

BDS Song-and/or-Dance FLASH MOB

Step-by-Step How-To Kit

[Rough ideas I'll insert in the email first:

- *Note that Flash Mobs are a tactic, not a strategy/campaign. This is a way to promote a campaign you're working on, not an action to do instead of having a broader campaign*
- *General information about Flash Mobs and how they are being used*
- *Some great talking points from (with a link to) recent Mondo Awards submission "2010: The Year of the Flash Mob" on what an empowering and engaging tool of organizing and resistance the flash mob is*
- *There are lots of other kinds of flash mobs besides song-and-dance BDS ones (Egs with links: Avatar, Freeze-Mobs, Bathrobe Brigades, "Follow the Leader," Flag Skating, Occupation role-playing, protesting AIPAC, etc.)]*

Scenario: You have identified a target of BDS (Egs: Ahava, Sabra Hummus, Aroma Café, Cultural Event) and written to the corresponding retailer(s) or performer(s), asking them to boycott. They have not responded favorably (to this nor to any other tactics you may have used). You are ready to mount another level of pressure.

Why not join groups around the world by using a flash mob to promote your BDS campaign in a way that's effective, empowering, engaging, and fun?!

Steps:

1. Form a **Flash Mob Working Group**.

2. **Basics**
 - a. Set a date, time, location
 - b. Build a time-line leading up to it, incorporating the steps below.
 - c. Don't necessarily send out the date and location far ahead of time, lest management be waiting for you. You might want it to be a surprise!

3. **Scope out the location**. Envision what you'll do where...
 - a. Will it be inside or outside?
 - b. Is there enough room for everyone?
 - c. Where will the videographers have a good angle?

4. **Song & Lyrics?**
 - a. Pick a song—something trendy or classic perhaps?
 - b. Consider writing new lyrics (the simpler the better).

- c. Consider shortening the song; you want it to be a “flash” mob, i.e. pretty quick!
- d. Do you want a skit at the beginning? [*STL-PSC example*]
- e. Or a speaker at the end? [*example Cape Town Opera in Tel Aviv*]

5. Choreography, etc.

- a. If doing dance moves, make steps simple and easy to remember. When everyone dances together, even something simple looks great (and better than something complicated but less in sync).
- b. People joining in a bit at a time can be good, like here. [*Train Station example*]
- c. Do you want Costumes? Props? If not, don’t worry—simple is also good.

6. Do you want to prepare **fliers or signs** as well?

7. Rehearsals & Last Minute Prep:

- a. Flash Mob Working Group teaches participants ahead of time—It’s lots of fun and a great bonding experience!
- b. Pizza party the night before the action, including a dance party/practice?
- c. Last minute rehearsal and preparation:
 - i. Practice as closely as possible to the real thing
 - ii. Decide: will you all arrive simultaneously or staggered?
 - iii. Does everyone know where the cameras will be?
 - iv. If management is upset, does everyone know to leave quickly and calmly?
 - v. Do you know if, where, and when you’re meeting up afterward?

8. Jobs Besides Performers:

- a. Filmer(s): This is arguably the most important job (see more below).
- b. Negotiator(s): This is also one of the most important jobs—someone to try to reason with management or security if they try to interrupt the show. This should be someone who can stay calm and gently take them aside. Some groups—but not all—have their negotiator wear a suit and tie!
- c. Musicians or Boom-Box Holder(s)
- d. Film-Helper: This person can be near the primary filmer to make sure people don’t stand in front of the camera, etc.
- e. People passing out Fliers?
- f. People holding Signs?
- g. Enthusiasts in the crowd to clap, be support, engage with strangers, etc.

9. **Filming:** Your largest audience is not those who witness the mob; rather, it’s all the people who will see it online afterwards. What will look best for the video should be a primary consideration in planning.

- a. Make sure there's a good place for the filmer to stand, with a good angle.
- b. Having multiple filmers from different angles is best.
- c. Make sure to tape the reactions of bystanders (and authorities?).
- d. If it's an inside action, consider having someone outside filming people stream out.
- e. If you were rushed/cramped doing the main action, consider doing it again in an open/safe space afterward for a clearer video. [*Philly BDS example*]
- f. Interview some participants?
- g. Interview some bystanders? [*HP example*]

10. Meeting Up after the Flash Mob (Optional)

- a. Reflections? What went well? What didn't?
- b. Do you have contact info for all the participants?
- c. Do you have a clear distribution strategy once it's released?

