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**Strategic Communication Issues for Nonprofits: Targeting Donors, Utilizing New  
Media, and Planning for Crises**

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**Strategic Communication Issues for Nonprofits: Targeting Donors, Utilizing New  
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by

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**Report**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of the University of Texas at Austin  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

**Advertising**

The University of Texas at Austin

December 2012

# **Strategic Communication Issues for Nonprofits: Targeting Donors, Utilizing New Media, and Planning for Crises**

by

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the growing nonprofit sector in the marketplace and the challenges and opportunities involved with attracting and maintaining donor relations and charitable giving. Nonprofit organizations have a number challenges relating to marketing and communications but I have chosen to focus on three dominant areas: targeting donors for support and greatly needed funds, the use of emerging media tools, and crisis management. These issues have a significant impact on an organization's ability to effectively communicate their brand as compelling to their public. First, I will briefly go over the branding process and what makes a nonprofit brand so unique. I will discuss the target market of donors, the importance of understanding them and their mindset, and finally provide some variables that relate to successful recruiting and maintaining of those relations. Additionally, my research will cover not only methods that could best attract donors but also why many nonprofits do not have marketing or communications plans in place already and the consequences for such a choice. Following that research, I will go into the actual marketing and communication tactics that can be used, not only through traditional but also in new or emerging media communications. Then, I will transition into research of crisis management, linking to the necessity of implementation of marketing plans and the consequences that can occur when nonprofits deal with crises ineffectively. Based on the research, I will conclude my own set of guidelines for how nonprofits should proceed should they want to be successful in a competitive marketplace.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction to Literature & Research**

The nonprofit sector has grown tremendously over the last few decades, and with that growth, the importance of organizational methods, such as marketing and communication planning has increased. In fact, the number of nonprofit organizations has increased to almost 1.5 million in the United States, and therefore the nonprofit sector deserves a significant amount of attention from the public and private sectors. This growth signifies increased competition in a field where there is already a limited amount of funds available from donors, the government, corporations, and other foundations. Significant reductions in government funding have resulted in nonprofits' increase of dependence on private donors.

With the increased dependency on private donations comes the concern that the required giving from those donors has not kept up with the growing number of different nonprofit organizations. Therefore, it is important for nonprofit practitioners to have marketing plans in place. In general, nonprofits did not use specific marketing techniques until the late 1960s, but now the utilization of these skills is a well-accepted, but often misunderstood, practice (Wenham, Stephens, & Hardy, 2003). A 2012 report that examined a nonprofits' use of a marketing plan or lack thereof found that only 24% of the nonprofits had a formal written and approved marketing plan for 2012, while the rest had informal notes that never officially passed through senior leadership. Therefore, it is important to explore the importance of the use of marketing in nonprofits and the actual process of instituting a marketing plan. According to Miller (2011), when you put a marketing plan into writing you are more likely to follow through with it. Therefore, the rest of the nonprofits that report not having an approved plan, simply having written

notes, or even having thoughts in their head, are less likely to follow through with what they wish to accomplish.

Overall, the various research studies discussed give a well-rounded report on how to tackle the problem of a lack of support for the nonprofit sector and the barriers to entry that exist in the market as well as within the organizations themselves. This is discussed in the context of the nonprofit brand, the target markets, the relationship between the market and the organization, successful utilization of appeals, and management of negative publicity.

In order to understand the nonprofit sector, it is necessary to examine the value of brand personality and its role in enhancing the marketing strategies that generate positive public perception. According to Holt (2003), there are four components of brand value that a nonprofit can and should have in its mission or message. For the purpose of this research, I focus on two of those components and how they relate to the three compelling ways in which branding comes together in this paper: targeting donors, utilizing new media, and crisis management. These two components are the reputation value of a brand and the relationship value of the brand. Reputation value is important, in that it states how brand messaging shapes perceived product or service quality (Holt, 2003). I examine the importance of reputation value further in depth in its relation to crisis management and the ways in which an organization either effectively or ineffectively responds to a crisis and how its actions reflect on its branding message.

The second component of brand value is relationship value, in that branding shapes relationship perceptions (Holt, 2003). This is why my research focuses particularly on the organization and its past, current, or potential donors. The

communication and marketing tactics that are discussed in the literature all lead up to the ultimate goal of attracting donors and maintaining a stable and lasting relationship with them even in times of crisis when an organization's image is truly put to the test.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: to examine the growing nonprofit sector in the marketplace and the challenges and opportunities involved with attracting and maintaining donor relations and charitable giving, and also how crisis management plays into this. Nonprofit organizations have a number of challenges relating to marketing and communications, but I have chosen to focus on two dominant areas: targeting donors for support and greatly-needed funds, and on crisis management. Both issues have a significant impact on an organization's ability to communicate its brand effectively in a way that is compelling to its public. First, I briefly go over the branding process and what makes a nonprofit brand unique. Then, I relate a part of the branding process to targeting donors, a nonprofit organization's main public. I discuss the target market of donors and the importance of understanding them and their mindset. Finally I provide some variables that relate to successful recruitment of donors and maintenance of those relationships.

Although my research will show that both traditional and emerging media are preferred and utilized by different types of nonprofit organizations, for the purpose of this research, I will focus on the new types of media available. Butcher (2009) found that in 2008 more than 89% of the nation's 200 largest nonprofit organizations were using social media, higher than both academic institutions and corporations. Therefore, Internet communication tools that are available to nonprofits are certainly a relevant topic worth discussing particularly in its relation to targeting donors effectively.

