Using Email and the Internet to Increase Print Coverage of the Varsity Members of an NCAA Division III Volleyball Team at a Small Liberal Arts College

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Abstract

Eight small market newspapers with circulations of 20,000 or less per day in northern Ohio were surveyed about their coverage of local high school graduates participating in athletics at the collegiate level. The purpose of this project was to determine if the amount of print media published about the female varsity volleyball players at a small liberal arts college increased when the sports information office communicated updated information about the team via electronic media at least once per week to the players’ hometown newspapers. Through this project this researcher learned that: (a) stewardship of positive relationships with journalists could lead to increased coverage by print media; (b) journalists embraced email and the Internet more and more as means of communication and research; (c) newspapers regularly covered high school graduates participating in sports at the collegiate level, mostly using materials submitted by sports information directors; and (d) coverage of the volleyball team increased considerably with the use of electronic press releases over research by the newspapers.
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Chapter I: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this project was to determine if the amount of print media published about the female varsity volleyball players at a small liberal arts college increased when the sports information office communicated updated information about the team via electronic media at least once per week to players' hometown newspapers. Within this purpose the researcher first sought to understand what steps could be taken to increase coverage by print media, how electronic media benefited the promotion of sports, and how newspapers covered collegiate athletes who graduated from local high schools.

In order to better understand and study these topics, four questions were used as the basis for the research: 1. How did organizations increase coverage by print media? 2. What was the role of electronic media in sports promotion? 3. How did small market newspapers determine what information to publish about local high school graduates participating in athletics at the collegiate level? 4. Did the number of articles published by the hometown newspapers increase when the sports information office communicated updated information about the volleyball team via electronic media at least once per week?

The four research questions were studied utilizing several methods. Questions #1 (how to increase print media coverage) and #2 (how electronic media was used in sports promotion) were answered through a review of journal articles, websites, and textbooks pertinent to the topic. Answering these questions helped the researcher lay the basis for
his original research by understanding what experts in the field had previously uncovered about similar issues.

The final two questions were answered through the research. Question #3 (how did papers determine what to print about local high school graduates) was addressed through the Small Market Newspaper Survey designed by the researcher and his adviser for the purpose of better understanding the practices of newspapers that were similar in circulation and other characteristics. This survey directed the researcher to question #4 (did coverage of the volleyball team increase using electronic press releases), which was examined by actively sending emails to two of the newspapers located in the hometowns of the varsity volleyball players and subscribing to those papers so as to track what information was used.

**Justification**

With smaller budgets and increasing competition for space in newspapers, public relations professionals must find new and innovative ways in which to provide information to the largest number of media contacts at limited cost. Use of electronic media, which included the Internet and email, was one simple solution.

The goal of the researcher was to test a method of information distribution that was new to his office in order to increase publicity for the volleyball team while limiting related expenses and still reaching a large number of media outlets. The researcher believed that the use of electronic media would provide such an opportunity and increase the likelihood of information being published about the volleyball team by decreasing the need for members of the media to research independently the team and its players. The project was of benefit to the researcher in that it allowed him to test this method of
information distribution so that, if effective, the method could be utilized in promoting other varsity athletic programs at the college.

Definition of Terms

**Brief** - a stand-alone newspaper article of three paragraphs or less without a picture; any article within a ‘briefs’ section.

**Buzz** – a season-to-date report designed by the researcher that promoted all of the players individually and the volleyball team as a whole in one release. Buzz was designed for release every two weeks and to reflect information frequently used in the ‘college capsules’ section of a newspaper.

**Capsules (college)** - a section of the newspaper where brief bios were offered about a large number of the local high school graduates participating in athletics at the collegiate level; referred to by various names from paper to paper, including ‘college corner’ among others.

**Circulation** - the average daily number of newspapers distributed through subscriptions and sales at newsstands as reported by the newspaper.

**Electronic media** - email and the Internet, two platforms for providing information that were used in tandem to notify (via email) media outlets about new information on the volleyball team being available (via the Internet).

**Feature** - a stand-alone newspaper article of four paragraphs or more in length; any article with a picture.

**Minor sport** – A sport in a comprehensive collegiate athletic program that, in
general, does not receive the same level of coverage by the media as other sports; usually, football and men’s basketball are considered major sports because fan support and readership interest, while other programs, including volleyball, are deemed minor sports.

**Population (coverage area)** - the number of people residing in and around the communities whose schools are regularly covered by a newspaper; this was based on information provided by the newspaper or as reported by the 2000 United States Census on the website http://www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html.

**Population (location)** - the number of people residing in the town or city in which a newspaper is located; this was based on information provided by the newspaper or as reported by the 2000 United States Census on the website http://www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html.

**Print media** - newspapers in the hometowns of the volleyball players which publish on a daily basis (at least Monday through Friday).

**Print media, amount of** - feature articles, match reports, weekly player updates in special sections covering local high school graduates playing sports at the collegiate level, and/or any item featuring information about the volleyball team and/or its players that was believed to have been generated directly or indirectly through the efforts of the college’s sports information office as printed by newspapers located in the hometowns of the players or by newspapers that were most apt to cover the high schools from which the players graduated.
Publics – any and all individuals and organizations, such as customers, sponsors, vendors, and media, who are served by or offer services to an organization and with whom positive relationships are important to an organization’s success; in the case of this project, the publics are the media outlets that receive information from the college’s athletic department.

Reciprocity - completing the duties of a public relations professional so as to thank the media for previous coverage of an organization; the mutual and cordial exchange of information between an organization and the media.

Sports information - the office in a college athletics department responsible for generating media coverage.

Stewardship - managing communications, information flow, and other interaction with the media so as to maintain a positive relationship between an organization and the media.

Limitations and Appropriate Use of Results

A relatively small sample of eight newspapers in Ohio (*The Bellefontaine Examiner*, *Sentinel-Tribune* of Bowling Green, *Telegraph-Forum* of Bucyrus, *The Daily Standard* of Celina, *The Crescent-News* of Defiance, *The Delaware Gazette, The Marion Star*, and *The Times Bulletin* of Van Wert) were surveyed, and of that sample, two newspapers were reviewed (Bucyrus and Van Wert) in comparing the differences in coverage between the 2001 and 2002 volleyball seasons.

Several limitations arose in relation to the Small Market Newspaper Survey (Appendix A, page 56). One was that the newspapers had to be similar in circulation and other characteristics. Secondly, only newspapers in northern Ohio were surveyed so as to
increase the likelihood that the papers were familiar with the college and had previously covered local high school graduates participating in athletics at the college. A third constraint was a complete lack of interest on the part of newspapers to participate in the survey.

Due to these limitations, the size of the sample was limited to eight papers for the Small Market Newspaper Survey. Tracking coverage of the volleyball team had to be limited to two newspapers because they were the only two that fit the limitations of the survey while also having local high school graduates playing significant roles on the team and not having previously received information regularly via fax from the college.

Because of these limitations, the results of this research should not be generalized for other colleges, athletic departments, and/or other organizations.

Facing these limitations, the researcher pursued the goal of increasing coverage of the volleyball team by utilizing electronic media. To do this, the researcher sought to understand how newspapers cover local high school graduates participating in athletics at the collegiate level by surveying a sample of papers. Before writing in Chapters III, IV, and V about the original research items, a review of literature on the issues of how to increase media coverage and how electronic media was used in sports promotion became necessary; these topics are approached in Chapter II.
Chapter II: Review of Literature

The purpose of this project was to determine if the amount of print media published about the female varsity volleyball players at a small liberal arts college increased when the sports information office communicated updated information about the team via electronic media at least once per week to the players' hometown newspapers. Within this purpose the researcher first sought to understand what steps could be taken to increase coverage by print media, how electronic media benefited the promotion of sports, and how newspapers covered collegiate athletes who graduated from local high schools.

In order to better understand and study these topics, four questions were used as the basis for the research. The final two questions - (3) how did small market newspapers determine what information to publish about local high school graduates participating in athletics at the collegiate level and (4) did the number of articles published by the hometown newspapers increase when the sports information office communicated updated information about the volleyball team via electronic media at least once per week – are documented in Chapters III, IV, and V as the original research aspects of the project. To lay a baseline for the original research, the first two questions - (1) how did organizations increase coverage by print media and (2) what was the role of electronic media in sports promotion - are the focus of Chapter II, Review of Literature.

How did organizations increase coverage by print media?

Organizations active in self-promotion consistently desired to have their names in the news so as to make themselves known to potential consumers and customers. Raising fan awareness, increasing support from loyalists, and attracting recruits were portions of
the goals of the small liberal arts college that could be achieved, in part, through increased media coverage. A five-step process known as ROPES (Research, Objectives, Programming, Evaluation, and Stewardship) and focused on stewardship of existing relationships presented one solution to raising awareness of an organization within the media community (Kelly, 2001).

