



IS YOUR CAUSE SHARE-WORTHY?

How to Create Contagious Donor Communication

Chances are, the last bit of information or news you shared with a friend or family member had one of the following characteristics: It made you look good. It was top of mind. There was something emotional about it. It was public. It had practical value. It had an interesting narrative or story. These six characteristics are explored in Jonah Berger's book *Contagious – Why Things Catch On*.

“Donor engagement is typically defined as two-way communication. But, what if donor-engagement was defined by three-way communication?”

Being share-worthy matters to health care foundations because if donors share your communications, they reaffirm their reasons for giving, deepen their loyalty, open up doorways to new prospects and create a more powerful voice for the cause you serve.

Engagement is all the rage. Rightly so, everywhere you turn, there is an article or presentation on the importance of donor engagement. Donor engagement is typically defined as two-way communication. But, what if donor-engagement was defined as three-way communication? What if we measured the effectiveness of how well we communicate with our donors by measuring their enthusiasm for sharing it? This raises the bar.

HERE'S HOW TO DO IT:

Be Strategic

If you've been listening and taking notes, your donors have told you what matters to them. They've told you what initiatives motivate them, which channels they prefer and how they want to experience it. So give it to them. Resist the urge to drive donor engagement with a 'what's in it for us' foundation game plan. Design a multi-touch point strategy with strings that recognizes

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patterns in how you communicate and that avoids being overly predictable. If you're giving them exactly what they expect, exactly when they expect it — you can expect to get nothing in return. Mix it up, become a delightful surprise to their day.

Use a Hook

It is estimated 81 percent of people only *skim* the content they read. Causing even more anxiety is the fact that we form a first impression in a mere 50 milliseconds. You don't have much time—so get to it. Often, an image will be the first thing a person looks at. Images that capture attention have an element of intrigue and set the hook for wanting to know more. Headlines can also set the hook. Considered the father of modern day marketing, David Ogilvy once said *"On the average, five times as many people read the headline as read the body copy. When you have written your headline, you have spent eighty cents out of your dollar."*

Get Behind the Scenes

You've heard it before: man was sick, man sought treatment, man was cured. Operational success stories are important — but more important to the hospital than to your foundation. You're not selling hospital services — you're selling donor impact and experience. Seek the story behind the story. How did the care change a patient's life? How has gratitude altered your donor's perspective on why philanthropy matters? Humanizing a story brings it into a world where trust can flourish. So, dig deeper, get the back story, don't worry about a perfect ending.

Test it Out Before You Send It Out

Using traditional market research methods can be both eye-opening and relatively simple. One such

simple rule to consider implementing is **"donor's opinions trump everyone else's."** Turn to those donors who are on your board or inner circle and ask them to review videos, direct mail, stories and messaging to get their honest input on how they'd react. Be mindful and respectful of their time, since it's not their job to design your postcard; ask for a gut reaction to your communications.

Make Sharing Easy — and Fun

Overly complex ideas are much more difficult to retain and share. Keep it simple. Also, while health care is a serious topic and needs the occasional tear jerker or emotionally taxing story to complete the picture of why philanthropy matters, try to focus on the benefits. Benefits are aspirational, inspirational and trigger a need within your donors to do something about the cause.

Becoming share-worthy is not an overnight trick. It requires being purposeful and never settling for less than A-plus results. It's also not a gimmick. Approach donor engagement with as much authenticity, transparency and truthfulness as you can manage. Sometimes the best way to begin is by selecting a single project and asking yourself the question "if I received this... would I want to share it?"

About the Author:

Michael J. Beall is a Principal Consultant with Accordant Philanthropy who leads communications and creative efforts. Mike brings a unique skill set and approach to health care philanthropy shaped by many years building marketing strategies, delivering internal and external communications and implementing creative brand and marketing ideas.