Additionally, my research covers not only methods that could best attract donors, but also why many nonprofits do not have marketing or communications plans in place already and the consequences of such a choice. Following that research, I go into the actual marketing and communication tactics that can be used, not only through traditional, but also in new or emerging media communications. Based on this research, I conclude with my own set of guidelines for how nonprofits should proceed should they want to be successful in a competitive marketplace. Finally, I transition into research on crisis management, linking to the necessity of implementation of marketing plans and the consequences that can occur when nonprofits deal with crises ineffectively. An example from a case study is given for clarification/real world context along with a set of guidelines for how to categorize and respond appropriately to a variety of crises.



## **Chapter 2: Targeting Donors**

After examining how branding is a major part of communication in targeting donors and maintaining that relationship, it is important to understand a donor's behavior and how this can assist in efforts to target this specific market. First, I discuss differences in for-profit and nonprofit organizations and how this relates to the importance of having a communication plan in place. Then, I briefly discuss personal factors of donors and how demographics such as a donor's age group play a part in donor behavior as well. Age group is examined further later in the discussion of the research literature when talking about the actual appeals and tactics to be used, such as new media communication. Additionally, this chapter focuses on the various barriers that exist not only to attracting donors and gaining a valuable relationship with them, but also in maintaining such a relationship so that the support continues. This relates not only to the emotional connection that donors need but also the importance of the degree of and the particular information exchange. The chapter then discusses research on measuring success once a relationship with a donor has been established and how trust and commitment play a role in predicting and evaluating the relationship. In relation to those variables, maintaining a donor relationship involves the components of reciprocity, responsible gift use, reporting, and nurturing. In addition to those areas of targeting and understanding donor behavior and mindset, psychological theories that support this research are discussed and this indicates how such theories help shape the particular channels in framing and successfully reaching the target market of donors.

## **Examination and Analysis of Target Markets**

Unlike for-profit businesses, which have customers or clients as their single target market, a nonprofit has multiple publics, and therefore, its approach is and should be quite different. These publics include volunteers and donors, but for the purpose of this research I focus on the donor as the main target market. The donor, to whom the organization must appeal, may respond to the marketing mix in different ways. Therefore, a nonprofit's marketing strategy must reflect an in-depth understanding of the target market. According to Pope, Isely, and Asamoah-Tutu's (2009) study on the development of a marketing strategy for nonprofits, the benefits gained by each target market of donors are often not monetary in nature. Therefore, it is important but difficult for nonprofits to communicate these intangible rewards clearly. For example, if a donor were to give funds to the organization for a specific cause, he or she would not necessarily get any sort of tangible "thank you" in return.

Pope et al. (2009) also found that personal values and demographic factors, such as age, income, and education influence individual choices on whether or not to donate and which nonprofit in particular to support. Additionally, Pope et al. found that the length of the relationship the donor had with the charity (i.e., the relationship value component of the brand and the donor's level of involvement with the nonprofit) all contributed to continued involvement with and donations to the organization.

## **External Barriers to Entering Relationships with Donors**

O'Neil (2008) found two barriers to an organization trying to enter into a relationship with its donor target market. O'Neil found the first barrier in a study he conducted with 10,000 donors via surveys. He discovered that 26% of donors quit giving

to a nonprofit organization because they thought another cause was more deserving of their support (O'Neil, 2008). Through his continuing research, he found that this barrier partially comes from the donors' lack of feedback on how their funds are being used toward the cause (O'Neil, 2008). The second major barrier to entry he found had to do with an organization's ability or inability to manage a crisis. The statistic he found came from a 2003 Brookings Institution report where more than 60% of donors surveyed believed nonprofits simply waste money. This belief partially stemmed from public knowledge of scandals and lack of accountability of assets or irresponsible allocation of resources.

Finally, the perceived effectiveness and efficiency of a nonprofit influences the donor, as explained earlier, in the perception of the level of competence of the organization. A new generation of donors identified by Venable, Rose, Bush, and Gilbert (2005) described the view that the nonprofit sector is more like a "big business" with accountability for its operations and the effectiveness with which donor dollars are received and utilized. In addition to clear communication about allocation of resources, O'Neil's (2008) research regarding public relations tactics for long-term success discussed how stewardship with donors also involves clear communication of the mission and work through promotional efforts in order to foster a strong relationship. This supports the importance of the relationship component of brand value discussed earlier by Holt (2003).

O'Neil (2008) used his research to link public relations to long-term success in terms of communications contributing to the variables of trust, satisfaction, and commitment in a nonprofit. He examined research done by Bruning and Galloway

(2003), who discovered that stewardship or successful and lasting relationships with donors consists of four different elements: reciprocity, appreciating and recognizing donors; responsible gift use, using gifts from donors for which they were intended; reporting, informing donors of how their gifts were used; and relationship nurturing, encouraging donors to renew gifts. Reciprocity is particularly important as it deals with two-way communication between the nonprofit and the donor, discussed in the new media tactics section of the research later on.

Knowing several of the major barriers found in nonprofit research, O'Neil (2008) further explored how stewardship with donors can successfully occur in two primary ways. In addition to being able to communicate and promote the organization's mission clearly, another important component was that the more donors know about the organization as a whole, the more likely they are to draw an emotional connection to it and make larger donations (O'Neil, 2008). However, it is important that in keeping donors in the loop and providing them with sufficient information, the organization must find a way to assess its donors' preferences in terms of the frequency and timing of the communication that occurs. Depending on the donor, the cause, and his or her individual experience, a donor has different preferences on what he or she believes to be "enough" information to feel comfortable with his or her involvement in the organization.

