Retransmission consent negotiations are private, market-based discussions between local television stations and pay-television operators. The current process provides incentives for both parties to come to mutually beneficial arrangements.

Despite rhetoric by pay-TV providers, nearly every deal negotiated since 1992 has been completed without a disruption in service. Broadcasters should be sure to have a communications plan on which to rely should pay-TV operators attempt to play politics with the process.

The following are general tips for successful communications with your internal team, viewers and policymakers should you need them.

1. **Be ready**
   - Ensure your company has a communications plan in place in the unlikely event of a breakdown in negotiations
   - Don’t wait until the negotiations begin to start preparing
   - Anticipate the worst case scenario from the outset
   - Task your communications officer with developing a plan and managing the process

2. **Develop a communications plan**
   - Identify key spokespeople in advance and ensure only authorized employees speak to the media, such as:
     - Communications officer
     - General manager
   - Prepare message points
     - Ensure they are fact-based
     - Messages should focus on the viewers and what a disruption in service will mean to them
     - Should be flexible to respond to viewer feedback or opponents’ claims
     - Arm all spokespeople with these messages
     - Educate all personnel on these messages
   - Be aware of counter arguments
     - Monitor pay-TV providers’ websites, advertising and communications
     - Do not let false assertions go unchallenged
     - Monitor blogs, social media and respond when appropriate in a measured, factual way
     - Take the high road (which viewers find more credible) as opposed to attacking the pay-TV provider
   - Communicate frequently with your personnel
     - Establish an internal communications structure
     - Post messages on company intranet
     - Ensure viewer concerns are communicated to the spokespeople so they can tailor public messages appropriately
3. If there is a threat of service disruption, proactively educate your audience
   – Showcase your spokesperson in editorial segments
   – Post information to your website and social media
   – Consider a paid media campaign if necessary
   – Utilize earned media contacts outside the station newsroom
     • Spokespeople should proactively reach out to the media
     • Consider placing op-eds or letters to the editor
     • Participate in print and radio interviews

4. Offer viewers help
   – Establish a call center to answer questions
   – Provide antennas as a free service to viewers
     • Include instructions for use with antenna and on website
   – Be responsive and receptive to feedback
   – Answer and respond to every call and email
   – Dedicate ample station resources to ensure viewers receive information
   – Understand that viewers care less about who is right or wrong if negotiations break down; viewers just “want their TV”

5. Communicate with policymakers
   – Proactively reach out to local, state and federal policymakers
     • Send initial letter explaining the negotiation process
     • Have GM follow up with phone calls
   – Explain how the negotiation process could impact your viewers/their constituents if the pay-TV provider is not negotiating fairly
   – Include the many ways you’re educating viewers and offering them assistance
   – Be sure your side of the story is told: you’re operating in good faith and you want to keep your signal on the pay-TV operators’ programming line up

6. Don’t give up
   – Keep executing your plan until the deal is done