

Why Strategic Communication and Brand Strategy Matter

Trisha Botty and Lorena Delancey



In a recent article published by the **Rochester Business Journal**, Trisha Botty, Senior Advisor, Strategic Initiatives at Empreinte Consulting and Lorena Delancey, Senior Advisor, Marketing & Communications at Empreinte Consulting, explore why strategic communication and brand strategy have become essential investments for nonprofit organizations. In today's increasingly competitive and digital landscape, organizations that communicate their mission clearly are better positioned to build trust, engage supporters, and expand their impact.

In *Why Strategic Communication and Brand Strategy Matter for Nonprofits*, Trisha and Lorena examine how thoughtful branding, audience-focused messaging, and strategic communication help organizations strengthen credibility, inspire action, and advance their mission. The article challenges nonprofit leaders and boards to view communication not as overhead, but as a critical component of long-term organizational success.

For many nonprofit organizations, strategic communication is still considered a secondary function. It is often viewed as an expense rather than a strategic investment that advances their mission. But in an increasingly crowded and digital world, successful organizations are often those able to communicate their mission effectively, build trust, and cultivate lasting relationships with their communities. The truth is, programs help deliver on your mission, but so can a well-developed brand and comprehensive communication strategy or campaign.

The goals of nonprofit leaders are enhancing the human experience and making our communities a better place to live. Nonprofit leaders know the value of their programs, services, and community partnerships. What is often overlooked is the role that communication plays in amplifying



their efforts. Even the most effective organizations often struggle to gain traction if the people they are designed to serve, or the donors and volunteers who support them, do not clearly understand their value. A strong brand and strategic communication can help bridge that gap by reaching the right audiences at the right time with the right messages.

There is no better example of the power of strategic communications than the truth campaign. Launched

in 2000 to reduce youth smoking, the campaign used target messages, strong branding, and a deep understanding of its audience to drive measurable behavioral changes. According to the Truth Initiative website, the campaign helped drive down the youth smoking rate from 23% in 2000 to a historic low of 2% in 2022, and saved millions of lives and billions of dollars. The campaign demonstrates that a well-executed campaign can influence decisions, shift attitudes, and have great social impact. Its success is a reminder that communication is not simply to raise awareness, but it can be a powerful tool for advancing an organization's mission.

A thoughtful brand strategy can strengthen credibility, increase visibility, and help organizations better communicate their value.



When stakeholders clearly understand who an organization is, what it stands for, and why its work matters, they are more likely to become engaged supporters. In this way, investing in brand strategy is not separate from the mission; it is a tool that can help advance it. For mission-driven organizations, efficiency matters. Most nonprofit leaders are motivated by the desire to improve lives and strengthen our communities. They are also aware that the resources are limited, and every dollar should be used wisely. Strategic communication and brand strategy use research, audience insights, and best practices, to reach and engage stakeholders. Rather than relying on guesswork, organizations can allocate resources to make informed decisions to advance their mission more effectively.

If the benefits are clear, why are so many nonprofits not investing in communication and branding?

The answer is often straightforward: limited budgets, restrictive funding, philanthropic philosophy that consider marketing communication

a luxury. In our experience, nonprofit leaders are eager to strengthen their organization's visibility and impact through brand and communication. What they frequently lack is the support, knowledge, or funding necessary to do it effectively.

This presents an important opportunity for nonprofit leadership and boards of directors. The sector is filled with experienced business leaders, entrepreneurs, and community members who understand growth, strategy, and organizational success. These individuals bring valuable perspectives that can help reframe how communication and branding are viewed within mission-driven organizations. Instead of asking whether an organization can afford to invest in strategic communication, leaders should consider a different question: Can they afford not to?

Board discussions should focus on identifying barriers to communication investment and exploring ways to overcome them. Organizations should ask what is preventing them from strengthening their brand and using communication more effectively to advance their mission.



The reality is that strategic communication and brand strategy influence our decisions every day. We see it on television, print, and social media. The communications landscape continues to evolve, and nonprofits must evolve with it.

Nonprofits will never be businesses, nor should they be. But they can learn from the strategies that help organizations build trust, engage audiences, and inspire action. In a world where attention is increasingly scarce, communication is no longer optional. It is an essential component of mission delivery.



For nonprofits seeking to create lasting change, investing in strategic communication and brand strategy is not about marketing for marketing's sake. It is about an increasing impact. And in today's rapidly changing environment, that investment may be more important than ever.

Maximize your impact with trusted nonprofit advisors.



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