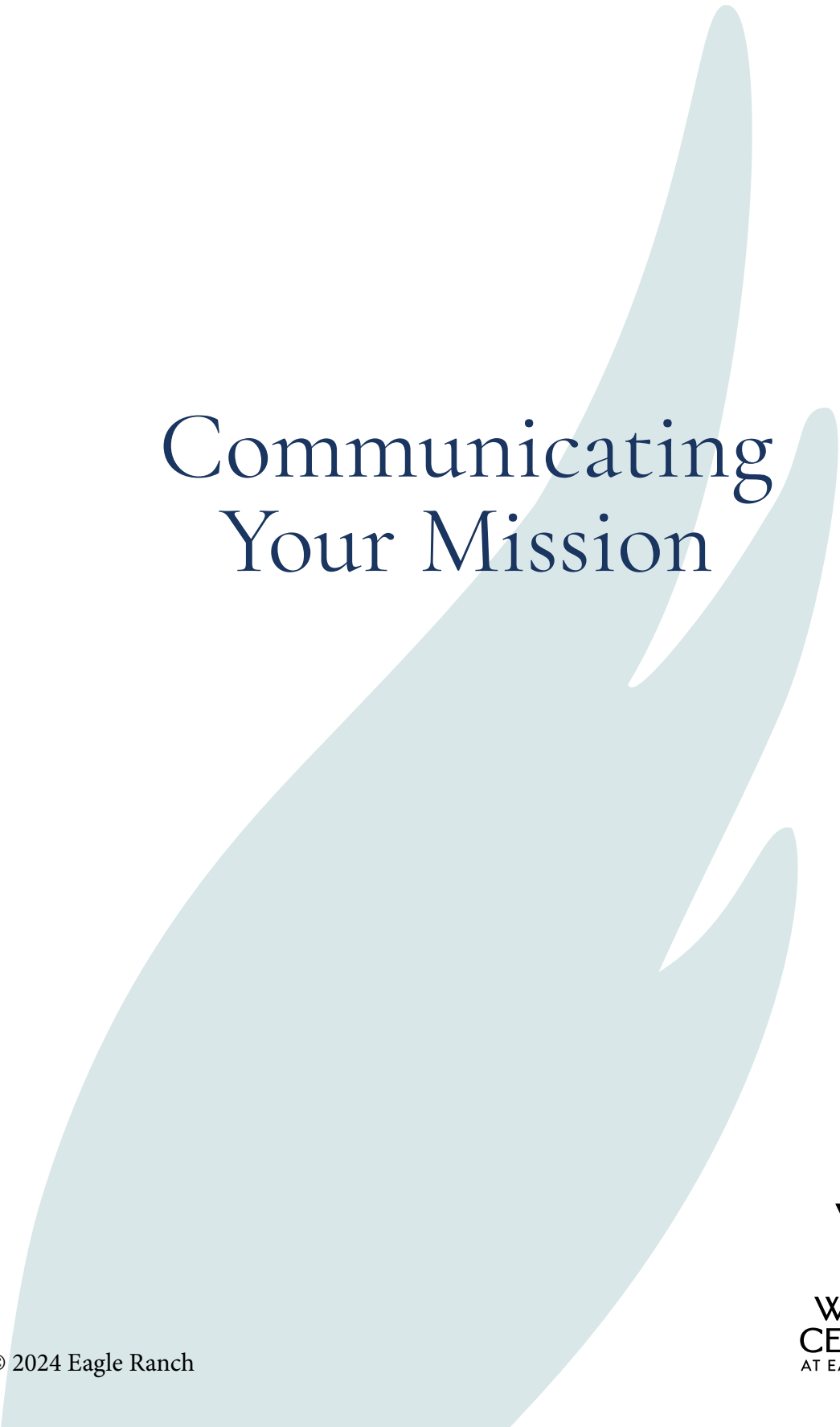




Communicating Your Mission

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YOUR “WHY” AND WHY IT’S IMPORTANT

Many times in my consulting role with nonprofits, I’m asked to help develop or refine the organization’s mission statement. First, I encourage them to step back and look at their why.

The why is the core reason your organization exists. Understanding and developing your organizational why takes a good bit of introspection and soul searching to go beyond the superficial reasons for your organizational existence.

For instance, you may state that you exist to provide a home for children who struggle in life. But at a deeper level, what are the reasons this is so important to you? That is your why!

PASSIONATELY COMMUNICATE

When I share Eagle Ranch’s why, I find myself passionately communicating. I feel like I am reaching into another person’s heart and saying, “Can you see the value of what’s being accomplished here? Don’t you want to get involved?” These are questions that I don’t necessarily verbalize, but I feel in my heart.

