

2013 Florida Public Relations Association, Treasure Coast Chapter
Division B: Printed Tools of Public Relations, Category: #6, News Release
John Carroll High School's Media Coverage Stemming
from its "Txtng & Driving: It Can Wait" Press Release

Research/ Situation Analysis: John Carroll High School (JCHS) is a private, Catholic, high school in Fort Pierce, Florida. The school has more than 4,500 alumni, 362 current students, and several hundred additional stakeholders. In September 2012, JCHS was contacted by a member of the AT&T public relations department, to see if the school would be interested in participating in its "Txtng & Driving: It Can Wait" program. The goal of the national public program is to save lives through bringing awareness to the dangers of this habit, which has been determined as teen's #1 form of communication, and something that occurs an average of 60 times per day.

Once JCHS agreed to participate, the school wanted to publicize the program and the AT&T-sponsored driving simulator which would be brought to campus on October 10th, in which students could experience first-hand the dangers of texting behind the wheel. To obtain successful results, much research was completed by JCHS and AT&T including informal, primary research such as focus groups, a communication audit, media analysis, complaint reviews, and observations. In addition, formal, secondary research such as fact-finding, historical research, and internet research was conducted. The target audience was identified as JCHS high school students, as well as all community members and stakeholders who drive, and could learn from the program.

Objectives: The objectives were 1) to create and disseminate a well-written media release to 5 news outlets prior to October 10th, 2) to increase awareness of the dangers of texting and driving by earning a minimum of two printed or online articles in area media outlets, 3) to raise \$250 for the JCHS Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) Club from October 1st- October 10th, through AT&T's pledge program, and 4) to have at least 200 students participate in the national "No Text on Board" pledge on October 10th.

Implementation: To address all audiences involved a thorough, professional plan was devised to communicate the program and reach the objectives set forth. An initial press release was disseminated to the media advising of the upcoming program in October, and phone calls were made to follow up with particular media outlets. Additionally, a local funeral home was contacted to inquire about having a hearse displayed in the front of the school with signage reading "DON'T text & drive. This could be your last ride." Coordination of media talking points were devised and disseminated for media representatives, and confirmation of their presence was made prior to the event. Details regarding the JCHS SADD Club's campaign to obtain pledges for the "No Text on Board" initiative were confirmed and publicized on all social media sites and through school announcements. Additionally, an email was

disseminated to all parents and students with the link for the online pledge site, and explaining that AT&T agreed to donate \$2 for every student who took the pledge, plus a bonus of \$5 for every student who invited five friends to take the pledge. Donations were made to the Florida SADD program, which then distributed funds to each school which has SADD chapter. Post-event press information regarding the success of the campaign was also created and disseminated to all media contacts. Additionally, JCHS promoted the information on its website, facebook page, and in its constant contact email newsletters, before and after the program.

Evaluation: The objectives were met and surpassed! JCHS received significant media coverage stemming from a press release announcing its participation in the “AT&T Txtng & Driving: It Can Wait Program.” 1) A well-written release was created and disseminated to 15 media contacts prior to October 10th. Five follow up calls were made to media outlets, which helped to foster relationships with reporters. 2) JCHS obtained front page coverage in SCRIPPS Treasure Coast Newspapers on October 11th, along with two additional articles being printed in area papers within the month. Two TV stations had reporter’s onsite and publicized the information on the evening news. Positive feedback was obtained from those who heard the story on the news and who viewed the spreads in the paper and through online platforms. 3) The SADD Club raised \$530 thanks to the AT&T’s pledge program, prior to October 10th. The money will support the activities of the club which is dedicated to educating students about the hazards of destructive decisions. 4) Approximately 290 students participated in the national “No Text on Board” day. The students signed the pledge card after being behind the wheel of the simulator, which used a video headset to display driving conditions as they attempted to text and drive. Finally, the students remarked that the experience of participating in the simulator or watching their classmates participate, made them acknowledge the dangers of texting and driving. Younger students, faculty members, the community, and stakeholders, learned from the statistics and output objectives of the dangers involved from texting and driving. Additionally, Haisley Funeral Home and Cremation Services allowed a hearse to be parked at the campus entrance for a week with signage sending a strong message to all who passed by the school. Finally, the Florida Senate panel unanimously approved bill SB 52, on March 6, 2013, making it a nonmoving traffic violation and loss of license for 30 days when drivers under 18 use their phones behind the wheel. The bill now moves forward to become a law.

Budget: The project’s budget certainly justified the results with its effectiveness at a nominal cost. The social media sites remained the same cost, with the cost equating to the Office of Institutional Advancement’s staff time at approximately \$300.