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Use Dashboards to Measure Communications

If your nonprofit has a strategic communications plan, then you already have a set of goals and a step-by-step strategy in place to assist you in reaching them.

Consider the ways that new marketing and communication initiatives can impact these goals, and then track the corresponding metrics in an easy-to-read dashboard.

“The purpose of a dashboard is to quickly keep you focused,” says Planning and Communications Manager for Covenant HealthCare (Saginaw, MI), Kristin Knoll. “Dashboards should be simple and manageable, otherwise you won’t use them.”

Knoll suggests measuring the impact of your communications by collecting metrics generated from the three O’s:

1. **Outputs:** Your outgoing communications.
2. **Outtakes:** The information the reader takes away from your communication.
3. **Outcomes:** The actions your reader takes as a result of your communication.

Start by looking at your organization’s goals and strategic plan, then hone in on the key goals within it. Make sure your goals are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound). Next, uncover creative ways that your marketing and communication can directly impact these goals. Start logging metrics in a dashboard — use an Excel spreadsheet or another easy-to-read visual. Depending on your organization’s needs, monitor them on a monthly, quarterly or seasonal basis to determine if your tactics are leading you in the right direction.

Some examples of your organization’s goals and corresponding metrics might include:

- **Education.** “If you are an organization who wants to train people in a specialized space, such as first aid and CPR, create a video and set an attainable goal of having 300 people view it,” Knoll says. By keeping tabs on views, you can easily determine which communications were most effective in leading your audience to watch your video.
- **Donations.** Perhaps you are an organization who has launched a capital campaign to raise \$20,000 through your online giving process. Record e-newsletter opens and website visits to learn more about the materials and behaviors that are converting your readers into donors.
- **Awareness building.** If you have a goal to host 10 community talks annually with more than 30 people in attendance at each, you can measure which topics and communications were most effective in attracting attendees. Log those outcomes in a dashboard to inform future strategy.

“The more digital the world becomes, the more data we can collect,” Knoll says. “Free data from Facebook, Twitter, Google Analytics, YouTube and other cost-effective tools like SurveyMonkey® and e-mail apps can help you pull critical information, as long as you know how those metrics support your end goals.” Knoll also recommends referring to donor software, or even using handwritten checkboxes to source metrics that can be viewed in an easy-to-understand dashboard.

“Ultimately, KISS (Keep It Simple, Strategist). With all the data available, it can be tempting to create too big a dashboard to be effective,” Knoll says. “Use your car as an example. Only mission-critical things are displayed on your car dashboard.”

The Art of the Video Interview

Filming an interview can make a subject's words dynamic and personal. Copy on a page can convey a perspective, but video and sound have the power to bring that story to life. With careful preparation and execution, video interviews can serve as an effective way to both entertain and inform your audience.

"With any video interview, I always remember Author Steven Covey's advice: 'Begin with the end in mind,'" says Todd Boruff, a video producer for the University of Notre Dame (Notre Dame, IN). "Having a clear understanding of my audience and the goal behind my video always gives focus to the interview process."

Boruff offers his advice for conducting effective and appealing video interviews.

1. **Hold a "pre-interview."** "Take some time to talk to your subject before the actual interview, whether it's in person or on the phone," Boruff says. "Explain what the interview will be like and ask preliminary questions in order to get to know your subject and their work. This pre-interview will put their mind at ease, build rapport and help you ask better questions when the cameras are rolling."
2. **Envision the story.** "When crafting your interview questions, it's helpful to think about a story arc," Boruff says. "Consider the subject's past, present and future, and don't be afraid to uncover problems or conflict. People love to hear about overcoming adversity, so find ways for your subject to express transformation."
3. **Edit as needed.** "At the interview, remind your subject that they can stop or start over as needed," Boruff says. "Then tell them that the most important rule of the interview is to answer in complete sentences since the question will not be heard in the video. Be prepared to have them repeat their response if they forget. Your editor will thank you!"
4. **Keep it conversational.** "Once the ground rules are set, start an informal conversation and keep that conversation going," Boruff says. "Ask your questions in a conversational tone rather than just reading them as written, and really listen to the answers that follow. Be ready to ask your questions out of order depending on how the conversation wanders, and never settle for boring, stock responses."
5. **Uncover personality.** "If your interview subjects are shy or nervous, start with basic questions to get them warmed up," Boruff says. "If you feel like you aren't getting natural answers, throw in a personal question in the middle of the interview to help break the pattern. This sort of curveball can help shift your subject from 'interview mode' into conversation, which will allow them to return to your questions with a fresh perspective."

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Build a Google Street View

Virtual tours provide an exciting opportunity for nonprofits who wish to share their spaces, and those of their members, with their communities. Today, drone-sourced photography and tools provided by Google help make these online visits more dynamic than ever.

"Many of our members are looking for a cost-effective way to increase their online presence, and the Google Street View technology fits the bill perfectly," says Holly Allen, director of marketing and communications for the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce (DACC; Dayton, OH). "Many consumers do online research before they make the decision to buy a product or patronize a business. These tours have the power to lure customers in before they ever leave home."

In an effort to add value, DACC partnered with Places Mobile, a certified Google photographer, to build tours for chamber members at a discounted rate. "Places Mobile takes a series of 360 degree photos, which are then seamlessly cut together to create the tour," Allen says. "Businesses can also choose to embed media, such as short videos or text pop-ups, at different points throughout the tour to highlight their capabilities, facility features or special offerings." Places Mobile communicates with Google on behalf of DACC to ensure that tours meet the requirements necessary to be displayed by Google. The partner also maintains DACC's Chamber Guide, which can be viewed at DaytonChamber.org.

Consider these tips when building your Google Street View tour:

1. **Research your options.** "When seeking certified Google photographers, be sure to take a look at samples of their work and ask about their present relationship with Google," Allen says. "Requirements for these tours change often, and it's important to partner with someone who keeps up-to-date with the latest regulations."
2. **Hire local photographers.** "You don't want your members or partners waiting too long for service," Allen says. "Opt for local or nearby photographers who schedule shoots often to ensure timely output."
3. **Seek sunny days.** "Our partner photographers try to schedule shoots during warmer months when the grass is green, the sun is shining and the trees have leaves, as these factors make for lively, attractive photos," Allen says. "We also encourage our members to showcase portions of their facility that are likely to appeal to their target demographic."
4. **Offer creative insight.** "Some of our local realtor members are using the drone capabilities of our partner to show shovel-ready spaces, while manufacturers are highlighting their pristine shop floors and high-tech equipment," Allen says. "Many members have reported that customers have decided to visit following a view of their Google tour."
5. **Make it newsworthy.** "We scheduled a two-day shoot to kick off the project, and earned great media coverage as a result," Allen says. "Offering this service is a benefit to our business community and especially to our members because of the discount they receive."

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