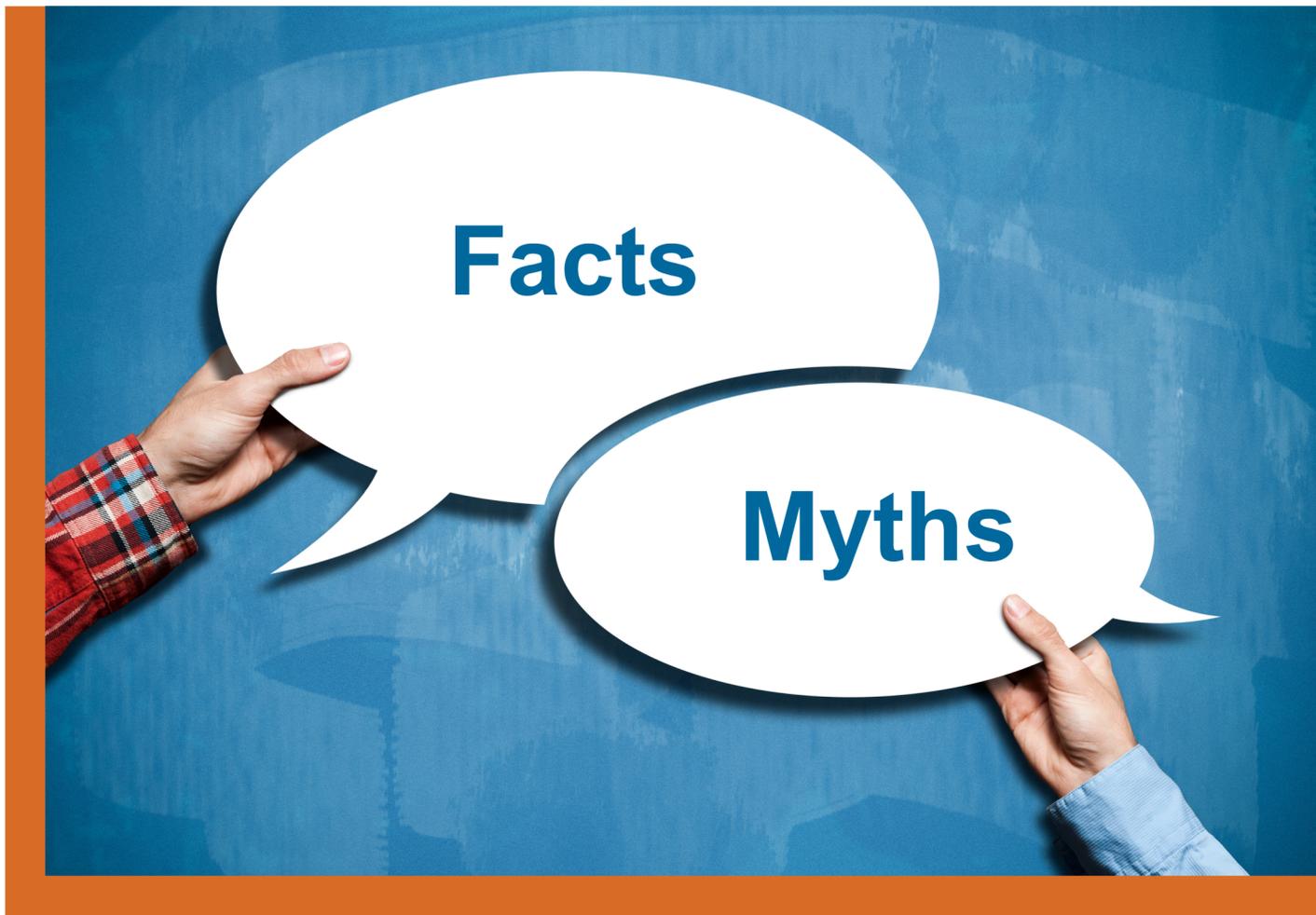
- Why PSAs are essential in the modern world of streaming and OTT media.
- Common myths that might be preventing some nonprofits from using PSAs.
- Distribution, tracking, results reporting, and why those metrics matter.
- What to do (and avoid!) to maximize PSA impact.
- How to handle the trickier aspects of PSA creation and distribution.
- How to combine broadcast PSAs with CTV, digital, print, and out-of-home tactics.
- Where to find support to get your PSA in front of audiences.

