



UP NEXT MONTH

Overhead and the Nonprofit



MARKETING TOOLS FOR THE NONPROFIT

Nonprofits should employ the same marketing tools and techniques as their for-profit counterparts:

**Video** — Gone are the days of expensive video shoots. Simple, engaging, high-quality stories can be shot from an iPhone.

**Social Media** — Don't have a social media guru who truly *knows* how to effectively use LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter or Pinterest? Identify an internal candidate passionate about social media and invest in online or community college courses that illustrate how these powerful tools can connect and engage.

**Partnerships** — Consider, for example, an animal shelter focused on abused cats. Rather than simply raising funds for food, it partners with a quality food maker recommended by veterinarians. The manufacturer offers a discount and places the shelter's mission on its packaging.



Richard Tollefson is founder and president of The Phoenix Philanthropy Group, an Arizona-based international consulting firm serving nonprofit organizations as well as institutional and individual philanthropists. [phoenixphilanthropy.com](http://phoenixphilanthropy.com)

# Better Branding = Fundraising Impact

A greater understanding of brand and messaging can bolster a nonprofit's fundraising efforts

by Richard Tollefson

Two simple questions lie at the heart of a nonprofit's branding and marketing efforts: *Who?* and *Why?* Who is the nonprofit helping, and why?

"Organizations often forget what they're really about," says Russ Haan, founder of Phoenix-based Charles Russell, a visual storytelling consultancy. Knowing that answer, he says, is the essence of a strong brand and a catalyst for fundraising.

Executives sitting on nonprofit boards, because of their distance from day-to-day operations, are in a unique position to provide objective clarity about brand. They can assess marketing materials against mission and vision, and help identify the distinctions that make their nonprofits unique from competitors. "So often," says Haan, "there is a disconnect between public perception of a brand and what the fundraisers and marketers think the brand is."

This type of confused messaging can color every aspect of an organization's outreach and success. "It is essential for all of our team to feel they have a deep understanding of *why* we do what we do and how they play an integral role in achieving our goals," says Katherine Ransom, vice president of marketing and communications for Irvine, Calif.-based Orange County United. "While our PR and marketing efforts are essential, our employees on the front lines are our most credible source. If they aren't working toward a common purpose, it negatively affects fundraising, morale and retention, as well as the overall brand."

Strong brands start with an understanding of purpose and are tied directly to a nonprofit's mission, vision and values. But how do nonprofits drill down to the heart of their brands?

According to Haan, it's as simple as communicating a story. He points to the philanthropic arm of Edwards Lifesciences, a medical company focused on heart-valve disease. "Their simply stated goal is to get a heart to beat once more," says Haan. That specific articulation led to a discussion of the things that can happen in one heart beat: a person can fall in love, the next Gandhi could be born, the world can change. And from that discussion was born a series of marketing messages and the foundation's brand premise, "Every heartbeat matters."

United Way followed a similar exercise as an example of one of four key priorities identified in its strategic plan: cutting the high school dropout rate in half. Not only do volunteers and fundraisers share real, personalized stories of lives touched, they also share quantifiable facts surrounding this issue.

"The heart tug is necessary to provide an emotional appeal, and is effective in personalizing human issues, but for United



Way to be perceived as a smart investment, we needed to point out economic consequences that affect the entire community," says Ransom. "A high school dropout is 12 years in the making, and the average cost of a dropout is \$300,000 in lower tax revenues. Dropouts earn less, have higher unemployment rates, rely on social support, and their kids are more likely to drop out. And, of course, the loss in human potential is immeasurable."

These very different approaches to the same "story" are essential because donors think with their hearts and their heads. They respond to messaging delivered by passionate individuals who understand the organization's unique services.

That's not to say that marketing materials — and even visual identity — aren't important ways to bolster brand. They are a clear part of overall identity, but Haan cautions nonprofits to avoid thinking of brand as a *logo only*. Logos, he says, can't fix the bigger "we don't know who we are" issues of an organization.

Steve Esser, creative director of Phoenix-based Esser Design, agrees. "Mission and vision statements go hand in hand with visual identity. Many times these key messages are adjusted and honed before any creative is attempted." Brand positioning, he says, is about finding distinctions that become the essence of the visual brand.

Logos serve as a unifying branding element across presentations and marketing materials, but they also can galvanize employees and the people they serve. "People begin to understand that a logo stands for what they think," says Haan. "That can be very powerful."

According to Ransom, the power of a strong brand and its tie to philanthropic dollars is too important to be overlooked, especially as her organization undertakes an ambitious fundraising plan that affects development, operations and infrastructure. "It's critical to ensure that our branding is aligned with our objectives, and that we build a strong case to attract and engage philanthropists." ■

