

CPR for Nonprofits

Creative Strategies for Successful Fundraising, Marketing, Communications, and Management

Alvin H. Reiss

Chapter 1: Getting Your Message Heard

BEFORE A NONPROFIT organization can reach out for support, it must first define its mission and focus on ways to communicate that mission to the publics it serves and to the other audiences it wishes to reach. The ability to communicate then is not just necessary, it is essential.

The primary role of communications for a nonprofit organization is to articulate clearly why the organization exists and what needs it must meet to fulfill its mission. Another, ongoing role of communications is to focus on specific issues as they arise and promote day-to-day organizational activities. The cases presented in this chapter represent a microcosm of the wide range of communications concerns facing nonprofits of every type and size. They include finding a way to use the media to reach millions, using a trusted voice to articulate a message of concern, promoting a concept or event, issuing dramatic evidence to bolster a key contention, and even counteracting inaccurate or incomplete information.

Despite the overt differences, there is a thread of commonality running through all of these cases. Each of the organizations crafted a carefully considered and artfully developed approach that was on target in meeting a major challenge. In some instances, words were the weapon of choice; in others, visual images were used to articulate a message with drama and fervor. In every instance, what stands out most is the organization's awareness of the scope of the need to be met and its diligence in finding the best way to communicate that need.

A Tearful Reminder

Developing Potent Messages That Articulate Your Case

BACKGROUND

Keep America Beautiful was founded in 1953 to promote litter prevention and community beautification efforts. Supported by several hundred leading American companies, it developed, over the years, a national network of hundreds of community organizations and statewide affiliates and the annual grassroots involvement of several million volunteers.

CHALLENGE

Nearly two decades after its founding, the organization had made a positive impression on the public through its many public service announcements and programs. Yet despite the organization's growth as a public awareness program and the ongoing support of many major corporations, many Americans still had not heeded its message. Clearly, there was a need to develop a simple yet effective way of impressing Americans with the

warning that we were despoiling America with our litter.

PLAN

The beneficiary in 1971 of a pro bono promotional campaign under the aegis of the Advertising Council, Keep America Beautiful turned to the agency assigned to the account, Marsteller, in New York City, to come up with a clear and dramatic means of conveying its message. After studying the problem, the agency recognized the importance of addressing not only the issue of debris litter but also the entire question of pollution. Marsteller convinced Keep America Beautiful to take the approach of alerting the nation to the dangers of pollution. Recognizing that perhaps more than any other group Native Americans agonized over the pollution of America's resources, Marsteller cast Iron Eyes Cody, a Native American actor who had appeared in many movies and was personally committed to environmental causes, to appear in the spot. Cody agreed after he was assured that the campaign would indeed be part of a long-term effort to save the environment. The resulting public service spot featured Cody paddling in a canoe down a river polluted with oil slicks and physical debris and then passing an industrial complex spewing pollution into the air. It then shifted to a scene of Cody standing on a highway as a car passed and a passenger threw refuse out of its window. As the bag of garbage broke at his feet, an agonized Cody shed a tear. The tag line for the PSA read, "People start pollution. People can stop it."

RESULT

The spot received its first public airing on Earth Day in 1971. Used in television and transformed to print media and billboards, the Crying Indian campaign was a dramatic, impact-making alert to millions of people on the dangers of pollution. In time, it became one of the most effective ads ever used by a nonprofit organization to get its message across. The impact was so great in fact that the ad was voted one of the fifty top commercials in broadcast history by Entertainment Weekly and won a number of Clio Awards for the ad agency that produced it, Marsteller. The message was so effective that even after its run ended, it couldn't remain in retirement for long. In 1998, on the twenty-eighth anniversary celebration of Earth Day, Keep America Beautiful revived the image of Iron Eyes Cody shedding a tear for new and perhaps even larger audiences. A new "back-by-popular-neglect" campaign featured a thirty-second television spot, showing the original image of Cody, this time in a bus shelter, shedding his tear as people boarding a bus left litter strewn behind them. In addition to the thousands of airings of the PSA, its rebirth triggered major news and feature stories on network television and in metropolitan newspapers. The tremendous impact of the commercial can be gleaned from the fact that a special April 1999 issue of Advertising Age, "The Advertising Century," cited Keep America Beautiful's Crying Indian as number fifty of the nation's top hundred advertising campaigns of the century. Several months later, in an America Online poll, several hundred thousand subscribers who were asked to list their favorite commercial from among the ten listed cited the Crying Indian as their all-time favorite.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. If you're working with an ad agency, either volunteer or pro bono, have you given the firm the license to turn its creative juices on?
2. If your campaign has proved to be effective, have you, in a positive sense, developed means to exploit it?
3. Have you looked at ways to sustain the momentum that an effective message helped create?