11. The Video

- a. If there were lyrics, subtitles are strongly recommended.
- b. Consider text or images at the beginning to orient people (Possibilities: What are you boycotting? Why? Where did the action happen? When? Who? Etc.)
- c. Include an action that viewers can do, or a site they can visit for more information
- d. Upload the file to YouTube or another video-sharing site.
- e. Keep an extra copy in case it's taken it down.

12. Distribute like mad!

- a. Press releases [*CodePink?*]
- b. Action Alerts [*Philly BDS*]
- c. Facebook, Twitter
- d. Articles
- e. Email lists

Looks good. A few things came up, but this matched my limited experience. I am forwarding to John Sellers cc'd who was the brains behind the Target Ain't People flash mob we did.

I'd take some of the question marks away. For instance, I'd like to stress multiple cameras. If someone gets shut down you need to have Multiple backups, especially if the action has complex viewing angles.

Also, getting wireless mics on the main players seems like a technical luxury, but doing one of these actions takes a lot of work so investing the extra time or money or both to get good sound just seems smart. There are lots of affordable portable recording devices that could be used if

you don't have camera crew with wireless mics. John Sellers and Andrew Boyd of Agit Pop have demonstrated the wisdom of his in their Public Option Annie and then again with our Target effort. Good technical quality will increase viability of final product for potential to go "viral."

Scouting for the Target effort was very very well done. Two visits to the site with photos and pacing off the space to recreate it with tape on the floor for rehearsal and camera direction really helped our Target effort. Logan Price and Duskin Drum did an amazing job with that for us.

They also discovered ways to use props from the place in the choreography. This is tricky and made me a bit nervous in the planning, but it worked beautifully. We purchased some of the gear to rehearse with. Stuff that was collected inside as prop was deposited in a predetermined shopping cart on the way out. John can confirm, but Someone was ready to pay for anything broken or mistakenly taken. Would be terrible to have news coverage be about damaged or stolen goods.

Live Music - music under singing should be sparse and not too loud. This takes some practice and skillful arranging. Notice in the Target Ain't People piece how the horn line is NOT playing the melody but rather punctuating with hits like in a salsa or funk band.

A tuba or Sousaphone may not always be possible, but the low end and the visual add a great deal. Drumming should also be quiet and sparse under vocals. Recording devices get overwhelmed by drums, so this is very important for the quality of the recording. It worked well for us to integrate less experienced musicians with a core of professionals who were sympathetic to our cause.

When relevant, having a pitch pipe to provide the singer(s) with first note is essential.

Also, be sure you prepare performers for and control their tendency to RUSH, i.e. Speed up. It's natural, but needs to be moderated. Reminding people to berate, listen to the music helps. Having the musicians controlling tempo also helps. Remember that lyrics will be understood better more slowly, and that's more important than matching songs original tempo etc.

In our situation, big stuff in last was essential. We waited for signal from inside coordinator cell phone to outside coordinator cell phone before entering. BUT - be sure not to start until Everyone is in place. It is easy to rush. Main director/coordinator Needs to give that cue. Make sure everyone knows who is giving the cue, so that nerves don't take over. For example, at our Lincoln Memorial action with giant We the People people stopped slightly early, which made set up more difficult. The cue was given by someone other than the action coordinator because roles were unclear on that detail.

With the Lincoln memorial action, which may not qualify as a true flashmob it was important for us to get the tourists involved by inviting them to sign the giant Preamble in order to confuse the park police and increase our capacity to hold the space. Beauty and infusing awe or humor, usurping imagery, appealing to and appropriating cultural symbols help disrupt and confuse security in a positive way.

Finally - "practice, practice, practice" and then practice again right before. We found a park across from the Target store to rehearse at before and rendezvous afterward.

Anna - thanks for doing this. I'd like to have it in our rollout as well. Coastline are a tactic AND part of a strategy for keeping engagement on serious issues fun.

In collaboration,

Bill Moyer
Backbone Campaign