

Government Relations

American Cancer Society

Challenge: The American Cancer Society Wisconsin Division, Inc. (ACS) was seeking a 50 cent per pack increase in the state cigarette excise tax. Time was limited for the project since the Joint Finance Committee was set to complete their work on the state budget in about two weeks. ACS cited two main reasons for the proposed increased excise tax: the additional revenue could be used to help pay Medicaid costs of smoking-related illnesses and the increased taxes would discourage people – especially impressionable teen-agers – from starting or continuing a dangerous habit.

Target: State government officials, citizens around the state, statewide media

Strategy: Given the limited budget and time constraints for the project, The American Cancer Society worked with Bottom Line Marketing & Public Relations (BLMPR) to target select districts of members of the Joint Finance Committee. A higher cigarette tax could be inserted into the state budget by this committee, but it was also necessary to generate public awareness and support. Districts with heavy tobacco grower populations, such as Richland Center, were intentionally avoided.

A :30 second radio spot was produced by BLMPR. This spot aired for a week on select radio stations in the target areas to reinforce the message by airing the spot several times during the week. Newspaper advertisements urging residents to call their legislators were also developed. Towards the end of the radio buy, quarter-page ads were scheduled to run in local markets where the radio ads were airing. The newspaper ads reinforced the message of the radio ads and asked readers to call their legislators.

The print and broadcast ads urged people to “do something good for their children and grandchildren by supporting the higher excise tax.” (Studies indicate that a higher cost per pack would result in fewer young people starting to smoke.)

Bottom Line Marketing & Public Relations provided the American Cancer Society with a list of the media buys for both print (newspapers) and radio. The American Cancer Society scheduled editorial board meetings at the papers that were running the ads. Additionally, ACS officials pitched the ad campaign as a news story in the markets where the ads were running to help reinforce the messages that the ads were projecting.

Outcome: This classic public relations combination of paid and earned media along with direct communication with ACS members helped in the success of this campaign. Several newspaper articles and radio and television talk show conversations on the topic and many positive editorials were generated. Ultimately, the state legislature included a 6-cent per pack increase in the state’s cigarette tax in the 1995-96 budget.