### **Barriers within the Organization**

In addition to external barriers impeding a nonprofit from developing a successful and lasting relationship with donors, there are barriers within the organization itself that are important to consider. Marchand and Lavoie (1998), in their research on nonprofit practices and perceptions of advertising, found several reasons why the nonprofit sector

may be unsuccessful due to its lack of marketing or public relations efforts. One of the most common barriers within the organization is a low advertising budget (Marchand & Lavoie, 1998). A low budget usually means that the message of the nonprofit does not get pretested, has little reach, and its impact does not get evaluated. Marchand and Lavoie (1998) identified the use of Public Service Announcements for message awareness and found that when they or other free advertising is used, the target group is rarely identified or understood before the message is framed and created (Marchand & Lavoie, 1998). Another financially-related barrier to effective message creation and dissemination within nonprofits is that there is a reluctance to use funds on advertising due to a belief that the public would view allocation of those resources negatively (Marchand & Lavoie, 1998). This fear relates to the decreased level of donor support when the use of funds is not clearly communicated or explained.

### **Variables contributing to a Successful Donor Relationship**

The specific variables that contribute to a successful relationship with the nonprofit's target markets can be measured through levels of trust and commitment. O'Neil, Schroudt, and Grau (2008) concluded that in both a business context and a nonprofit context, trust does not impact behavior directly (O'Neil, Schroudt, & Grau, 2008). Instead, trust is actually a predictor of commitment, which then motivates behavior (O'Neil et al., 2008). In this particular context, commitment is defined as the lasting desire to continue a valued relationship or, in other words, as the behavioral intent and emotional attachment toward an organization.

O'Neil et al. (2008) also found that trust is considered to be a relationship outcome. This kind of trust consists of three concepts: integrity, dependability, and competence<sup>1</sup>. Integrity involves the degree to which the public believes an organization is fair, dependability is the degree to which the public sees that the organization does what it claims, and finally competence is the degree to which the nonprofit actually has the ability to do what is promised (O'Neil et al., 2008). It was also found that the satisfaction of donors in their relationships with the organization was an antecedent to another relationship outcomes in that satisfaction produces trust, which in turn positively predicts commitment (O'Neil et al., 2008). Overall, the research indicates that nonprofits must allow donors their own voices so that they may be heard while engendering both trust and commitment via appropriate communication tactics in order to generate lasting involvement (O'Neil et al., 2008).

### **Relationship Maintenance**

Based on the above research conclusions, strategies proposed for developing relationships between the brand and the target market have been identified. Once these strategies are understood and utilized in the correct manner, one must discover how to maintain these relationships successfully. O'Neil et al. (2008) found that a relationship with the donor has four elements: reciprocity, responsible gift use, reporting, and nurturing. This is similar to the research mentioned earlier, but describes in depth how to use these strategies to the organization and the donor's advantage if nonprofits wish donors to remain involved for an extended period of time. The idea of reciprocity

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<sup>1</sup> For clarification purposes, this type of competence described and measured is defined differently than the competence variable mentioned earlier, which is believed to exist solely in for-profits.

involves appreciating and recognizing donor efforts. Responsible gift use is when the organization truly uses the donor's monetary gift in the area as promised. Reporting is when the organization continuously informs donors of exactly how the gifts were used. Finally, nurturing the relationship means that donors are encouraged to renew their gifts in the future because the value of the relationship has been made clear to them and over time becomes stronger and more apparent (O'Neil et al., 2008).

### **Marketing Appeals and their Role in Maintaining Donor Relationships**

Once nonprofits come to an understanding of their target markets, barriers to entering a successful relationship with their donors, and how to overcome such barriers, they may be prepared to put the correct strategies into action. Such tactics involve the particular types of appeals that would attract donors and keep them interested and loyal supporters. According to White and Peloza (2009), appeals for charitable support fall into two categories: an appeal made to the ego and an appeal presented in an altruistic manner. For the purpose of this research, I will focus on the ego-based approach, since the supporting theories accurately explain these appeals, while an altruistic appeal is more straightforward and less complex so that the way to develop this type of approach needs less attention. To support these types of appeals for the identified target markets, the Social Exchange Theory and the Impression Management Theory can be used as a part of the theoretical framework. The Social Exchange Theory was first explained by Peter Blau in 1964 as an explanation for the efficacy of self-benefit appeals, in that people invest in relationships on comparative levels of costs and rewards (Blau, 1964). These theories support the appeal to the donor's ego, and communication efforts should

attempt to find a way to craft the message to fit what the donor is looking to get out from their support of a nonprofit.

The Impression Management Theory discusses a person's heightened public self-image concerns and in relation to Social Exchange theory, people will invest in acts that will help to project the image they wish to convey to the public (White & Peloza, 2009). Additionally, the Impression Management Theory is a desirable concept because it appeals to reducing any sort of internal conflict on whether or not to donate or get involved, while reducing the pressure to help in the future (White & Peloza, 2009).

To complement the specific types of appeals marketers use in the nonprofit sector, there are also traits of the brand itself that are important to understand for the target audience. In reaching a clear understanding of such traits, we must return to the studies done by Venable et al. (2005), which showed that consumers prefer brands with personality traits that are like their own and that exist with their own self-schema, i.e., the beliefs and ideas people have about themselves which guide their information processing. Furthermore, these preferences were moderated by the way in which they used "self-monitoring" or the way they wished to conform to society in certain situations. This psychological connection is related to the appeal used and explained by the Impression Management Theory in that a person's individual actions can be motivated by the positive image he or she wishes to present to society.

Further, donors themselves are not only able to ascribe the traits described previously to nonprofits, but they also have the ability to differentiate which nonprofits have the traits and which ones do not. This explains why donors are able to relate to certain nonprofits but not with others (Venable et al., 2005). Research has also



concluded that “by recognizing that current and potential donors can view nonprofits as unique personalities, nonprofit organizations may be able to match their personality better... in the crowded nonprofit marketplace” (Venable et al., 2005, p. 27).

