



Air War for the Ground War

Strategic Communications for Grassroots Organizing





Get Trained!

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Objectives of the Workshop

- ★ An understanding of what Strategic Communications is.
- ★ Examples of successful Strategic Communications work in progressive struggle.
- ★ A general understanding of best Practices for Strategic Communications.



Strategic Communications

“Strategic communications is an art – the art of presenting ideas clearly, concisely, persuasively and systematically in a timely manner to the right people. Strategic communications is about maximizing available resources and positioning your organization to be **proactive instead of reactive**. It’s about advancing your mission and actualizing your vision.”

-SPIN Project



MWC Strategic Communications

- ★ Full integration of communications planning into organizing planning.
- ★ Exposing the root cause of campaign issues.
- ★ Shifting the debate to the Left.

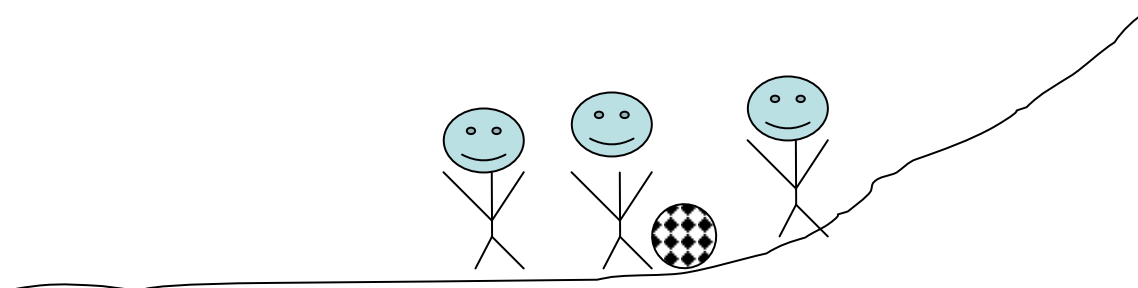
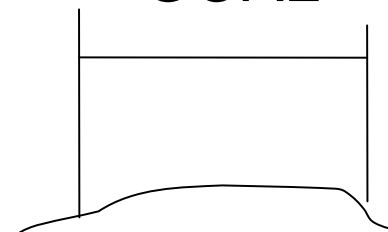


Theory

- ★ Strategic communications can build the base.
- ★ Strategic communications can build power.
- ★ Strategic communications can combat right wing hegemony.



GOAL



Strategic communications



Miami : “Paradise Lost”

- ★ Haven for right-wing Latin American exiles
- ★ No industrial economy, no history of organizing
- ★ Ethnic tension and culture of segregation

Miami Communications

- ★ Create space in the collective imagination
- ★ Challenge hegemony and shift the debate Left



Our Audiences

- ★ Base: low-income Blacks and Latinos
- ★ Middle-Class people of color
- ★ Targets and the people that care about them
- ★ Local Progressive Circles
- ★ National Progressive Allies
- ★ Reporters and Editors



Tactics

★ Media

- ✓ Action coverage
- ✓ Longer term / Bigger picture stories
- ✓ OpEd and Letters
- ✓ Freelance Stories
- ✓ Ethnic Media

★ Propaganda

- ✓ Culturally appropriate
- ✓ Consistent “good” design; consistent frame



Tactics

- ★ Online Organizing (website, blog, eblast, donation)
 - ★ Pirate Lists
 - ★ Personal Voice
 - ★ Maintain contact database
 - ★ Regular contact, but not too much
 - ★ Set benchmarks and measure outcomes
 - ★ On-line actions, tied to base work



2000 - ? : Justice for Scotts

- ★ **CHALLENGE:** Government project displaced residents & destroyed a Black neighborhood
- ★ **STRATEGY:** Shift Frames from “racist” to “**corruption and bad housing policy**”
- ★ **TIMING:** On the heels of Katrina coverage & development boom
- ★ Built on credibility and expertise from 6 years of organizing
- ★ Worked with investigative reporter for 6 months



★ Miami Herald wins Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting

★ Over 40 in-depth stories in 4 months: print, web, radio & tv





2008: March on the Mayors

- ★ **CHALLENGE:** Nat'l Mayors Conference already framed as urban democracy, messaging a movement, Cuban factor.
- ★ **STRATEGY:** Mayors Conference as hook to frame RTTC movement, centering neo-liberalism and human rights (+ power).
- ★ **TIMING:** U.S. Conference of Mayors, Presidential Elections



★ Great visuals and creative concept.

★ Article placement, OpEd, Letter to the Ed, Online communications - Website, E-blast, Facebook, Training for spokesperson.

28 Press hits in 2 weeks (more rolling in), 5 e-blasts sent with 500 person readership, redirection of messaging, no collection on fundraising.



2007 - 2008 : Slum Sluggers

- ★ **CHALLENGE:** Targets shift from public to private; framed as need to protect poor homeowners - solution is bank bail outs.
- ★ **STRATEGY:** We are tactical.
- ★ **TIMING:** Mortgage crisis.
- ★ **Defensive organizing.**
- ★ **Sometimes you just have to throw rocks and see if you can break a window.**



Tactics: leaflets, online action, article placement, media events, new media production.





Key Insights... Best Practices

- ★ Organize the Media
- ★ Do-it-Yourself
- ★ Spokespeople: Leaders, not Victims
- ★ Reach beyond the base, beyond the media
- ★ Timing is everything
- ★ Communications can Lead
- ★ Resource the Work



Key Insights:

Organize the Media

- ✱ Build Relationships
- ✱ Seek opportunities for political struggle
- ✱ Keep 2-3 stories in your back pocket
- ✱ Become a source and expert for reporters
- ✱ Get the story placed - aim high, but settle
- ✱ Seek national (and international) opportunities
- ✱ Consider reporters as the cousin you never see but sometimes need to borrow money from



Key Insights:

Do-It-Yourself

- ❖ Be a freelancer: Cover your own stories
- ❖ Partner with alternative media/create media
- ❖ **Always** take photos



Key Insights:

Spokespeople: Leaders, not victims

- ✱ Political education and **organic** understanding of issues
- ✱ Ongoing training and coaching for speakers
- ✱ Frame for power and shifting the debate



Key Insights:

Reach beyond the Base, beyond the Media

- ✱ Have on online presence (web, myspace, blog, eblasts)
- ✱ What about the Tech Gap?
- ✱ Online organizing program; independent but tied to campaigns



Key Insights:

Timing is Everything

- ❖ Seek opportunities to expose our issues and shift the public debate
- ❖ Monitor local and regional events and trends
- ❖ Stretch



Key Insights:

Communications can lead

- ❖ Mass form of outreach and popular education
- ❖ Creates space for conducting outreach and initiating campaigns
- ❖ Shifts debate to create opportunity for allies and targets to step up



Key Insights:

Resource the Work

- ❖ Dedicate Time, Dedicate Staff: Its worth it.
- ❖ Invest in relevant technology
- ❖ Invest in creativity and innovative tactics