PSAs are a uniquely valuable tactic for nonprofit organizations, associations, and agencies. Free, donated advertising space from stations and networks reaches wide audiences to raise awareness without breaking budgets. It's time for your organization to take advantage of this opportunity.

# Part 1

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## Busting Common Myths About PSAs



# Common Myths About PSA Distribution

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Some persistent myths about PSAs keep organizations from investing in them. Before we dive into the nitty-gritty of how PSAs work, let's put those myths to rest once and for all.

## Myth #1 Digital advertising is the most cost-effective way to boost awareness

Many organizations think they can rely exclusively on digital advertising to get their message out. While digital advertising does offer advanced targeting options, you pay for each impression or click. That means the costs add up quickly, especially over a long campaign. Digital advertising is most valuable when it's used to target a specific, well-defined audience in coordination with a broader broadcast awareness campaign. By contrast, PSA media is always donated and free.



## Myth #2 Broadcast stations are required to air PSAs

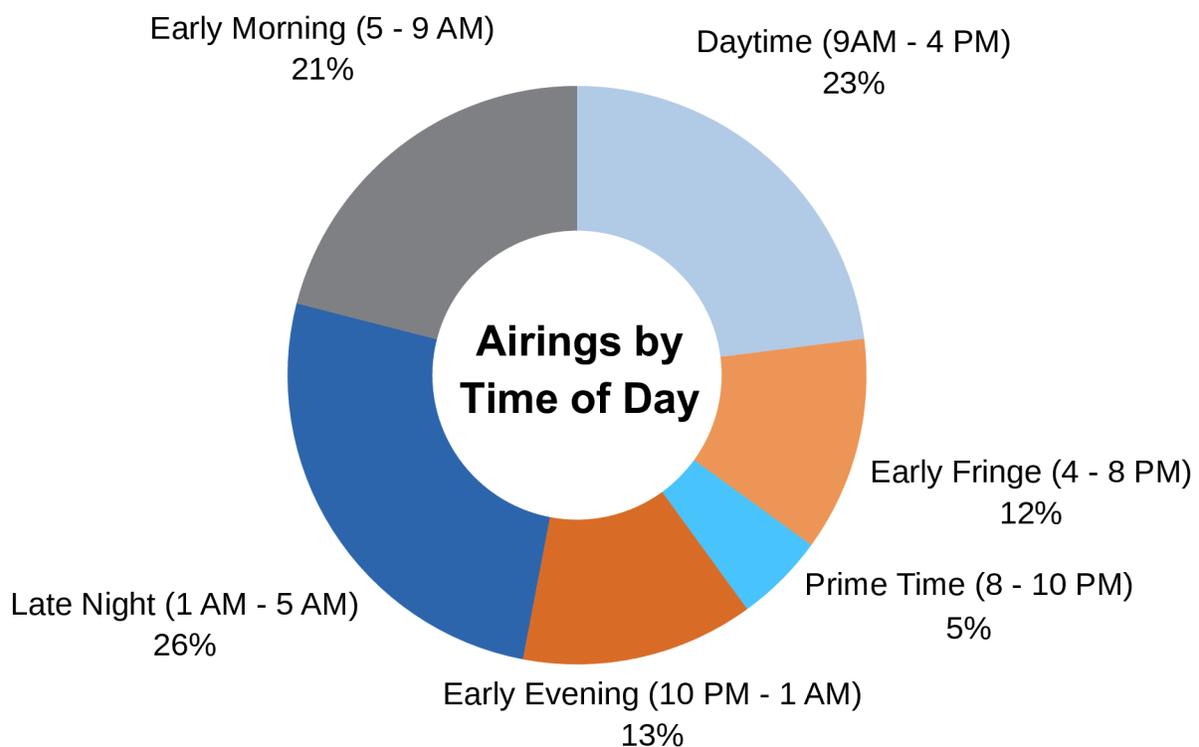
The FCC lifted that requirement decades ago, but stations still air PSAs for three reasons. First, running PSAs is an easy way for stations to prove to the FCC that they're operating "in the public interest." Second, it shows communities and advertisers that the station is a community-minded organization. Third, PSAs help stations fill unsold commercial ad space without impacting pricing for full-price inventory. Stations have many commercial breaks to fill and it's impossible to sell out every commercial slot. PSAs fill the gap.

