

CHARITY MATTERS

To communicate or not communicate; that is the dilemma!



At The Wheel's Annual Conference in Dublin this past May, Ms. Susan Mitchell from the Sunday Business Post addressed the delegates and suggested that the charity sector does not communicate its successes and achievements on a regular basis and indicated that this was an opportunity to connect directly with the public in a very meaningful way during a particularly difficult period.

I agree with Susan's comments and firmly believe that there is a huge opportunity to highlight the myriad of essential services that are delivered on a daily basis by charities around the country. The issue that many charities face is that they don't have a clear communications strategy and they have limited resources available to manage this critical function. So what can we do to improve how we communicate?

Any communications strategy begins with identifying the audiences with whom you want to engage with remembering that your audiences are both internal and external. Separate your audiences into segments such as those you need to keep satisfied, those that are key players and those you need to keep informed. Place a priority around these segments and decide which are the most important to you. (As an example, it's pointless having a wonderful engaging Facebook page if you are failing to communicate on a regular basis to your key funder as per the terms of your funding agreement). Once this prioritising is complete, you build a communications strategy around each segment.

I hear some people saying right now....."I don't have the time or resources to do that". That may be true but your board will not thank you if a key responsibility of your role is being ignored. There is always a way and that begins with the creation of a communications strategy; identifying the priority groups you wish to communicate with and determining the resources you need to deliver on it. That strategy needs to be approved by the board and the resources placed in behind it.

If you are beginning that process, it is very helpful to develop a timeline over a 12-month period initially that highlights key elements and places priority items into individual months. Print that timeline and discuss it with your colleagues. Next look at the human resources that you have available to help you deliver that plan. Most organisations cannot allocate or afford to have a fulltime communications officer so can you get external assistance through a work scheme, student work experience or student placement. Students studying a marketing or business background are a great resource as they are social media savvy and can play an important role for your organisation.

In terms of how you communicate, think about linking your Twitter and Facebook accounts which enables one message to be placed on two platforms simultaneously. What about email signatures? How many emails does your organisation send out per week / per month from a number of staff members? If each staff member had a specific message as part of their email signature each month, think of the number of people you could reach and the number of different and relevant messages you can put out.....it's significant!



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