I want to bring people to the fire and not the “effects” of the fire (i.e., reputation, facilities, finances, systems, processes). A lot of people tend to communicate those lukewarm places of the effects of the fire instead of communicating the burning coals to an audience.

THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

Jesus told stories because there is something about communicating anecdotally that moves people to action. Your storytelling needs to be rooted in your why – the genesis of the vision. Before a mission statement or vision statement is established, it’s important that the founder understands at a very deep level the why behind their organization.

HOW TO COMMUNICATE YOUR MISSION

Effective communications are critical to the success of your nonprofit. Words and images have the power to build – or compromise – your organization.

To share your mission and vision with excellence, you must employ a cohesive and deliberate marketing and communications strategy. The vehicles you choose to use—website, newsletters and collaterals (physical and digital), social media—will provide unique ways to educate and engage with your audience.

Instead of a comprehensive guide, we have pulled together key insights and best practices on effective communications for a nonprofit organization.

The following sections include information on:

- The Basics
- Website
- Newsletters and Collaterals
- Social Media

Please note that we are sharing the following information in hopes that a branding framework is already in place for your organization. This needs to be one of your first action steps if this has not yet been completed.

THE BASICS

A general understanding of the basics is essential to your marketing success.

DEFINE YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

- The demographic who can invest most significantly in your mission are in the 55-age range and up. For the most part, these people have raised their families, put their children through college, and are coming into expendable income.
- You do need to have different, less resource-dependent strategies for the younger generations. These groups may eventually be significant donors to your organization but in the near-term might be limited in their giving capacity.

MESSAGING DEVELOPMENT

- Remember to stay within your brand guidelines when communicating about your organization and the services you provide
- Determine the specific outcomes you want to achieve through your content, and keep these goals in mind as you build out your communication tools.
- Examples include motivating people to provide financial support, raising general awareness of your mission, casting vision, and educating on a specific issue.

DEVELOP A CONTENT STRATEGY & HIGH-QUALITY CONTENT

- Develop an annual calendar that details your major newsletters, events, and other collaterals. This framework for the year will allow you to strategically plan out and reuse content you might otherwise overlook.

- Content development is important:
 - A critical step is to develop the verbiage – who you are, what you do, and most importantly, why you exist.
 - Identify inspirational stories and images that will create buy-in from your donors and volunteers.
 - Create a multi-use strategy, and put your content across multiple platforms, cross-posting on your website, social, newsletters, and other collaterals.
- Choose high-quality images, graphics, and videos to make content more engaging, visually appealing, and shareable.

USE CALLS TO ACTION

- Encourage your audience to take action, such as donating, volunteering, or sharing your mission with others.
- Consistently include contact information such as your web address, phone number, and mailing address.
- Make it easy for people to take the next step.

MEASURE, EVALUATE, AND OPTIMIZE

- Regularly evaluate the success of your communications tools by measuring how well your audience is responding to your calls-to-action. Also listen to the feedback you receive from donors, volunteers, board members, and your constituency “community.”
- For your online tools, use analytics to measure the performance of your efforts.
- Take note of what is or is not working and adjust accordingly, but remember that your communication efforts might not show immediate results. Take the long view (i.e., cultivation) as much as possible.

BE A GOOD STEWARD

If you’ve taken the time and effort to develop a substantial piece of content, use it on your website, in your newsletter, on social media, and more. Everything you develop and spend time on serves a purpose, so reuse that content in as many ways as possible to reach as many people as possible. Frequency/saturation is important.

STRIVE FOR QUALITY

Suppose you are not in a position to handle these different levels of communication on your own. In that case, outsourcing to a reputable communication firm is critical to help you position your organization from the earliest days. Sloppy branding and communication tools (i.e., website, social media, collaterals) will haunt you for many years; this is not an area where you “go alone.” Many communication firms are looking for gratis projects to take on, especially those that will benefit their community. Utilize your Board of Directors to seek out such a resource.

WEBSITE

Your website is a tool to communicate who you are, what you do, and why you exist. A website gives you credibility and serves as the central hub of information for your organization, highlighting your mission, vision and goals.

CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

Your home page should feature inspirational stories, advertise upcoming events, and provide updates on what is happening at your organization. By combining key message points with beautiful imagery and design, you can effectively communicate with your constituents.

WEBSITE UPDATES & MAINTENANCE

Your website should be user-friendly and easy to navigate—simple is better! Review your website once a month for any significant updates, and conduct a thorough overhaul once a year. Create a new website every five years to stay relevant with advances in design and navigation.