## Myth #3 The Ad Council is the only way to get a PSA on TV

There are many ways to get a PSA on television. The Ad Council only manages some of the PSA campaigns that run each year. In fact, Nielsen reports that about 1,000 non-Ad Council TV PSAs are running in any given measurement period. Some nonprofits elect to work with their public relations firm or ad agency, however, Connect360 distributes more PSAs for more nonprofits than anybody else.

#### Myth #4 Broadcast PSAs only air in the wee hours of the morning

People often assume that PSAs mostly air late at night because that's when stations have the most unsold inventory. Not true. Based on our analysis of more than 2.7 million TV airings from 2024, only slightly more than a quarter (27%) occurred in the late night hours, and more than half (53%) of airings occurred during normal waking hours. In addition, 5% of airings occurred during prime time. That may not seem like a large percentage, but given the broad prime time audience, that 5% is valuable.



#### Myth #5 Broadcast PSAs mostly air in smaller markets

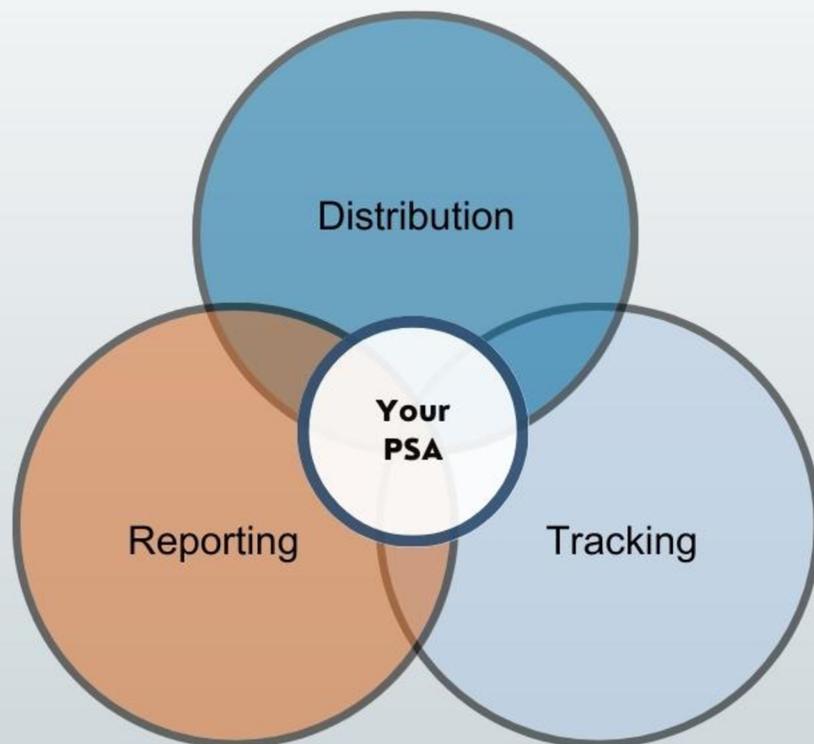
This also is not true. According to analysis of 2025 results so far, 20% of airings occur in the Top 50 DMAs local stations. A total of 37% air in the top 100. National and regional networks account for 5% of airings.

# Part 2

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## Why and How Broadcast PSAs Work

### 3 PILLARS OF PSA SUCCESS



# Why Broadcast PSAs Work

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With the ubiquity of digital advertising, television and radio public service announcements may seem like more of an “old school” tactic. But we prefer to think of them as classics. They’ve been around for a long time, but they still deliver results. Whether independently or as a complement to a digital campaign, broadcast PSAs can help achieve broad awareness.

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## Television and Radio PSAs Can:

-  **Extend visibility**

Stations generally air a PSA for six to 12 months or longer. That’s strong visibility over a sustained period of time. Donated media placements can augment a digital campaign, which is usually shorter in duration due to ad costs.
-  **Drive broad awareness**

With stations across the country airing a PSA, an organization’s message can reach new ears. A year-long television campaign typically generates about 100 million impressions.
-  **Get free placements**

Stations donate valuable advertising space when they air PSAs. A year-long campaign typically generates in excess of \$5 million in donated media, with some campaigns generating more than \$25 million. Nonprofit CFOs are required to record this value as an in-kind contribution and report it on their audited CPA financial statements. As a result, a typical TV PSA campaign returns upwards of 150x more free advertising time than a nonprofit spends to distribute it.

Now that you know what PSAs can do, let’s get into the details of how PSAs are distributed, tracked, and reported.