LESSONS LEARNED

Heed the advice of professionals when you solicit it, and if a concept works, don't be afraid to use it again.

LAST WORD

A single image can create many lasting impressions.

In Him We Trust

Leveraging Key Relationships

BACKGROUND

In July 1994, a small group of religious leaders came together in Washington, D.C., to express concern over the growing power of the religious right and (as they saw it) its manipulation of faith and politics. Their meeting ended with the formation of a new organization, the Interfaith Alliance, charged with promoting the positive, healing role of religion in life while challenging all forms of what they perceived to be religious political extremism. To complement the political activities of the organization, a public education and research arm, the Interfaith Alliance Foundation, was established the following year.

CHALLENGE

The alliance grew steadily over the following years, attracting new members and support. Yet recognizing an urgent need for increased backing to allow it to undertake key programs to challenge the messages that religious extremists were sending to millions of people, the alliance investigated ways to significantly expand its membership. Two stumbling blocks were evident: the alliance didn't have the finances to launch a giant direct-mail campaign, and it didn't have a respected nationally known figure to sign a letter to potential members. When the direct-mail firm A. B. Data agreed to provide some initial seed money and to help with a mailing, a membership package was prepared and sent over the signature of board chair, Albert Pennybacker. The mailing was effective and helped raise alliance membership from virtually zero to about twenty thousand. With a momentum developed, the alliance, recognizing an opportunity, knew that the time was ripe for it to take its membership drive to an even higher plateau.

PLAN

To realize its potential, the alliance decided to develop a national advisory board. Through organizational connections, it was able to attract a number of well-known figures, including Terry Anderson, who agreed to serve as chair. Anderson was the Associated Press journalist who was held hostage in Lebanon from 1985-1991, longer than any other American. In planning for a new mailing, organization leaders knew that if they could attract someone with the stature of Walter Cronkite, widely recognized as one of America's most trusted figures, to lend his support to the campaign, it would really make a difference. Anderson put the alliance in touch with Cronkite, and conversations with the television commentator followed. A number of options were explored, including designating him as honorary chair, before Cronkite, impressed with the organization and its message, agreed to sign a letter endorsing the alliance.

RESULT

In January 1997, the alliance commenced its new direct-mail drive, with Cronkite's signed letter-the outside envelope bore his name as the sender-as the cornerstone of the campaign. In reviewing the draft sent to him in advance, Cronkite made only one small change, removing a postscript. The mailings-consisting of the Cronkite letter, a flier

about the alliance, a letter from an alliance leader, and a reply card and envelope-have continued regularly since then. To emphasize the alliance stand, the reply card, listing donation boxes of \$25 and higher, was headed, "Dear Walter." The text read, "Yes! I want to take a stand and help the Interfaith Alliance say 'NO' to Pat Robertson, Ralph Reed and their fellow extremists." The direct-mail acquisition letter, sent to over 4.6 million individuals between January 1997 and May 1999, drew a return of about 1.4 percent and attracted over seventy thousand new supporters to the coalition. It also won a major marketing award for A. B. Data. Perhaps equally important has been the relationship that the alliance has been able to build with Cronkite. Alliance leaders have kept in touch with him regularly, reporting on organizational progress and sending him snippets from the letters they receive from new members. In 1998, the alliance announced the creation of the Walter Cronkite Faith and Freedom Award to honor individuals sharing the values of the alliance. Cronkite attended the announcement kickoff press conference. In addition, Cronkite has agreed to participate in a video project endorsing the alliance stand against religious political extremism. As one alliance staff member said, "We're lucky to have Walter Cronkite involved with us. He's made the major difference."

QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. If you've developed a relationship with a nationally known figure, have you found ways to strengthen that relationship by keeping that person informed of your organization's progress every step of the way?
2. Have you offered options to that person for further involvement?
3. Have you publicly thanked that person for his or her involvement?