ANTICIPATED RESULTS

- Builds credibility.
- Increases awareness of your mission and vision.
- Expands audience.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- When building your website, think about how a potential donor, client, or volunteer would want to navigate it. What information is relevant to each group? What information do you need to have easily accessible? What do you want people to know when they first visit your website?
- Make sure all contact information and donation forms are easy to find and use.
- Use Google Analytics to evaluate what pages of your website are most popular, and spend time building out those pages and keeping them relevant.
- Most importantly, find a partner to help work out the kinks in your website design, coding, functionality, and other issues you may not be equipped to handle. Many marketing and communication firms will offer services at reduced rates or gratis to nonprofit organizations, or you may be able to find a community volunteer who specializes in such technology.

NEWSLETTERS & COLLATERALS

Print is not dead! Your major giving demographic still prefers a physical document that they can get their hands on. A high-quality print presence will set your organization apart and allows you to connect with your audience in ways others cannot.

CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

Use your newsletter and other print collateral to communicate your mission. Share inspirational and real-life stories of those you serve, the challenges and successes of your organization, and milestones in your program development. Offer calls to action including:

- Links to your website for giving, volunteering, specific program information, etc.
- A giving envelope that allows donors to contribute to general operations, special needs, Memorial/Honor program, or even to your endowment fund.
- Invitations to events to get your audience on campus.

FREQUENCY

Ideally, newsletters should be mailed once a quarter. You can time specific issues around major holidays and the end-of-the-year giving season. Create additional periodic special editions as needed throughout the year to celebrate organizational milestones, such as anniversary issue to celebrate another year of service.

ANTICIPATED RESULTS

- Draws constituency into the mission and vision of your organization through an honest, transparent relationship.
- Increases awareness of programs and progress.
- Increases gifts from recipients. You will note a direct correlation between newsletter distribution and inflow of funds.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Structure your newsletter in a way that the reader can “read it” from the mailbox to the front door. How do you do this? Keep headlines prominent and use beautiful, engaging photography to tell a story. Those who have more time will dig into the details of your stories. See examples of Eagle Ranch newsletters for possible layout suggestions.
- Quality matters. Use color when you can, especially on the front and back pages (remember, the back page is the 2nd front page!) of your newsletters and collaterals. High quality paper is also important to ensure the longevity of your product.
- Use a lot of pictures — after all, they are worth 1,000 words! Photography could be provided by staff, if needed, but use an outside photographer when possible. Quality is important.
- Use the newsletter to market your Memorial/Honorarium Program.
- Although printed newsletters do have a longer shelf life, keep in mind they have higher production costs than digital ones because of postage, labels, mailing services, and other associated expenses such as purchasing mailing lists. Have a clear understanding of your budget so you can plan accordingly.
- Invest in a quality database system so that you can build and maintain a solid mailing list.
- Frequency is the key to a newsletter strategy. Episodic mailings don’t get the necessary traction with your donors and can cause credibility issues.
- In the early years, there is nothing wrong with printing in black and white on lower grade paper. Make it a goal to work toward higher quality as soon as possible.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Digital marketing is a cost-efficient way to increase brand awareness and engage with supporters. By utilizing social media platforms, you can connect with current and potential donors, volunteers, and advocates on a local, national and global scale.

CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

Again, be strategic in your efforts to reuse content as much as possible. Share stories from a recent newsletter, inform your audience of any upcoming events, and provide insight on interesting giving opportunities. Storytelling is critical, with emphasis on short yet powerful content. Pictures, graphics, and short video segments are also impactful means of digital communications.

FREQUENCY

Your activity on social media is entirely dependent on what you can handle from a capacity standpoint. At a minimum, make three posts per week to stay active and top-of-mind with your audience. If you can do more, do more, but always focus on quality over quantity.

ANTICIPATED RESULTS

- More immediate conversations with and feedback from your audience.
- Raises awareness of your mission and vision.
- Expands audience, especially younger generations.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Pick 1-2 social media platforms and do them WELL. Don't try to be all things to all people by engaging in too many platforms and creating more work than you can handle with limited capacity. Select the social media platform(s) where your target audience is most active.
- Regularly review your audience. Who is interested in your posts and videos? Is this the target demographic you are trying to reach? If not, consider an overhaul of what types of content you are sharing.
- Vary the types of posts you make to engage your target audience. Include high-quality photography and video, engaging content that will spark conversation, educational content to support and inspire, and more.
- Develop a consistent brand voice across all social media platforms to build trust and recognition with your audience.

- Interact with your audience by responding to comments and messages. If you have more capacity, engage in further conversation with your followers to build relationships.
- Review social media accounts of similar organizations to see what types of posts/content are successful. You can use these as a framework to build out your own. You don't have to reinvent the wheel; see what works best and incorporate your verbiage into those "templates."