

## Spreading the Word: Grassroots Public Relations Ideas You Can Start Today

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### What PR is...and isn't

Ask anyone what the term 'public relations' means and you will get a variety of responses. Some may say PR is about 'spinning the truth' to create a favorable public image for a person or group. But that's not the type of PR we're advocating. True PR is not about 'building an image' or self-promotion. It's about two-way communication with a simple purpose: to educate others about your services and expertise, and to build positive relationships with your 'publics.' Athletic trainers have many publics – parents, athletes, administrators, coaches, and fellow staff members. PR can be as inexpensive as a phone call or as costly as a full-page ad. And with a little effort, you can easily practice good PR as part of your job that can go a long way in building relationships. Here are a few ideas to get you started that you can implement right away.

**Call Parents Often** When an injury occurs, a simple phone call home not only demonstrates your concern for the student-athlete, it also enhances treatment compliance and educates parents of your role. When a parent contacts you with questions about their child's injury, make it a general rule to return phone calls and emails within 24 hours.

**Send Home Handouts** Well-designed home treatment instructions improve treatment compliance, show professionalism and demonstrate your expertise. Topics can range from RICE, to beginner ankle sprain exercises, to home exercises for patellofemoral syndrome. See the sidebar 'Create Dazzling Documents' for tips on creating reader-friendly handouts.

**Attend Back To School Night** This event gives you a chance to meet parents at the beginning of each school year. Make sure you're listed in the program and you have plenty of literature on hand. If parents go the cafeteria at any point during the event, that's probably the best place to set up a table for high visibility.

**Use the Community Cable TV Channel** Many school districts have access to a local cable station to broadcast content. The AT can offer tips for hydration in the fall, nutrition advice in the winter, and muscle strain care in the spring. If athletic events are broadcasted, ask a technology teacher to help you create a "Sports Medicine Minute" for breaks in the action (halftime, between innings). You can also provide post injury care and prevention tips on a school social media account.

**Speak to Parent Groups** Schools usually have a parent athletic association that meets regularly. Volunteer to speak about your role and offer a visit to the athletic training facility. Include a hands-on demo such as how vacuum splints work or exercises to prevent lower back pain.

**Create a Website** Post information here as another resource for the community. Content can include injury care and nutrition tips, athletic training policies, and a short bio.

**Create a Mission Statement** A mission statement informs parents, coaches, patients and administrators of your treatment philosophy. Put it on your website, your office door, or on the back of your business card. Here's an example:

*'Our mission is to provide the best possible health care to our injured student-athletes. We focus on educating the athlete and employing the latest treatment and rehabilitation techniques. We strive to return injured athletes back to participation in the shortest but safest time frame, placing their overall health and safety above all else.'*

**Be professional** Maintain appropriate appearance, hygiene and conduct. Communication researchers say within the first 10 seconds of contact, people will form many impressions about you, including: Are you visually clean, credible, confident and courteous? Remember, if you look and act professional, most people will treat you as such.

## Create Dazzling Documents

### Use the dollar bill test

If your document looks like it's too much to read, most people won't read it – unless highly motivated. Break up your body copy, or paragraph text, with pictures, graphics, lines, sidebars, and boxed items. Place a dollar bill anywhere on your document, at any angle, and it should touch something other than paragraph text.

### Strive for 17-word sentence length

The longer your sentences, the less you will be understood. Vary the sentence length to give your prose rhythm, but keep them short. You will reach 75% of your readers with a 17-word average; 40% or less once your sentences get any longer.

### Don't fear white space

It is tempting to crowd every square inch of your document with information, but don't let your masterpiece look too busy. Give your reader's eyes a break with some white space.

### Choose the right font

Use a serif font for your main body copy. Serif fonts are easier to read since they have the little 'feet' or small hooks on the letters. The reader's eyes can go from foot to foot. Examples include Times New Roman or Garamond. Sans serif fonts, such as Arial, lack these feet or thick/thin transitions and are best for headlines and subheads.

### Write for an 8-10th grade reading level

Research indicates this is the best way to reach your audience. Minimize your use of 3-syllable words and keep your sentences on the shorter side for a good score. Use the [Gunning Fog Index](#) to determine your content's reading level.

Check out an example [AT Talk](#) to educate your school community about what you do!