ROPES was a process that was applicable to virtually all public relations fields. In order to appropriately serve an organization’s publics, the public relations professional had to have a complete understanding of the organization, its history, and its publics so as to know how to focus promotional efforts towards achieving the organization’s goals. ROPES provided a step-by-step process for meeting those goals.

Step one in ROPES was research. Practitioners had to “be thoroughly familiar with the organization’s history, finances, personnel, products and services, and past public relations efforts” and had to understand what opportunities were available with the organization’s publics (Kelly, 2001). This was accomplished through research.

Upon completion of the research, the objectives, step two of ROPES, were laid out. Objectives, or goals expressed with measurable outcomes (Kelly, 2001), came in two forms. Output objectives were measurements of the amount of effort (i.e., number of press releases) made by the public relations office (Hendrix, 1998). Output led to impact objectives, the intended effects on the organization’s publics (Hendrix, 1998).

To reach the organization’s objectives, public relations then initiated the third step, programming. Programming was designed through planning and then implemented (Kelly, 2001). After programming was implemented the organization reached stage four, evaluation of the effectiveness of the activities (Kelly, 2001). The goal of the entire
process was to reach step five, the stewardship of a long-term relationship with the publics (Kelly, 2001).

Stewardship, the management of interactions with the media to maintain a positive relationship, was the key to a successful relationship. The focus of stewardship was on the maintenance of relationships with publics (Kelly, 2001), ensuring continued relationships through contact and by showing appreciation for what the publics did on behalf of the organization. Stewardship was based on four elements: (a) reciprocity - the mutual sharing of information between the organization and media; (b) responsibility - assisting the media as requested and meeting their expectations; (c) reporting - maintaining a regular flow of information to media about changes in the organization and newsworthy items; and (d) relationship nurturing - helping relationships with the media to grow in a positive direction (Kelly, 2001).

The focus of reciprocity was to show appreciation to those who had supported the organization in the past (Gouldner, 1960). In dealing with media outlets that had previously reported on the organization, the public relations professional reciprocated by being responsive to their requests for information and interviews. Responsibility in stewardship required promises to be kept (Kelly, 2001). In athletics providing press releases, game information, and statistics to media were key in the meeting the responsibilities of the sports information director.

Reporting on relevant items within an organization was important to stewardship as well (Kelly, 2001); these efforts kept media members informed about the happenings in the organization and helped them to build relationships with the organization based on full disclosure and trust. For the sports information director, changes in personnel,
policies, and schedules, as well as game results and feature stories, were disclosed to members of the media so that they could build appropriate relationships with the entire athletic department. The ultimate compliment to successful stewardship was a nurtured relationship in which both sides repeatedly benefited (Kelly, 2001).

Philip Margolis, PR manager at Fleet Capital Corporation, reflected the ideals of the ROPES method, stating, “There is no substitute for good media relations practices such as targeting journalists, knowing their beats, understanding their outlets, verifying data, and building relations” (Bransford, 2002). Having the in-depth knowledge discussed by Margolis allowed the public relations professional to better serve his customer and build closer relationships with the media.

Bransford (2002) discussed the need for a targeted approach to having success in media relations. In a survey of 142 journalists conducted by public relations specialist Vocus, Bransford’s employer, 52% expressed that public relations professionals could improve their press releases by focusing on news that they would cover (Bransford, 2002), thus increasing the likelihood of the story being covered. “Secondly, journalists requested that exclusives be pitched a few days before deadline and, third, that materials be delivered on time (both received 23%)” (Bransford, 2002).

When asked what compels them to read one press release over another, 35% of journalists said they looked for releases that appear newsworthy, 22% will read releases sent from people they know, and two choices - “expecting information” and “looks intriguing” - each received a 17% response. (Bransford, 2002)

While meeting these expectations were important to improving coverage by the media, appropriate use of electronic media also was beneficial. Links to photos posted to
websites, especially in breaking news stories, were very valuable (Berger, 1997). In fact, 47% of print journalists surveyed by Bennett and Company (2000) "said they would like to receive" releases with website addresses where photos could be retrieved; "82% said they put these packages to use." Archiving old press releases and using e-mail to push information to journalists also increased the likelihood of success (Berger, 1997).

In summary, through the ROPES process, active and targeted information distribution, and a focus on meeting the needs of the members of the media, public relations personnel achieved success in attempts to increase coverage by the media. Having a strong understanding of his or her organization and the media outlets of interest opened the door to the opportunities of promotion for public relations personnel. Acting responsibly and responsively in representing the organization and meeting the needs of the media was the foundation to long-term relationships with journalists and increased coverage from those outlets. The use of electronic distribution of information was embraced by the media and thus a greater understanding of the role of electronic media in sports promotion was pursued by the researcher.

What was the role of electronic media in sports promotion?

In order to achieve the goal of greater coverage by print media, electronic media including the Internet and email had taken on increased roles in the field of sports promotion in recent years. With an ever-increasing number of media outlets offered through cable television and the Internet, sports information directors and other public relations specialists had sought an inexpensive route in which to deliver information to all interested parties in a timely manner (Lordan, 2001). Electronic media presented a solution to the need for cheap, efficient distribution of information.
Electronic media had taken on a major role in public relation activities for several reasons. Television cable networks such as MSNBC, ESPN, and Fox News were among the specialty news stations that sought the latest in news and sports 24 hours per day (Lordan, 2001), fighting to capture the big headlines before the competition. As these networks continued to grow in quantity and delivered better quality through in-depth coverage of major stories, opportunities for minor stories arose through the need to fill programming (Katzman, 1995). Many of these networks, along with newspapers, also crossed lines into the online world, joining electronic news sources in contending for the attention of the Internet user (Lordan, 2001).

In what he termed a "hyperspeed process," Thomsen (1995) stated that media attempted to meet the demands for high-quality, late-breaking news by actively pursuing the news through "pro-search" rather than waiting for the news to come to them. Providing immediate access to the latest news to all interested parties became a primary role of electronic media in public relations.

Members of the media embraced the distribution of information through electronic media to help meet their lofty goals. In a survey of 142 journalists conducted by public relations specialist Vocus, 70% cited the Internet and 26% cited email as the technology that had the greatest impact on their profession in the previous three years due to the immediacy of access to the new information (Bransford, 2002). In the same survey, 83% expressed email with an attachment or website link as the preferred method of receiving press releases (Bransford, 2002).

In addition to providing the latest news, electronic media also presented organizations with opportunities to expand into new forms of promotion. Video news
releases and press conferences viewed over the Internet through media players were one such example (Lordan, 2001). Use of this technology expanded at an annual rate of 25% during the 1990s (Lordan, 2001), while “nearly seven in 10” television journalists occasionally utilized video news releases (Bennett and Company, 2000). Convergence, the mixing of multimedia with print in online media relations, also expanded the role of streaming technologies (Zoch & Smith, 2002).

While meeting media’s ever-increasing demands for latest news, electronic media also took on other roles in public relations activities. Understanding the needs of media was very important as well (Lordan, 2001). Using online surveys and requesting users to register when visiting the organization’s homepage helped the public relations professional to better relate to his or her clientele (Petrisin and Wang, 1993). Email surveys were also “a viable option for collecting data” on the needs of an organization’s publics (Gaddis, 2001).

Electronic media also played an important role in research by members of the media. Ross and Middleberg (2000) reported that 92% of all journalists accessed the Internet for researching articles and that journalists preferred email over the phone, mail, or fax in communicating with sources because of the cost savings and efficiency in gathering information. According to Binneman (2002), “We need to set up our websites in such a manner so that journalists can find enough background and current material to prepare themselves, so that the questions themselves will even be limited.”

Electronic media had a role in the interview process, as well. Conducting an interview through email, chat rooms, or instant messenger allowed the interviewee to completely answer questions that are asked (Persichitte, Young, and Tharp, 1997). The
interview did not need to be scheduled or limited in time, allowing it to be completed in a manner convenient to both parties (Persichitte et al., 1997).

These roles of electronic media in public relations were seen throughout the world of sports promotion at the college level. Southeastern Louisiana University offered “The Express,” a daily newsletter sent via email to supporters of the school (Sullivan, 2001). Capital University in Columbus, Ohio utilized audio streamed via the Internet to reach its fans (Reich, 2001). Oakland (MI) University replaced media guides with complete information about teams, players, and the history of the athletic department online (Lowe, 2001).