### **Chapter 3: Targeting Donors through New Media Uses**

After coming to an understanding on how and why the target market of donors for nonprofits behaves or acts in certain ways, nonprofit practitioners can come to an understanding of what tools are out there for them to utilize to reach these donors. Much of the following research discusses results from a 2012 study regarding practices of nonprofits, preferences in communication tools, and especially the availability and use of new media in addition to traditional media practices. This study gives relevance to the growing competitive nonprofit marketplace for obtaining and maintaining donor relationships. Additionally, differences in usage of traditional versus emerging media tools and their implications are discussed, as new media are an essential channel of communication. This is discussed in regards to budget (similarly to advertising budget being a barrier as discussed earlier in the paper), the importance of having a media mix, and finally several fears of nonprofit practitioners in terms of incorporating new media into their planning (or lack thereof). Additionally, the idea of the technological revolution has often led to overuse or misuse of these channels. This leads to a discussion of barriers to entry to donor relationship, which include the dissemination of information and computers being unable to replace one-on-one interaction. Following that argument, research is presented on how the Internet allows for a conversational, two-way tone of communication, which relates back to the overall concept of trust. This research discusses the Internet's ability to give a certain degree of transparency to the organization, thereby encouraging the trust that is so important to donors. This

transparency allows for variables of donor trust to be addressed, such as a donor's desire to be heard and accountability on behalf of an organization.

A 2012 report regarding organizations' media use stemming from 1,288 nonprofits in 42 countries, 80% of them from the United States, indicates why it is so important for nonprofits to have plans in place and also why it is necessary for many nonprofits to utilize new media communication methods.

One of the reasons these results are so crucial to understanding the ways nonprofits work and try to reach the public, especially donors, is that there are more tools than ever before available to these organizations. The same report listed 14 marketing communications tools that were the most popularly used and then asked the organizations to pick three from the list that they believed were most important, somewhat important, and least important. The results showed a mix of both traditional and emerging forms of communication tools. The "big six," as the report labeled, them went from websites and email marketing as most important, followed by print (newsletter, direct mail), in-person events, Facebook, and media relations/PR. By examining these results, one is able to conclude that the utilization of communication tools is, according to this study, a mix of both traditional and emerging communications.

In addition to the mix of utilization of those tools comes another interesting conclusion from the study. When separating smaller organizations from the larger more well-known organizations, there is a noticeable difference in what each type is more likely to use. While smaller organizations rely more on the emerging media, such as social networking and blogging, larger organizations tend to rely more on traditional channels like print and PR. The main take-away from this is that smaller organizations

choose emerging media more often to communicate with their audience because it comes either free or at a relatively low cost. Larger organizations, however, often have larger budgets and are able to spend the money for paid advertising that will fit their message, their brand, and their target audience in a carefully formulated plan.

Traditional use of communication, such as quarterly direct mail, was more popular than the use of emailing. One would assume that with emerging media tools that can be used by all types of organizations to help cut costs, the difference would be relatively insignificant. Half of nonprofits (51%) will still send out quarterly direct mail in 2012, which is only 4% down from the previous year. Whether this is due to nonprofits' knowledge, comfort, or unwillingness to explore other fields of communication, it is evident that many nonprofits potentially are unable to adopt emerging tools and practices.

Although many nonprofits have stated that the integration of communication channels is a part of their future marketing plans, there are still several barriers to these plans being set into motion. Specifically, Miller's (2011) report mentioned four different fears of nonprofits about integrating their marketing channels more effectively into their systems of communications. The first was that nonprofits believe that with the growing availability of different marketing tools, it will be even harder for their brands to attract their target audiences with all of the varying messages of other organizations using similar tools and overwhelming their public. Second, many of the older nonprofits are fearful of trying out the emerging media, such as social networking sites, both because they simply do not understand how to use them and they are comfortable with their

current systems of communications and not feeling the need to try something new. This is explained further in the following section regarding the use of Internet tools for effective communication. Third, the economy is certainly a factor that plays into any kind of organization with any budget trying to get support for an integration of its communication systems.

Finally, many nonprofits feel that their marketing staff is already overworked and with new communication tools being added daily, there is not enough time to keep up. One of the responses to Miller's (2011) research included that there are just "Too many projects, with too little staff time to devote, and too little internal technical knowledge for some of the upgrades we are undertaking" (p. 43).

### **Emerging Potential of Social Media and Barriers to Effective Use of these Tools**

Butcher (2009) found that in 2008 more than 89% of the nation's 200 largest nonprofit organizations were using social media, higher than both academic institutions and corporations. Therefore, although there are several barriers to an organization's willingness to adopt Internet communication tools, there are significant levels of participation within these channels that are worth examining.

Although there are many different tools available both to individuals and to businesses today, this research focuses primarily on the most popular Internet-based tools, such as Facebook and Twitter. Social media sites such as these can be defined, according to Agichtein et al. (2008), as "user-generated content domains" (p. 2) with an emphasis on the relationships among the different users in that community. These sites are representative of an emerging group of channels through which people can interact and share in a way that traditional media like print and television are unable to do. In

fact, these sites are becoming so popular that Facebook is the second most visited website, YouTube is the fourth most visited, and Twitter is at number fourteen.

