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PROVIDENT COUNSELING, INC.: A MARKETING VIDEO

The initial contact/idea for doing a marketing video for Family and Personal Support Centers, Inc., (F&PSC) came from Carol Dillon of Lindenwood's Public Relations department. Carol is also on the board of F&PSC and had approached Peter Carlos with the idea that this might be an interesting project for one of his video students. Peter suggested that I do this project because of my background and current employment in the field production of videos in the health care field for Medical Video Productions, a company based in Creve Coeur. This, however, was not the typical surgery/physician interview video that my company routinely produces. It was to be, instead, a marketing tool for a counseling agency that was suffering somewhat from an identity crisis. In addition, my role in this project was to far surpass that of merely field production and was, indeed, a thorough learning experience.

Employee Assistance Programs for major corporations in

the St. Louis area routinely referred clients to the various agencies in the city for counseling. F&PSC sought a way to introduce the individual counselors and clinicians to the EAP referral services. They wanted to get the faces, specialties and personalities of their group of counselors in front of the EAP referrers so that they could validate their credibility as a quality counseling agency and ultimately increase their client load. This, in turn, would qualify F&PSC for additional assistance from the United Way. My task was to market F&PSC in a dignified manner that at once preserved the integrity of the counselors' profession and maintained the privacy of their current clients. In my job experience with Medical Video Productions, the problem of patient anonymity was virtually nonexistent since the patients involved were usually seen from the inside out in a surgical setting. The occasional patient interview was covered by a patient consent form, drawn up by the company attorneys. For the F&PSC marketing tape, no actual clients were to appear on camera in order to not jeopardize their privacy or reveal their identities. In fact, it was somewhat difficult to get some of my friends to agree to act on camera as clients being counseled or even as members of a group attending a counseling seminar. There was apprehension that an acquaintance would by chance see this video and perceive them as "having problems" in the areas of marriage, drug abuse, and perhaps

finances, since F&PSC is a United Way agency. This misperception resulted in a number of no-shows when it came time to mock up some B-roll or cutaways for the video.

Before my first meeting with the board of F&PSC, I met with Peter Carlos and determined that my agenda should include the following points:

- a. determine audience for which video is being developed
- b. objective of video, i.e., inform? instruct?
- c. proposed length
- d. best speakers they'll want to feature
- e. contact for hard costs (tapes, etc.)

The points that I wanted to make special note of included:

- a. meetings attended and calls made
- b. questions asked and responses to questions
- c. any research done
- d. brochures and literature accumulated
- e. all drafts of script
- f. tape logging

Initially, when I met with the twelve-member board of F&PSC in January of 1989, they wanted me to produce a thirty

minute video. I felt confident in convincing the board that a video half that length would be more than enough time to not only get their message across in an effective way, but also that because of what audiences were used to in terms of condensed news, the "sound bite," and other such "fast-food" approaches to media, their target audience would be more amenable to a 10 minute introduction to their agency. To back this up, I had a short video with me that I had co-produced for a local outpatient surgery center. We viewed this together at the meeting and, in addition to the concepts of why a short program would be better, I explained to them the benefits of the voiceover versus a didactic presentation by a person who may not be effective on camera. (Some of the board members initially wanted to have each counselor be on camera and recite their background and tell what their particular type of therapy covered.) I was given a large envelope of brochures (enclosed with this report), a history of the agency written in 1985 and a videotape that was produced for the 125th anniversary of the agency. I promised to review the materials carefully, come up with a first draft and meet with them within a month.

There were many good ideas presented to me at that meeting. Many, many good ideas. So many, in fact, that I ap-

proached the director of the agency, Sarah Griffin, by phone the day after the meeting and suggested that a subcommittee might be an easier way to filter out the abundance of ideas on what this video should address and accomplish. Sarah agreed that my meeting with one or two representatives might be more productive and suggested the two persons that I had planned on requesting.

Of the twelve people that I had originally met with, no two of them had the same idea of direction they wanted this video to take or the audience to be targeted. In fact, it was even proposed that I produce two separate tapes: One targeted to referring agencies and one targeted to the actual client.

