

Boosting Visibility: Getting the Most from Print Communications



To receive the greatest impact for your communication dollar, use these keys.

By Jessica Kotas Eng

Getting the right message to your constituents has never been more important. While print communication isn't the only way to get the word out, this medium can generate the most impact. Printed materials are still the most effective vehicle for building a visual presence and establishing an identity or "brand."

However, not all print materials are created equal. Follow these fundamentals to get the most from your print communications:

Establish clear objectives.

It's essential to identify written objectives for what you want your print communications to accomplish. The more specific you can be, the better. Do you want to:

- inform and educate?
- change behavior?
- attract volunteers?
- raise money?
- build event attendance?
- promote a program?

People are 40% more likely to be interested in a printed piece that contains color.

Decide how you want the reader to respond. Sometimes the desired action — mailing a check, say, or answering an invitation — will be obvious. At other times, people may need to go through several steps — visiting your Web site or calling for a brochure, for example — before achieving your desired result. In any case, what you want the reader to do should be a prominent part of your message.

Understand your audience.

Determining who you want to reach is a critical step before developing your message. What audiences will help you meet your objectives? What relationship does your organization have with them? How much do they know about your organization? How "in tune" will they be with your message?

Cutting through the clutter means taking time to understand what makes your audiences tick. Research

their needs. You may find there are a number of audience segments with different reasons for interacting with your organization. You may consider creating several versions of the same printed piece to appeal to different audience segments. New developments in digital printing make it easy to use variable data to customize print communications.

Create a meaningful message.

What you find out about your audience is essential in guiding your message. How can you relate what your organization provides to what's on your audience's minds? If your message fails to resonate, it will have a poor chance of getting your target's attention. Once you've defined a meaningful focus for your message, state it in clear terms for your audience.

continued on page 12



Photos courtesy of Allegra Network

This award-winning annual report for the Coalition for the Homeless in Louisville, Kentucky, uses vignettes and paper-bag-type paper to create a gritty, urban theme.

Adopt a theme.

Translate the focus of your message into an easy-to-understand theme. Your theme should set the “mood” for the piece. Convey it through a catchy headline, tagline, and message points throughout the piece. Make sure your theme has meaning for the audience and re-

lates to your organization’s goals.

An annual report of the Coalition for the Homeless in Louisville, Kentucky, uses a series of real-life vignettes to show that homelessness can occur with people from all walks of life. The award-winning piece uses a paper stock similar to what is used for paper bags to create a gritty, urban feel.

You have less than five seconds to catch your reader’s interest.

Keep it simple.

Avoid trying to do too much in a single piece. You have less than five seconds to catch your reader’s interest. Keep your message short and to the point, whether you’re creating a brochure, newsletter, ad, or other print communications. Narrow your focus to one or two strong messages.

Convey a strong, consistent identity.

All your print communications – posters, save-the-date cards, invitations, newsletters, and publicity materials – should carry a consistent identity. Each time you develop a printed piece, it should be recognizable as belonging to your organization. Use consistent color, typefaces, and design elements to create a “look” that distinguishes you from your competition.

A national women’s healthcare organization in San Antonio and south central Texas increased its client base, in part, by adopting a consistent identity in promoting its programs and service locations. The organization used dramatic black-and-white human-interest photos accented by a different color for each program. This tied together a variety of educational pieces – posters, brochures, service cards, and advertising – to reach college campuses and the local community.

Demonstrate your credibility.

Your materials should convince readers that your organization is viable, well-run, and making a difference. Consider using:

- **facts** to educate people about the problem you seek to rectify
- **examples** to show the need for your services
- **anecdotes** to humanize problems and goals
- **success stories** to show the im-

Case Example: Find the Hero Within



The American Red Cross River Valley Blood Service Region’s “Find the Hero Within” campaign uses a targeted series of print pieces to reach blood donors willing to volunteer for a more advanced procedure.

The American Red Cross River Valley Service Region (serving parts of Kentucky, Illinois, and Indiana) needed more donors to provide “advanced blood donations” of platelets, red blood cells, and plasma. Unlike a standard blood donation that typically takes only minutes, this procedure can require up to one hour. The clarity of the organization’s objectives made it possible to develop a highly focused series of communication pieces.

The “Find the Hero Within” campaign used a Superman-type photo to add exclusivity and emotion to the organization’s appeal.

Audience: Individuals who are regular blood donors.

Theme: “Find the Hero Within” draws on emotion and the power to save lives.

Elements: A “teaser” piece followed by a brochure with response card and a phone call.

Design: Strong cover image that plays off a Superman theme. Use of black and gray tones saves money and presents a sharp contrast with red used to reinforce the visual identity of the American Red Cross.



Photos courtesy of Allegra Network

Infants Remembered in Silence, Inc. (IRIS) uses the iris as a symbol in its print communications such as these pieces produced by Insty-Prints in Owatonna, Minnesota.

part of your efforts

- **testimonials** from respected individuals to validate your messages.

Also pay attention to accuracy. A few typos, incorrect spelling, or poor grammar can undermine your credibility. Edit and proofread carefully.

Enhance readability.

Choosing the proper design makes your printed piece work. Strengthen readability by following some simple design rules:

- **Create balance** with appropriate margins on all sides.
- **Leave some white space.** A page crowded with text, photos, and graphics is unattractive and hard to read.
- **Highlight important points** by using bold type, adding graphic symbols, and boxing small areas of type.
- **Limit the number of typestyles** and avoid large amounts of all-upper-case words, italics, and reverse type, all of which can slow readability by 10%.

Attract attention.

Probably the best way to get your printed piece to stand out is by adding color. Studies show that people are 40% more likely to be interested in a printed piece that contains color than one without it. Color also increases recall from 56% to 78%.

The Internet puts every nonprofit organization in the world in front of your constituents.

With today's digital printing techniques, full color isn't nearly as costly as it used to be. You can save even more by using two colors or two mixed colors — for example, blue with yellow to get green. Other options include screening techniques, in which the printer progressively lightens the tint of a color, and duotones, in which a second color is added to black. Another simple way to add color is by printing on colored paper.

Large formats have also become more affordable. Digital signs, posters, and banners are a great way to increase support and attract volunteers at meetings, fundraisers, and special events.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "It is a luxury to be understood." This is true for any organization seeking to gain support in today's competitive, fast-paced society. A final suggestion: Be persistent. Understanding doesn't result from a single memo, billboard, or brochure. Constantly remind supporters why they decided to pay attention to you in the first place. ■

The Allegra Network FootPRINT FundSM has contributed or designated more than \$2.5 million in print communication services to nonprofits throughout the U.S. and Canada. Organizations have received awards of graphic design, printing, copying, and bindery services. To apply for an award, locate your nearest participating Allegra Print & Imaging, American Speedy Printing, or Insty-Prints location at www.allegranetwork.com.

Resources

Beach, Lisa, "Is Your Newsletter Doomed to Fail?," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 16, No. 1.

Bosc, Joyce, "Brands: They Need to Work Just as Hard as You Do," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 20, No. 1.

Ott, Christine, "Nonprofit Communications on a Shoestring," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 8, No. 2.

These and other resources on communications are available at www.snpo.org/members.

Jessica Kotas Eng is director of marketing for Allegra Network, a print and graphic communications franchise with world headquarters in Northville, Michigan. Eng played an instrumental role in the creation of the FootPRINT FundSM for Nonprofit Friends, which awards printing and related services to eligible nonprofit organizations in the U.S. and Canada. Allegra Network, (www.allegranetwork.com) franchise center owners contributed to this article.