LESSONS LEARNED

A key public figure can lend credibility to your mission. If you do not have access to a national figure, then a respected leader of your community may serve you well.

LAST WORD

Engender trust in your cause. It is possible that nothing will be as important to you.

The Power of the Press

Launching Effective Advocacy Campaigns

BACKGROUND

Greenpeace was founded in 1971 by conservationists who believed that verbal protests were not an effective way to register serious concern about assaults on the environment. Through nonviolent, although sometimes provocative, tactics, this multinational organization with over five hundred thousand members has carried out numerous protests, often attracting worldwide attention, against threats to endangered species, the dumping of toxic waste, nuclear testing, and other key areas of concern.

CHALLENGE

Among its many issues of concern, Greenpeace targeted the genetic alteration of crops. Beginning some years ago overseas, and since 1996 in the United States, Greenpeace has tried to identify products that because of genetic alteration might prove harmful to consumers. It hoped to find ways to get the manufacturers to discontinue making these

products. Greenpeace did not target food companies specifically; but as the technology of genetic alteration continued to develop, it became evident by 1999 that the food industry, and specifically the makers of baby food, should be scrutinized. With sufficient evidence of alteration, Greenpeace could then organize and conduct an all-out advocacy campaign to alert the nation to what it saw as a growing danger.

PLAN

Greenpeace decided that its essential first step was to determine specifically which companies and which products were involved in alteration. Greenpeace staff bought a wide range of baby food products and sent them to an independent laboratory for testing. Greenpeace then sent questionnaires to every one of the eight companies-including industry giants, Gerber, Heinz, and Beech-Nut-whose products were purchased and asked them a range of questions regarding their policies on using genetically altered ingredients. Only one company, a small one, responded to the questionnaire, indicating that it never had and never would genetically alter any of its products. When the independent laboratory report indicated that a three-grain cereal made by Gerber, Gerber Mixed Cereal for Baby, and two nutritional supplements made by medical food producers were genetically altered, Greenpeace decided it was a call to action. A press conference was called in New York on June 18, 1999. Greenpeace officials, joined by Martha Herbert, a distinguished neurologist, and Aisha Ikramuddin of Mothers & Others for a Livable Planet, discussed the findings of the laboratory report and the response to their questionnaire-or lack of response-from baby food makers.

RESULT

Although press conference attendance was sparse, enough positive developments came out of it to make a difference. The CBS national news filmed part of it and reported on genetic alteration without mentioning Gerber; however, a story in the Los Angeles Times on the conference day included findings of the laboratory study on the Gerber and the other products using genetically altered ingredients. With national attention drawn to the issue, and faced with calls from concerned consumers questioning its position, Gerber announced about a month after the press conference that henceforth it would not use genetically altered ingredients in any of its products. A front page story in the Wall Street Journal summed up the impressive Greenpeace victory. Headlined "Strained Peace, Gerber Baby Food, Grilled by Greenpeace, Plans Swift Overhaul," it indicated that Gerber was going even further than Greenpeace had demanded by using organic corn and soy flour and that another company, Healthy Times Natural Foods, had switched from canola oil, which in some cases is genetically altered, to safflower oil because of Greenpeace's efforts.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. Before beginning a specific advocacy campaign, have you done your homework and come up with the facts?
2. Have you given your potential adversaries a chance to respond before you go public?
3. Have you determined the best way to launch your effort, and have you found allies to join with you and help broaden the case?

LESSONS LEARNED

Advocacy for your cause should be an ongoing effort. If you have a specific cause beyond your overall mission, make sure that you gather all the information you will need, find respected allies, and develop a plan to take your case to the publics you wish

to reach.

LAST WORD

Public opinion is a powerful weapon, and by harnessing it, even a David can confront a Goliath and perhaps slay him in the process.

I've Heard That Song Before

Reinforcing Familiar Images

BACKGROUND

Since 1990, Housing Works, in New York City, has provided housing, support services, and advocacy for homeless men, women, and children living with AIDS and HIV. Its activities have been supported by proceeds from its Used Book Café and from the sale of merchandise donated to its three Housing Works Thrift Shops in Manhattan, each offering quality designer merchandise at low prices.