# The Three Pillars of PSA Success

The success of a broadcast PSA campaign is built on three pillars: Distribution, Tracking and Reporting. Let's take a closer look how each one supports your PSA campaign.



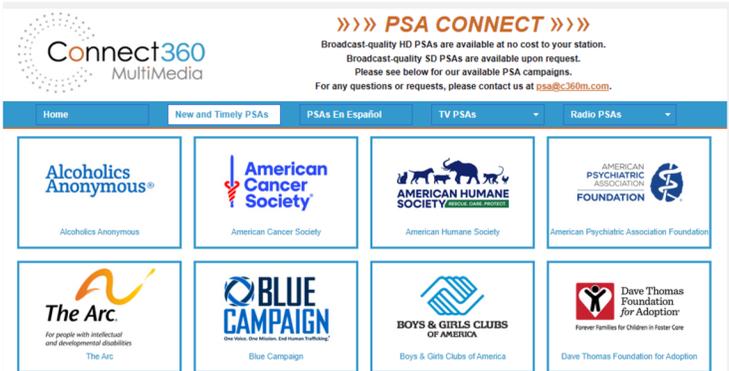
## PSA Distribution

### Digital Delivery

Digital delivery is the preferred method for PSA distribution. Most stations receive PSAs from Extreme Reach, a company that delivers the vast majority of paid commercial ads in the United States. Through Extreme Reach, a PSA Director is notified when a new campaign has been dropped into their cloud-based inbox. From there, they can read campaign materials and easily preview the PSA. If they want it to run on their station, they simply notify the traffic department to access the Extreme Reach platform and put the PSA into rotation.

### PSA Libraries

Some stations also digitally download PSAs from resource centers. These PSA libraries allow a PSA Director to see what campaigns are available at any given time. This is especially valuable if they are looking for PSAs on a specific topic.



Connect360 developed PSA Connect, a library of all the PSAs we are currently distributing. Stations can browse the campaigns, click to review campaign materials, preview different versions, and then download. Other PSA libraries include the Ad Council's PSA Central and the National Association of Broadcasters' (NAB) Spot Center.

## Tracking PSA Airings

### TV PSA Airings Tracking

Stations that donate airtime rarely inform nonprofits that their PSA is being aired. To find the dates and times of airings, nonprofits rely on Nielsen's SIGMA monitoring service.



As a subscriber, Connect360 puts an electronic watermark on every PSA prior to distribution. This tracking device notifies Nielsen every time a PSA has aired. Nielsen collects this data and delivers it daily to Connect360.

#### The SIGMA Report Includes

- station call letters
- market
- exact date of airing
- exact time of airing

The information above is important to understand because it enables Connect360 to calculate how many viewers were exposed to your message.

### Radio PSA Airings Tracking



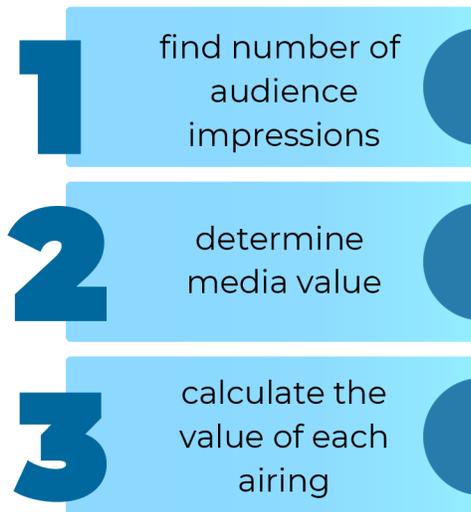
Media Monitors, the number one radio monitoring service in the country, uses similar technology to track radio airings. They're able to monitor about 2,100 of the nation's 15,000 stations across all major markets.

For non-monitored radio stations, Connect360 has developed a self-reporting system. Through an exclusive reporting portal, we have made it possible for several hundred additional stations to provide us with their usage information.

Accurate tracking of television and radio station airings ensures that reporting and valuation is based on facts, not conjecture.

## PSA Results Reporting

Each day, we import airings data into our proprietary database and run it through our system to properly value air time for each PSA. The first step is to determine how many people saw your PSA each time it aired. This is done by applying the Nielsen audience rating for the show in which the PSA aired using the constantly updated viewership database we license from Nielsen.



Next, we determine the media value of the audience impressions. Since stations don't make their rate cards public, we obtain pricing data from a marketing research company called SQAD which confidentially gathers actual price data from the nation's largest media buying services.

