Online Communication for Nonprofits

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Triangle United Way
Agency Communications
Workshop

A good nonprofit web site is…

- Educational
- User-oriented
- Up-to-date & current
- Asks for support
- Interactive
- Professional
- Transparent
- Accessible

EmPOWERment
INC.

Affordable Housing
increasing affordable housing and preserving neighborhoods

Community Organizing
neighborhoods working for change

Economic Development
small business incubator supporting entrepeneurs

About EmPOWERment, Inc.

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- Mission-driven
- Affordable

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Nonprofits must change...
along with our constituents

◉ Moving from one-way to **two-way** and **every-which-way** communication
  - Examples of different types
  - Impact on message control and movement building

◉ Think outside the web page
  - RSS, aggregators, audio, video
  - Mobile phones and PDAs

Top 10 cool new(ish) tools

1. **blogging**
   authentic voice
2. **technorati**
   feeds & tagging
3. **del.icio.us**
   bookmarks & tagging
4. **flickr**
   sharing & tagging photos
5. **bloglines**
   aggregator
6. **friendster**
   and other social networking sites
7. **wikipedia**
   collaborative wisdom
8. **43things**
   sharing and supporting goals
9. **instant messaging**
10. **Internet phone**

Online communication planning

◎ **Organizing goals** — the purpose of advocacy communication is to inspire people to take specific actions that lead towards organizing goals.

◎ **Audiences** — a communications plan has to identify the target audiences for the communications. "The general public" is not a valid answer. Neither is "moms." Describe the audiences in terms of their attitudes towards our issues.

◎ **Desired outcomes** — what are the attitude and behavior changes we're trying to create?

◎ **Influences** — our communications plans need to identify the "forces and sources" that influence the attitudes and behaviors of our target audiences. For example, who do key legislators listen to when deciding how to vote on choice issues? Our communications strategies need to focus on getting our messages into the channels that actually influence our target audiences.

◎ **Messages and framing** — talk about the good and bad language to use when talking about our issues to our target audiences. (See George Lakoff.)

◎ **Content** — what content do our target audiences desire? What will engage them in fighting for our issues? We need to learn to see our issues from our audiences' points of view, and structure our information in ways that make sense to them, not according to our organizational chart.

◎ **Tactics** — specific ideas about effective communications tactics. Websites with features x, y. z. Press releases with specific elements. Specific advertising strategies, etc.

◎ **Projects and campaigns** — tactics will be bundled into discrete, manageable projects that are sequenced in a logical order.

◎ **Resources** — projects will have estimates of the time and money needed to execute them — and to sustain them on an ongoing basis.

Adapted from http://blogs.onenw.org/jon/index.php?p=624

Different strategies for different supporters

◎ **Need to get to know your audience better**.
Beyond just demographics - what are their interests, education level, online activity, level of support for you? What are they likely to take on? What influences them and who do they influence?

◎ **Who are the super-duper activists/volunteers/donors, and how do you talk to them?**
Similarly, how do you talk to single-issue supporters, potential donors, luddites, super-geeks, long-time donors, teenagers, soccer moms, activists, etc.

◎ **You need different messages and different tactics to suit different people.**

Advanced online communication tips, part 1:
Growing your list

- ◉ Always give people something to do.
  - ▪ Put a link to the action at the top and bottom of your message to make it easy for the user. Have at least one thing (and no more than 3-4) to do.
- ◉ Keep your list fresh
  - ▪ Don't let folks sit and wonder what you've been up to.
  - ▪ The more you do, the more people will join.
- ◉ Timing and consistency
  - ▪ Schedule messages with affiliated and partner organizations so members don't get overloaded.
  - ▪ Let people opt-in to extra messages so they get what they want.
- ◉ Messages
  - ▪ Keep your message simple and short. Get to the point and offer a link to more information.
  - ▪ Write like you talk (not like you lobby or fundraise).
  - ▪ Use graphics and white space to improve readability, not distract from it.
  - ▪ For alerts: Create urgency, not panic. Always indicate time-sensitivity.
  - ▪ Clear, un-spamlike subject lines

Advanced online communication tips, part 2:
Effective communication

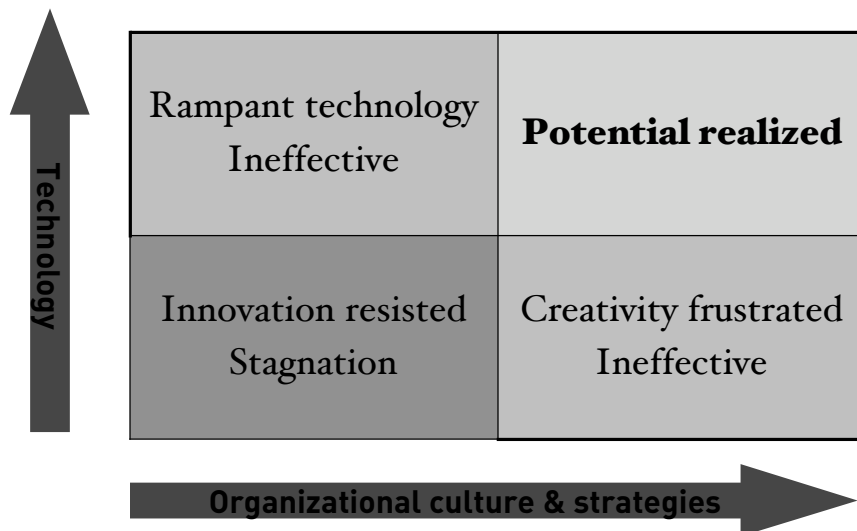◉ **General online writing:**

- ▪ Write like you talk.
- ▪ People have a 4 second attention span – in other words, when someone logs onto a website it only takes them 4 seconds to decide if they are going to stay.
- ▪ Introduce 'White Space' whenever possible – the eye loves white space because it doesn't have to work – It allows for scanability.

◉ **Action alerts:**

- ▪ Make it clear who the message is from and provide contact information
- ▪ Identify the issue quickly and clearly
  - • Create urgency, not panic
- ▪ Make it easy to read:
  - • Ask for clear simple logical action
  - • Brief understandable language
  - • Use key facts to support and get them right
- ▪ Clear, un-spamlike headlines/subject lines
  - • Avoid person's name in subject line
- ▪ Date it & indicate time-sensitivity

The technology trap

Rampant technology Ineffective	**Potential realized**
Innovation resisted Stagnation	Creativity frustrated Ineffective

Technology (vertical axis)

Organizational culture & strategies (horizontal axis)

Participant questions

- How do you get donors to give you their e-mail address?
- How often should a website be updated?
- How often should constituents be e-mailed?
- Are online newsletters better than printed copies?
- How to use online communications without getting lost in all the online communications that is out there.
- How do you draw individuals to your website, especially when you do not have donor e-mail address to create online newsletters etc.
- What are the key components to online communications?
- How can nonprofits build technology into their agencies.
- How do we get people to visit our website?

Others?

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