When social media tools were first created, they were primarily used for individual or personal use. However, when Facebook opened up its domain to businesses in April of 2006, this changed the existing competition entirely. In *Hot, Flat, and Crowded* (Friedman, 2009), *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman argued that the Internet has made the world “flat.” That is, “the technological revolution level[ed] the global economic playing field and enable[d] so many more people around the world to compete, connect, and collaborate” (Friedman, 2009, p. 63). Although there are so many positive results of having the Internet available to all kinds of demographics as a communication tool, there are significant drawbacks as well. According to Miller (2011), not all nonprofits are using social media tools effectively or appropriately. Either they become intimidated or they get so excited about how accessible they are to use that they register for every account they can find. Miller also stated that “some organizations are not using social media to promote two-way dialogue, even though user interaction is an important characteristic of the medium” (Miller, 2011, p. 32). Not only is there increased competition in an already competitive sector, but also many nonprofits are rushing to create all different kinds of accounts with these new types of communication tools to try and keep up. With the ability to be in the public eye through the use of Internet tools, a nonprofit especially must be extremely careful in how it utilizes these tools and must make sure its brand is represented correctly, especially to current or potential donors.

In Miller’s (2011) survey of the potential of the Internet and social media sites for nonprofit organizations, the warnings he made somewhat stem from the additional

barriers he discovered to using emerging media communications effectively. One of the main findings was that nonprofits simply reported there being a lack of time and staffing to update social media sites. Miller's research involved a workshop in which he included nonprofit volunteers and employees from various organizations. Some of the attendees reported things like, "We barely have time to train volunteers. How will we have the time to constantly update our Facebook page?" and "How do I go to the board and explain to them that this is a priority, when we have so many other issues to tackle?" (Miller, 2011, p. 42). These are very important points that should not be taken lightly. Nonprofits in particular are hard pressed for time and are already exhausting all their efforts to get support from donors. Especially if the nonprofit's staff is unfamiliar with the use of Internet tools, the time it would take to learn how to utilize these tools could be used to continue doing what they are already doing through traditional media communication.

Another major barrier to utilizing the Internet effectively as a communication tool is the generation gap. This factor is especially important because it relates directly to a nonprofit's target market demographics and adjusting the channels of communication to most effectively reach donors. Not only are nonprofits trying their best to keep up with new media tools, but donors are as well. Miller (2011) found that there is a positive correlation between age and the amounts in which donations are made with older people giving more. Therefore, the generation gap should be taken into consideration very seriously when trying to appeal to the target market and frame the message appropriately, as well as trying to direct it through the appropriate channel of communication. However, there is some hope. According to a study by Qualls (2009), Americans aged 55

and up are the fastest-growing group of new social media users. Therefore, the new channels that the Internet opens should not be ignored, as they could be integral to reaching donors.

Although, it should be understood that although potential donors are in the process of discovering new media like social networking sites, they may still need the reassurance and communication that can be used traditionally, such as in print or on television. In other words, it is important to consider how comfortable or uncomfortable the donor is with emerging media and that there may be a lag time before some donors attempt to set up and use online media. This is especially a consideration when nonprofits wish to use Internet communication with donors in the interest of keeping them in the loop and receiving feedback. If donors are unable to voice their needs or concerns because they do not understand the medium in which they are being contacted, this could present an issue for the organization.

In addition to considering the demographics of both nonprofit practitioners and their target markets of donors, including age or the generation gap, the age of the nonprofit's board members may be relevant as well. Earlier findings have suggested that a frequent barrier to social media use is that older board members often fail to see the value in social media. While the present findings do not enable any cause-effect relationship to be determined, they do support the belief that social media networking sites, such as Twitter, can be (and often is) used to foster non-traditional relationships. Future research into the impact of these relationships on public attitudes and behaviors would provide even greater insight into the results-oriented social media perspective and this is reviewed further in Chapter 6.



Another barrier to entry that Miller (2011) discovered was in the access or availability of Internet tools. There are still 25% of Americans who do not have access to the Internet, whether that is due to their lower income, their age, or their living in rural areas. Although one could argue that these demographic groups are not necessarily the target market of donors, the reliance on Internet tools poses the issue that if there were to be some sort of technological issue, all communication would cease entirely.

Now that I have reviewed how the Internet can be misunderstood, especially by both nonprofit practitioners and the target market, a related issue is in that there may be difficulty in teaching an Internet user how to differentiate between what is real and what can be easily misconstrued as true. In other words, anyone with access to the Internet can start blogs saying anything they choose or pretending to be someone they are not on Twitter or Facebook. There is, therefore, the issue of dissemination of information that comes with using the Internet as a communication tool and having your audience use it as a means of gathering information. Regarding this matter, Danielle Abramson, an AmeriCorps participant, stated that “Because the whole point of social media is audience participation, you don’t have control over what the audience is saying” (Driscoll, 2009, p. 22). The opportunity and ability to connect with others while engaging them on a different level are also some of emerging media tools’ largest drawbacks. The inability to monitor what others say on the Internet about you or your organization constantly makes the Internet a dangerous tool. We now live in an age where people use sites like Wikipedia to get what they believe to be fact, when that is not always the case. Although most people understand that what they see posted on the Internet is not always true, there is still a large group out there that has yet to understand this and it is possible that these

people may fall into the generation gap. Therefore, nonprofit practitioners must be wary of this and be certain to take this into account in their marketing communications plans.

Miller's (2011) final discovery related to barriers to using Internet communication tools is in the ability or inability for communication tools to give someone "the personal touch." This is to say that Internet cannot replace a communication tool as valuable as one-to-one interaction, although according to Qualls (2009), social media is the middle ground between traditional media like direct mailings and face-to-face communication. As the research compiled earlier spoke of the importance of maintaining donor relations, the use of face-to-face communication should not be lost. Although the Internet can be a wonderful tool in many different ways, face-to-face meetings with donors to tell them how much you appreciate their donations and what they have done for your cause is priceless, and it is advisable that every organization remember this as the Internet becomes more prevalent in the coming years. Miller added that "bequests, corporate giving, and endowments will require more than sending out an email that asks if the donor is interested in giving a large donation... longer-term, larger donations always take more effort and relationship building" (Miller, 2011, p. 33). This can certainly be done by using face-to-face relationship building and maintenance to supplement other forms of communication.