This information is only licensed to a limited number of analytical and media research companies. It tells us what actual media buyers paid each month to air their commercials.

By combining this information with our knowledge of where each individual spot aired and how many people viewed it, we are able to determine the value of each airing. We are also able to identify demographic information about the audience that was exposed to the spots, which can be useful for organizations hoping to reach specific audiences.

This approach meets the requirements of CPAs, who need to measure the value of gift-in-kind donations that organizations receive. It is in compliance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) because it relies on actual market sales prices for transactions that occurred in the same time period that the donated services were received.

### Speaking of gift-in-kind donations...



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## Gift-in-Kind – A Little-Known Secret

Public service campaigns offer a valuable perk beyond awareness of the cause. They can actually help with a nonprofit's ratio of revenue and expenses, something that donors look at when choosing a charity to support.

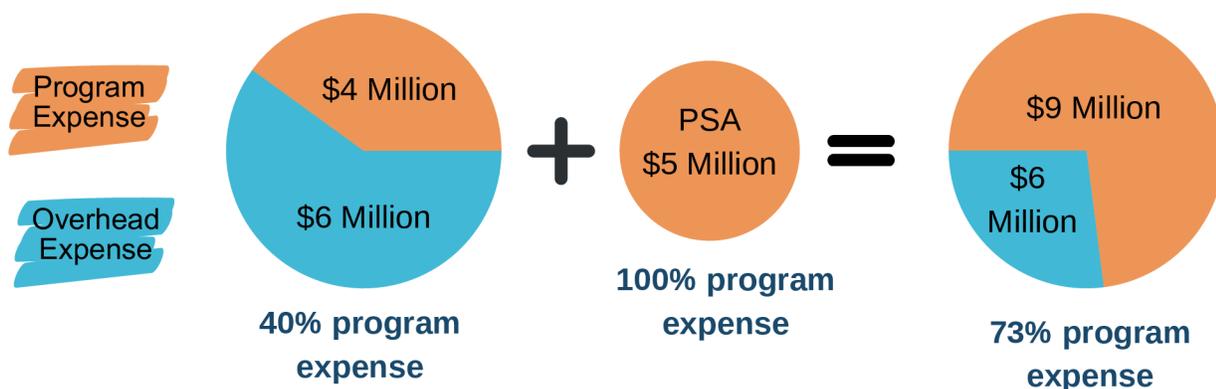
### How it Works:

When a station airs a PSA, it donates to the nonprofit the value that it otherwise would have charged an advertiser. This donation is called a gift-in-kind donation, which means it's a contribution made in a form other than cash. By the end of a PSA campaign, this can end up being a very large donation to record!

Since donated advertising time is used (in most cases) to promote the mission of a nonprofit, it is considered a 100% program-related expense. That is, an expense incurred to promote the mission of the organization rather than for overhead or fundraising. Donors and charity rating organizations generally like to see more than 70% of resources being spent on program expenses.

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## PSA Campaigns Improve the Overhead-to-Programs Expense Ratio



As a result, donated advertising time raises the total percentage of financial resources that the organization spent on program-related expenses. In the example above it moved the needle from 40% to 73%. By running this PSA campaign, the organization shows that it is more financially efficient, making it look better to its donors.

# Part 3

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## How to Succeed with Broadcast PSAs



# 6 Essential Dos and Don'ts for Successful Broadcast PSAs

Whether you're new to PSAs or hoping to improve results on your next campaign, these six tips are a smart place to start.

## ✓ Do provide multiple PSA lengths

Offer stations a mix of lengths so they can choose based on their inventory. If you only provide a :30 second spot and they are full of :30s, they may pass on your campaign. By providing other length options, you have more chances to have your PSA chosen. We recommend providing :60, :30 and :15 second spots.

## ✓ Do send PSAs at least four to six weeks in advance

If your cause has an awareness month, we recommend sending your PSA a minimum of four and an optimum of six weeks in advance of when your awareness month starts. Each station differs in their practices. Some review right away, while others pile up incoming PSAs and review the backlog once every few months. It's always best to err on the side of caution.



## ✓ Do include a Call to Action

Every PSA must have a call to action at the end. This can be as simple as, "for more information visit our website." Stations are more comfortable when viewers have a next step to take once they have viewed the message.

## ✓ Do include an “evergreen” PSA with a time sensitive one

For organizations creating PSAs for a special awareness month, we recommend including another set that is more evergreen because it can run at any time of the year. This way if a station cannot air the dated awareness PSA in time, they have another option so you don't lose out completely.

