



Welcome to the SPIN Project's e-newsletter, our monthly compendium of news, notes, and ideas.

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New Tutorial: Online Communications

One of the cruel ironies of nonprofit communications today is that, just as many organizations have begun to realize the importance of adopting a strategic approach to their communications work during the last five to ten years, the communications landscape itself has shifted radically beneath their feet.

In 1996, a mere ten years ago, the fax was state-of-the-art for press release distribution, newsletters required stamps, and only computer nerds knew what HTML meant. Today, of course, trying to work without Internet access is nearly unthinkable, especially in an area like communications, where ease of distribution and cheap bandwidth made possible by technology are revolutionizing the discipline.

But not to worry, the SPIN Project is on the case! For some insights into the brave new world of online communications and the resources to help you explore it, download our [Online Communications Tutorial](#) (PDF).



Photo credit: [La Salabete](#).

The Keys to the Op-Ed Page: Good writing, good timing, good contacts

Our good friend Jeff Gillenkirk (who some of you might know from his guest appearances at our SPIN Academy) graciously agreed to share some tips on the

art of the op-ed that he recently put together.

Publishing an op-ed is a priceless opportunity to get your message out and help sway public opinion - and public officials - to your side. But first you need a clear, concise, compelling op-ed that puts your message into play.

For tips that take the mystery out of the op-ed process, the SPIN Project turned to op-ed wizard Jeff Gillenkirk, a man who has forged an impressive career by applying his talents as a writer to movements to end the death penalty, promote workers' rights, and achieve social and economic justice.

Gillenkirk sums up the art of the op-ed in three steps: good writing, good timing and good contacts.

1. Good writing. Advocates often overlook the importance of a well-crafted argument because they are blinded by the "importance" of their organization's mission. But righteousness alone does not grow movements. Good writing allows you to connect with people who don't yet see your issue from your perspective.

- Grab readers at the outset with an engaging opening paragraph.
- Write in the active voice, with strong verbs, colorful images, anecdotes and personal stories that illustrate the issue in human terms.
- Craft your op-ed so that it leads to a solution. Problem-discussion-solution is the classic structure.
- Be cognizant of your audience. You are talking to regular folks, not your familiar base of loyal supporters.
- Remember: objective, yet controversial, material is most likely to be printed.

2. Good timing. Use a "hook" to help you insert your issue into the news cycle. Shamelessly exploit anything happening in the news.

- Decide on a hook. Write the op-ed and get sign-off from your Executive Director within a 2-3 day time-frame, faster if possible.
- Do a Pre-Submittal Pitch (PSP): Have the "author" (your ED, Board Member, or celebrity) call the op-ed page editor directly to quickly describe the column idea with the hook.
- Submit the op-ed within 12-24 hours after including any initial feedback from an editor.
- Follow up with assistant and op-ed editor 24-36 hours after submission. Mention why the column is important. Again, have the "author" make the call. Editors like to speak "equal to equal" rather than to your communications director.
- If you don't hear within 2-3 days, assume that it's dead and submit elsewhere. Be careful about multiple submissions, because most major dailies require exclusivity to print.

3. Good contacts. Chances are, you are one degree of separation from an editor at your local paper. Tap your social network to find out.

- Use your in-house resources, leverage your staff, expert allies, and Board of Directors to identify any contacts with editors.
- Find the names of editors on op-ed pages or on the paper's websites.
- Use a celebrity signer to break in to a paper - actor, athlete, author, national political figure. (Local elected officials rarely help, as politicians are always looking for a forum and newspapers are skeptical.)
- Call an ally organization that has published an op-ed previously. Ask them if they have advice for you, and ask the name of the op-ed editor or assistant editor they worked with at the paper.

A former speechwriter for New York Governor Mario Cuomo, Gillenkirk has composed and/or placed op-eds in the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, and Washington Post, among other outlets. He is currently the Communications Director at the San Francisco Food Bank. For inspiration, see the op-ed section of Gillenkirk's website: www.yourmessage.org.

Congratulations to Miami Workers Center!

Last fall *The Miami Herald's* series "House of Lies" publicly exposed the corruption and collusion between county government and private developers. It showed that tens of millions of taxpayer dollars for affordable housing had been stolen, misused or squandered.

After years of community organizing and relentless action, our good friends at the Miami Worker Center (MWC) took full advantage of the housing scandal to leverage their demands for replacement of the Scott Harver housing project which had displaced over 1000 families in the historically black neighborhood of Liberty City.

Using strategic communications to compliment their organizing -MWC won an historical agreement, which among other things includes:

1. One for One Replacement: so there is no net loss in extremely low income units, plus an overall gain in affordable working class housing on site and in the neighborhood.
2. Right to Return: so every one of the 1,129 families displaced from the community has the right and affordability to return to their community and its social, economic, political and cultural networks.

You can see [video](#) of the press conference and signing, including speeches from Mayor Carlos Alvarez, Chair of the Miami-Dade County Commission Moss, MWC Director Gihan Perera, and LIFFT Leader Yvonne Stratford.

And check out the great coverage MWC received from the [Los Angeles Time](#) and the [UK Guardian](#). Congratulations on a great victory!

That's it for this issue of the SPIN Project's e-newsletter. Please feel free to forward any of this information to anyone you think might be interested -- we'd greatly appreciate it.

Thanks,

The SPIN Project Staff

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149 Natoma St., 3rd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105

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