CHALLENGE

For approximately a decade, the Housing Works Thrift Shops have been doing two mailings a year, spring and fall, soliciting donations of furniture, clothing, housewares, and other items. Looking for a way to arouse interest and reach more people, Bill Gover, director of the stores, was able to prevail on a friend, Michael Ian Kaye, a top designer of book jackets, to contribute a motif for the thrift shop trucks that pick up donated merchandise. The truck design, in orange, blue, and yellow, with a message urging prospective donors to contribute merchandise, was introduced in 1998. It attracted so much attention that Housing Works, which tries to use a different design for its mailings each season, decided that the truck design was worth adapting to other uses.

PLAN

The motif used on the sides of the trucks was transferred to oversized postcards, which featured the locations and phone numbers of each of the thrift shops on the address side against a plain white background. On the reverse side, a message designed to engage the reader's attention was outlined against a bright orange background, beginning, "Warning: This card may cause you to donate your sofa, your lamp, your pants, your raincoat, your records." Interspersed among the more than forty items mentioned were key phrases, highlighted in yellow, such as "your desire," "your heart," "your support," and "your compassion."

RESULT

Between April and June 1999, some three hundred thousand cards were mailed to a list of prospective contributors. According to Gover, the mailing was a tremendous success. It resulted in one of the largest-if not the largest-responses ever, so large in fact, that additional space had to be found to house all the donated items. As an indication of the mailing's success, many people mentioned the card specifically when calling for a pickup.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. Before deciding on the message or approach you'll use for a major mailing, have you

looked at everything you already do to see if any of these concepts are adaptable?

2. As visual identity is important, have you searched for an image that can clearly and unmistakably focus on your organization and its message?

3. Have you sought artistic or design talent to help you develop a visual identity symbol?

LESSONS LEARNED

Visual identification can be a powerful force that focuses recurring attention on an organization. Before spending your energy on developing new visual symbols, look carefully at what you've already done to see if some symbol or symbols might be adapted to new uses.

LAST WORD

Familiarity breeds contentment.

Gorillas in Your Midst

Developing Market Strategies to Kick Off New Activities

BACKGROUND

The Bronx Zoo, which opened in 1899, is the largest urban zoo in the United States. Officially designated the Wildlife Conservation Society, the zoo covers more than 265 acres and features 6,000 animals and 665 different species. With over two million visitors a year, it is the top family attraction in New York City.

CHALLENGE

The zoo was preparing for the June 1999 debut of one of the most innovative and ambitious exhibits it had ever undertaken. The Congo Gorilla Forest, four years in the making, simulates an African rainforest and is designed in such a way that after experiencing it, visitors become keenly aware of the need to support the conservation of the rainforest and its inhabitants. Planners knew that the exhibit, with its two troops of gorillas, would attract tremendous attention, but they had been having concerns that the public's awareness of the zoo and its recall of the zoo's advertising were down slightly, indicating a need for a major marketing and advertising strategy.

PLAN

An advertising strategy was developed to focus on the opening of the Congo Gorilla Forest, with specific emphasis on the eight weekends following the pre-opening festivities. The target audience for the campaign was identified as women between twenty-four and forty-nine years old with children between two and eleven, living within a seventy-five-mile radius of New York City. It was decided that because of the news value of the opening and the photogenic attraction of the exhibit, television would be a prime medium to use during the kick-off phase. To support key weekends, television would be supplemented by a series of print ads with a decidedly light touch for placement in major newspapers. Ads in suburban papers would be placed during the summer. To create excitement around the exhibit, pre- and postopening special events with promotional value but little cost were added to the overall marketing mix.