By employing the Internet and email to increase promotional activities, sports information directors and other public relations professionals found new opportunities to market their organizations. Information about many organizations was in higher demand due to the increasing number of 24-hour media outlets in cable television and on the Internet. Video and audio streaming generated more interest in the activities of the organization. Through electronic surveys public relations officers gained more knowledge about the wishes of the media, including archived information about the history of the organization that was used in electronic interviews.

How did small market newspapers determine what information to publish about local high school graduates participating in athletics at the collegiate level?

The researcher reviewed previous literature published on this question and found no direct discussion of this topic. Due to the perceived importance of this question, the Small Market Newspaper Survey created by the researcher and his adviser was used to address this question. The purpose of the survey was to gain a greater understanding of
how newspapers cover local high school graduates participating in college athletics; the
survey addressed this by asking, among other questions, about how reporters obtain the
information that they use, what formats are utilized to report on college athletes, and how
frequently information is printed. The results of this survey, and thus the answers to
these questions, are addressed in Chapter IV, Results.

In summary, the review of literature revealed the value of the ROPES process,
stewardship, and electronic media in the efforts to increase coverage of an organization
by print media. In the ideal relationship, an organization maintained consistent
communication with its publics, assisting the media with their requests and providing up­
to-the-minute information and photos. Distributing this information through electronic
media gave instant access to all interested publics and helped to steward a positive
relationship between the parties. With these thoughts in mind, the researcher found value
in studying questions #3 and #4 - how newspapers covered local high school athletes at
the collegiate level and would the use of electronic media increase coverage of the
college volleyball team, respectively; the methods and procedures of this study are
described in Chapter III and the results in Chapter IV.
Chapter III: Methods and Procedures

The purpose of this project was to determine if the amount of print media published about the female varsity volleyball players at a small liberal arts college increased when the sports information office communicated updated information about the team via electronic media at least once per week to players' hometown newspapers. Within this purpose the researcher first sought to understand what steps could be taken to increase coverage by print media, how electronic media benefited the promotion of sports, and how newspapers covered collegiate athletes who graduated from local high schools.

In order to better understand and study this topic, four questions were used as the basis for the research. Questions #1 (how to increase coverage by print media) and #2 (the role of electronic media in sports promotion) were addressed in Chapter II, Review of Literature. In the review the researcher found that a key to increasing coverage by the media was through appropriate management of the relationship by the public relations professional. Electronic media provided one way to build that relationship by offering immediate access for all media members to photos, press releases, and other materials distributed through the Internet and/or email.

With this information in mind, the researcher chose to test these ideals in his original research by posing the final two questions. Question #3 (how newspapers determine what information to publish about local high school graduates playing sports at the collegiate level) was addressed through a survey of sports editors and writers. Question #4 (did coverage of the volleyball team increase by distributing press releases electronically) was studied by sending weekly information via electronic media to the
hometown newspapers of the players. The methods and procedures for analyzing these questions are laid out in the remainder of Chapter III.

Participants

Eight newspapers in northern Ohio were selected to participate in the survey with the belief that they would be familiar with the college after having covered local high school graduates who went on to play sports at the college in prior years. All of the papers had circulations between 7,000 and 20,000 and were located in cities between 10,700 and 35,000 in population (Appendix B, page 58).

All of the papers were considered daily newspapers, publishing Monday through Friday and at least once on Saturday or Sunday. Most of the papers covered between five and 12 local high schools, with 36 schools covered by one paper. The 36-school newspaper also claimed the largest coverage area, distributing papers to six counties. One paper covered two counties in full; two papers incorporated one county in full and portions of at least one other county while the remaining four papers embraced just one county each in their coverage area. The contact at each paper was either the sports editor or a primary writer in the sports department.

Among the sample for the survey were two papers whose coverage of the volleyball team would be tracked throughout the season. The two papers had circulations of 7,000 and 7,300, respectively, and covered cities of 10,700 and 13,000 in population, areas of 29,700 and 44,000 in population, and five and six high schools, respectively. Each published Monday through Saturday and covered just the county in which it was located.
Other newspapers in the hometowns of volleyball players made up a portion of the sample, but their coverage of the team was not tracked during the season; this decision was made for a variety of reasons. Some of the papers did not publish on a daily basis (at least Monday through Friday), did not utilize electronic media within the office, or did not have a local graduate who played in at least 80% of the team’s games in the 2001 volleyball season and was expected to do so again in 2002. Other papers did not respond to voicemail and/or email messages or were already in the college’s regular coverage area and received the information via fax.

Thus, not all of the newspapers in the survey were part of the volleyball list, but all were familiar with the college and were selected to be part of the survey sample.

**Instruments/Protocols**

The Small Market Newspaper Survey (Appendix A, page 56) was developed by the researcher and his adviser and contained three parts. Part I of the survey collected demographic information about the papers, including circulation, location, and so forth.

Part II of the survey contained a series of open-ended questions with sub-questions listed and/or potential answers in parentheses to help clarify the question and to ensure that respondents addressed topics relevant to the researcher’s interests. One question used in the survey asked, “How do you obtain the information that you use,” and was followed by the subheading, “Sources – website, email, phone calls, traditional mail.”

Part III of the survey asked the respondent to rate reader interest in 11 collegiate sports (Baseball; Basketball – Men’s; Basketball – Women’s; Cross Country; Football; Golf; Soccer; Softball - Women’s fast-pitch; Tennis; Track and Field; and Volleyball -
Women's). The respondent was given the option of using four potential ratings - '0' for No Interest, '1' for Low Interest, '2' for Medium Interest, and '3' for High Interest. This section also left open an area for comments by the respondent and the researcher.

To track which updates were used by the two hometown newspapers for the volleyball team, the researcher subscribed to the papers during the season. The researcher recorded what day information was released from the college to the papers, what kind of release it was (i.e. game story, feature, etc.), what the story was about (i.e. specific opponent, match preview, etc.), and if the information was found in either newspaper during subsequent publishing dates.

Procedures

The focus of the research was utilizing the principles of ROPES (Research, Objectives, Programming, Evaluation, and Stewardship). Prior to initiating this project, the researcher had reviewed the history of the volleyball team and past public relations efforts from his office and had acquired contact information for all of the newspapers that were part of the project. Thus, a portion of step one in ROPES, the research, was already started. However, understanding the coverage offered by the newspapers required further research.

Before researching the newspapers further, the next step for the researcher was to consider his objectives, principle two of the ROPES process. According to Kelly (2001), this stage consisted of both output and impact objectives. The output objective of this research was to increase the amount of information sent to hometown newspapers of the college's volleyball players by utilizing electronic media. The impact objective was to see that information put to use by the hometown papers.
Having set the objectives, the second step taken by the researcher was to complete the research stage of ROPES so as to establish the newspaper samples used in the project. This was done by contacting all potential hometown newspapers associated with the volleyball team to clarify which ones would be included in the Small Market Newspaper Survey and in the updates sent via electronic media throughout the season. The papers were contacted by telephone and/or email, and the researcher screened out newspapers by asking, among other inquiries, if the paper was a daily (at least Monday through Friday), if email was used in the office, and if the staff published material on collegiate athletics.

The researcher imposed several limitations in determining which newspapers associated with the volleyball team would be included in the project. The first limitation was that the newspaper’s respective volleyball player had to have seen playing time in at least 80% of the team’s games during the 2001 season and was expected to play a similar role during the 2002 season; this was done to have a consistent basis for comparison between the two seasons. Because the newspapers were generally small in circulation (20,000 or less), some did not publish on a daily basis (at least Monday through Friday) or did not utilize electronic media within the office; thus, the researcher chose not to actively track their coverage or was unable to send them information electronically. Some papers did not respond to initial or follow-up contacts that were made via phone and/or email and thus showed no interest in being part of the sample. Others were already in the college’s regular coverage area and received information via fax.

While more papers were desired for the research aspects of the volleyball team (research question #4), only two papers met the criteria set forth. Thus, other papers among the researcher’s contacts were incorporated into the Small Market Newspaper
Survey (research question #3). This was done strictly to create a larger sample for the Small Market Newspaper Survey.

Without prior notice, an initial list of eight papers was sent the Small Market Newspaper Survey via email attachment, given the opportunity to review the inquiry, and presented the option of setting up a phone interview at a time of their convenience to review the survey with the researcher. Since some of the first contacts did not respond to the email, the list was expanded and consolidated until eight total papers, including two volleyball papers, agreed to take part in the survey.

The papers selected were deemed similar in nature. All of the papers were in cities of comparable size (10,700 to 35,000 in population). The papers were all published on a daily basis (at least Monday through Friday) and had daily circulations between 7,000 and 20,000.

