



Strategic Communications for Nonprofits
A Step-by-Step Guide to Working with the Media
Second Edition

Chapters Online
Producing Effective Graphics and Materials

Part of the Jossey-Bass Nonprofit Guidebook Series

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Producing Effective Graphics and Materials

- Combine professional help with in-house graphics.
- Use cost-saving strategies.
- Develop a standard press kit.
- Create “evergreen” materials.
- Package speeches and clips.

In the early days of computers, predictions about a “paperless” office and society were commonplace. But while it’s true that the amount of digital memory in use has skyrocketed, the use of paper still continues to increase. Whether it is in the form of regular mail, printed emails, press kits, brochures, reports or news releases, printed matter still is part of the overall outreach strategy of effective nonprofits. You should have electronic versions of key publications for emailing or posting on your Web site and plan to design publications for printing on paper and on-line.

Many of the basic principles of graphic design apply to print and web, but there are guidelines for print that don’t apply to the Web. And as long as people have a paper mailbox, the look and feel of printed matter can still speak volumes about your organization.

Communicating electronically does entail some special considerations, including the choice of format for your documents. For example, common formats for Web posting and e-mailing are HTML and PDF. Be careful which you choose, and where possible, offer both options.

Why offer both? For one, when you are communicating with journalists, HTML is almost always preferable, for the simple reason that it is far easier to cut and paste from HTML. The exceptional cases where a PDF might be better include situations where the layout of the pages is paramount. So if you are posting or e-mailing a document that is meant to be printed, with specific elements meant to appear on specific pages and an audience limited to non-journalists, a PDF might be okay. For instance, if you have prepared an elaborate newsletter with strong graphic elements for your members or your funders, you might choose PDF. But if you think that same newsletter would be of interest to a reporter, prepare an HTML version for them, or skip the PDF altogether.

Also, note that for some users, PDF's can take along time to download. This might include audiences in developing nations with slower Internet access. Conversely, some of your more technologically advanced audiences might rely on "Web feed" services like RSS (Real Simple Syndication), which are used in connection with blogs and other regularly updated content like podcasts. RSS eliminates the need for a user to browse to a Web site every time to get new content, hence the "feed" aspect. And RSS feeds don't pick up PDFs.

Finally, as noted in the chapter on earning good media coverage and elsewhere, it's better to e-mail a journalist a hyperlink to your carefully laid-out documents and Web pages than to use any kind of attachment, ever.

CHOOSING A LOOK

Generally speaking, an arts organization would want Web graphics and printed materials that reflect a well-developed aesthetic sense. A group fighting childhood disease would want to offer a hopeful, colorful appearance, although not humorous or flippant. Certain colors and causes have also become associated. All these principles apply to Web and printed graphics equally, but there are print-only rules that reflect the differences between print and in the internet. Web sites don't concern themselves with paper stock, or the size of the printed object. But the return address on your envelope, the look of your logo, and the layout of your press release all send signals about your organization. A confusing, slipshod press release on plain typing paper can give the impression that the source is fly-by-night and unreliable. On the other hand, high-gloss, four-color materials that look too expensive can also send the wrong messages.

For example, an environmental group distributing kits that cannot be recycled invites criticism. The press kit that comes from an antipoverty group should not look like one prepared for a major corporation. Generally speaking, printed materials prepared for nonprofits and public agencies should be well designed but not glossy.

GRAPHICS

You can get just the "look" you want by combining desktop publishing and some professional advice.

Using the Design Studio and Print Shop on Your Desk

As in so many other fields, computers have brought about remarkable changes in graphic design and publishing. Decades ago, the process was

based on photographic technology. Today, digital desktop publishing is the standard.

As processing speeds have increased, so has the ability to create, edit, and display images of all kinds. Desktop publishing packages offer a range of templates and computerized “coaches” or “wizards” that can take even a beginner step-by-step through the process of laying out a flyer, newsletter, brochure, report, or other document.

Recently, the availability of moderately priced scanners and digital cameras has taken PC users to even greater heights in designing and assembling sophisticated documents. All the equipment fits on an average desktop. With optical character recognition (scanning) software, it is possible to transform hard copies of existing documents into digital files for editing or redesign. The World Wide Web has opened a vast range of possibilities for small publishers. Today’s computer software packages anticipate the need for publishing on the World Wide Web by integrating print, on-screen, and overhead presentations.