RESULT

The launching of the Congo Gorilla Forest was a critical, promotional, and monetary success, boosted by tremendous press coverage. The print ads, showing gorillas and other animals that were included in the exhibit, were designed to attract attention through their low-key humorous messages, with such headlines as "Gorillas in Your Midst" and "Rookie of the Year," which featured a juvenile lowland gorilla. One of the ads that featured animals read, "Please check all pockets for pygmy marmosets before leaving Congo." Another read, "The rock python hunts by sensing body heat. Hopefully, that chill running down your spine'll throw him off." Additional marketing support came from an eight-weekend sponsorship by State Farm Insurance, which added advertising and promotional dollars to the campaign. Among the attention-getting weekend events was a group of over twenty traditional African artists-musicians, drummers, and stilt walkers among them-parading through the African exhibit. Other events included face painting, which transformed youngsters into Congo animals, and an African mask-making program for children. The advertising and the promotions paid off. Overall attendance at the zoo in the four months following the opening increased by 7 percent. Equally significant was the fact that admission charges for the special exhibit and some additional donations during the same period raised over \$700,000 toward a key goal of the exhibit, conservation of the African rainforest.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. In developing a marketing campaign to boost a special program, have you been able to target the precise audience you wish to reach?
2. Has your advertising captured the special and unique flavor of the program or event you're promoting?
3. Have you integrated all aspects of a campaign for its maximum impact?

LESSONS LEARNED

A successful marketing strategy is much more than a single activity. A strategy must pinpoint its target audiences, find the specific media to reach them, and present its message in such a way that each audience it reaches remembers the message.

LAST WORD

A light touch is often the right touch.

Cost Efficiency

Financing Major Promotional Campaigns with Pro Bono Support

BACKGROUND

San Diego is home to a number of major performing arts groups as well as a growing number of smaller music, dance, and theater organizations. A service organization, the San Diego Performing Arts League, has been promoting its activities to potential audiences since its founding in 1983 through such ongoing efforts as a regular newsletter, a calendar of events, a discount ticket booth, and an annual Bargain Arts Day, at which patrons are told to "pay what you can afford" for tickets offered by any of the 130 groups affiliated with the league.

CHALLENGE

Over the years, the league has done a more-than-credible promotional job. Its leaders felt, however, that there were still pockets of the population that were not being reached. Clearly, there was a need to make a unique effort to significantly raise the level of awareness of the performing arts in San Diego County.

PLAN

With insufficient funds on hand to embark on an all-out promotional campaign, but not wishing to downgrade and compromise what it envisioned as a giant effort, the league decided to see if it could finesse a campaign using as much volunteer support and contributed space as it could muster. With this in mind, the league presented its board with a concept built around four key goals-to significantly raise awareness of the performing arts; to position them as fun, affordable, enriching, and valuable; to drive ticket buyers to performing arts programs; and to drive ticket buyers to league programs. The board, which includes representatives of member arts organizations and the community, agreed on the importance of the effort; and as a demonstration of their commitment to the project, individual board members contributed \$10,000 in seed money to fund the creative design that would jump-start the campaign. With the help of the local chapter of the American Marketing Association, the league was able to win the pro bono services of one of San Diego's top agencies, Di Zinno Thompson Integrated Marketing Services, to create a campaign that the league hoped would elevate the status of the performing arts in San Diego. The league also wanted the campaign to be local, unique, beckoning, and fun and to make attendance at performing arts events a "cool" experience. The creative team at the agency jumped at the opportunity to donate its services because it gave them a chance to show off their promotional skills in the kind of campaign with which they might not otherwise be involved.

RESULT

The open-ended campaign, over two years in preparation, featured billboards, print ads, bus shelter posters, PSAs for radio and television, broadcast promotions, and the design of a Web site, all with the same tag line, "San Diego's Performing Arts. Come for a Change of Scenery." The five print ads, all fun oriented and featuring local performers, included one showing a ballerina, with the line below it reading, "There's a little artist inside of everyone. We just let ours come out and play." The league itself, along with many of its member organizations, integrated the campaign into its marketing materials. Community groups picked up the campaign as well, with such contributions as free ads in nine media outlets, inclusion in the Convention and Visitors Bureau Visitor Pocket Guide, the pro bono design of the league Web site, an advertising direct-mail package sent to fifty thousand homes, and promotion on airport vans. To increase visibility for one of the key print ads, the league was able to convince the San Diego Symphony, a member group, to feature the ad on its big-screen "jumbotron" during one of its concerts. In addition, the league began soliciting local businesses to underwrite different aspects of the campaign, which resulted in sponsorship donations. By late 1999, six months after the April 1 launching of the campaign, thousands of dollars worth of donated advertising had been generated, along with what league marketing director, Toni Robbin, claimed was "fantastic publicity." Because it was difficult to quantify the results of the campaign in audience terms, the league planned to add a fulfillment element, an incentive premium, to be able to track results. Early in 2000, the league had its Web site redesigned to include the six images featured in the campaign. It also redesigned its performing arts guide to include a different campaign image in each issue of the bimonthly guide published during the year. Thanks to the positive response, the league still had not spent the \$10,000 donated by its board members even many months after the campaign's launching.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. Have you carefully determined what message it is that you wish to convey?
2. Have you developed a list of businesses in the community that might benefit by donating their services to your organization?
3. Have you presented a plan to your board and your constituents to show why you should undertake a major promotional effort, and have you solicited their support?

