

The Seven Faces of Philanthropy: Custom Messaging for Donors

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Sometimes, nonprofit executives want to throw their hands up in the air in frustration. "We do such good work – why don't more people know who we are?" is a refrain we hear frequently from our clients.

With 26,897 501(c)(3) organizations in Colorado clamoring for attention, it just might be that people are tuning out. Or maybe it's our tendency to try and tell too much at once – to be wordy. Chip Heath, one of the authors of *Made to Stick*, says that's one of the primary reasons messages don't "stick" or resonate with the public.

Too often, nonprofit communication contradicts Heath's notion of "sticky messages." One of the primary credos of keeping a message "sticky" (e.g., a message that will stick in a person's mind) is keeping it simple.

As you ponder messages that might stick, it's also important to consider whom you're attempting to reach. As you ponder this, it's important to understand what Russ Prince and Karen File call the "Seven Faces of Philanthropy" – the seven primary factors which motivate people to give – and to contextualize your story in a way that each will understand.

The Communitarian believes in the importance of community. Prove to the Communitarian that your nonprofit is making your community stronger, is a vital part of the social infrastructure, and he or she will support you. Communitarians tend to support cultural, human service, religious and educational organizations.

The Devout gives for spiritual reasons. Every major world religion embraces giving. For Jewish donors, it's Tzedakah, the Hebrew word for charity, or giving to the poor, an obligation in Judaism. Christianity begins with the gifts of the Magi, the doctrine of redemption and Jesus' words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Buddhists have bodhisattvas, charitable beings that bring compassion and wisdom to all that lives, however long it takes. In Islam, the Prophet Muhammad said, "Never will charity diminish the wealth, rather it augments it." Make a case for the blessings of giving and this donor will hear you.

The Investor is a donor who is simply willing to invest in what he or she perceives is a good idea. Investors don't see their donations primarily as charitable gifts, but are seeking a return on investment. The Investor is also interested in the tax and estate benefits of a gift. Demonstrate to Investors the ROI, what the gift will accomplish, and the best business practices of your organization, to push their "hot buttons."

The Repayer believes the community has been good to him or her, and that donations fulfill a responsibility to "give back." Like Investors, Repayers want to see cost-effectiveness; they also want NPOs to focus on the needs of clients. To partner with this donor, show how your organization's good work also gives back to the community.

The Socialite wants to be perceived as "in," important in the highest social circles, chic, in vogue, and to have fun. He or she loves special events and delights in being made to feel exceptional. Treating Socialites as if they are a part of the inner circle of your organization, while positioning your NPO as one of "the" groups in town, will endear you to the Socialite.

The Altruist is motivated from the inside, from the belief that giving is the right thing to do, a social responsibility. Altruists tend to donate huge amounts of money, but in little pieces spread out over the community. Altruists believe they are "true" philanthropists, not held back by business consideration or personal benefit. While you may not snag major gifts from Altruists, demonstrate your good work and your organization's own altruism to capture their interest.

The Dynast has been raised with a family culture of philanthropy and sees philanthropy as perpetuating his or her family's legacy. With increasing frequency, we are seeing "new money" donors begin to create legacies as well. To reach Dynasts, you will have to show that their gifts will live on and continue to make a difference. Dynasts frequently prefer named gifts, too.

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Getting Started

- Review your donor list and segment it according to the “voice” of philanthropy each represents.
- Next, ask yourself the motivations that would spur additional involvement. Exactly why should Joe Soap and his wife Mary care about your organization?
- Consider whether there are misperceptions or misunderstandings about your organization that you need to correct.

Now you can begin crafting your organization’s key messages, but keep them “sticky”: clear, credible, and making the reader wonder, “what happens next?”

- Begin to contextualize these messages for each donor type.
- Make sure that your entire leadership team, including upper management, fundraising and public relations, are on the “same page” with key messages.
- Reinforce your messages in all communications – external and internal.
- Finally, look for ways you may be unintentionally subverting your image. One of our clients had one of those “ahh!” moments recently after we shared some initial findings from a campaign planning study. One of the findings indicated brand confusion in the marketplace. The client noticed soon thereafter that a tag line

on their news release letterhead reinforced that confusion, by reminding the media of the organization’s founding name from 30-plus years ago. An easy oversight, and an easy one to correct.

So, discern what you want to say, to whom you need to say it, and ensure the message is consistent, credible, concrete and unexpected. By using these simple steps, you’ll stand out and be heard.

Linda Garrison, Senior Consultant, Robert B. Sharp Company of Colorado, has been a public relations and fundraising consultant since the late 1980s. Prior to her consultant career, she served as development director for several nonprofit organizations and spent 12 years in the field of public relations for nonprofits and institutions of higher learning. Working with hospitals, colleges, museums, human service providers, and churches and other faith-based organizations, her experience includes capital campaign development, collaborating on capital campaign feasibility studies, direct mail, annual fundraising, special events, and corporate and foundation relations. Additionally, Ms. Garrison creates in-depth individual prospect profiles, analyzing capacity of potential donors. She graduated from Metropolitan State College of Denver with a degree in journalism and was accredited by the Public Relations Society of America in 1993.