Making Decisions Before Contacting a Graphic Designer

At some point in this process, you will probably want to involve a professional graphic designer. Many talented young designers may have been trained in the technical aspects of print production, but might have done relatively little of it compared to their work on sites. Be sure to ask for samples of both print and internet design if yours is like most organizations that rely on both print material and the internet to reach your various audiences.

Also, be ready to discuss ownership issues with top-notch designers, especially in big cities. Some of the best will provide a basic design for a set fee, but charge more if you intend to revise their work in future publications and postings. And the cost differential can be 30 percent or more.

Before you schedule any time interviewing potential designers, give serious thought to the following issues:

- Know your audiences. If your funders include large numbers of academics and other professionals, you may want a greater emphasis on text than if you’re trying to reach the general public. And remember that some fonts are easier on older eyes – “cutting edge” typography doesn’t cut it if your best supporters cannot read your text.

- Know the tone you want to convey. Should it be dignified and traditional, jazzy and hip, or streamlined, modern, and informal? Clip out or save materials you like and show them to your designer.
- Have a sense of appropriate colors. Putting orange with black works for Halloween and not much else. Pastels convey a softer feeling. Some blues are tranquil; others are electric.
- Develop a time line. Plan to have the process take at least three to six weeks from start to finish. Last-minute rush jobs cost more money and usually do not work as well as designs created in a calmer atmosphere.
- Have a reasonable budget. Determine well in advance if you have several hundred or several thousand dollars to spend. Do not be penny-wise and pound-foolish. If you have a limited budget, think about asking a top-quality designer to consider working pro bono, for a nonprofit rate or at a lower rate than for big corporations. If you have no budget, then rely on the templates in your word processing program.

Here are some less expensive graphic design options:

- Designers or advertising professionals who are members of your organization.
- Local advertising agencies that will take on your account as a public service.
- Local colleges with art departments. College seniors or graduate students may be looking for projects with which to build their portfolios before leaving school.
- Your professional printer. Some printers have in-house designers and provide graphic services as a part of a package deal.

Starting with the Basics

For starters, you will need graphics artwork for general stationery and news releases. This might mean a logo redesign and new color schemes.

Without a consistent look for all graphical applications, it's easy to wind up with a hodge-podge of publications, letterheads, and designs. If this is the case in your organization, collect all written materials from across your

various departments and divisions. Spread them across the table at the next meeting of your media team and try to reach a consensus on a consistent “look” for your organization. It should be recognizable in printed matter from across the room, and carry through onto every page your site. The cover of *Time*, for instance, is instantly recognizable for its distinctive red border, a design element that is echoed throughout Time.com.

With consistency in mind, ask your graphic designer to do several rough design layouts, or review the appropriate templates from your software before selecting a final version. The design might include large text that says “News About ...,” or you might place a typeset “News Release” across the top of your standard stationery. Use the same design for envelopes, stationery, and press kit folders. Spend extra time designing envelopes or mailing labels, using as much care as you would in direct mail appeals for fundraising.

Depending on your budget, other useful graphic elements could include the following:

- Your logo or group name blown up and mounted on foam board for use on the front of the lectern during press conferences or televised meetings.
- Digital files of your logo, for TV, as a background on talk shows, news segments, or public affairs programs. JPEG’s are a basic format that is adaptable for most applications. Be sure your logo is also available in a high-resolution format to prevent it from getting fuzzy when enlarged. That can make even the most professional logo seem like an amateur job. You should also consider having different versions of the logo available, for example, some that include your group’s tag line or motto, and some that do not; different layouts that can be used to fit a wide horizontal space, a vertical space, or a small space depending on how and where it is being used.
- Charts or graphs on major aspects of your main themes, principles, or points, sized to fit on easels for use during press briefings or conferences. Make sure the print is large enough to be readable from all corners of the room. Keep copy to a minimum. Reduce the graphs and make copies of them for insertion into press kits.
- You should have a digital folder of good quality head shots and other photos of your officers and key staff. Many groups now include pictures along with staff bios on their sites to help visitors feel they

know your group better, but individuals who prefer not have their pictures posted should be permitted to opt out.

Designing Printed Graphics: Tips

Think about the reader or viewer who is encountering your organization for the first time. What do your logo and printed materials say to that person, both visually and verbally? What will a reporter see upon opening your envelope or visiting your site for the first time? If you have close friends or relatives who are reporters, ask for their advice on what grabs their attention. They might be willing to show you graphics that they like so that you can see your competition firsthand.