The board had the following suggestions for the target audience: Physicians, parole officers, ministers, treatment centers, counselors at education centers, to generate word-of-mouth, EAP with which they had contracts, insurance companies, mental health HMOs. They wanted to introduce the clinicians and focus on the security and stability of their staff (eight full time, three part time), stressing their low staff turnover. While, certainly, this is something to be

proud of, I didn't feel that it had any place in a marketing videotape. One can call attention to something that may possibly be perceived as a negative by virtue of the fact that it strays from the original intent and thrust of a video, I think.

They wanted to mention the issues of drug abuse, divorce, family issues, school problems, seminars, the self-esteem group, the mood/depression group.

Their main competition, I determined, were the mental health programs at St. Anthony's Hospital and St. John's Mercy Medical Center. These are major corporations with huge advertising budgets. Their radio spots abound in the St. Louis market. F&PSC really doesn't have a bad image, but their low visibility compared with the big corporations may give that misperception. Rather than take on the "big boys" head on, which would be a mistake with no real budget for this type of marketing, I suggested that we determine where the bulk of their business comes from and establish this block as our target audience. The employee assistance programs, then, would be the main target audience. I would try to keep the tone of the video generic enough that it could be

used for some of the other groups that referred to F&PSC.

I viewed the anniversary tape. It was all voiceover with cuts and dissolves of historical photographs. In addition, there was an irritating Scott Joplin rag throughout the video at a level almost equal to the female voiceover. The music was far too loud and detracted my attention from the content of the script. This gave me much hope and confidence in my project, because this is a pretty basic rule of audio mixing and this tape had been put together by Laclede Communications, a prominent St. Louis production company. I read the brochures I had been given, read the history book and put together a first draft of a script. The basic format of this first script was using a voiceover to introduce each concept or counselor, and then go with the board's original idea of having each counselor or individual representative speak for 30 to 45 seconds on what they do, how and why they do it. At this point, I project a running time of approximately 15 minutes. After viewing a marketing tape in class that week, however, I set 12 minutes as my limit.

Approximately a month later, I met with Sarah Griffin and Janice Clark, one of the counselors who would be featured

in the video, and read the first draft of the script aloud, having given each of them a copy to make notes on. It became immediately apparent that many of the brochures and much of the material in the book was now dated. A great deal of the first draft was cut and/or changed. Sarah and Janice told me that I had been very general in my scripting. (Finally, some specific direction!) They told me that they wanted more emphasis on their particular agency in Clayton versus the entire Family and Personal Support Centers, Inc. network of agencies in the greater St. Louis area. They said they would get together with my script and put together ideas about what they wanted to be covered and get back with me.

Since one of the original ideas presented to me was that F&PSC had an identity crisis, I made sure in the first draft of my script that I mentioned the name of the agency several times. It's not really a catchy name and doesn't really scan or flow all that well, but I thought perhaps that repetition would breed a sort of familiarity. In fact, I even came up with the idea to use the following anagram, which I presented to the subcommittee and which was met with great enthusiasm:

Family

&

Personal



Support
Centers
Dissolve out the words, leave the first letters, dissolve in:
Feedback
&
Plain
Simple
Caring

However, it was in the plans to change the name of the agency to something more corporate-sounding. So much for cutesy creativity.

In the first draft, the fact that I had so many character generations pointed out to me that I was perhaps trying to relate too much information in what was supposed to be a short, introductory video. Fortunately, much of this information was decided by the subcommittee to be deleted anyway, so I didn't have to address the problem of going on and on with CGs. In the final product, however, I did use CGs to introduce each counselor as they spoke as a talking head on screen for the first time. I used CGs, of course, for the opening and closing screens/scrolls, and I also used CGs in a slow reveal to match the cadence of the voiceover during the listing of the accreditations of Provident Counseling, Inc.

These CGs were keyed over a United Way logo to subconsciously get the fact across to the viewer that Provident Counseling, Inc. is a United Way agency without dwelling on the fact. I did think these accreditations were important enough to establish credibility of the agency to warrant the use of CGs. The only other use of CGs in the program were the two workshops that were briefly mentioned before Sarah Griffin's closing remarks.

