

DIALOGUE

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LRIS Feature

Pro Bono

Oregon State Bar Promotes LRIS with 30-Second Law School

LRIS

By George D. Wolff

OSB's
30-Second
Law School

From the Chair

Raising
Student and
Staff
Awareness of
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Beginning in October 2009 and continuing through January 2010, the Oregon State Bar's Communications Department, which promotes the programs and goals of the Bar and its Lawyer Referral and Information Service (LRIS), had great success running a public service announcement campaign on cable television. The following is an interview with Kay Pulju, the Oregon State Bar's Communications Manager and Project Manager of the campaign. She is interviewed by George Wolff, Administrator of the Oregon State Bar's Referral & Information Services Department and member of the ABA Standing Committee on LRIS.

George Wolff: What is 30-Second Law School?

Kay Pulju: It's a series of public service announcements (PSAs) for cable TV that pose basic legal questions, provide answers, and direct viewers to the bar's website for more information. The questions were designed to pique people's interest by debunking legal myths and focusing on areas of law that impact a lot of people.

Delivery

Wolff: Where did the 30-Second Law School idea come from? Who thought of it?

Pulju: We first thought of it about 15 years ago, but didn't have the money to move forward. At that time, we were contemplating paying a production company and trying to get the program aired on network stations. We did produce one spot, but it aired only on the station that we paid to produce it. The way networks view PSAs isn't what it used to be, and it can be very difficult to get your spots aired.

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Wolff: Had you seen this idea presented by other bar association Communications Departments or LRIS programs before?

Pulju: Not in this way.

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Wolff: What was 30-Second Law School's purpose? Was it in response to feedback about other public outreach efforts? What need was it fulfilling?

Pulju: The purpose was to get people to re-think what they thought they knew and to establish our website as a "go to" source for legal questions and information. We designed the spots to look like our website and pamphlet series as part of an overall branding effort. Now that the cable run has finished, we will continue to use the format for PSAs on community access TV.

Wolff: When 30-Second Law School was done before, did it get a lot of play for the money spent?

Pulju: The first ad we did was filmed by our local network TV sponsor. We paid \$5,000 for production and relied on free air time as a pure PSA. We received very little air time, and only on the channel of the station that produced it.

Wolff: What other formats were considered or used this time, e.g., posters, website, public service announcement radio spots, etc.?

Pulju: We considered radio, print ads and movie theater on-screen advertising. Our ultimate decision to go with cable was based on cost and the number of estimated households we could reach.

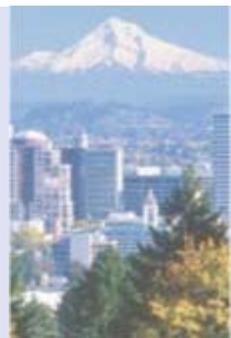
Wolff: Which came first -- the 30-Second Law School idea or seeking out a

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low-cost Cable TV contract for Oregon State Bar-related PSAs?

Pulju: 30-Second Law School. As I've said, the idea has been around for a long time but we did not have the money or expertise to make it happen. Two fairly recent developments made it possible for us to produce the series last year. First, for several years we have been producing a community access series using bar staff for all the production positions. Our experience producing television has given us the skills to produce PSAs on our own. We have a better understanding of what works in the time given, and access to the software and other tools we needed. Second, the poor economy has hit advertising in many sectors, including television, and in 2009 we were able to purchase more air time than we could have for the same amount of money just a year or two earlier.

Wolff: What made you think that a cable TV provider might be receptive to the idea?

Pulju: Because we solicit advertising and sponsorships for some of our other bar programs we pay attention to industry trends. We knew the down market might make our concept more affordable than in the past. Frankly, everyone we approached was receptive, but we were particularly interested in cable TV. Having tried both network and community access, it was the natural next option to explore.

Wolff: Did you have an idea of what it would cost to place the spots before you approached the cable TV provider?

Pulju: Yes, and it was less than I had expected.

Wolff: What did you need to put together to pitch the campaign to the cable company?

Pulju: Just our idea, and the message that we would produce the spots ourselves.

Wolff: How did you get the cable company to even take your call or agree to a meeting?

Pulju: That wasn't a problem. We simply called them and asked for a meeting. They were very receptive, and followed up several times while we went through our typically long process deciding how to move forward. Again, we were exploring multiple options and working with a committee of lawyer volunteers to help decide how we would proceed.

Wolff: How did the negotiations take place?

Pulju: In person, with staff from the cable station and me.

Wolff: Who developed the questions for the TV spots?

Pulju: Members of our Public Service Advisory Committee, working on topic suggestions we gleaned from our experience with LRS clients mostly. For example, in LRS we get a lot of Monday morning remorse calls from car buyers. There's a well-established myth out there that you get three days to change your mind when you buy a car. That's not the law in Oregon. I've heard this one so many times I was determined to de-bunk it with our first PSA spot.