At a time designated by the newspaper, the researcher called the contact (either the sports editor or a main sports writer) to discuss his or her responses to the survey questions. The researcher did not view the respondent’s answers in advance; rather, he asked each question and typed out detailed notes about the respondent’s answers into a Microsoft Word 2000 file containing a copy of the survey specifically designated for that newspaper. If the respondent could not answer the questions about the population of the city or the coverage area, the researcher looked the information up on the website of the 2000 United States Census http://www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html.

The respondent was also asked to rate 11 varsity sports (Baseball; Basketball - Men’s; Basketball - Women’s; Cross Country; Football; Golf; Soccer; Softball - Women’s fast-pitch; Tennis; Track and Field; and Volleyball - Women’s) listed in the
latter portions of the survey. He or she was given the option of making additional comments about the role of the sports information office in the paper's operations and to ask questions of the researcher about the project.

Once the interview was completed, the researcher took the opportunity to clarify and expand his notes. The researcher also made his personal comments on the interview at the end of the survey.

With the surveys completed, the research and objectives stages of the ROPES process were complete. For step three of ROPES, the programming, the researcher took on the task of sending updates to the two volleyball newspapers throughout the season. All press releases about the team, including match results, features, and other special public relations materials, were posted to the team's website immediately upon completion.

Once online, an announcement about the update was emailed to the newspapers, including a one-to-two sentence synopsis within the email, and each was invited to click on a link within the email to the volleyball homepage where the complete release could be obtained. If the release was not considered pertinent to either one or both of the hometown newspapers, no email was sent to the respective paper(s).

With the programming in place, the researcher tackled step four of ROPES, the evaluation of the programming. To document which releases were being used by the papers, the researcher subscribed to each paper for the 13 weeks that covered the volleyball team's regular season from early September until mid-November.

Throughout steps three and four, programming and evaluation, the researcher continued to approach step five of ROPES, the stewardship of the relationships with the
two newspapers. This was done by reviewing which material was being used, talking to the newspapers about the coverage, and adjusting the releases to better meet their needs. Stewardship of the relationships continued on after the research was completed.

Timeline

Initial contacts with all newspapers were started in early August. During the month, the surveys were completed. All potential volleyball newspapers were sent a season preview through regular ground mail, and subscriptions were purchased to the two newspapers that would be sent email updates throughout the season.

The first round of surveys was sent early in the second week of August with a request for interviews later in the week. A second round of surveys was issued during the third week of August in order to complete the survey sample. All notes were typed in as the answers to the questions were given, and the surveys were reviewed and analyzed by the researcher and his adviser shortly after completion.

Delivery of the papers did not begin until September 1. Releases sent via email to the hometown papers started on September 3 and ended on November 18. During this time, 17 releases were issued about matches, four features were written, and four editions of "Buzz" (see Definitions in Chapter I) were distributed.

Due to obligations in the office, the researcher was not able to further address the results of the project until June and July of 2003. At that time the researcher and his adviser again reviewed the surveys and materials published by the two hometown newspapers. Relative data analysis, along with writing of this report, was completed at that time. Final drafting of this report continued until completion in August 2004.
Data Analysis

Information from the phone surveys was organized and analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2000 on a Microsoft Windows 2000 Professional Edition operating system. The mean and standard distribution formulas used were default formulas built into Excel.

Means and standard deviations were calculated for portions of Part I of the surveys, the newspapers’ biographical information, to determine if there was any difference in comparing the newspapers. These calculations were performed to determine differences in circulation, population of the each paper’s location, and population of the coverage area. Means and standard deviations were also applied to Part III, the ratings given to the 11 collegiate sports by the eight newspapers.

For Part II of the survey, the responses to the ten open-ended questions were not statistically analyzed or coded in any manner. Instead, the answers were placed into a table to simplify comparison of the responses.

The amount of coverage of the volleyball team in the hometown papers was documented in a table using Microsoft Excel as well. The amount of coverage was not analyzed from a statistical point of view.

The published material was designated as either a ‘brief’ or a ‘feature’ in Appendix E on page 62. Briefs were defined as any stand-alone article of three paragraphs or less without a picture or as any article within a “briefs” section. The term feature was assigned to any article of four paragraphs or more in length or any article with a picture. These definitions were of the researcher’s choosing to help distinguish the type of coverage offered by the papers.
In summary, the participants in this project included eight daily newspapers (published at least Monday through Friday with circulations between 7,000 and 20,000), each of whom completed the Small Market Newspaper Survey; two papers were included in the survey because their coverage of the volleyball team was going to be tracked during the season. Instruments/protocols were comprised of the Small Market Newspaper Survey, which collected information on print coverage of collegiate athletics, and subscriptions to two of the newspapers to track their coverage of the volleyball team.

Procedures of the project were based on the ROPES process (Research, Objectives, Programming, Evaluation, and Stewardship). After completing research of the public relations history of the volleyball team and establishing the project's objectives, the Small Market Newspaper Survey provided research insight into newspapers that were in the coverage area of the college, including two papers in the hometowns of volleyball players. Programming also included distribution of press releases electronically to the volleyball newspapers. Evaluation followed the success of the releases in being printed, and through stewardship the releases were modified to better suit the needs of the papers.

This all happened in a timeline from August to November of 2003. Data analysis covered both the results of the Small Market Newspaper Survey and the print coverage offered to the volleyball team by the two hometown newspapers. The results of the data analysis are discussed in Chapter IV.
Chapter IV: Results

Thus far, the researcher has presented background information into the original research that he performed in relation to this project. In Chapter I the project was introduced, and in Chapter II previous writings on related topics were reviewed.

The purpose of this project was to determine if the amount of print media published about the female varsity volleyball players at a small liberal arts college increased when the sports information office communicated updated information about the team via electronic media at least once per week to players' hometown newspapers. Within this purpose the researcher first sought to understand what steps could be taken to increase coverage by print media, how electronic media benefited the promotion of sports, and how newspapers covered collegiate athletes who graduated from local high schools.

In order to achieve these purposes, the researcher then presented the methods and procedures that were used to test the four questions that were the basis for the research. Having already addressed Questions #1 and #2 - how did organizations increase coverage by print media and what was the role of electronic media in sports promotion, respectively - in Chapter II, Review of Literature, the focus of Chapter III, Methods and Procedures, became Questions #3 and #4: (a) how did small market newspapers determine what information to publish about local high school graduates participating in athletics at the collegiate level and (b) did the number of articles published by the hometown newspapers increase when the sports information office communicated updated information about the team via electronic media at least once per week. Chapter IV now presents the research results of the study laid out in Chapter III.
How did small market newspapers determine what information to publish about local high school graduates participating in athletics at the collegiate level?

Eight newspapers were used for the sample of the Small Market Newspaper Survey. Completing the survey – during a phone interview with the researcher - took 15 to 30 minutes each. Part I of the survey documented the background information about each paper. The items addressed in Part I included: newspaper name, location, name and title of contact, circulation, publication cycle, days published, population of location, population of coverage area, number of high schools in coverage area, and radius of coverage area.

The researcher found that all eight papers published at least six days per week. Most of the papers covered between five and 12 high schools. A single paper had the largest coverage area (six counties), most high schools (36), greatest population in the coverage area (205,000), and highest circulation (20,000).

Three items from the survey were considered for descriptive statistical information - circulation, population of location, and population of coverage area. All eight papers had circulations between 7,000 and 20,000 (X = 11,225; s = 4,243). Populations ranged from 10,700 to 35,000 (X = 19,675; s = 9,227) for the cities and from 29,700 to 205,000 (X = 93,213; s = 54,995) for the coverage areas. These aspects of Part I of the Small Market Newspaper Survey are displayed in Appendix B on page 58.

Appendix C on page 53 displays the results from Part II of the survey. Ten open-ended questions were asked to help the researcher better understand how the newspapers decided what to print about local athletes at the collegiate level. Question 1 was, “Do you routinely publish information about ex-local high school athletes who are now
playing sports at the collegiate level?” As a follow-up the researcher then inquired as to how frequently they did so.

All eight papers confirmed that they covered their local graduates when the athletes moved on to college. Three of the papers estimated such information was published at least two times per month on average; two more papers said four times per month and two other eight times per month. One of the papers did not give a specific response numerically but used information whenever justified.

Another question of value to the purpose of the project was Part B of question 2. Question 2 asked, “How do you obtain the information that you use,” with Part B as a subheading, “Medium - website, email, faxes, phone calls, traditional mail.” After discussing whether the paper did its own research or was dependent on submissions by outsiders during Part A of question 2, the respondent then addressed where the information was found or how it was received.

