"While our PR budget has not increased significantly in the past three years, our productivity has changed dramatically. A key element is Vocus and the ability to get us to the contacts we need and to focus our energies. The more we do, the more kids are helped and the more we can allocate resources to remain one of the most charitable charities."
– Marianne Haisten, Public Relations Coordinator

Challenge
As a nonprofit benefiting children and families, Starr Commonwealth looks for every opportunity to reduce operating costs to allocate more to helping kids and families. At the same time, it needs aggressive national and international PR to attract attention to its programs and support donations.

Solution
With Vocus, Starr Commonwealth implemented a comprehensive PR solution that brought efficiency to media contact management, list building, distribution, news management and analysis.

Results
Starr Commonwealth tripled coverage the first year using Vocus, and reclaimed days each month once spent creating lists and sorting clips. And, free from external clipping services, Starr Commonwealth saves $36,000 per year.

Vocus Helps Keep Starr Commonwealth One of the Most Charitable Charities in the Nation

Customer Profile

Every year, Starr Commonwealth gives thousands of children and families a better chance in life. Founded in 1913 in Albion, Michigan, the private, non-profit organization and its associated programs help children and families with services ranging from foster care to residential treatment, and from in-home counseling to programs that help young adults learn to live independently. The organization employs more than 400 people across five locations in Michigan and Ohio, and serves children nationally through various workshops, school programs and residential treatment. Montcalm School, a private referral and residential program, helps children 12 to 18 years old, while No Disposable Kids, a nationally recognized training program, helps today's educators create and maintain a healthy school environment for students and staff.

Challenge

Starr Commonwealth has been named by Consumer's Digest as the sixth "most charitable charity" in the nation, meaning Starr Commonwealth is more efficient than most charities at using donors' dollars for charitable services, rather than for administrative and other costs. While that ranking would be satisfactory for most organizations, Starr Commonwealth continues to aim for the top.

All departments, including the PR department, are held to high standards of fiscal efficiency. However, initially Starr spent $36,000 annually for clipping services – and PR still spent a full day each month logging clips. Similarly, creating media lists to reach new markets nationally and internationally took days. Beyond streamlining costs and time, PR needed to monitor and measure its efforts and results so it could focus on the right areas.

Vocus Public Relations Solution

Part of Starr Commonwealth's fiscal efficiency and success stems from its progressive attitude toward methods and technologies. To bring much-needed efficiency to PR, Starr looked at various options, including Vocus' online software product for public relations. Impressed with Vocus' attentive, needs-oriented consulting during the selection process – as well as the promise of significant cost and time efficiencies – Starr selected Vocus.

With Vocus in place, Starr Commonwealth streamlined all its PR processes, allowing the two-person PR team to reach more contacts in a shorter amount of time – and generate more exposure for the unique organization.

Precise Media Lists in Under an Hour

When Marianne Haisten, Public Relations Coordinator, joined Starr Commonwealth to start the new PR department, the organization had one media list, comprised only of organizations that had previously covered Starr Commonwealth. Haisten quickly found that creating new lists to generate much-needed coverage in other nationwide markets was extremely tedious, at times requiring days to visit each outlet's Web site.

With Vocus in place, Starr Commonwealth now accesses an extensive database of nationwide contacts. In less than an hour, Haisten and her colleagues built a targeted list for specific campaigns. Plus, the PR team has confidence it's hitting the most appropriate contacts at each outlet. With more precise lists, Starr Commonwealth established key relationships with new contacts that resulted in coverage.

As former journalists, the PR representatives at Starr Commonwealth believe strongly in sending releases directly to contacts, rather than relying on wire services. With Vocus, they easily tailor releases to each contact's preferences and send them out as personal emails. In just half an hour, they prepare and release news to an entire media list reaching up to 100 journalists.

Saving a Day a Month with Vocus' Integrated Clipping Service

Starr Commonwealth now uses Vocus' News-on-Demand feature, the first electronic clipping service to be designed and offered as an integrated feature of a complete PR management system. This addition alone freed a full day each month for Haisten, who previously blocked off an afternoon every two weeks just to sort and log clips provided by clipping services.

News-on-Demand seamlessly brings electronic clips into Vocus, which allows Starr Commonwealth to comprehensively see and analyze coverage. With newfound time, Haisten can redirect her efforts to more strategic activities. "With Vocus, I can actually research stories to work on. I'm not spending hours cataloging clips," she said.

Identifying Winning Programs, Opportunities for Improvement

With a record of all coverage in Vocus, PR easily runs customized quarterly reports for management or other departments to inform them of PR's efforts and results. With that information, the department can easily adjust its strategies to improve results.

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For example, the PR department provided state-by-state coverage reports to the development department, which brings in donations. By comparing donation levels and coverage received, both departments could clearly see areas that could benefit from more PR attention in the future.

Starr's development department recently launched a comprehensive speakers bureau, for which the bulk of its promotion throughout the states of Michigan and Ohio depends on public relations and the PR team's ability to track the success of that promotion in Vocus.

Results: Triple the Media Coverage for Thousands Less

Haisten considers Vocus an indispensable member of Starr Commonwealth's PR team. The department streamlined most of its regular tasks, such as list development, distribution and clip processing, giving it extra days each month to focus on more strategic activities.

With more targeted lists, Starr Commonwealth gets its message to the best individuals at each outlet, which has helped increased coverage in markets nationwide. In fact, coverage more than tripled the year the department added Vocus. Starr effectively brought its message to more people while saving at least $36,000 per year by eliminating external clipping services. That goes a long way toward helping Starr reach its goal of being the most charitable charity in the nation.

"While our budget has not changed significantly in the past three years, our productivity has changed dramatically," Haisten said. "A key element is Vocus and the ability to get us to the contacts we need and to focus our energies. The more we do, the more kids are helped and the more we can allocate resources to remain one of the most charitable charities."

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About Vocus, Inc.

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