We took our list of topics and myths to the committee, who worked on crafting short questions to which we could give a clear answer. That was a lot more difficult than you might expect – unless you have a lot of experience drafting by committee.

Wolff: Who created the spots and how?

Pulju: Our internal design and IT staff, using LiveType for the graphical elements and Final Cut Express for the final video rendering.

Wolff: How many spots were there?

Pulju: Five, all using the same template that we will now use to produce more spots for broadcasting on our state's network of community access stations.

Wolff: How did you keep production costs down?

Pulju: By keeping it simple and doing everything ourselves. The spots are entirely graphically based, which means our designer could do everything on his own desktop – no actors, no film, no voiceovers. For audio we relied on simple sound effects and the lucky circumstance that our RIS administrator

(George Wolff) is a talented musician/songwriter with his own home studio. He donated original music for the series. So in essence we had zero production costs, with the added benefit that the staff who worked on it now can say their work has been on TV – during Monday Night Football on ESPN.

Wolff: Who owns the rights to the spots?

Pulju: We do.

Wolff: What areas of law did the spots cover?

Pulju: Consumer law (return policies and co-signing), DUII, Unemployment, and common law marriage.

Wolff: Why were those areas of law chosen?

Pulju: They are areas of the law that cause a lot of public confusion, plus we were able to identify discrete issues that fit into our simple Q & A format.

Wolff: How flexible was the cable company with respect to using different spots at different times? Did you have to run one or two spots the whole time? What enabled you to have some flexibility?

Pulju: They were pretty flexible, and so were we. The spots aired in rotation, but we were able to give more weight to some over others. We could not control directly which spot ran on what station at what time. Our package did include an option to designate a few specific time slots on a few stations. One of the ones we picked was Monday Night Football on ESPN. We were able to request that the car buying question run in that slot, which seemed like a particularly good audience fit.

Wolff: How many times did the spots air?

Pulju: About 1,400 spread out over 5 months.

Wolff: What advice would you give to a non-profit LRIS that wanted to duplicate this campaign?

Pulju: First, keep it simple. If you can't do production yourself, pay someone to create spots in a flexible format so you can modify and update your product for future use. Our spots are computer-generated, not filmed, which means we now have a template we can use again and again. I think our simple, clean graphics and quiet audio made our series stand out from the noisy crowd and seem less "cheap" than anything we could have afforded using traditional film or video.

Second, tie it in to a larger, overall marketing plan. Our goal was to make viewers think of the bar's website as the best place to go for legal information. Even though the cable campaign is finished for now, the website is still there. Our public site is similar to the PSAs design-wise, so it will look familiar to anyone who has seen the series. We also saw the initial expenditure for cable as more of a launch of our brand than a discrete project. The web presence will live on, and we will use the template for promo spots for another of our ongoing projects, the Legal Links cable access series.

Wolff: What would you have done differently?

Pulju: Started working with the committee sooner. Getting a final set of questions acceptable to everyone took a very long time. I would not, however, try to circumvent the committee process, which I do believe resulted in a better product. I would just give it more time.

Wolff: What surprised you?

Pulju: How much fun we had producing the series ourselves. And how few words you can really use in a 30-second production.

Wolff: What was better or worse than you expected?

Pulju: We had more placements than originally planned. A bright side of the slow committee process is that by the time we were ready, prices had dropped.

Wolff: During which cable programs were the 30-Second Law School spots placed?

Pulju: We selected a few specific programs targeting different demographics, beyond that we had choices of stations only, not specific programs or times. We picked stations based on the middle-income

demographic we were hoping to reach.

Wolff: What sort of statistics did you receive from Comcast on the public's response to the spots?

Pulju: We received regular reports on when the series aired, along with weekly reports on click-throughs for our banner ad on their site (included with our ad package).

Wolff: What kind of affect did the cable spots have on the Oregon State Bar's website traffic?

Pulju: Significant increase in traffic directly to oregonstatebar.org, the new "public home page" included in the PSAs.

Wolff: What kind of feedback did you receive from lawyers who saw the spots?

Pulju: Very positive. They were pleased we were reaching out in such a public way, and thought our approach was informative and professional. Plus, I found out that a surprising number of people I know watch a show about something called "ice road truckers."

Wolff: How big were the markets in which the spots aired?

Pulju: Comcast reaches approximately 650,000 households across the state.

Wolff: Are the spots still running anywhere else?

Pulju: Community access.

Wolff: Where I can see an example of 30-Second Law School?

Pulju: We don't have the actual PSAs streaming online right now, but you can see the web-only companion versions here:

<http://www.osbar.org/public/>

Editor's Note: View the sample videos on the ABA LRIS Clearinghouse web page: <http://www.abalegalservices.org/Iris/clearinghouse/tvads.html>

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