The most common media used to obtain information were the facsimile machine and websites; seven of eight papers affirmed their use. Also high on the lists were email and ground mail, both of which were recognized by six respondents, while two papers mentioned regular use of the phone. See Figure 1 for the answers to question 2, Part B.

![Figure 1](image.png)

**Figure 1.** Of Eight Newspapers, the Number Confirming the Use of Email, Website, Fax, Mail, and/or Phone for Receiving Information.
Questions 4 and 5 of the survey delved into the formats of reporting on the athletes. Question 4 inquired, “What format do you use to report on the athletes (‘college capsules,’ feature stories, game stories, etc.),” while question 5 explored frequency, “How often do you use each format (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, whenever justified, etc.)?”

The answers to question 4 revealed feature stories as the most common format, utilized by seven of eight papers. Five papers each picked briefs and college capsules while one chose game stories as well. See Figure 2 for the answers to question 4.

Figure 2. Of Eight Newspapers, the Number Confirming the Use of Features, Game Recaps, Briefs, and/or Capsules as a Format for Reporting on Local High School Graduates Competing in Athletics at the Collegiate Level.

The newspapers stated the college capsules format was not as prominent because of a small staff and a lack of submissions from sports information directors. Maintaining a capsules section required either a good deal of research by the media or a consistent flow of information from the college.

For question 5, three of the papers did not specify how often each format was used, responding that the theme of the story and the amount of information determined or justified the format. Four papers specified that the capsules format was used on a regular basis, ranging from once per month to four times per month but just two utilized capsules.
on a weekly basis. Three papers ran features as little as three and as many as six times per school year; two others did so at least twice per month. One respondent stated that briefs about college athletes were often used twice per week.

Questions 3 (major college versus small college) and 6 (major sport versus minor sport) were important to the research as they represented two major characteristics of the team being publicized by the researcher (a small college volleyball team, considered a "minor" program in collegiate athletics). Question 3 inquired, "Does the level of collegiate play (NCAA Division I vs. III vs. JUCO) impact the decision to publicize information about an athlete," with one paper saying that it does, stating that athletes at lower levels (Division III or JUCO) would receive less coverage than Division I athletes. The same paper, in responding to question 6, "Does the sport being played impact the decision of which format to use (football in feature vs. volleyball in capsule)," was the only paper to portray the idea that a minor sport would not receive the same coverage as the major sport.

Thus, seven of the eight papers stated that the level of collegiate play and the sport being played had no impact on the coverage of local high school graduates participating in collegiate athletics. However, the contacts, in general, did say that better coverage would be given to a higher level school (NCAA Division I) and/or a major sport (football, basketball) when competing head-to-head for space with lower division schools (Division III) and/or minor sports (soccer, track).

In question 7, newspapers were asked for their preferences when receiving information from outside sources. In Part A, the respondents addressed what information was of most value for getting a press release published; all eight put honors and records
as high on the list. Six selected season statistics while five each picked game statistics and career statistics as being valuable. See Figure 3 for the answers to question 7, Part A.

Figure 3. Of Eight Newspapers, the Number Confirming that Honors, Records Set, Game Statistics, Season Statistics, Career Statistics, and/or Quotes Were of Value for Getting a Press Release about Local High School Graduates Participating in Athletics at the Collegiate Level Published.

In Part B, seven of the papers enjoyed receiving information via facsimile, while five found email to be a good method. See Figure 4 for the answers to question 7, Part B.

Figure 4. Of Eight Newspapers, the Number Confirming Email, Fax, Mail, and/or Phone as a Preferred Method for Receiving Information.

All eight newspapers related in Part C of question 7 that the athlete needed to be a significant contributor to the team in order to be considered for a feature article.

In Part III of the survey, the newspaper discussed reader interest in various sports by rating 11 collegiate sports, based on his or her expert opinion and demographics of the
newspaper's readers. Using a system of ‘0’ for No Interest up to ‘3’ for High Interest, only football was rated by all eight papers being of high interest.

Men's basketball came in second with just one ‘2’ rating and the remainder being ‘3’ (X = 2.875; s = 0.354). Women’s basketball came in third with a mean of 2.250 (s = 0.707), followed by baseball (X = 2.125; s = 0.641).

Volleyball was ranked fifth by mean rating. Two papers each rated volleyball with a ‘3’, two more with a ‘2’, and the remainder chose a ‘1’ (X = 1.750; S = 0.886).

The deviation of the ratings was extensive for several sports. Cross country had two ‘0’ ratings and two ‘3’ ratings. Softball received all ‘1’ ratings except for two ‘3’ ratings. More-prominent sports such as baseball and women's basketball even had sizable deviations, receiving ratings from ‘1’ to ‘3’.

The complete list of ratings by paper and sport can be found in Appendix D on page 61. See Figure 5 for the mean rating of each sport by the eight papers.

**Figure 5.** The Mean Rating of 11 Varsity Collegiate Sports by Eight Newspapers, Based on Expert Opinion and Reader Demographics.
Survey Responses by Volleyball Newspapers

Answers to the Small Market Newspaper Survey provided by the two newspapers in the hometowns of the varsity volleyball players are shown below. The two newspapers were the Bucyrus, Ohio Telegraph-Forum and The (Van Wert, Ohio) Times Bulletin.

See Figure 6 for the answers by the Bucyrus and Van Wert newspapers to Part I of the Small Market Newspaper Survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bucyrus</th>
<th>Van Wert</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Circulation</strong></td>
<td>7,300</td>
<td>7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Days Published</strong></td>
<td>MTWRFSat</td>
<td>MTWRFSat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population (Location)</strong></td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>10,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population (Area)</strong></td>
<td>44,000</td>
<td>29,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High Schools Covered</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6. Biographical Information of the Bucyrus, Ohio Telegraph-Forum and The (Van Wert, Ohio) Times Bulletin, Obtained Through Part I of the Small Market Newspaper Survey.

See Figure 7 for the answers by the Bucyrus and Van Wert newspapers to Part II of the Small Market Newspaper Survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bucyrus</th>
<th>Van Wert</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Justified</td>
<td>4x/month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a.</td>
<td>Submission</td>
<td>Submission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b.</td>
<td>Email Website Fax Mail</td>
<td>Email Fax Mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucyrus</td>
<td>Van Wert</td>
<td>Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Does the level of collegiate play (NCAA Division I vs. III) impact the decision to publicize the athlete?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features - Briefs</td>
<td>Features Games Briefs</td>
<td>Formats used to report on collegiate athletes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F - Justified - B - Justified</td>
<td>F - Justified G - Justified B - Justified</td>
<td>Frequency each format is used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Does the sport (football vs. volleyball) impact the decision of which format to use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honors Game Info Season Info</td>
<td>Honors Records Set Game Info</td>
<td>Information of value to receive in a press release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email Fax</td>
<td>Email -</td>
<td>Preferred medium for receiving information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>Threshold of performance needed to justify a feature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Does the level of collegiate play or the sport affect that threshold?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 7.** Responses of the Bucyrus, Ohio *Telegraph-Forum* and The (Van Wert, Ohio) *Times Bulletin* to Seven Questions about Coverage of Local High School Graduates Participating in Athletics of the Collegiate Level, Obtained Through Part II of the Small Market Newspaper Survey.

See Figure 8 for the answers by the Bucyrus and Van Wert newspapers to Part III of the Small Market Newspaper Survey.
Figure 8. Ratings of Reader Interest in 11 Varsity Collegiate Sports by the Bucyrus, Ohio Telegraph-Forum and The (Van Wert, Ohio) Times Bulletin, Obtained Through Part III of the Small Market Newspaper Survey.

Did the number of articles published by the hometown newspapers increase when the sports information office communicated updated information about the volleyball team via electronic media at least once per week?

Sports stories from the Bucyrus, Ohio Telegraph-Forum and The (Van Wert, Ohio) Times Bulletin were tracked during the season. Both newspapers published six days per week (Monday through Saturday), had circulations of 7,000 to 7,300, and covered five to six local high schools. Per conversations with the respective newspapers, neither had published information on the college volleyball team or the local graduate during the 2001 season.

Actively providing information via electronic media proved to be valuable. Bucyrus used material from eight of 24 updates and printed six articles, all in the briefs format. Van Wert published information from six of 21 releases with two articles being briefs and four being features.
A total of 25 releases were issued during the season with one release not being applicable to each paper. Three other releases could not be tracked for Van Wert as the paper was not delivered to the researcher on a normal publishing date. A table can be found in Appendix E on page 62 with documentation of this portion of the project. See Figure 9 for this table as well.

