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# ommunication Management

The Importance Of Communication in Fundraising

Good communication can be overlooked sometimes, however not-for-profit organisations need to realise the absolute importance of this one tool in their quest for the fundraising dollar. Within her first article for *Fundraising Success*, **Clare Collins** shares her thoughts about how communication is at the heart of every fundraising effort.

**T**here is a great deal of evidence to support the idea that fundraising is all about communication. But communicating is so much more than asking for money and support; it's about managing communication efficiently and effectively and in such a way that builds confidence in your organisation so you can develop new and long-term relationships that offer a win-win for all parties. Relationships that keep donors giving!

Ask any successful fundraiser and they'll tell you that the key to attracting and maintaining donor support is brand awareness and relationship management. And the key to brand awareness and relationship management is strategic communication, which builds trust, demonstrates accountability and, acknowledges loyalty and support.

Everyone is a potential donor. Whether it's a ten-year-old child offering the contents of their money box; a philanthropic socialite who heads a committee for an annual fundraising ball; a corporate giant who partners in a three-year sponsorship deal; an elderly woman wanting to bequeath her estate to save homeless cats; a teenage girl who chooses to buy the water bottle with the pink lid rather than the blue; a businessman who purchases a pin from the school kid at the train station or any number of individual donors who give in response to a direct mail or e-newsletter appeal; all contribute to an organisations' annual fundraising success because these donors know who you are, what you do, and why.

We know that a 'brand' is more than a logo or a carefully constructed set of guidelines. It is the essence



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of who we are, the heart and soul and character of our organisation made up of our values, vision, mission and ethical governance. Creating awareness of our brand utilising multiple communication streams in a coordinated, strategic approach is the first step to generating income for any organisation because if people don't know we exist, they can't support us. Just as suppliers of fast moving consumer goods would implement a strategic plan to build and maintain brand loyalty to move their products off the shelves and into the consumers' shopping trolley, the same decisive action is essential for fundraisers wanting to achieve greater sales and brand loyalty of their unique product – the power to create social change.

Many not-for-profits refer to contributors simply as 'donors', however from a communication perspective, if we think of donors as consumers of products such as social responsibility, goodwill and empowerment to make a change for the better, we gain insight into how we can

build brand awareness to create relationships and consumer loyalty. And like any business, if not-for-profit organisations see themselves as unique brands supplying products that in essence are a 'positive experience' for donors (the consumer), we can then examine how best we supply these high quality products and services to attract and maintain customer loyalty and bring about increased financial return.

### STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Every organisation has the ability to apply strategic communication methodology to engage consumers and increase revenue. The more they know about you and the work you do, the more likely consumers are to support you. With the majority of organisations relying simply on advertising, marketing and online social networking; often public relations is overlooked. Although the public relations industry has sometimes suffered, having been misused and misunderstood, public relations is far more than just spin as some might suggest. It's the key to managing communication effectively to engage multiple target audiences.

According to the Public Relations Institute of Australia, ethical and strategic public relations is, *"The deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation (or individual) and its (or their) publics. It's the key to effective communication in all sectors of business, government, academia and not-for-profit."*

Although for some charitable organisations, public relations is seen as a low priority in terms of allocating fundraising resources, this could be seen as a major oversight and one, which is having a negative impact on achieving their overall fundraising targets. When viewed as a critical tool to build brand awareness in the media, initiate new relationships and develop existing relationships with all stakeholders, the impact of public relations in fundraising cannot be overstated.

At Insight Communications we've seen these results firsthand. Recently, Insight was retained by the NSW beneficiary of a national fundraising campaign to manage their media. The objectives were clear: to increase awareness, participation and sponsors to boost revenue outcomes.