## ✓ Don't feature a current TV star



Some nonprofits tend to think celebrities are needed for credibility, but PSA directors are rarely swayed by big name talent. Rather, stations tell us they look at the message and its relevance to their audience.

Celebrities from popular television shows may cause other networks to avoid your PSA because they may view it as promoting a competing station. Celebrities also sometimes get involved in scandals that can tarnish your organization by association. A non-celebrity spokesperson keeps the focus on your message.

## ✓ Do track actual results, not estimates

When it comes to PSA results, estimates are not enough. These numbers are more than basic marketing metrics, they're reported on your financial statements and directly impact the financial health of the organization. Work with your campaign manager to make sure you're accurately tracking, reporting, and calculating PSA results.

## Money Talk: Asking for Donations and Thanking Corporate Sponsors

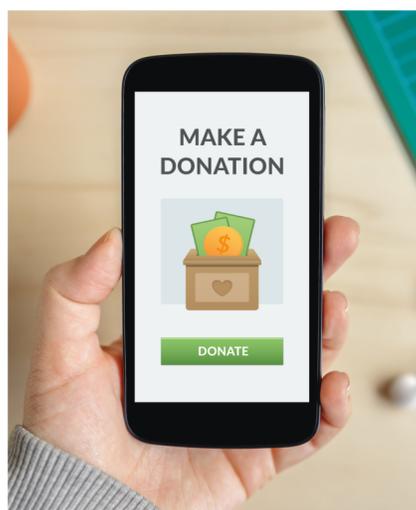
Stations donate free airtime to share messages that are important to their audience. This makes them look like good stewards of the airwaves and builds goodwill in the community. So, it's understandable that stations may get uncomfortable if PSAs ask for donations or call out corporate sponsors. Money talk can obscure their good intentions.

Knowing how to ask for donations and include corporate mentions can mean the difference between a missed opportunity and PSA success.

### How to Ask for Donations

At one time, stations were against any pitch for funds, but many have come to understand the importance of donations to nonprofits. To meet stations halfway, we recommend against making the PSA all about donating.

Try a more subtle approach by including an end tag that says, **“for more information or to donate visit our website at (insert URL).”**



We also recommend including a second set of PSAs that do not mention donations. That way stations uncomfortable with money talk can use the non-ask version.

### How to Recognize Corporate Sponsors

Sometimes a corporate sponsor may want visibility in a PSA. While most stations would prefer to avoid this, you can incorporate the corporate ID at the end tag. Where you may have “A Public Service Message from ABC Nonprofit,” you can add an additional message in smaller font that says **“in cooperation with XYZ Corporation.”** Avoid any visual of a brand product in a PSA.

If possible, distribute two versions, one with the corporate mention and one without. This way you won't lose out if they cannot air the corporate version. Corporate-sponsored campaigns are a better fit for digital media where corporate identity is not an issue (but advertising costs tend to be higher).

# Common Challenges PSA Campaigns Face & How to Overcome Them

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How do we deal with budget constraints?

Focus on the message rather than big-ticket production value

Few nonprofits have the resources to spend six-figures on a PSA production. Fortunately, stations tell us they are not swayed by big-ticket production values. The number-one reason they will choose a PSA to air is because the message is of importance to their viewing audience.

Using animation, a series of still images, or a spokesperson shot against a green screen can be effective while keeping costs affordable. You can even reuse footage that was shot for other purposes and create a PSA from that.

Digital delivery has brought distribution costs down significantly. Currently, digital delivery can go to as many as 1,900 television stations and 9,100 radio stations.

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How do we reach a specific target audience?

Try an integrated campaign

Broadcast PSAs help you reach a wide audience. To target a very specific audience, include digital media tactics in your campaign.

Adding digital media helps you reach people in specific age, gender, marital or parental status, occupation and other demographic groups.

This method is more expensive than broadcast PSAs. Digital platforms don't donate unused ad space, so you'll need to pay for placement out of pocket. However, they can be a successful complement to an existing broadcast campaign.

You can target these audiences through display ads, search ads, and anywhere else they spend time online. Combining digital and broadcast tactics gives you the widest possible reach for your PSA campaign.

How can we reach Hispanic or multicultural audiences?

Design specifically for this audience

The media like to serve all of their audiences with important messages. Spanish-language stations, in particular, tell us that they are underserved with PSAs.