### Materials Used by Hometown Newspapers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Story</th>
<th>Information Used?</th>
<th>Format of Report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09/03</td>
<td>Feature</td>
<td>Conference Preseason Poll</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/03</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>Heidelberg</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/12</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>Tri-State</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/14</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>Home Quad</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/17</td>
<td>Feature</td>
<td>Conference Season Preview</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/18</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>Earlham</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/21</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>Mt. St. Joe/Alma</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/24</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>Ohio Northern</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/25</td>
<td>Buzz</td>
<td>Buzz - Edition I</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/28</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>St. Francis Tri-Match</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/01</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>Bluffton</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/04</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>Transylvania</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/09</td>
<td>Buzz</td>
<td>Buzz - Edition II</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/12</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>Franklin/Hanover</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/15</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>Anderson</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/17</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>Ohio Wesleyan</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/22</td>
<td>Buzz</td>
<td>Buzz - Edition III</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/22</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/26</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>Kenyon Invitational</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/28</td>
<td>Feature</td>
<td>Player of the Week Winner</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/29</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>Spring Arbor</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/31</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>Oberlin</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/05</td>
<td>Feature</td>
<td>Conference Tour. Preview</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/10</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>Conference Tournament</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/18</td>
<td>Buzz</td>
<td>Buzz - Edition IV</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notations:

**Buzz** – A report about the team's season to date.

**NA** – Release not applicable to paper.

**NP** – No paper delivered on normal publishing date.

**Brief** – a stand-alone article of 3 paragraphs or less without a picture; any article within a "briefs" section.

**Feature** - a stand-alone article of 4 paragraphs or more; any article with a picture.

Figure 9. Schedule of the Press Releases by the Researcher and the Resulting Coverage Offered by the Bucyrus, Ohio *Telegraph-Forum* and The (Van Wert, Ohio) *Times Bulletin*.

Overall, the results of the research reflected what the researcher expected and the Review of Literature stated – use of electronic media in sports promotion can lead to increased coverage of the female varsity volleyball players at a small liberal arts college. By applying the principles in ROPES, the researcher learned that more journalists were using electronic media for their own research (92% according to Ross and Middleberg, 2000) and actually preferred to correspond using email (83% according to Branson, 2002). Through the Small Market Newspaper Survey, it was learned that hometown papers would embrace electronic press releases. The researcher chose to utilize email and the Internet to contact two newspapers with releases about the volleyball team. The researcher’s efforts resulted in 12 articles about the team in 2002, compared to no articles in 2001, in the two papers.
Chapter V: Discussion

The purpose of this project was to determine if the amount of print media published about the female varsity volleyball players at a small liberal arts college increased when the sports information office communicated updated information about the team via electronic media at least once per week to players' hometown newspapers. Within this purpose, the researcher first sought to understand what steps could be taken to increase coverage by print media, how electronic media benefited the promotion of sports, and how newspapers covered collegiate athletes who graduated from local high schools.

In order to better understand and study these topics, four questions were used as the basis for the research: 1. How did organizations increase coverage by print media? 2. What was the role of electronic media in sports promotion? 3. How did small market newspapers determine what information to publish about local high school graduates participating in athletics at the collegiate level? 4. Did the number of articles published by the hometown newspapers increase when the sports information office communicated updated information about the volleyball team via electronic media at least once per week?

Questions #1 and #2 were answered in Chapter II, Review of Literature. In Chapter III, the researcher described the methods and procedures for the research and in the Chapter IV, the researcher described the results. The researcher's thoughts on the implications of the research of each question are found in the remainder of Chapter V.
How did organizations increase coverage by print media?

Kelly (2001) showed that an important aspect of increasing media coverage was fostering positive relationships with the media by responding to the media’s requests and meeting their needs and in return seeing positive coverage and greater interest in the organization. To understand that relationship and develop it, Kelly (2001) suggested the five steps of research, objectives, programming, evaluation, and stewardship (ROPES).

The ideals portrayed in the ROPES process are as important as any other to the public relations professional and are especially useful at a small college. Facing competition for print space from professional and major collegiate athletics, the small college sports information director, who is often much younger than the veterans of larger schools, would be wise to incorporate the ROPES process into his or her practices. Doing so allows for growth: (a) within the office by expanding on the previously available resources, including the number of media contacts, approaches to public relations, and history of the athletic programs; (b) with the media through improved relationships; and (c) within himself or herself by developing career skills.

Research, step one in the ROPES process, is clearly the foundation to success. Knowing the relationships of the past between the athletic department and the media, the history and tradition of each team, and the failures and successes of the past in public relations efforts is invaluable as the sports information director plans the direction of new public relations efforts. With such knowledge, the sports information director can develop improved media relations by making new contacts and advancing previous relationships.
After completing the research in step one, the sports information director must lay out the objectives of the public relations efforts, step two of the ROPES process. One goal may be the promotion of record-setting players, coaches, and teams at the school, knowledge gained through the research completed in stage one. Reaching new markets should also be a major objective; the markets already a part of the sports information contacts would have been discovered in the research stage.

How the goals of step two are expected to be reached is through the programming developed in step three. With the overall goal of increasing media coverage, the sports information director must determine which stories receive the highest priority and when the stories will be written. The programming will also include any new ideas or approaches to the design of the public relations plans.

An evaluation of the promotional programming, step four of ROPES, is integral to the continued growth of the relationship between the sports information office and the media. To evaluate the successes and shortcomings of the public relations activities, the sports information director could subscribe to newspapers or may contact papers about what releases and information the papers find of greatest value. By doing this, the public relations programming can be redirected where deemed necessary and should meet the needs of the media on a more consistent basis.

Having a positive relationship with the media is the ultimate goal of the ROPES process and the public relations professional. Rather than building new relationships, the stewardship of existing relationships, step five in ROPES, will lead to greater success in promotional efforts. To maintain the positive relationships, the sports information director can strive to consistently send releases to the media, quickly respond to requests
for information, interviews, and photos, and show appreciation for coverage the outlet provides the school.

Other efforts can also improve relationships and media coverage. Targeting stories to appropriate media meant a greater possibility of the release being used (Bransford, 2002). Electronic media is also a positive as it allows for instant distribution of releases and access to photos, old releases, and other meaningful information. More roles of electronic media in sports promotion are discussed below.

**What was the role of electronic media in sports promotion?**

From the original source to being in the headlines, the dissemination of news continues to become more and more competitive all of the time. Round-the-clock access to news through the Internet and 24-hour television networks have brought greater demand on the public relations professional for late-breaking stories of high value (Lordan, 2001). A way to meet this demand is the use of electronic media.

Distributing press releases through email and the Internet makes information instantly available to all interested parties. The sports information director can also make photos, box scores from games, and team and individual season statistics available immediately after contests by placing them on the team’s website. Such an approach also allows the sports information director to expand the number of regular contacts without incurring an increase in related expenses, including long distance charges.

Electronic media can also serve an interactive function between the sports information director and the media. Online press conferences and interviews were reflective of this (Persichitte et al., 1997). Conducting surveys of media needs were also a possibility (Petrison and Wang, 1993).
Such interaction between sports information directors and the media presents a definitive route to lowering expenses and expanding coverage, an aspect especially important to the small school with a limited budget. Offering historical and current information about the teams online lessens the need for printing media guides while emailing also removes the costs of faxing and phone calls.

The use of electronic media clearly has many advantages. The number of contacts receiving regular information can grow without increasing expenses. Making information and photos available immediately to the media helps them meet their deadlines. A bonus for the media is the ability to copy and paste releases from the electronic source, eliminating the need to rewrite a hard copy.

These efforts can also have shortcomings. One major shortcoming is the possibility an email release will not be viewed as consistently as the fax. The fax offers a readable version of the release without any special effort on the part of the recipient; the electronic version requires the recipient to either open an attachment or visit a website to view the release. Another concern is that the electronic release may not be viewed on time if the recipient's email account is not actively checked.

Taking these positives and negatives into consideration helps the sports information director determine if faxing, ground mail, or electronic media is the method of distribution of greatest value to his or her school. From the researcher's point of view, electronic distribution was ideal as it saved the expenses of long distance faxing and of paying a student to complete the task. It also allowed him to reach not only hometown newspapers but also more media in the counties surrounding the college. To see if
potential contacts would view electronic releases favorably, the researcher conducted the Small Market Newspaper Survey that is discussed in the next question.

**How did small market newspapers determine what information to publish about local high school graduates participating in athletics at the collegiate level?**

The Small Market Newspaper Survey (Appendix A, page 56) proved valuable in achieving the overall goal of the project, the promotion of small-college volleyball using electronic media. The eight papers that were surveyed were similar in many characteristics. All of the papers published at least six days per week, had circulations between 7,000 and 20,000, and were located in cities between 10,700 and 35,000.