Although Miller (2011) argued that Internet-based communication tools cannot possibly replace or provide the personal touch that methods such as one-on-one communication provide, it can also be argued that there is a way to maintain that sense of humanity or personality so that Internet tools are just as effective a method. According to Kanter, Fine, and Zuckerberg (2010), the shift of corporate communication methods from

traditional to more modern opens the possibility that “allows organizations to engage by being human through the computer” (Kanter, Fine, & Zuckerberg, 2010, p. 62). Their reasoning for this is the ability of Internet communication tools to allow a more conversational tone which is, in effect, a more human-like quality that not only fosters two-way communication but is also easier to relate to and less formal than messages that present themselves through traditional media channels. According to Kanter et al., blogs or other social media outlets “encourage a colloquial tone” and “are becoming increasingly prevalent methods of communication” (p. 19). This “humanness” described by Kanter et al. is seen as a personalization that ultimately factors into generating increased support. Finally, the engagement of organizations with their donors or major publics fosters a sense of reciprocity and connectedness between donors and their causes (Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009).

Although this research has explored a variety of potentially negative effects that the utilization of new media via the Internet could have on nonprofit organizations, it is also important to examine the potential benefits that could result. Most of the tools like YouTube or social media websites are free or priced at little to nothing to use, which is particularly important for a nonprofit that is already struggling for a donor’s attention and funds in this environment of increased competition. Additionally, something that sets new or emerging media channels apart from traditional media is that Internet communication tools can provide an organization with immediate feedback from its public. According to researchers Wenham, Stephens, and Hardy (2003), this is a quality that allows for fluid communication from organization to donor and vice versa. This is discussed in detail with the research on the resulting benefit of transparency for donors.

In addition to having access to tools that provide measurable results, whether they come in the form of followers on Twitter, fans on Facebook, or the categorization of positive or negative comments posted by users, Greenberg and MacAulay (2009) identified another important benefit in connecting to the target public by using new media. They call this the “currency of trust.” Their research and discussion explained that nonprofits operate under what they believe to be this currency of trust, meaning that their worth is determined by the impact and trustworthiness of their mission. Alternatively, the nonprofit’s worth, in a current or potential donor’s eyes, exists within its ability to be accountable. Greenberg and MacAulay also concluded that it is important for nonprofits to make a shift from selective message dissemination to open conversation, which Internet tools permit. This shift can be seen as a shift to transparency, another critical variable for nonprofits that can be achieved via new media methods.

One of the positive results of a nonprofit utilizing Internet communication tools in its marketing plan is transparency. According to Kanter et al. (2010), transparency within a nonprofit organization is “the most ethical form of public relations” (p. 23). They state that there are three levels of transparency that are observable and measurable. The first level is the fortress level, where strong walls are built, creating a blunt distinction between internal and external publics of the organization. The second level, transactional, is a somewhat less rigid organizational structure; however, organizations base their decisions on how much benefit would be received and at what cost. Transparents, the level most beneficial to developing and maintaining donor relations, are organizations that operate without a wall separating their internal and external publics. They function “like sponges; anchored with clear goals, yet easily allow information to

flow in and out” (Kanter et al., 2010, p. 27). This level of transparency results in a “learning loop,” which ultimately allows dialogic communication between a nonprofit and its audience. In short, transparency is beneficial for a nonprofit organization not only in the opportunity it allows for engagement, but also in creating and maintaining donor trust. As stated earlier, research suggests that donors care about being heard and therefore the utilization of communication tools via the Internet makes such a desire possible, which is critical for relationship-building and relationship maintenance.

## **Chapter 4: Crisis Management**

Crisis Management is an important part to the overall idea of effective branding and building the reputation aspect of brand value. The following section includes literature on the importance of having a crisis management team in place, similar to the importance of having public relations or marketing communications plans in place for organizations. Also, this section includes the reasons or excuses why many nonprofit organizations have a lack of crisis management plans or teams in place. Additionally, different types of crises are discussed and categorized as well as types of responses. Finally, a case study from the American Red Cross regarding internal crisis communications provides a real-world example of how a nonprofit organization chose to handle a crisis.

### **Importance of Crisis Management**

After tackling conflicts and barriers to entry between the nonprofit sector and its audience, it is important also to examine the other side of nonprofit management: the need to work backwards after a crisis occurs in order to rebuild positive consumer support that may have already been established. In this case, the brand has likely presented itself to society in the way it was meant to be framed and perceived, but now the organization must use the correct techniques to repair its misdeeds before it can continue moving forward. The reputation of a nonprofit especially is a major factor in generating public support and the way in which crises are handled is a true testament to a nonprofit's credibility.

Now that the importance of the reputation of a nonprofit has been identified, it is clear why the handling of a crisis is integral to shaping or repairing the brand and public perception. As Sarstedt and Schloderer (2010) concluded, reputation should be considered the most important intangible asset. That being said, why are crisis management teams important for a nonprofit's reputation? The public's perception and support of a nonprofit and of nonprofits in general can be determined by how a crisis situation is dealt with. The crisis can define the organization unless handled appropriately and so in order to keep the credibility of the brand, a nonprofit must protect itself against any backlash that would result from a crisis. Fussell Sisco, Collins, and Zoch (2009) posited that the situational crisis communication theory can help further understanding of the proven importance of effective crisis management. The theory states that certain public relations crisis situations are resolved efficiently and effectively if organizations adopt specific crisis response strategies (Fussell Sisco, Collins, & Zoch, 2009). Therefore, since crisis management is so vital, what are the existing barriers that keep so many organizations from having a team in place?

