



avicom public affairs PR case study

Public affairs PR drives positive outcomes.

When a technology client proposed to build a city-wide wireless data network, misinformation and misperceptions presented a major roadblock to the company's success. The client sought a public affairs campaign to help set the record straight. The resulting campaign grounded public discourse in accurate information by driving the conversation through traditional media and wireless technology and political blogs, as well as government and political outreach.

campaign outcome

The city's Common Council voted 14-1 in favor of the client's proposal.

An initial benchmark of aldermen's stances on the plan showed several undecided and two against – one being the chair of an important committee in the process. The campaign's effectiveness might best be gauged by comments made by that alderman prior to a key hearing: *"So this is the company I've heard about on the radio, seen on television and read about in the paper this morning."* During the hearing, he went on record as supporting the program.

background

The client's proposal to the Common Council was to build, maintain and operate a wireless network at no cost to city taxpayers.

The client would pay fees to the city to lease rights of way on city facilities on which to place hardware for the wireless network. The company would then lease bandwidth to service providers.

Four days prior to introducing the plan, the client sought a public affairs campaign that included conducting research, crafting messages, creating background materials, providing media coaching and delivering media interviews in time for coverage the morning of the crucial hearing.

Knowing initial coverage by the newspaper of record would set the tone for other coverage, one campaign objective was to ensure key messages and concerns discovered during our research were addressed in the newspaper's initial story.

The daily newspaper published a lengthy, front-page Sunday story with key messages permeating headlines to body copy. The rest of the campaign would focus on responding to every misperception about the proposal.

campaign challenges

With public campaigns come challenges.

On the eve of the Common Council vote to authorize terms, an influential local online magazine editor requested an interview. Leading questions by the editor indicated a negative blog post would follow. After lengthy phone calls involving the editor, the client and the PR team, the editor agreed to post our response to his critical blog entry, which directed readers to the client's website. There, readers could find terms of the deal, FAQs, media coverage and a fact sheet. Intense educational efforts turned what could have been disaster into a more thoughtful blog.



unlikely sources of praise

Public relations efforts rarely are praised. Media are especially critical. But in this case, telling feedback came from local drive-time news radio jocks following Council approval of the proposal.

“Whoever handled the PR for this wireless initiative pulled off the impossible. You cannot get the Common Council to agree on anything.”

the results

The public affairs PR campaign played an instrumental role in gaining city approval of the **proposal**. Easily digested and highly visible messages fended off myriad misperceptions allowing decision makers and influential groups to help lead the race to become the first major U.S. city to completely unwire web connectivity.