For Hispanic audiences, send the PSA in both English and Spanish (not just with Spanish subtitles).

We also know PSA Directors will check the nonprofit's website to make sure there is an *En Español* section. Stations want to know their Spanish viewers won't get frustrated by hearing a Spanish message and then visiting a website that's only in English.

If reaching people of a specific ethnicity is important to you, consider creative and culturally relevant messaging. Also, include people of that ethnicity as actors or voiceover artists.

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## Get Expert Insight from the Start

Too often, nonprofits come to us with a PSA already produced that has issues we know will impact station acceptance. Worse, we could have eliminated the issue and achieved greater success if the client had included us in the production phase.

If you're contemplating a PSA campaign, don't start with the producer. While the producer knows how to make a video, they may not have the media knowledge to know what stations are looking for and what might be a deal-breaker. Start by talking to a campaign manager to help formulate the framework for the PSA and anticipate common challenges.

What should we keep in mind as we plan our PSA?

We're so glad you asked!

Then find a producer who can combine your message with expert guidance to create a successful PSA. Our goal is not to interfere with the creative process, but to make sure the end product is acceptable to stations so the nonprofit has a successful campaign.

# Beyond Broadcast: Expand Opportunity Using Other Media Channels

The most effective marketing campaigns use a mix of media to reach audiences in different places. While this guide focuses mostly on broadcast PSAs, there are other opportunities for nonprofits to share their messages.

## Digital Placements: Search, CTV, and Streaming Platforms

Digital placements are a perfect complement to a broadcast campaign. While a broadcast PSA can reach the masses, a digital campaign can target a specific key audience.

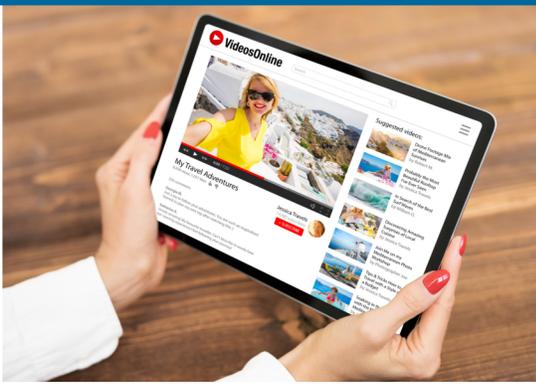
Digital campaigns on websites, streaming platforms, and CTV can use demographic targeting to reach specific groups. Geographic targeting help you reach people in a desired region, state, city or zip code. Location-based mobile marketing takes this further by feeding ads to individuals based on their GPS coordinates in real time.

### Demographic Targeting

- Age
- Gender
- Income
- Ethnicity
- Marital status
- Topic interest
- And many other audience characteristics!



Digital placements may include video, display ads, or a combination of both. Many of them are designed to allow visitors to directly click for more information, making it easy for a person interested in your organization to engage immediately.



If you have the budget, paid placements can put your PSA on platforms like Hulu, YouTubeTV, Amazon’s Prime Video and other streaming platforms. You can target audiences by device, reaching them on mobile, desktop, or Smart TV platforms including Apple TV, Roku, Prime Video, Amazon Fire and others.

All of this targeting comes at a premium. You’ll pay per impression or click until your ad budget is spent. This makes digital placement an ideal solution for reaching a specific audience in a defined location. It’s a valuable supplement to a general awareness campaign, but cannot match the reach of broadcast PSAs.

With so many options for digital placements, you’ll often see the best results by partnering with an agency like Connect360. We can help you navigate the options and make recommendations based on your specific objectives, KPIs, and budget.

## Out-of-Home Ads: Billboards, Place-Based Ads, Digital Street Furniture

Like broadcast stations, out-of-home ad companies also see the need to support nonprofit PSA campaigns. They do this through both donated and discounted placements on posters, billboards, or other displays.

PSAs often appear on street furniture like bus shelters, kiosks, and shopping mall panels. Because these placements fill space that is unsold, the nonprofit does not have control over placement site. Although the placement is donated, the nonprofit needs to pay for the production (ad development and printing or posting).





# What to Ask a Potential PSA Manager

If you are talking to more than one company that provides PSA campaign management, it can be hard to compare apples to apples. Here are a few key questions to ask before you commit.