Proportionality appeared to be a characteristic in portions of the survey. *The Crescent-News* (Defiance, OH) embraced the largest circulation, coverage area, and number of high schools covered. In proportion Defiance most frequently covered local high school graduates, doing so eight times per month, a number matched by *The Bellefontaine (OH) Examiner*. Defiance also posted the most features on college athletes at one per week.

However, proportionality between paper size and coverage of local high school graduates did not hold true in all cases. Van Wert was the smallest paper for circulation, population of location and coverage area, and number of high schools covered but tied for third for coverage of local graduates at four times per month. *The Marion (OH) Star*, which covered 12 high schools, only touched on local graduates twice per month.

The researcher’s survey also found an item that was reflective of a previous survey. As stated in Chapter II, Review of Literature, Ross and Middleberg (2000) revealed that 92% of journalists used the Internet for researching articles. Of the
respondents to question #2 of the Small Market Newspaper Survey, “How do you obtain the information that you use,” six papers said they did research of their own; the same six papers were also among those who said they used websites as a source of information in question 2B.

Otherwise, question 2 did not reveal anything of surprise to the researcher. None of the sources was selected by all of the papers. Submissions from sports information directors were highly valued as each of the papers had inadequate personnel to appropriately research the college athletes.

Questions #3 and #6 in the Small Market Newspaper Survey, which asked how the level of collegiate play and how the sport impacts the coverage of the athletes, respectively, reflected sentiments that were somewhat surprising to the researcher. Seven of the eight papers said that the level and the sport had no role in determining whether to cover the story. The fact that six of these seven contacts were male could have lent towards the opposite sentiments.

The researcher believed that male newspaper editors would tend to have a strong bias for higher-division schools and major sports, where the loyalties of male sports fans are generally strongest. The fact that the opposite held true and editors consistently embraced athletes of all levels and sports certainly reflects an understanding of the readers’ interests and an ever-growing marketplace in the United States for sports such as soccer and other minor sports.

For question 4 (what formats were used to report on the athletes), the relatively minor use of capsules came as unexpected result. Five of the eight papers used capsules while the researcher had anticipated all of the papers reporting in this format. This was in
part due to the fact that the researcher’s local paper uses capsules on a weekly basis. Only two papers reported using capsules every week.

The three parts of question 7 presented few surprises. In Part A (what information would be of most value), honors and records were expected to receive the most recognition from the media; the responses reflected these expectations. However, the researcher had anticipated equal weight to be given to season and career statistics, but only six and five papers, respectively, selected season and career stats. To the researcher, season and career statistics are the most definitive way of understanding an athlete’s success.

In Part B of question 7 (how would you like to receive information), only five papers selected email as a preferred method of receiving releases. This may have been due to smaller size of the papers as many may have not adopted the technology within the office yet. All of the papers viewed the player’s contributions as ‘significant’ in order to justify a feature in Part C.

The ratings offered by the newspapers for the varsity college sports in Part III of the survey fell in line with expectations. Football was rated a ‘3’ by every paper with men’s basketball, women’s basketball, and baseball in the next three spots for highest mean rating. Tennis, golf, and soccer were the lowest-rated sports.

The deviation in ratings within certain sports was most likely due to the interest of the papers’ readers in the same teams at local high schools. As mentioned in Chapter IV, some sports deviated between ‘1’ and ‘3’ ratings or even ‘0’ and ‘3’ ratings.

The researcher had several expectations entering the survey process. He expected all of the papers to provide coverage of local high school graduates at least once per
week, mostly through the use of capsules. The researcher also believed that most of the papers did their own research using websites and most often received information through fax. The researcher expected the newspapers to give significant preference to Division I schools over Division III and to major sports (football, basketball) over minor sports (volleyball, track).

In areas where the survey did not meet all of these expectations, this may have been due to several factors. One was the fact that only two of the papers were located in college towns. Thus, the other six papers had less of a vested interest in covering college athletics in order to meet local market demands.

A second factor was the coverage of college athletics offered by the local paper where the researcher resides. College capsules and features were a weekly aspect of this paper. The paper tended to show heavy preference towards major sports. When requesting information from the researcher, the paper often used season and career statistics for capsules and features.

Overall, the researcher was pleased with how the survey met his expectations about the coverage of local high school graduates. All of the papers showed an interest in covering local high school graduates. All of them stated regular use of email and/or websites in writing stories.

The newspapers made it clear that the sports information director played a necessary role in their coverage. A small staff limited most of the papers in their ability to properly cover the college athletes. Submissions from the sports information director were important in complimenting the newspapers’ efforts; this gave greater validity to the researcher’s efforts in the area of electronic submissions.
The reflections of the surveys truly showed the need for a fresh approach from the researcher's point of view. By submitting information via electronic media, the researcher increased the likelihood of coverage from the media. This method decreased the media's need to research a minor sport at a small college, characteristics that may otherwise push the college's athletes down the list of coverage by the papers. The success of this method is discussed below in the final question.

**Did the number of articles published by the hometown newspapers increase when the sports information office communicated updated information about the volleyball team via electronic media at least once per week?**

Both newspapers were receptive to receiving information about the volleyball team via electronic media. Bucyrus used information from eight releases, and Van Wert printed material from six releases. Neither paper had published any articles about the team during the previous season. The coverage of the team by both papers was reflective of their answers in the survey.

Bucyrus' responses to the survey revealed that they would print information whenever justified and use information from submissions with little or no research. The _Telegraph-Forum_ did not follow a regular schedule to cover the team, printing the information on multiple days during the week, including Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. The period between coverage varied from one week to two weeks to three weeks. All of the material used was submitted by the researcher.

Bucyrus' responses to the survey also showed that briefs were a prominent format of reporting on local high school graduates and that honors, game stories, and season statistics were normally included in their reports. All six stories written during the season
were in a briefs format and included information from both matches and the season as a whole. Honors were discussed in two of the stories.

Van Wert indicated in the survey that they would provide overall coverage of local graduates four times per month based on submissions received from colleges. *The Times Bulletin* averaged two articles per month for the volleyball team and replicated releases in part or full as received from the researcher.

Van Wert listed features and briefs as regular formats of reporting on the athletes while honors, records, and game stories were the most frequently used forms of information. Two of Van Wert’s six articles about the team were briefs while four were features. Match and seasonal information were most commonly used in the articles; honors and records were also used at least twice during the season.

As the coverage shows, this method of information distribution was certainly a good step, especially for a minor sport such as volleyball. With football and basketball, media members will seek out the information, or pull it to themselves, on a consistent basis. With minor sports the sports information director will likely need to push the information to the media in order to increase coverage. However, this method would also be good for a sport like football, which has dozens of players from dozens of hometowns.

Many negative factors to this method must also be considered. A great deal of time is required to research all of the contacts for all sports. Due to time limitations, the sports information director may not be able to develop interpersonal relationships with the media; information on the team and school may have to be distributed in a cold contact with the first email to the media outlets.
Some steps could be taken to overcome these negatives. At the beginning of the season, the sports information director could have the athletes fill out a form with all of the necessary information. A student assistant could perform the research aspects of who the contacts will be and could even make initial phone calls to introduce the team and school. Because both the student salaries and the phone calls may increase costs, the sports information director may chose to write a cordial email which may include a season preview, roster, and other introductory information.

Even with these negatives, the use of the survey in combination with the distribution of the electronic releases brought about positive results for the researcher. With every release printed, the college’s name was seen by more and more readers. Such is the goal of the sports information director, and since only two papers were followed, the researcher can only assume that many other articles were written about the team in the other papers on the team’s list.

Summary

The purpose of this project was to determine if the amount of print media published about the female varsity volleyball players at a small liberal arts college increased when the sports information office communicated updated information about the team via electronic media at least once per week to the players’ hometown newspapers. Within this purpose the researcher first sought to understand what steps could be taken to increase coverage by print media, how electronic media benefited the promotion of sports, and how newspapers covered collegiate athletes who graduated from local high schools.
The researcher first conducted a review of literature that presented several points. ROPES (Research, Objectives, Programming, Evaluation, and Stewardship) was a process that could guide the public relations professional in developing strong relationships with the media (Kelly, 2001). The review also showed that 92% of the media embraced use of the Internet in research for a story (Ross & Middleberg, 2000) while 83% communicated with sources using email (Bransford, 2002). The use of electronic media met the journalist’s need for a cheap, efficient method of information retrieval and distribution.

