



Marketing Issues

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Simple Rules for Effective Bannering

In previous issues I have discussed the importance of preparing for the future, and we continue to do just that. Soon you will be able to add one more organizing tool to your portfolio: “Close the Deal,” a top-down presentation which will be offered to union members through the George Meany Labor College. We are working with the AFL-CIO to have this class designed specifically for the Roofers and Waterproofers union. This training should be available this fall.

Meanwhile, many of you are using aggressive organizing tactics in these slow economic times—and getting results. Among the many tools useful for organizing are the Mark Breslin top-down approach, hand-billing, picketing and bannering. Bannering—and some of the rules you need to follow—is an important topic to discuss, since many of you are using this form of organizing. Adhere to these procedures to reduce your chances of running into legal problems while bannering.

The following points are only suggestions. You should always contact your legal counsel before doing any job actions. Bannering—if done correctly—is not picketing, but we need to follow guidelines to avoid conduct similar to picketing.

Bannering should not stop anyone from working

The beauty of bannering, as opposed to picketing, is that you can get your message out to the public without costing our building trades brothers and sisters time and money. A picket usually prevents only union members from crossing a picket line, and then only for a short time. Then the general contractor sets up a neutral gate, and union members think it’s okay to cross the picket. We all know better; a picket is a picket, regardless of how many “neutral gates” are set up.

With bannering, you are not asking anyone not to work, so it is a winning situation for you and your union brothers and sisters. If a picket is going on, call your counsel before displaying your banner. If the location allows, you might move your banner to a spot far away enough that the picketers and banner holders cannot see each other. Do not use the banner in conjunction with any picketing that you or other building trades unions may be doing.

Do NOT place your banner near an entrance

Placement of the banner is critical. It should not be close to any entrances—remember, it is the public you want to inform. Stay as far away as possible from any driveways, doors, gates or any other entrances to the facility you are bannering.

Do not block sidewalks. Sidewalks are for the public to use, not for you to stand on and hold a banner. Also, be very cautious of trespassing. Avoid this risk by doing your due diligence prior to bannering. Visit the courthouse and contact the proper department. The initial visit might be time consuming, but once you figure out who to contact, it will be much easier. Be prepared to provide an address or at least a detailed description of the location you intend to use as a bannering spot.

DO place your banner in a high-volume traffic area

You want to inform as many people as possible, so pick an area that attracts a lot of traffic—both cars and pedestrians. The banner needs to remain stationary in its approved location so as to not break any trespass laws or interfere with traffic patterns. Banner placement is comparable to the three most important things in real estate: location, location, location.

Assign three or four people per banner

Usually two people can hold the banner, but it’s easier using at least three so you can stagger your breaks while keeping the banner up. You should never need more than four people to hold the banner. Remember, this is not a picket.

Distribute handbills while you are bannering

Banner holders have only two jobs: holding the banner, and distributing a pre-approved handbill. You should not be confronting people with a handbill or stopping traffic. Give a handbill only to someone who asks for one. You do not need to speak to anyone about what you are doing; the handbill will explain everything.

Make sure handbill information is accurate

Handbill, whitepaper, flyer, leaflet—whatever you call it, it is crucial that it contains only truthful and accurate information. Do not pass out any material unless it has been approved by your legal counsel.

The handbill should explain why you are “shaming” the contractor or why the contractor hurts the local economy and community. Do not make any kind of recognition claim, do not make any statements regarding the contractor’s union status and do not state or claim that the union is seeking to represent employees of this contractor.

Remember that *factual and truthful information* is vital, regardless of where you get it. Refer to last quarter’s article for resources that can help you gather information, and use all sources available.

I hope this article has helped explain the proper uses of bannering and ways to stay within the law. Established guidelines are also available and can be obtained by contacting the Market Development Department. Finally, always contact your legal counsel before taking any action. Be smart, and be safe. ■