

Fundraising *IS* Communications



The fundraising world is changing,
but if you ask me, not fast enough.

In the era of integrated marketing and donor-centric communications, how is it possible we are still dealing with silo-driven revenue crushers like these:

- Letting marketing directors send out newsletters that address our major donors as “Dear Friend.”
- Hiring branding companies to reframe organizational messaging and NOT inviting input from the fundraisers who bring in the majority of the organization's revenue.
- Waiting a week to get our “emergency” fundraising emails sent during a crisis because, “It’s not on the ‘Master Schedule.’”
- Or, how about explaining to the editor from the communications team that we understand our letter is repetitive; it’s supposed to be!

As a fundraising communications consulting firm, we interface with our clients at this intersection every day. On some days, I

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feel very weary of bumping my head up against those same silo walls. But there are signs of hope.

Forward-thinking organizations are increasingly adding a "development communications" staff position to their fundraising teams. This person is not a novelist; she is a creative, results-oriented marketing professional.

Planned Giving communications are also getting a fresh new makeover. By using direct marketing best practices such as modeling, personalization, and targeted messaging by segment, we're helping our clients realize response rates of eight to 10 percent and generating high quality leads on planned giving mailings.

And, we are seeing some shining examples of collaboration across silos. We recently developed a fundraising case for support for the Nuclear Threat Initiative. By actively engaging both the communications and development teams, we were able to shape a compelling, future-focused case for support.

In another bright spot, the marketing team at Trout Unlimited reached across silo walls to engage our firm. They turned to the organization's fundraising consultants, rather than a traditional branding firm, when they needed brand architecture, positioning, and key messages for their high dollar giving societies. The marketing team understood that this project belonged in the hands of a fundraising-minded creative team.

We've also been called on to train staff across all departments on how to find and share powerful stories that deliver more than just the facts. We love helping people dig for the

storytelling gold that exists within their organizations.

These examples inspire me to keep tearing down silos—for the greater good of our client organizations and the world. I hope they inspire you as well. But inspiration alone won't transform your fundraising communications. So here are **three simple steps** you can take today to improve your organization's fundraising messaging.

1. Manage up.

Have a conversation with your boss or chief executive about what makes fundraising communications different. Explain that while the communications team is focused on reporting past successes, fundraising must be FUTURE-focused. Share articles like this one, and suggest regular meetings between departments to share stories and content updates.

2. Be generous.

Talk to your colleagues on the other side of those silo walls, and learn about their needs. Ask how you can help them achieve their goals and tell them about yours.

3. Find your common stories.

You know you need them – those stories that make your donors feel warm and fuzzy about supporting your organization. The communications team needs them too. Consider creating a cross-departmental story team focused on identifying stories, conducting interviews and beginning to create a central story bank for the organization.

Most of all – keep the faith! Collaboration in messaging is a win-win. It helps raise the organization's profile and raise more money. We know you can do it too!

Be bold. After all, if your organization survives almost entirely on the funds you raise, shouldn't your brand be a fundraising brand? And shouldn't *all* your communications reflect your fundraising case for support?

We're proud to be working with our clients to bring marketing, communications, membership, and development teams together. Because, when we all get along, we can change the world even faster.

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