

Communications Capacity Building

Our Media Trust Consultant, Oliver Hickson of Hickson Communications, offers his top tips and suggestions on how charities can improve their communications strategies.

1. Ensure you have a clear mission, succinct messaging and overall objectives (your audience need to understand what it is you are offering).

You should be able to clearly convey your organisational purpose in an 'elevator pitch' style delivery – within no more than 30 seconds. It is important to always have a call to action which could be encouraging your target audience to visit your website, or contact a telephone number. This serves two purposes; to make it easy for people to contact you and to ultimately increase your number of supporters.



2. Understand your audience. You need to be able to clearly identify who your audience is – maybe you need to break it down into a primary target audience with other secondary audiences. It is important to frame your message for each audience.

Types of audience can range from your clients, volunteers, partners and stakeholders, as well as potential beneficiaries. Segmentation is key when communicating with and addressing your various audiences. Not only will

segmentation allow you to frame and convey the correct messages for your target audience, it will also ensure that you do not saturate your audiences with irrelevant communications.

A good example of this is Oasis Cardiff where their primary audience is newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees to Cardiff, with secondary audiences of business, stakeholders and the wider public.

3. Always plan your communications ahead, ideally with a communications calendar. The calendar should map out all planned communications activity, content themes as well as wider landmarks in the communications calendar (like a specific Volunteer's Week or an event on your local calendar). It is good to use a combination of social media channels, Facebook and Twitter for a general (and slightly older audience), Instagram and Youtube for a younger audience.

It is important on the social media side to have planned content – whether tweets, Facebook posts, Instagram content. This will help ensure your communications are ‘always on’ – staying fresh and up to date.

Observe the social media distribution of similar and likeminded organisations. When do they send content out? How many times a day?

Look to maximise earned and owned media opportunities, rather than paid ones. Earned opportunities (earning free

media placements), will range from securing free editorial in your local newspapers, to free poster space, to working with commercial partners. Case studies are very useful for earned opportunities and people always like to read or view real life examples.

In some instances it may be worth spending a little bit on paid media, such as a Facebook ‘local’ promotion or to secure some prime poster sites. A Facebook localised promotion can cost as little as £10 and will mean a post is sent to a specified local



audience (could be by age, gender, location). It is always worth liaising with the Local Council regarding their poster sites as they are likely to offer them at reduced charity rates or, on some occasions for free.



4. Look to maximise your social media reach and impact. With most organisations the recommendation would be to go with Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. It’s good to post video content directly on these channels, and also on YouTube for material with a longer shelf life.

Ensure content is always up to date and monitored. It is a good idea to look at co-creation of content with your staff, volunteers, and even service users.

This could take the shape of video content, photographic or written. Always encourage

any people you work with to produce content that can be loaded onto your sites such as quotes and testimonials or short video clips. Encourage people to share content to other sites using appropriate hashtags and include a call to action where relevant.

At HRP Hartlepool they have a dedicated social media person who looks to put out two new pieces of content a day.

5. Utilise ‘ambassadors’ to maximise the reach of communications and ensure you get the very best content.

Ambassadors within your organisation could be staff members, volunteers or beneficiaries. It is important that when you identify them, you give them clear 'ambassador roles'. For example this could be to look after a social media channel, help recruit new members,

co-create content when out on an activity. Video and photographic content should be the essential backdrop to your digital and social channels. Videos should be short and ideally not more than 45 seconds in length and don't forget you can produce them in different

languages depending on your target audience.

At Oasis Cardiff they work with some of their clients to help get their messages across to the various communities and sometimes in different languages.

6. Have a clear funding and business strategy in place.

With funding for charities in short supply, it is very important to diversify funding streams and research ways to maximise commercial revenues.

Fundraising is key, therefore it is essential to plan ahead and go for bids that suit your organisation's key strengths. It is critical that you follow the correct terminology and language, omitting any jargon.

This will include proving the positive outcomes and impact (short and long term) of your work both in quantitative and qualitative terms.

Local business support should be sought (whether for cash or in-kind support.). Where applicable, business support packages should be worked up (e.g. for sponsoring an

event), making very clear to the business the benefits on offer for their support and the cost of involvement.

Stakeholders are important to help spread the work of your organisation and offer support where possible. Stakeholders could be anybody from local councils to other statutory bodies.

Women's Aid in Nottingham has managed to secure a number of corporate partners. They have followed a clear route, identifying a target list of companies, contacting them with a concrete offer (on no more than two pages) and following up to secure offers in place.



7. Track what you do. Prove the value of your work (Social Impact).

To help ensure you are as successful as possible with funding bids and other commercial opportunities, you need to be able to demonstrate the value of your work – through outcomes and impacts.

All project work should be tracked against set criteria to help measure the progress of participants. Always remember to include statistics, testimonials and case studies.

At Plymouth and Devon Racial Equality Council they have put measures in place to track soft outcomes (seeing how their clients are progressing along a path to settling and work) as well as hard outcomes (the money saved by putting these early interventions in place).

8. Look to ensure sustainability

The ideal long term aim of your work should be to secure sustainability. This can be achieved by a combination of a successful funding programme coupled with other long term commercial revenue generators.

At the Rainbow Centre, Penley, they are putting measures in place to secure additional commercial rental funds as well as running a successful café for the community.

An example of a revenue generator could be securing rental monies from people/ organisations using your

premises. You may also be able to bring long term commercial partners on board. The best way to secure a long term commercial partner is to get them involved with your activities and for the partner to see how the work aligns with their community social objectives.

9. Sharing best practice

Where possible showcase your work as best practice. Sharing best practice will identify and fill gaps in knowledge, enable better decision making and establish you as an authority

in your field enhancing your credibility. This is a great opportunity to help other organisations in your field and share ideas, as well as giving you the opportunity to

charge for consultancy work. Connecting ideas is where innovation comes from, and connecting with people makes those ideas come into fruition.

At Independent Arts, Isle of Wight, they are at the forefront of advocating 'social prescribing', and are hoping to run a test pilot in arts therapy for the elderly. If the results prove successful it should pave the way for other organisations to get funding for similar projects.

10. Make the very most of your staff, volunteers and clients.

To ensure the maximum effectiveness of your communications you need to have clear designated responsibilities for any staff, volunteers and clients that are involved. Volunteers are a key asset and resource to any organisation. They allow your organisation to offer more support to those using your services, bring a new perspective, inject energy and enthusiasm to your organisation and can bring a new set of skills and experience They are

also key in supporting staff and under resourced organisations who lack the funds to employ additional staff. Volunteers also raise awareness of your organisation, your profile

At the Harbour in Bristol they have a strong volunteer programme helped by an excellent reputation of the service. Volunteers play a key role in the running of the organisation and have been key in maintaining sustainability.

and what you do. Be sure to recognise and appreciate the work that they do.

In order for charitable organisations to be successful in this unstable and unpredictable environment you have to be creative. Charities need to find ways to stand out and make their voices heard. It is worthwhile considering collaboration on campaigns or projects with similar organisations to maximise the impact of your work.