Sky's the Limit for Writing About Your Members

There are so many benefits to be derived from writing about your members in your newsletters, on your website, as features for the media and more. These profiles and news stories not only serve to recognize deserving members but also bring attention to your organization and serve to attract new members.

Don't get stuck in a rut in deciding what to write about when it comes to your members. Create a checklist of story angles, such as the example shown below, to help you consider the many directions your member articles might take:

- A story of accomplishment about one of your member committees or chapters.
- A day in the life of ....
- How membership has positively impacted one individual's life.
- The result of a community service project involving one group of members.
- The professional life and achievements of a member.
- Profiles of a handful of members' unique hobbies.
- How one member's countless hours of service have made a real difference.
- An account of one family's multiple generations of membership.
- Ways in which members serve as ambassadors for your organization.
- The one-of-a-kind contribution one member has made to your organization.
- An account of why one or more individuals chose to become members.
- The multiple memberships from one corporation.
- How one member's idea resulted in a great new program for your organization.

Overcoming Objections

- If someone criticizes an action your nonprofit takes, be proactive. Ask the person how he/she would have handled the situation under similar circumstances. This will both disengage a potential confrontation and provide you with a solution.

Share Best Practices With Employees

By Kerry Nenn

Strategic Communications staff at Hamline University (St. Paul, MN) have made best practices a priority. They offer employees, students and anyone who visits their website (http://www.hamline.edu/offices/marketing/email-guide/) recommendations for effective e-mail marketing campaigns. Here the developer of this page, Web Designer and Content Specialist Daniel Campbell, addresses the why and how of this process:

Why should a communications office address these issues?

"As communications professionals, our job is to empower everyone else we work with. Whether we're collaborating with the marketing department or student affairs, they each have the same goal — to get their message read. Our expertise is in knowing how people interact with different mediums — in this case, e-mail. By establishing best practices, we can ensure each message has the best possible chance of success."

What are some key best practices you encourage?

1. **Keep e-mail designs simple and use a single call to action.** "With more users relying on mobile devices, it is increasingly important to put those users first when designing an e-mail. Minimize image use to decrease load time. Write text that is easy to scan without much scrolling. Give them a straightforward 'next step.'"
2. **Include your call to action as early as possible, so they don't miss it.** "Recipients often only read the subject line and the first sentence of an e-mail. They scan the rest."
3. **Do not rely on flashy buttons, animated graphics or other gimmicks as hooks**. "Good, targeted content will always be more effective. More often than not, heavy-handed techniques like big red REGISTER NOW!! buttons will turn people away before they read your message."
4. **Don't put important text into images.** "Many people have images turned off by default, so their messages load quicker. The more content you create as a graphic, the less they'll see, and the less informative the e-mail will be."
5. **Always send a test e-mail to yourself to check for errors**. "Having an e-mail go out with a misspelled word or a broken link will make the recipient question how professional your company really is."

Have you ever had instances in which avoiding best practices caused an issue?

"One of our tactics involved adding social media icons to the top of every e-mail. This went against the 'keep it simple' approach we usually follow. A couple months later, Gmail switched to the new tab layout. We found that the more images and links we had, the more likely we went from the main inbox to the promotions tab, which meant a much lower chance of getting viewed. We decided it was best to stick with our best practices and remove the social links."

Source: Daniel Campbell, Web Designer and Content Specialist, Hamline University, St. Paul, MN. E-mail: dcampbell04@hamline.edu. Website: www.hamline.edu

Compare Internal and External Perceptions

To begin improving your nonprofit's public image, first compare what the public thinks of your organization with what your employees think of it.

Whether you use a survey, focus groups or other methods, determine the extent to which the public is aware of your organization: its programs, services, accomplishments and shortcomings. When you discover that misconceptions exist, your challenge may be to dispel myths.

After gathering those external opinions, ask your employees to share perceptions.

Next, compare the information between the two groups. Identify perceptions that differ between the public and your employees, then develop strategies focused on improving your public image.

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