Another idea that was rejected by the committee was to end the program with comments from executives in the agency, Paul K. Reed, President and Bruce S. Buckland, Chairman of the Board. Sarah Griffin wanted to make the closing comments herself when it was determined that the thrust of the video was on the Clayton center versus the whole citywide agency. This was an excellent suggestion, because Sarah comes across on camera as very personable and sincere. I think the final tone she sets of the program will leave the viewer with a positive perception of Provident Counseling, Inc. of Clayton.

The following month, I met again with Janice and Sarah with a second draft of the script that incorporated the ideas we had discussed in the February meeting and that excluded

the parts that we had agreed were not important. The script was cut further to delete the somewhat lengthy set of voice-overs and CGs explaining the Mission Statement beginning at the bottom of page 1 of the second draft. While this four-point statement of purpose was appropriate in the written history from which it was derived, I felt that it brought the already established pacing of the video to a screeching halt and abruptly segued from the informative, friendly tone to a didactic one. This became obvious upon reading the script aloud, a practice I established early in the production of the program and one that proved to be invaluable for determining pacing, tone and relevancy of content.

An additional cut in the second draft was the listing of various programs and services of the agency that begins on page 3 of the second draft. This listing of programs and services was not relevant to the established target market of people who would be referring clients to the agency. These programs and services were more important to establishing the role of the agency within the community.

By this time, the tone, approximate length and content of the program was firmly established in my mind and upon

meeting with the subcommittee in May with the third draft of the script, it was agreed that we had a workable script. I made arrangements to shoot as many interviews with the counselors on one day as I could, working around my job schedule and the schedules of the individual counselors.

To assuage any fears of the counselors to be interviewed that they would be put on the spot a la "60 Minutes," I suggested about five questions that might be posed to them in interview. Janice typed up the questions and distributed them to the counselors so that they could think about their responses and jot down a few points that they wanted to bring out in the video. I requested and received copies of their responses in order that I might get a feel for their personal intended direction before each interview yet still maintain control of the content and tone.

When June 19 was established as the first day for shooting, I made an appointment with Peter Carlos to gain a grasp on operation of the remote equipment. I took the equipment home over the weekend to familiarize myself with it. This was probably the most stressful part of the entire project, since my current employment routinely places me next to the

camera instead of behind it, in the role of field producer/director. I made copious notes in my notebook for this project on setup of camera, which cords connected to which jacks and how to operate the recording deck. The new remote equipment that was purchased in late summer is far easier to operate and in much better condition. I had several difficult moments with light stands that did not extend to full height and with tripods that did not hold the camera steady. I learned the hard way that it is best to have someone else along for assistance with equipment setup, advice on lighting and set dressing and transportation of equipment. However, working with no budget, I could not afford this luxury during this project. It is far easier to contract a crew, negotiate a fair price, and let them do what they know how to do. On the other hand, if one will be editing the piece that one is shooting, one can certainly have the script in mind and be confident that one is obtaining all the B-roll and cutaways one needs the first time out.

On June 19, I arrived an hour before the scheduled time of the first interview in order to set up the videotaping equipment and lights. I selected an office in the back of the building that seemed to have the least amount of noise from inside and out and set up the camera, lights and a

monitor I had borrowed from work. Since none of the lavalieres microphones from Lindenwood were functional, I propped a hand-held mic in a drawer off-camera toward the interviewee. If I were to do this again without a lavalier, I would have hung the microphone from the ceiling to obtain a better, more even audio signal. I rearranged the pictures in the background and added a table lamp and plant to the second and third interviews. One can see the learning process progress throughout the video if one knows the order in which I conducted the interviews. The first interview was with Ray Fezzi, the second with Janice Clark and the third with Sarah Griffin who appear seventh, fifth and sixth in the final video. Janice Clark, a black woman, was probably the biggest lighting challenge for me. I lit Janice as much as I could and allowed as little light as possible to hit the light colored wall behind her. Janice had appeared on videotape before and expressed a dissatisfaction in the way she appeared. In reviewing the videotape with Janice immediately after it was shot, both she and I were satisfied with the lighting and general appearance on tape. I believe by letting her be a part of the taping/reviewing process, her confidence in me on this project was firmly established which, of course, was my intent.

