



Strategic Communication: Telling Your Story

Volume Two, Number Nine
September 2009

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“Telling your story is more than just talking; it’s educating about your mission, convincing to support and, ultimately changing someone’s perspective on a social issue. That’s a lot to accomplish with just a story.”

Telling a Story, Changing an Opinion

In the nonprofit world, telling your story is vital. Educating anyone and everyone about the mission and vision of your organization is essential for sustainability. The more people who know about your organization, the more people who donate, volunteer and advocate.

While the theory is simple, the process can be complicated. Telling your story is more than just talking; it’s educating about your mission, convincing to support and, ultimately changing someone’s perspective on a social issue. That’s a lot to accomplish with just a story.

Foundations of Strategic Communication

With more nonprofits per capita than any other state, nonprofits in Alaska have an especially difficult marketplace to compete in. A successful communications plan, one rooted in the mission and vision of the organization, can increase awareness, affect the bottom line and be the catalyst for social change. Without it, the road to success is much more difficult than it needs to be.

So, what exactly is a Strategic Communications Plan? In simple terms, a communications plan is a recipe for telling your story. The plan includes the following important items:

Mission and Vision Statements: The mission and vision statement will be the basis behind all of your communications decisions. Everyone on your communications team should have the mission and vision statement memorized because they will repeat them so often.

Communications Goals: While they should be in line with the goals of the organization, objectives and methods may vary. Some examples:

- Increase Awareness of Organization
- Recruit More Members/Volunteers
- Increase Funding
- Influence Policy and Opinion Makers
- Create Positive Media Relationships

Budget: Even if you just have a few hundred dollars to commit to your Communications Plan, it’s important to have a budget. Know what you want to spend your money on and how much it will cost. You would be

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surprised at the expense of traditional advertising outlets, so be creative. There are many resources for free advertising out there; they may take more time, but they are worth it in the end.

Case Statement: A good case statement is the starting point for any conversation with potential donors. The statement is the best way to make a good first impression. (See the April 2009 AFC Whitepaper for more information on creating a case statement.)

Local Media Resources: Have a media list that includes all local television, newspaper contacts. Any community-centered blogs would be an additional news contacts to add to your media list. Keep this list current and work on maintaining relationships with local reporters and writers. If they know who you are, they are a lot more likely to contact you before they put your organization in the spotlight.

No Time, No Resources, No Success

The reality for most is that there is far too much to do with far too little time to do it. Keeping the lights on and food going out the door is hard enough---how in the world do we make the time for strategic communications?

Use what (and who) you know. In small communities it will be much easier to cultivate a relationship with reporters. In a larger community, use as many degrees of separation as you need to get connected to the media and make the effort to stay connected.

Once you have the media connections, the next piece is funding. You'll need money for advertising, market research and marketing materials. These can be expensive, but make excellent in-kind donations. Ask your volunteers if they have any skills or expertise in writing and/or design. Contact local career centers to connect to students looking for projects with impact. Contact every news outlet in town to solicit in-kind advertising for an event. Connect with retired business professionals with time on their hands to offer advice and assistance.

No matter what your process for achieving your communications plan goals, the outcome will be to your benefit! With continued positive interaction with the media, you'll build a solid foundation of supporters for your organization.

More Resources

If you have questions about creating a communications plan or for more resources, contact Kerri Burrows, Alaska Food Coalition Manager, at afc@foodbankofalaska.org or 907.222.3103.

**Next Month:
Beyond the
Bake Sale:
Development
Strategies**