Stay away from complex graphics that may be aesthetically pleasing to experts but incomprehensible to outsiders.

Do not use color for its own sake, and be sure to think about what a color graphic will look like if it is printed out. Think about using cross-hatching or other elements to distinguish data points, rather than using color alone. And don't forget that white space is as important as text

Nonprofits relying on volunteer support will need strong printed materials that can be handled and copied over and over again. Before deciding on a design, make four or five generations of your stationery to be sure the words are still legible.

Designing TV Graphics: Tips

When having charts designed for TV, try to use an artist with experience in broadcasting. High-gloss paper can cause serious problems; the camera can pick up glare. Also, certain designs will cause a rainbow "rippling" on TV. Some colors don't work as well as others. You may want to ask artists working at local TV stations whether they do freelance work for outside groups.

Make it a regular habit to prepare and update digital files and video presentations of "evergreen" data (those with a long shelf life) for possible use by TV talk shows or in local news features. Just having that kind of information may make them more interested in your work. Beware of including too much information in any graphic, especially in presentation materials. Keep graphics as simple as possible, and do not put more than one chart on a page or slide.

When designing visuals for backdrops, remember that in 2008 and following, TV broadcasters and cable outlets will move to high definition signals. Big screen TVs typically will have an aspect ratio of 16:9. For visuals at a news conference, this change suggests that a board measuring 48 inches wide and 27 inches high (or other multiples of 16 and 9) will not only be readable from across the room but also fit onto the screen of most viewers.

WRITTEN MATERIALS

Although most organizations increasingly rely on e-mail to transmit information, you will still need certain basic printed materials for the media to use. Physically mailing a catchy postcard or succinct threefold brochure may be a good way to introduce yourself to reporters and editors who might not pay attention to an e-mail from an unknown organization.

News Advisories, Press Releases, and Tip Sheets: Simpler Is Better

In today's busy newsroom, time is of the essence. Reporters do not have enough of it to read lengthy news releases or to plow through long reports. Keep your release as simple and straightforward as possible. You have less than ten seconds in which to capture their attention, so it is critical that your releases be well written and include a summary box, a picture with caption or a compelling pull quote to make your key points right up front.

Your written release may take one of several basic forms.

- A *media advisory* is a specialized kind of release that offers only bare bones information: the who, what, where, when, and why of an event or news conference. At the top, list the contact person's name, e-mail address, office phone number, and cell phone. For the date, put either "Use through ..." or "Good until ..." so reporters know when to toss it in the wastebasket. You might include a single sentence explaining the event, but don't confuse an advisory with a full-blown release.
- A *press release* is generally two to four pages, or 500 to 1,000 words. It is double-spaced and includes a headline and subhead. It should grab your reader's attention and entice him or her to do a story. Write it so that smaller media, such as weekly papers or local radio stations, can print or air the information as a ready-made story, making only minor changes.
- A *media tip sheet* can give reporters story ideas several weeks in advance of a release or event and can suggest local contacts and ideas for national stories. A "tip" sheet is just that—it shares a helpful hint or

useful information in a sentence or two. Send along several tips in each release.

Standard Press Kits

Any media outreach effort must have a compelling and media-friendly press kit. The kit's purpose is to provide basic information that will invite stories or at least further inquiries. A well-done kit signals a level of seriousness that reporters understand immediately. It should be simple, clear, and not too showy, drawing attention to your main messages and themes. It should offer only basic background data, not every available bit of information. The idea is to create interest, not to exhaust it.

A good kit, for example, can be the foundation for an invitation to an on-the-record media briefing, even without an immediate prospect for a news story. The kit can be a quick way to introduce your group to anybody; after distributing it, call and ask to follow up with a one-on-one briefing.

The press kit is built on a standard set of materials—pieces that can be used no matter what the story may be at any time. Print these up in large quantities. The same material, with different cover letters, can be used as information packets for prospective funders, board members, and new employees.

Headlines, subheads, and boxes are road signs that steer a reader through your document. Journalists skim by reading subheads, so make sure your major points are boldfaced or boxed to make them stand out. Keep them short and simple, and let them help present your narrative in a logical way.