LESSONS LEARNED

There may be all kinds of pro bono help available to you, if you know who to ask and what to ask for.

LAST WORD

You don't have to spend a lot of money to make your point.

The Times Is Hard

When Good Publicity Isn't Good Enough

BACKGROUND

In 1992, families and friends of several children afflicted with Canavan disease, an illness that afflicts Jewish people from an Eastern European Ashkenazi background, joined together to form the Canavan Foundation. A key foundation activity was the support of research that would lead to the development of accurate carrier and prenatal tests for the disease. Once those tests were developed, the foundation would then educate the medical and the target populations about the disease and the existence of the tests. In the following years, as the genes were identified and accurate carrier and prenatal tests were developed for the primary target population, the foundation, while continuing to support research, stepped up its campaign to emphasize disease prevention. It embarked on an education program that included mailings to rabbis, public service announcements, advertising, and information through its own Web site.

CHALLENGE

For nonprofit causes seeking to broadcast their case to potential supporters, a detailed article about their concerns in the New York Times Magazine would fit anyone's bill of a major public relations coup. In anticipation of just such an article, the Canavan Foundation mailed its annual appeal letter shortly before the article was due to appear, alerting their supporters to the upcoming story. But when Canavan Foundation leaders first read the story, "Keeping Jacob Alive," about one family's struggle to deal with Canavan disease, in the December 6, 1998, issue of the New York Times Magazine, they were upset. The article failed to tell the entire story about the disease, which they thought had to be told. Although the article was compelling and called national attention to the horrors of this illness, it did not report on a key point relevant to dealing with Canavan disease—that reliable carrier screening existed to prevent the disease from occurring. This lapse, organization leaders agreed, had to be bridged.

PLAN

Within two days following the article's appearance, the parents of Morgan Gelblum, the

seven-year-old girl who died in 1997 from the disease (the mother, Orren Gelblum, is president of the Canavan Foundation), sent a letter to the editor at the Times, praising the handling of the story by the writers but indicating that the article "did not make clear a crucial fact: this kind of tragedy could have been avoided and never has to happen again." The foundation board waited two weeks, hopeful that the letter would appear in the newspaper. When it didn't, they decided that their concern about the article's major omission had to be voiced, especially because supporters had been alerted in advance to the article's appearance. On December 20, the board sent the Gelblum letter, with a cover letter explaining the situation, to its entire mailing list of eighteen hundred supporters.

RESULT

Gelblum and several board members received a few phone calls thanking them for the letter. Although donations continued to arrive, it was difficult to determine if they resulted from the letter. Yet despite the less-than-hoped-for response, the board recognized at its next meeting that the magazine article presented the foundation with an opportunity it could not afford to miss. With a vast new audience now aware of Canavan disease and its horrors, the foundation now had an opportunity to inform a broader audience than it ever had before of the fact that with carrier screening the disease could be prevented. With this in mind, the board voted to commit its resources to a major informational campaign to achieve this goal. Soon afterward, a national television program highlighted Canavan's disease. The foundation, aware of the previous situation, worked to contact local stations around the country that were carrying the program, asking them to insert a message on where further information on the disease was available. Several stations did indeed carry the message.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. If a major article or report about your organization or mission omits key information or is less than favorable, are you prepared to fill in the missing information or correct an error?
2. Do you have a single spokesperson who, alone, will speak on behalf of your group?

LESSONS LEARNED

Never measure the significance of publicity solely on the basis of the size or the influence of the periodical in which it appears. Measure significance by the totality of the story. If it is less than complete, find aggressive ways to fill in the gaps.

LAST WORD

It's often not how much is written but what is not written that is important.