## Who is doing the work?

Effective PSA management is expensive when you consider the costs to maintain all the data, the subscriptions to media databases to keep station information current, plus subscriptions like Nielsen, SQAD and others for tracking and measurement. There are companies who say they'll manage your PSA, but they actually subcontract to another company. Find out who will ultimately be responsible for your results. At Connect360, we do the work.



## How does the company define digital distribution?

Believe it or not, digital delivery can mean different things. Some consider digital distribution to be simple emails to the stations with PSA links. Connect360 believes in following station preference by distributing through Extreme Reach. This comes at a cost, but we believe it drives more success. Be sure you know exactly how your PSA will be digitally sent to stations.

## How does the company determine the number of impressions and estimated media value?

Make sure that the distributor is using nationally recognized sources for this information and is not guessing or using their own formulas. This is particularly important for media value because the Financial Accounting Standards Board requires transparency in how value is determined.



If you're planning to run a radio campaign, ask if the management company monitors and values radio. Many don't have the ability to track radio plays and valuations.

## Does the company provide accounting compliant in-kind media valuations?

Your CFO and CPA need reliable information about donated, in-kind media valuation. Some campaign managers just estimate these numbers, resulting in inaccuracies and potentially, missed value.

At Connect360, both impressions and media values come from Nielsen and SQAD and all of our reporting is under the auspices of a CPA, who holds us to the highest industry standards.



### The key takeaway is this:

When choosing a PSA distributor, look for a company that has the experience and information to position your PSA for success. Bring them into the process early and lean on their expertise to help you reach your campaign goals.

# Authors

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## Julie Ellman

Partner & Senior VP  
San Francisco, CA

For over 25 years, Julie has been a strategic media counselor for all types of nonprofits, associations, government organizations and PR/marketing firms. In her role as senior advisor, Julie works closely with her clients to set campaign strategy and collaborates with the Connect360 team to ensure KPIs are reached and success is delivered.

Under Julie's stewardship her clients have experienced measurable results that have made a lasting impact such as increased brand awareness, upticks in website traffic, record-breaking campaign sign ups and more.



## Ivette Achong

Vice President  
Mineola, NY

Ivette Achong leads Connect360's public service division and is the company's multicultural specialist. In addition to running the daily operations of the PSA department, Ivette works to strategize and execute public service campaigns to meet each client's objectives and budgets. She has established a record of success in garnering national exposure, as well as millions in donated media values and audience impressions.

Ivette's multicultural marketing experience, diverse ethnic background and fluency in Spanish have helped her clients successfully reach the Hispanic market via culturally-oriented campaigns.



## Chelsea Olsen

Senior Business  
Development Manager  
Mineola, NY

Chelsea Olsen is Connect360's Account Director and Senior Business Development Manager. She is responsible for managing client public service campaigns as well as spearheading the company's new business development and marketing.

Chelsea believes in supporting important social causes. She prides herself on really listening to the needs of each organization. A cornerstone of her approach is to conduct a thorough review with a nonprofit to understand their objectives. This helps her strategically recommend the best tactics to assure success. Chelsea is well versed in traditional earned media as well as today's newer options on digital and social media.

# Why Choose Connect360 for PSA Campaign Management?

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**Experience matters. Connect360 manages more PSA campaigns than any other organization in the United States. Today, 1 in every 5 non-Ad Council TV PSAs detected by Nielsen are for campaigns managed by Connect360.**

**On average, we launch 90+ campaigns per year.** In 2024, Nielsen reported our television PSA campaigns received in excess of 2.7 million airings, which generated more than \$717 million in donated media value. Using the new Connect360 Visual Desktop system, clients can now see up-to-the-minute campaign results any time they want, presented both graphically and in a host of insightful reports.

**Our highly experienced staff have decades of success managing PSAs** on television and radio stations, print, CTV, and other digital media, as well as out-of-home media. Our unique insight also helps clients develop and place Spanish and multicultural campaigns. We work with Charity Navigator's highest-ranked nonprofits, well-known professional associations, Fortune 500-supported foundations, government agencies, ad agencies and public relations firms to share important messages for the good of their audiences.

**Most importantly, our team cares about the success of every campaign.** We take the time to understand your unique needs and goals. Then we create a customized strategy backed by a hands-on approach to campaign management.

For more guidance on PSA distribution, visit [c360m.com](http://c360m.com) or contact us directly using the information below.



## Contact

212-624-9180  
[info@c360m.com](mailto:info@c360m.com)  
[c360m.com](http://c360m.com)