Evergreen materials should include a brochure—a foldable single-sheet or longer pamphlet that will fit in a standard #10 business envelope. The brochure can be glossier and more colorful than the rest of your material. This may be your most useful publication, so spend the time and money to make a good one that will still be inexpensive enough to distribute generously. This can be used for reporters, funders, members, and policymakers.

Also include separate sheets that cover the following items:

Statement of purpose: your group's mission statement, goals, or reason for existence. Outline the problem you are addressing, explaining why it is important and what you hope to do about it.

The background of your organization: its history, size, sources of funding and such operational information as chapter locations, activities, and membership demographics. This should be concise enough to fit on one sheet of paper if you use subheads, bullets, and short paragraphs instead of long, expository passages.

One-page profiles of your spokespeople: sketches that include basic biographical information, such as professional background, education, and some personal information. Offer to supply photographs on request.

Issue briefs: one-page background and “factoid” sheets on aspects of your issues. These could include a chronology, a glossary of terms, opinion poll data, state-by-state summaries on your issue, press contacts, and academic contacts. Give only a few briefs, putting one on each page and making it punchy in style. Where possible, reduce statistical information to charts and graphs. Again, use bullets and subheads.

Contact list: names of your principals and experts, inside and outside your organization, who can provide further information on your issues. Include a line or two about each expert’s background or specialty, as well as full contact information, including office and home phones and e-mail addresses. Consider diversity of culture, ethnicity, geography, and so on in choosing names to list.

Additional resources or bibliography: a list of related books, articles, and other published or taped material available from your organization or elsewhere. Be sure to list any relevant Web sites, Internet mailing lists, or online discussion groups.

Press clips: three or four favorable newspaper or magazine articles that feature or mention your group, or editorials or cartoons that present your issue as you see it.

Optional items: your annual report, a copy of your latest newsletter or other publication, endorsements or letters of praise from notables, or the texts of outstanding speeches. You might just list these items as available on request from your office.

As Joanne Omang, a former *Washington Post* reporter, tells nonprofit groups in training sessions, “The idea is to give enough information to allow intelligent questions, not to explore the debate completely. You may want to raise your opponents’ best arguments and demolish them, so those journalists will then see those arguments as old news. Remember that it is

the reporters' job to write the story. A good press kit will supply all of the facts and still let them do their job."

Do not forget to provide general background information about your program's beneficiaries and success stories or about the plight of people who have not yet been reached. You might include anecdotes, with names, places, ages, and individual histories full of drama. Nothing brings an issue home like a human face, especially to journalists. If you can offer pictures, film, tapes, or interviews with the people featured, be sure to note that in the press kit. Be certain you have the individuals' permission to tell their stories.

Use your basic press kit with cover letters or with dated press releases and additional documents for special events, such as news conferences or fundraising galas. And take it along when you are scheduled to do a major interview or appear on TV. Press kits are also good tools with which to promote your strategic communications efforts to large donors and foundation executives.

A Note on Newspaper Clips

Aside from their many other uses, newspaper clips can be an effective addition to any printed package of materials. They can also be a big draw on a site, especially if a blogger decides to refer to a clip about you by linking to your site.

Scan articles that appear in the newspapers. You may need to do a little physical cutting and pasting to come up with a pleasing layout that is easy to follow. Include the date, the publication name, and the page number where the story appeared. It can't hurt to keep a few copies of recent clips in paper folder for ready access.

Whatever storage system you develop, keep it simple. Unless clips are under control, they can pile up to unmanageable levels. And be sure to obtain reprint permission from publishers before sending out large numbers of copies to the media or prospective donors, or you can be sued. Alternatively, you can send an e-mail with the link to the article, since most publications don't object to information sharing that drives traffic to their own sites.

Distribution of Special Speeches

If your executive director, board chair, or other senior staff member makes a particularly good speech about your organization's issue, try packaging it for wider distribution. You may want to make an audiotape and have the

speech transcribed, edited, and typeset into a brochure format that fits into a standard no. 10 business envelope (4 1/8 by 9 1/2 inches). Mail it out to your press list, funders, board members, and others. Slip it into your standard press kit of materials for dissemination, but realize that its usefulness is limited after a few months.