### **Excuses for a Lack of Crisis Management**

According to Spillan (2003), many nonprofits believe that crisis management teams are too costly and/or that there is not enough manpower to have one in place. Many times organizations will wait until a crisis actually occurs to respond to it instead of preparing for it before and being able to manage the time for reparation more efficiently (Spillan, 2003). Additionally, Spillan found that many nonprofits typically assume that a crisis will not happen to them, but could happen to any other nonprofits. Maintaining this naïve mentality is risky for a nonprofit, because lack of preparation

could lead to a hectic, undeveloped, or inappropriate response. Spillan also found that many nonprofits defend their lack of a crisis management plan by using the Insurance Argument. This argument states that if a crisis were to happen, their insurance would be able to care of it anyway (Spillan, 2003). However, this would only aid in any financial loss incurred, but would not take into account public relations and social responsibility results, which could be even more detrimental and time-consuming than lost funds (Spillan, 2003).

### **Types of Crises**

In developing notes on the nonprofit sector, Professor Allen Grossman and Research Associate Naomi Greckol-Herlich (2009) discussed responding to two types of failure in this sector that can lead to crisis and the need for crisis management. They stated that market failure is when markets do not allocate resources efficiently for a variety of reasons, and further, it is the market's inability in itself to generate public good (Grossman & Greckol-Herlich, 2009). The second type of failure they discussed is a contract failure. This is when "the beneficiary of goods or services is someone different from the person or organization paying for them" (Grossman & Greckol-Herlich, 2009, p. 38). These two different components of failure within an organization to meet public need and create public good for its citizens can be further understood by separating specific types of crises into clusters.

In order to make crisis management easier to understand, Fussell et al. (2009) decided to put the types of failure into separate crisis clusters and separate the types of responses that would be appropriate. They stated that there are three main types of crises: the victim, the accident, and the preventable (Fussell et al., 2009). The victim cluster



leaves the nonprofit with the least amount of organizational responsibility. It is when a crisis occurs that could not have been prevented given that it was out of the organization's control (Fussell Sisco et al., 2009). These could be rumors, natural disasters, etc. The second type of crisis is the accident crisis, which is of moderate impact and could include major damage or technical breakdowns (Fussell Sisco et al., 2009). The preventable crisis is the most damaging and could include intentional human error and organizational misdeeds (Fussell Sisco et al., 2009). This type of crisis usually attracts the most media attention.

### **Types of Responses**

Fussell Sisco et al. (2009) also categorized the types of responses that a non-profit may use in a crisis situation. These responses are to deny, to diminish, or to rebuild. The deny response essentially involves denying a claim that has presented the organization in a bad light. The diminish response is to reduce the negative effect generated by the crisis. Finally, rebuilding is the most intensive response in that the organization publically acknowledges the wrongdoing and takes full responsibility. Then, the rebuilding process begins, where the organization must move forward in using all of its resources to repair the brand image of the organization.

### **Appropriate Response for the Crisis**

According to the categories laid out by these researchers, Fussell Sisco et al. (2009) believe there are appropriate ways to respond to each type of crisis. In a victim situation they believe the best strategy to use would be to deny the claim, especially if it is false (i.e., a rumor). If an accident crisis occurs, this research suggests that the best type of response to use would be the diminish strategy. Finally, if a preventable crisis

occurs, which places the maximum responsibility on the organization, the rebuild strategy would be most appropriate in order to win back public support.

### **Case Study: American Red Cross**

In order to understand how these types of responses go along with the specific type of crisis a non-profit is facing, it is important to go through some real-life examples. Fussell Sisco et al. (2009) use the categories to compare and evaluate the American Red Cross crisis response strategy. The American Red Cross has faced significant backlash in recent years regarding evidence of misdeeds that have come to light in the media. For example, the Red Cross was caught embezzling millions of federal grant funds and in turn was ridiculed by the media both for its lack of control over the situation and for allowing local chapters so much financial control over public donations. Another crisis occurred after 9/11 when it withheld more than half of the \$543 million in donations collected to help survivors and the families of those killed in the aftermath. The response given by the organization came from its CEO, who stated, “If there was a failure in the wake of September 11th, it was in the Red Cross’s inability to turn the perspective of the media around” (Fussell Sisco et al., 2009).

### **Evaluation of American Red Cross Response**

Fussell Sisco et al. (2009) evaluated this response to these crises by concluding that the Red Cross overused the diminish strategy, even though the crisis was a preventable one, and it should have responded by rebuilding. Their reasoning for the organization’s inappropriate response was that perhaps it had a need for a quick solution to the intense media attention being focused on the organization. It chose the most natural reaction, which was to select a strategy that downplayed the severity of the crisis

in order to try and calm the public (Fussell Sisco et al., 2009). Although this was the safest and easiest approach, the Red Cross's response was certainly inappropriate for the type of crisis with which it was dealing. The CEO's response came off as harsh and immature and placed the wrong type of blame on the organization.

## **Chapter 5: Recommendations/Suggestions for Nonprofit Practitioners**

After reviewing the literature on targeting donors, there are several suggestions for nonprofit practitioners to consider for building and maintaining a relationship between the donor and the brand. My first recommendation is that nonprofits make sure to have a plan both in their strategies for targeting donors and in crisis management planning. This planning is essential for nonprofits wishing to target donors effectively as well as for the outlining of how to respond to potential crises.