Launched in 2008, the campaign was NSW based and driven by high profile ambassadors attracting around 1000 participants and generating more than a \$250,000.00. In 2009, the innovative creators of this online fundraising movement built on this success and rolled the event out nationally. Partnering with one not-for-profit healthcare facility from each state, the organisers were keen to improve on the inaugural years' fundraising success. More ambassadors were recruited from each state to provide a coordinated national presence and drive traffic and dollars to the website. As an integral part of the overarching fundraising strategy, each beneficiary was invited to create their own state based media campaign leveraging off the awareness created by the ambassadors in their states. In consultation with our client and the campaign organisers, we created a media campaign strategy for NSW that kicked off with a media launch.

### ACHIEVING MEDIA COVERAGE

Unlike marketing or advertising campaigns where the message is controlled and pre-determined, space is pre-selected, pre-purchased and guaranteed; achieving media coverage is a little different. It cannot be controlled or pre-determined. It can never be purchased and it is never guaranteed. It is also dependant on what else is happening in the news on any given day. Only strategic communication management can achieve the best possible outcome. The date of our NSW campaign launch turned out to be a busy media day in terms of big stories that we were forced to compete with. However, we achieved state-wide coverage over a two-week period that featured in the press, on radio and regional television.

In terms of achieving the objectives, in 2009 the number of participants in NSW increased on last year's by 150% and while funds are still coming in, it would be fair to say that the total revenue generated for our client is shaping up to surpass last year's figure by at least double.

Due to limited resources, none of the beneficiaries from the other states conducted a strategic media launch to leverage their fundraising activities. To date, the other states have had an average of around 290 participants and current figures suggest that collectively through

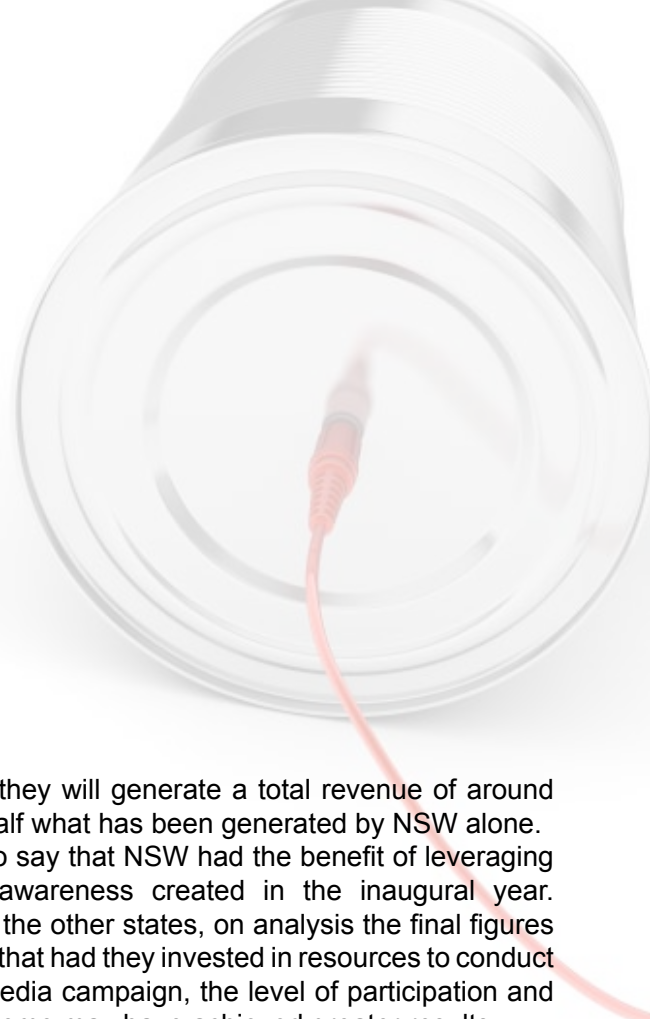
sponsorship they will generate a total revenue of around \$250,000 - half what has been generated by NSW alone.

It is true to say that NSW had the benefit of leveraging off existing awareness created in the inaugural year. However, for the other states, on analysis the final figures may indicate that had they invested in resources to conduct a strategic media campaign, the level of participation and financial outcome may have achieved greater results.