Sarah Griffin was the third and final interview I was able to shoot that day, and we shot her interview as a counselor and her closing remarks as well. She was very at ease on camera and I think hers is the best interview in the program.

Next on the shot list for that day was a mock-up of the Women's Self-Esteem Group led by Janice Clark and the Mood/Depression Workshop led by Ray Fezzi. Due to the apprehension of friends I asked to sit in as actors on these groups, I had a poor turnout and had to use some of the same members in both groups. I set up lights in the conference room where these would be shot and went outside to get exteriors of the building for the introduction. I made use of the fine display of flowers from the building next door and made the shot more colorful, I feel.

The shoot of the mock-up groups was relatively uneventful, save for some minor problems with the tripod not holding the camera to it. I solved this problem by taping the camera to the tripod with gaffer tape. Few of the volunteer actors that were involved were able to stay longer than an hour, so it was obvious that I would have to set up another shoot of

this sort and get some additional cutaways and B-roll.

The next day of shooting was a week later. I obtained some additional building exteriors, some shots of the front desk personnel for the introduction of the program, three relatively uneventful additional interviews in the same setting and shots of one counselor who refused to be interviewed. I now realize that had the three additional interviews been shot in a different office setting than the ones shot a week previous, the feel of the final program may have been a bit more relaxed. Again, this is something that I don't think I could have learned without actually having experienced this.

As far as the person who did not want to be interviewed, Mary Lou Gauger, I used a shot down the hall with her speaking with Sarah Griffin, which I feel was a valid situation, since Sarah is the director of this agency. I directed them to be standing there, discussing a handful of paperwork. At my cue, they were to end their conversation and Sarah was to go into an office to the left. Mary Lou would walk toward the camera, not looking at the camera, and go off into an office to the right. I feel that this is a balanced shot and

that it works very well with the cutaways that I obtained on the next day of shooting, taken over Sarah's shoulder and over Mary Lou's shoulder. The voiceover that this video covered was approximately 8 seconds. I eventually shot approximately 10 minutes of video to cover this one sequence.

My next step was to take my "rushes" to Peter Carlos for review and suggestions. Peter made suggestions for additional cutaways of the groups, the secretaries and the sequence with Mary Lou and Sarah, described above, which I anticipated. In my field production job at Medical Video Productions, the shoots I produce are always written by someone else because of their technical medical nature. A common request I have from the editors and authors is to "get plenty of B-roll." I have learned from this project that as soon as one thinks one has obtained enough cutaways, one should shoot twice as many again. And then, just perhaps, one will have a sufficient amount.

July 24 was the next shoot day. So far my subjects were very cooperative in wearing the same clothing as they had before to aid in continuity. I obtained additional cutaways of the secretaries, including sufficient B-roll for a sequence

of one of the secretaries taking a phone call. This sequence includes wide shots of secretary typing, CU of her hand picking up the receiver of the phone, CU of her talking on the phone, CU of her writing a message. I also obtained a sequence of cutaways featuring the second secretary getting information from a Rolodex. This sequence included similar type shots as previously mentioned, and some over-the-shoulder shots as well. The reason for the inclusion of these sequences in the introduction was by request of the subcommittee: They specifically wanted to feature the two secretaries at the beginning of the video.

This shooting day, I also obtained some more shots of the groups. Again, I ran into the problem of getting sufficient volunteer actors to show up, but I worked with what I had and obtained some usable video.

At this point, I made a verbatim transcription of all that was said in the interviews with the counselors. I reviewed the transcription and highlighted what I thought sounded like the sort of image Provident Counseling might like its counselors to project. Then I reviewed the video of these highlighted parts to see if they bites were presented

in a visually acceptable manner. The next step was to send a copy of this highlighted transcription to Sarah Griffin for her input. (By this time in production of the video, Sarah was my only contact. She kept in close contact with me and I with her about how production was coming along.) When Sarah returned a copy of the verbatim transcription to me with her selections and comments, I reviewed them and was almost ready to begin the editing process.