Many cities have lunchtime events, such as the prestigious City Club Forum in Cleveland, which is carried on NPR and which often makes newspaper headlines through national wire service coverage. The same is true of testimony before a state legislature or Congress and speeches made at the Detroit Economic Club, the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco, Harvard's Kennedy School of Government in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism in New York City, and the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. Try to book your principals or spokespeople at these or similar forums, such as local business or professional clubs, and then repackage the speech for wider distribution in a brochure or op-ed.

Convention Press Packets

For major conferences, include a conference schedule; a map of the city or immediate area, noting the building location; a floor plan of the meeting site with the main-event hall and press area well marked; and local restaurant and sightseeing information if available. Provide your group's local phone number and staff cell numbers and the hotel or headquarters location where you might have coffee and snacks available. In your cover letter, welcome journalists to the gathering, and invite them to register at your headquarters so you can find each other during the meeting.

Newsletters

Nonprofit groups often jump into the time- and resource-consuming task of putting out a newsletter, just to have one to share with colleagues, funders, and friends. Or worse, groups continue to publish one because the group has always had a newsletter. Keep in mind that in today's world, people have less personal time and are busier than ever. The average person receives dozens of messages each day and innumerable publications at home and at the office. In many places, newsletters just stack up or end up in the trash without being read by your target audience.

Before producing another newsletter, consider alternatives such as a "blast" fax or mass e-mail sent to many recipients simultaneously. When the W. K. Kellogg Foundation launched Families for Kids, an initiative to promote adoption and foster care, they developed for grantees and others a monthly two- to three-page fax called Successes and Challenges instead of a

newsletter. It had a distinctive masthead design and was simple to produce regularly. Each page cost 4 cents, for a total of 8 cents or 12 cents per fax, whereas for a traditional newsletter, the postage alone would have cost 32 cents per recipient, above and beyond the paper, printing, and envelope costs. The information in the fax was also used to update the foundation's Web site.

If you are thinking about launching—or deciding to maintain—a newsletter, ask yourself and others, whom do we want to reach with what information? What will motivate people to take the time to read it? How will it compare with the competition in the quality of writing and production? Is there a better way to communicate with our target audiences? How much upkeep and waste can we anticipate from the start? Who will update the distribution lists? Then total up your direct and indirect costs.

A mailed newsletter or mass e-mail should never be seen as a final objective but rather as another way of packaging and disseminating information. Other outlets for a standard newsletter might include a regular column or blog on your Web site, individual e-mails, and even personal letters for those of the 40+ generations.

Ways to Spread the Word

This idea of having multiple outlets brings us back to the fuller discussion in Chapter Five about developing messages and making sure they are repeated over and over in a number of formats. As before, start with your basic message and reformat it in a number of ways:

- A few words for billboards, print ads, posters, flyers, and booth or Web site banners
- Copy for public service announcements (thirty seconds or a hundred words), flyers, letters to the editor, and background information for very busy people—CEOs and top decision makers, governors and elected officials, editors and publishers
- Several pages of copy—including press releases, executive summaries of reports and articles, brochures, op-eds, newsletters, Web sites, and direct mail—for potential donors, new members, people with limited time, or people who might help your organization by writing a story, sending a check, or volunteering time

- Documents of 30 pages or more—including books, manuals, Web sites, scripts for videos, and annual reports—for people with lots of time or people who have already indicated that they want your information

Writing Skills and Styles

Good writing, editing, and proofreading skills are learned over time. If your staff's skills are deficient, hire a freelance writer or editor or a former reporter to help with some of the heavy lifting. Try to have this person on call during particularly busy times. Send staff members, including secretaries, to writing classes as a part of their on-the-job training.

Here are a few writing, editing, and proofreading tips:

- Use active verbs and shorter sentences. A passive voice is often slow and boring. For example, "That man ought to be stopped!" just does not have the same impact as "Stop that man!"
- Keep professional jargon, technical language, and abstract concepts to a minimum. Stick with common, everyday words that an average high school freshman could understand. Use words of one, two, and three syllables.
- Try to vary the way you start sentences. Avoid beginning with a preposition, to keep it simple. Use white space to your advantage, along with bullets and bold headlines, if appropriate.
- Do not forget the five Ws (Who, What, When, Where, Why) and the H (How).
- When in doubt, consult the stylebook of the Associated Press, the *New York Times*, or another news organization.
- The devil is in the details. Before going to press, do one last proofreading. Double-check all phone numbers, spelling, grammar, dates, facts, titles, and data. You may want to have two people review each document before it goes out the door.