While we can't say for sure that the media campaign conducted in NSW was responsible for the successful outcome for our client, we can say with confidence that along with leveraging off the success of the previous year, word-of-mouth and increased celebrity involvement, the NSW media campaign was certainly one of the contributing factors in increasing participation and revenue raised for our client.

### SUCCESS ACROSS THE BOARD

This level of success in strategic communication management to aid in fundraising is not limited to online or event fundraising activities. Another successful outcome was achieved for an environmental organisation through media awareness following the tragic Victorian bushfires. With 'Sam the Koala' attracting international acclaim we identified this as an opportunity to generate income to help fund treatment for injured wildlife. In conjunction with a widely distributed e-newsletter that took on viral-like status, we issued a media release Australia wide and strategically approached a select number of international publications and online news outlets. With our headline declaring that '*Sam the Koala is not alone*', the outcome of leveraging off the e-newsletter in the media was astounding. Tens of thousands of dollars were generated to help fund veterinarian expenses and cover the cost of medical supplies to provide lifesaving aid to many native animals seriously injured in the fires.





## ...the key to brand awareness and relationship management is strategic communication...

This initial financial success was not the only benefit obtained from maximising the brand awareness of the organisation. In addition to the immediate financial gain, the environmental organisation was brought to the attention of an international corporate giant. This introduction initiated a partnership that would establish funding of two major environmental regeneration programs in NSW and QLD - a long-term relationship was born.


Media management involves more than writing, issuing and pitching a media release. It's about building strong, professional relationships with those with the power to tell your story – journalists with the position and influence to connect you to your target audience. While developing a good relationship with journalists is favourable, even if they're a blood relative, you won't get to first base with your pitch unless the story is newsworthy and relevant to the medium. Awareness of deadlines is also critical as is the timing of your release in relation to a campaign or unique fundraising activity. Fundamental to success is identifying a compelling, inspiring story relevant to your organisation and its reason for existence. It should encompass your brand and include a case study with key messages and a call to action for consumers to purchase your product – a piece of goodwill.

### **RAISING AWARENESS FOR HEALTH SERVICES AND MEDICAL RESEARCH**

Another example that demonstrates the importance of communication management in fundraising can be seen in a recent national campaign supporting health services and medical research into a life-limiting illness. Our objectives were firmly focussed on creating awareness that would lead to generating revenue and we identified multiple story opportunities to appeal to a variety of journalists across multiple areas of interest, which ensured maximum reach to the widest possible audience.

Personal inspiring stories of courageous patients living with the illness formed the baseline for the campaign. Our introduction of a newly appointed celebrity ambassador from a high rating national television program provided other story opportunities across various entertainment outlets. Finally, through examining the scientific research being conducted we identified the last crucial story element that gave substance to the campaign. Together these elements enabled us to achieve national coverage across mainstream media. Through careful media planning and an understanding of the brand, our stories were picked up by radio, television and the press in every capital city and across multiple rural and regional areas in a diverse variety of sections including news, arts, entertainment, sport, science, health and community.

While there are some not-for-profits who may see their clients' involvement in media activity as unnecessary and a possible abuse of their situation, statistics gathered at the conclusion of the campaign contradict this view. Based on a survey of all clients who told their story in the media, the response was overwhelmingly in favour of participation with 100% expressing gratitude for having had the opportunity to be part of a campaign because it generated awareness of their circumstances, gave those around them a deeper understanding of their illness and most importantly, gave them some control over their situation.

Media coverage is just one important element of strategic public relations in fundraising. While media coverage creates brand awareness and introduces consumers to your cause, public relations also plays a significant role in maintaining and developing relationships with your consumers. Donor loyalty programs are also among the benefits of strategic communication management. Keeping consumers informed, acknowledged and engaged is critical to maintaining long-term relationships – relationships that enable not-for-profits to continue their good work in our community. 

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