

M A R T N E R S

STAND OUT IN A CROWD:

Why Integrating Fundraising & Awareness-Generating Media is Essential for Today's Non-Profits.

**By Richard DeVau
Executive Creative Director**

More Competition Than Ever Before

The non-profit world has a population problem. The number of non-profit organizations has increased by 42% in the last decade alone. And with the IRS granting non-profit status to an average of 83 new organizations every day, it's clear this is becoming a very crowded environment.

As a result, the non-profit industry also has an identity problem. In a marketplace that's this crowded with new and existing competitors, how do you distinguish your organization from all the others rivaling for donors' attention and funds? How can your organization stand out in such a large and continually growing crowd and still get noticed? How can you make your mission resonate with donors, so that when your appeal arrives in the mail, or when they enter your website, they'll respond with a gift? And then how do you convince donors to keep giving to your organization?

It's About Relationships

The answer to these questions, in a word, is connection. People don't give money to strangers or causes they know nothing about. Communicating with potential donors is more about relationship building than it is about persuasion. And, like all relationships, there are phases: the introductory phase, the exploratory phase, and the commitment phase. Organizations that believe they can conduct all three phases—introduce themselves, convey their mission and purpose, and then ask for money—all in the same direct mail appeal are

usually met with resistance. This is why donor acquisition appeals usually generate low-performing results, and why mailing such large quantities is necessary. So, what do you do?

Non-Profits and For-Profits Think Alike

Non-profits have to reach the same audiences as commercial businesses, while using the same highly saturated mediums. Both need to gain mind- and market-share. And both need to generate revenue in order to thrive. The reality is that nonprofits usually have only a fraction of the budgets and resources available to most businesses, but need to accomplish all of these same objectives. And therein lies the challenge. So let's start addressing it.

Awareness and Branding

In the introductory phase of a donor relationship, visibility for your organization is the first logical step. This is the phase of the relationship when potential donors are forming their first impressions of your organization and beginning to get to know you by collecting information. And as the old adage goes, you don't get a second chance to make a first impression.

That's why you should take a long, hard look at your "brand." And by that I mean your reputation and donors' current perceptions of your organization. If you're not sure how your organization is perceived by donors, you may want to conduct some research. The best means to do

this would be to ask your current agency to help you, providing you have one, or to contact a research firm to help you gain deeper and more objective insights. Depending on the results, you may need to take a good look at your mission. Have you drifted off track, or has your mission become diluted over time? If so, then donors won't fully know who you really are today or what you stand for, which will in turn affect donations. It's amazing to me to see how many organizations have an outdated mission statement. As the organization has evolved over time, the existing statement no longer reflects reality. Updating this most vital component of both internal and external communications should be a top priority and completed before doing anything else.

If your organization's mission statement is still germane, you may need to look at some of the other aspects of your brand identity: your logo, your tagline, the images, typefaces and colors you use. These elements of your brand are your organization's "face." And, in this case, looks do matter. These components of your brand are the first things people see when they meet you. It's also your organization's personality—the way you present yourself to, and interact with, the world. Some have called these branding elements an organization's DNA—everything that determines who you really are.

Because these branding and messaging elements are so vital to your organization, adding an audit of these to the research mentioned earlier will reveal just how much recognition and equity your existing

logo and tagline hold. Chances are you may not need a whole new "face," perhaps just a facelift will do.

Donor-Focused Print and Web

Fine-tuning your messaging is next. What you say in your communications should also reflect who you are today and have a strong donor focus. What do we mean by "donor focus?" Simply this: connect the donor directly to those served by their donations. Too many organizations unwittingly neglect to do this. Most organizations are institutionally focused when it comes to communications, failing to involve the donor directly, missing this opportunity to build a meaningful relationship with the very people who enable the organization to exist and grow.

Which brings us to the exploratory stage of the donor relationship, where donors take some initiating steps to gather more information to determine if there is common ground and interests they share with your organization. Communication from the donor at this point is still fairly superficial and passive. In the not too distant past, this was achieved by providing printed materials and literature to prospective donors, and to a degree still is. However, today more and more of this information-gathering step taken by potential donors and volunteers is accomplished online. That's why your website is such a critical ingredient in your organization's communications and branding mix. Your site needs to reflect your organization and its mission, be clearly and

succinctly written, designed to reflect your branding, and easy to use and navigate.

With a well written and designed website, potential donors and volunteers will often move fairly quickly from the exploratory stage of the relationship to the commitment stage by making a donation of money or time. Online giving has grown more than 50% per year for the last few years. And this growth trend has every indication of continuing. That's why placing the development and/or upgrade of this vital communications vehicle into the hands of proven professionals is a must.

Tying It All Together

So, let's say you have your branding and messaging fully developed to reflect your mission and your website upgraded and up and running. Now what? Well, it's time to go back to the beginning. And by that I mean back to the introductory phase of the relationship, where visibility is key. You'll need to introduce yourself to potential donors and begin driving them to your website. And to do that you'll need to show up where they are—in their newspapers and magazines, on their billboards, radios and televisions, at the mall, in their movie theaters, on their favorite websites, in their email, and in their mailboxes.

The non-profit world's population problem will only grow more pronounced over time. The only way to stand out from this ever-growing crowd and gain your organization's share of loyal donors is by developing

an ongoing, cohesive, well-planned and integrated communications and fundraising campaign that utilizes appropriate awareness-generating and relationship-building media.

Meyer Partners is a full-service fundraising and marketing communications agency providing integrated, data-driven solutions using our holistic, multi-channel

Direct Effects® approach.



Integrated Fundraising Communications

Direct Effects®

2055 Brookdale Lane, Suite 100
Palatine, IL 60067

105 East Fifth Street, Suite 402
Kansas City, MO 64106