The original research of the project focused on a small market newspaper survey and distribution of electronic press releases to hometown newspapers. The sample for the survey was comprised of eight papers with circulations between 7,000 and 20,000 and located in towns between 10,700 and 35,000. Two of those papers were used to track coverage of the volleyball team.

Ten questions were posed to the eight newspapers through the Small Market Newspaper Survey. Through the survey the researcher learned that all eight papers covered local high school graduates at the collegiate level, mostly using information submitted by sports information directors. All of them used either email or the Internet, or both, in receiving releases or performing research. Coverage of the athletes ranged from two to eight articles per month with honors, records, and season and career statistics the most commonly used information.

The papers were also asked to rate 11 college sports by reader interest. Ratings ranged from ‘0’ for No Interest to ‘3’ for High Interest. Football received all ‘3’ ratings
and was followed by men’s basketball, women’s basketball, and baseball for average rating. Volleyball finished fifth among the respondents.

Coverage by the hometown newspapers for the volleyball team was significantly improved in the 2002 season. Neither paper had printed any material on the team in 2001. Each published six articles in 2002. All of the information printed by the papers was received via electronic media from the researcher, who notified the papers via email that a press release had been posted to the team’s website.

Overall, the project proved of great value to the researcher. By utilizing the ROPES process and sending releases via electronic media, the researcher was able to increase coverage of the volleyball team. Electronic releases met the interests of the media, who sought to have instant access to high quality, late-breaking news and were embracing the Internet and email in an ever-increasing role to get that news. This also fulfilled the interests of the researcher by expanding into new markets without incurring significant cost increases.

Recommendations

While the project achieved its purposes, one major change could have advanced the project to a point of greater success. Through the survey process the researcher learned that some of those who used electronic releases preferred to receive them as email attachments rather than linking to a website. Formats to use on the attachments could include Adobe PDF, Microsoft Word, or Text.

Another change would be in how the releases were written. The researcher should have made a concerted effort to include information about all players in every
release that reported on matches. Touching on all of the players would probably mean greater coverage for the team.

A third step would be to expand on the use of photos. Use of photos was limited to one request from Van Wert for a head-and-shoulders photo of the local graduate. By pushing head-and-shoulders and action photos to the papers, more coverage may result. This ideal was portrayed by Bennett and Company (2000), who found that 82% of journalists would utilize electronic packages that included online photos.

Likewise, other steps could be taken in order to expand on the research. One way would be to include a broader market of newspapers, differentiating the survey sample with greater circulations and larger markets so as to represent all athletes at the college. Another change would be to test the idea on multiple sports in one project or to test a different sport, especially a major sport such as football, to compare the differences in coverage between two sports.

By broadening the sample the true value of the survey and the electronic releases could be realized. With greater numbers in both tests, the accuracy of the results would be validated, revealing the potential of the ROPES process and having a positive effect on relationships with the media. Growth in a positive direction can result by understanding more of the media’s needs and by providing up-to-the-minute information through email and the Internet. More coverage of the college’s athletes should result.

Conclusion

Overall, this project proved to be valuable in helping the researcher better understand the field of sports information and its role in promoting college athletes. Studying the work of experts in the public relations field exposed the researcher to how
the ROPES process can help him properly build and maintain relationships with the media - and thus increase print media coverage of the college - and how electronic media had previously been used in sports promotion. This background knowledge was extremely beneficial in shaping the success of the project, as the researcher followed the ROPES process to complete the project and moved forward confidently in the project after seeing how integral electronic media had already become in promoting sports.

The Small Market Newspaper Survey provided tremendous insight into the needs of the media in working with sports at all levels, but especially into how a sports information director promoting a minor sport at a small college can assist newspapers in increasing coverage. By actively sending information via electronic media to two newspapers, the researcher found the results of the Small Market Newspaper Survey, within its limited scope, to be accurate and that electronic information distribution is an efficient and useful method to promote small college athletics. The opportunity to test this success at a higher level or on a major sport is one that the researcher would relish in efforts to continue educating himself while moving up the career ladder.
References


A2=ind0206&L=ipr&D=1&T=0&H=1&O=D&F=&S=&P=722


Appendix A
Small Market Newspaper Survey

Newspaper __________________________________ Location______________________________

Contact/Title ____________________________________________________ Circulation________________________

Publication Cycle________________________________ Days Published _____ M _____ T _____ W _____ R _____ F _____ Sat _____ Sun

Population Base (location)________________________ (coverage area)____________________________

Local schools (number)________________________ (radius of coverage area)____________________________

1. Do you routinely publish information about ex-local high school athletes who are now playing sports at the collegiate level?

2. How do you obtain the information that you use?
   Own research vs. information submitted by college communications department, parent, etc?
   Medium – website, email, faxes, phone calls, traditional mail?

3. Does the level of collegiate play (i.e., NCAA Division I vs. III vs. JUCO) impact the decision to publicize information about an athlete?

4. What format do you use to report on the athletes (‘college capsules’, feature stories, game stories, etc.)?

5. How often do you use each format (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, whenever justified, etc.)?

6. Does the sport being played impact the decision of which format to use (i.e. football in feature vs. volleyball in capsule)?

7. If information would be provided to you:
   a. What information would be of value (season stats, individual game performances, honors, records set, etc.)?
Small Market Newspaper Survey (continued)

b. How would you like to receive this information (email, fax, traditional mail, phone)?

c. How would the level of performance (i.e. starter vs. bench player, high vs. low contribution) affect your decision to publish that information in a feature story?

   i. What threshold of performance is needed to justify a feature?

   ii. Does the level of collegiate play or sport being played affect that threshold?

Based on demographics and your expert opinion, please rate the following collegiate sports in order of interest to your readers. Please use the following scale:

1 – No interest  2 – Low interest  3 – Moderate interest  4 – High interest

___ Baseball  ___ Golf
___ Basketball – Men’s  ___ Soccer
___ Basketball – Women’s  ___ Softball (women’s fast-pitch)
___ Cross Country  ___ Tennis
___ Football  ___ Track and Field
___  ___ Volleyball – Women’s
### Appendix B

**Biographical Information About the Survey Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Van Wert</th>
<th>Marion</th>
<th>Delaware</th>
<th>Defiance</th>
<th>Celina</th>
<th>Bucyrus</th>
<th>Bowling Green</th>
<th>Bellefontaine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>13,500</td>
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<td>MTWRFSS</td>
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<td>MTWRFSun</td>
<td>MTWRFSat</td>
<td>MTWRFSat</td>
<td>MTWRFSat</td>
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**Notations:**

Days - Days published  
MTWRFSat - Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday (R), Friday, Saturday  
MTWRFSun - Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday (R), Friday, Sunday  
MTWRFSS - Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday (R), Friday, Saturday, Sunday  
Pop (Loc) - Population of city where newspaper is located  
Pop (Area) - Population of coverage area of newspaper
## Appendix C

**Newspaper Responses to Survey Questions**

<table>
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<th>Van Wert</th>
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### 2a.

- Submission
- Research
- Submission
- Research
- Submission
- Research
- Submission
- Research

### 2b.

- Email
- Website
- Fax
- Mail
- Phone

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### 3.

- No
- Yes
- No
- No
- No
- No
- No
- No

### 4.

- Features
- Games
- Briefs
- Capsules

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### 5.

- F- Justified
- G - Justified
- B - Justified
- C - 2x/month

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### 6.

- No
- Yes
- No
- No
- No
- No
- No
- No

*For actual questions, see Appendix A.*

*Questions 7a, 7b, and 7c found on the next page.*
### Newspaper Responses to Survey Questions (continued)

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**Notations:**
- Justified - Reporting on an athlete/using a format when deemed worthwhile.
- Numbers next to answers in 2a and 2b reflect rankings by newspaper.
- Capsules - A special section of a newspaper dedicated to reporting on local high school graduates playing sports collegiate.
- Question 5: C (Capsules), F (Feature), and B (Brief).
- Question 7A: Game, Season, and Career reflect types of stats.

*For actual questions, see Appendix A.*
Appendix D

Newspaper Ratings of Reader Interest in Various College Sports

- **0** No interest
- **1** Low interest
- **2** Medium interest
- **3** High interest

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Notations:

SD - Standard Deviation
## Appendix E

### Materials Used by Hometown Newspapers

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**Notations:**

- **Buzz** - A report about the team's season to date  
  (See Definitions in Chapter I for more information)
- **NA** - Release not applicable to paper
- **NP** - No paper delivered on normal publishing date
- **Brief** - a stand-alone article of 3 paragraphs or less without a picture; any article within a "briefs" section.
- **Feature** - a stand-alone article of 4 paragraphs or more; any article with a picture.