

CHECKLIST

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✓ PREMIUM

4 Steps to Clearer Communications

By Elie Jacobs

School has started, and fall is here, which means organizations of all shapes and sizes are gearing up for the busy year-end fundraising season. A key element for fundraising success is a well-crafted communications strategy. Before things get too busy, take some time to re-evaluate how your organization talks about itself. When doing so, it is essential to keep the elements of powerful storytelling in mind.

American playwright David Mamet, who hosts an online class on dramatic writing, says in an advertisement for the course that a “story has a hero and he/she wants one thing.” This is true when writing a play or movie, and it is equally true for nonprofits telling stories to mobilize supporters. You should put forth one call to action in each primary message.

This is just one important element in improving your storytelling. For four easy steps to make sure your communications get attention in the coming months, read on.

Step 1: Answer some essential questions.

Answer these three questions in simple language:

1. What is the problem your organization is solving?
2. Why is your organization more qualified to accomplish that goal than anyone else?
3. How will you accomplish your goal?

Your answers will provide the core of all the messaging you create.

Step 2: Create a simple and clear message.

Particularly in the nonprofit world, messages often get muddled. Too many organizations get lost in a combination of overly detailed advocacy, personal storytelling, and grandiose visions — losing the opportunity to make a clear, concise “sell.”

Instead, explain the one thing your organization wants. If you can’t explain your goal in two sentences or less, start again.

Ideally, your organization’s message should be short enough to fit in the “bio” section of your Twitter profile, which allows 160 characters. But remember, although it’s short, this isn’t your tagline. It should state the goal your organization is working toward.

Step 3: Make a clear, consistent call to action.

Be very clear about your organization’s call to action in each online post, each public statement, each interview, each interaction you have with anyone. What do you need your audience to do right now to help your cause? Does the audience understand why

that task is the one thing they need to do? Whether you want them to give money or contact a lawmaker, make sure they understand what you need them to do.

Step 4: Get the word out on your own.

Getting journalists to pay attention to your organization is an entirely separate challenge, but today's nonprofits are no longer dependent on press releases, news articles, and interviews to get their message out. You now have many alternatives to traditional media coverage. For instance, on Medium, a free online publishing platform, you can post articles, graphics, and video easily and tell a story exactly the way you want it to be told.

Podcasting and YouTube videos offer the same level of control. If your organization doesn't have accounts and is not active on each, do it now.

As for Twitter, LinkedIn, Snap Chat, Instagram, and Facebook yes, yes, yes! These are all free tools that give you an opportunity to get the word out with complete control. Snap Chat may be temporary, but it is incredibly popular. Your organization ignores it at its own peril. In general, on social media, post articles about your organization, repost articles about the issues your organization addresses, and make appeals. This is all resource consuming, but vital in today's digital world. You're being delinquent if you don't have someone who's working nearly full-time (you read that correctly) to ensure that your organization is up to date on all social media platforms.

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