Citing relevant literature, I argue that nonprofits targeting donors should absolutely utilize Internet communication tools as a part of their marketing plans. However, in agreement with Miller's (2011) conclusions, the usage of emerging media tools should supplement current practices rather than replacing them completely. Maintaining a sense of continuity rather than implementing radical change in practice could help ease the anxieties or fears that act as barriers to successful communication with donors. Although new media tools like social networking websites are great in that they are cost effective and allow for immediate and measurable communication or feedback, nonprofit professionals should also be careful that they know how and why their organization specifically could benefit. It is important that nonprofit practitioners recognize both the shortcomings and the usefulness of incorporating Internet tools for communication. Furthermore, professionals must be realistic about what they can offer, not rely solely on such tools and abandon other traditional methods, and use caution overall in how they shape their marketing plans to fit their goals. Also, it is important

that nonprofits be realistic about what they can achieve in terms of manpower and budget, depending on whether they are small or large organizations.

Another suggestion has to do with a realization nonprofits should keep in mind when adopting new media communication tools. I am in agreement with Miller in his suggestion that it is important to remain aware that Internet communication tools such as social media sites are merely a means to an end. Creating a facebook page should not be a goal but rather be a part of the planning process to reaching the end goal, which in this case would be effectively targeting donors. This brings attention to my first and one of my main suggestions that nonprofits have a system of planning in place. Only with planning would nonprofits be able to take the time to consider each of their steps and maintain a sense of awareness on which, how, and why utilizing certain tools may be appropriate or not to reaching such goals. In other words, nonprofits should not involve new media tactics if there is the possibility they could lose sight of what they are really trying to accomplish in the long run.

The other essential part of planning is in the preparation and appropriate response given on behalf of the organization. I argue that the research and conclusions made by Fussell et. al provides an accurate categorization of types of crises, types of responses, and connecting each type effectively. If nonprofits were to have crisis management—a very particular and sensitive part of communications—in place, then nonprofits could avoid responding to a crisis either too little, too much, or inappropriately in that it does not fit with the type of crisis they are dealing with. Just as communication planning in targeting donors is essential, crisis planning is critical to organizational success as well.

In reaching out to the donor, one of my recommendations would be that the organization find a way to communicate the intangible rewards that the donor would be receiving if he or she gave or continued to give funds to the cause. Since those rewards are not similar to the tangible rewards a donor would receive as a result of giving a company his or her money, it is essential that a nonprofit work on message framing and communication methods. This goes hand in hand with the issue of reciprocity and also along with the recommendation that nonprofits make sure this particular type of communication is timed correctly and at the right frequency depending on the donor's preferences.

Another issue in understanding the target market of donors is that nonprofits must acknowledge that donor giving has to do with personal values, which may involve appeals to the ego as discussed earlier. Donor involvement or giving also has to do with an understanding of the demographics of the donor, and in particular, the age. A donor's age could shape what channels of communication are used, whether primarily through the Internet or a mix of emerging and traditional media.

In relation to building and maintaining successful donor relationships, nonprofits must make sure to provide adequate feedback to their donors on how their gifts were used and communicate that the nonprofit is not wasting money and especially not wasting their money. This accountability factor on behalf of the nonprofit must be communicated effectively in order to build trust and commitment with the target market.

Additionally, nonprofit practitioners should appeal to the egos of donors rather than focusing on any altruistic framing of rewards. The rewards, although not necessarily spoken, have to do with the intangible benefits of giving and connect to an understanding

of who the donor is or wishes to be seen as, as reflected by the ego-based theories like Social Exchange Theory and Impression Management Theory. This framing or method of message communication must also match up with the personalities of donors. The donor should be able to see his or her own personality traits reflected in the organization itself and how it chooses to brand its message.

### **Limitations and Proposal for Future Research**

In order address nonprofits' fears or misunderstandings of the importance of crisis management teams or planning, more should be done to quantify the non-financial damage that would incur as a result of not having a team or plan. The major factors of trust, commitment, support, public relations, and marketing tactics in general that were used in order to develop a successful brand are both intangible and tangible. Therefore, in order truly to understand the cost of crisis management as well as the return on investment, this must be done both in a quantifiable and qualitative manner.

If that research were completed and used to find a way to prove that the cost of having a team is worth the outcome of dealing with a crisis well, it is possible that many nonprofits could be more inclined to have crisis planning in place. Additionally, to be able to demonstrate that having a team is worth any backlash from the media and would reduce the cost of needing to rebuild the entire brand would be monumental for nonprofit practitioners.

Another limitation of this research is that little has been done to discover a way of measuring how a nonprofit should assess the detrimental effects of crises so that its response is not too little too late and it does not force the nonprofit to shut down

operations completely. It would be interesting to learn from organizations that give up and close down whether or not there is hope for them to rebuild.

Another limitation or element of confusion in the research concerns the barriers that exist within the nonprofit sector's organizational practices. As discussed earlier, many nonprofits believe that they must limit themselves in their communication to the public by the use of certain funds and allocating such funds to an area such as advertising. However, this is contradictory in that without a communications strategy in place, perhaps due to fears of public perceptions of negatively handling funds, many fears from donors could not be addressed in the first place.

An area of interest that could certainly use more research is in the emerging media literature. Unfortunately, to get literature published can take quite a long time and therefore the material could already be considered outdated, since emerging media technologies that focus on Internet-based communication tools are rapidly changing. It is important to continue to research new media because although 89% of nonprofits are reported to have used it in one way or another, it is also a concern that the best way to use it best may not yet have been discovered. This is particularly important since, as the previous literature has discussed, there are many internal and external factors or barriers that come into play when adopting new media uses by nonprofits to reach donors effectively. Further research will be required in the future when certain sites gain more popularity and overall as technology progresses.

There is much work to be done in the nonprofit sector both in terms of research, planning, and utilization of new media. With the ways people communicate changing every day, it is important that nonprofits do not fall behind in the existing competitive



environment. Rather, they should remain aware, realistic, and knowledgeable about the importance of effective branding, their ability to understand donors and target them efficiently, and why planning is so important to make it all happen.

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