I needed some generic shots to go with the introductory voiceover so, at Sarah's suggestion, I contacted Polly Paulus of the agency's public relations department at the main F&PSC office downtown. Polly had a large collection of generic slides and photos of youths, families, couples and groups. After careful review of this file with my script in hand, I selected approximately 40 of the slides and borrowed them. I took them to Medical Video Production and shot them on Beta-cam, then bumped the Betacam tape over to VHS.

At my first edit session on September 8, Peter Carlos instructed me on operation of the system and showed me how to record my voiceovers. The most logical way of editing this program, it was determined, was to lay down the voiceover and

edit to the audio. I recorded the audio and familiarized myself with the editing system. I worked five hours that evening. Peter assured me that all I needed was about two to three days of editing.

Three days later, I put in an additional four hours, assembling video to correlate with the audio that was laid down. Most of the edit session that day and the next ten hours of editing were involved with laying down twelve of the forty or so slides that I had selected from the P.R. department of F&PSC.

In working with Betacam equipment at Medical Video Productions, I was used to working with a time code that was permanently burned into the tape, i.e., a time code of 1:17:23 would always be at the same place on the same tape. I found out that this was not the case in working with VHS tape. In my initial efforts at logging tape for usable sound and video bites, I zeroed the tape at the beginning of the tape. Since 120 minute tapes hold a great deal of video and audio, it was most time consuming to work within this format. I later learned to zero the tape counter at the first frame of each new sequence or interview. Logging tape in this man-

ner sped up the process considerably.

As I assembled the portion of the program that involved the interviews with the counselors, I found that I did not have enough cutaways to cover jump cuts or to make the program interesting. While it was my intent to have as much talking head as possible during the interviews, since the one of the purposes of the tape was to familiarize the referrers with the counselors, a certain amount of B-roll and different shots of the same person are needed to keep the program from being stale and tedious to view. The easy way out of this dilemma would be to go back to Polly Paulus' slide bank and get some generic shots of groups, couples in therapy, etc. The difficult way would be to shoot some more B-roll.

I knew I had seen and used the best of what Polly had to offer in the way of slides. I researched the areas libraries for generic slides of this sort. I asked the psychology and sociology department heads at Lindenwood for these sorts of materials, but none were available. This was actually better that these materials were not available, because when I did get a chance to go back and get additional cutaways of three of the counselors (Joe Pfeffer, Barbara Neudecker and Gil

Marsh), they were much more at ease in front of the camera and I was much more at ease behind the camera. From my editing experience, I had also gained additional knowledge about setting up lighting and shots that would be usable and easy to edit. Whenever I contract a local crew on a remote shoot for Medical Video Productions now, I routinely ask for a shooter who is also an editor. It seems as if knowledge and talent involved in the two tasks complement each other in that someone who knows what is needed in the edit suite will be more likely to be able to think ahead when they're behind the camera and get the necessary varieties of shots the first time around.

I completed six additional days of editing over the next two months, working around the problems of equipment being repaired at Lindenwood and the problem of trying to talk someone at Medical Video Productions to do something for nothing: To lay down some decent looking Chyrons that I had painstakingly generated and saved on a large disk for only the reward of a free lunch.

I learned some very important things from doing this project. I learned that it is very difficult to count on

other people if no monetary compensation is involved. This includes everyone from actors to fellow students for gripping and assistance to technical personnel to featured performers. I also learned a deeper respect for the professionals that I routinely work with at Medical Video Productions; a respect for people who know how to do just one part of a video production but do it well and competently. This project taught me how to recognize quality performance in even the smallest role in a video crew and how essential each person's peak performance is to the success of the entire, completed project. While I feel extremely privileged to have had the opportunity to produce a video program entirely by myself, I would not recommend it to a person who is inflexible. It seems as if the key to video production is, in addition to being able to think on several planes at once, to also always have a "plan B" available.

A talented and even-tempered editor I work with regularly pointed out to me that a video production can only have any two of the following three qualities going for it: Cost efficiency, being on schedule and quality of production. In other words, one can get a program good and fast, but it may not be cheap to produce. The variations on this somewhat pessimistic theme can be debated endlessly, but I feel that

each of these three variables are essential to a cohesive, lasting program. I feel confident that Provident Counseling, Inc. will be as satisfied and pleased with my final product as I am.

Roberta Holler

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