

Integrated communications for greater impact? You can't be serious

Not every charity can spend millions of pounds on awareness advertising to boost its awareness. However every organisation can integrate its communications at minimal cost in order to maximise the impact of its message. Integration can be done at the tactical level or the strategic level. There are two broad ways in which an organisation can integrate at a strategic level.

Integrated branding

Any brand strategy (the messages and the image that an organisation wants to get across) should be created so that it works for the whole organisation. We have seen too many organisations create a fantastic strapline or core message which doesn't work for fundraisers, or the media team, or with volunteers. It is not good to have a group of key stakeholders, like volunteers, who look at the messages of the organisation and feel distanced or alienated by them. That is not to say that any attempt to create a more powerful brand should be ditched at the first sign of opposition. Those involved in communicating a brand should be involved in its creation and also given training and supporting on how best to communicate it.

We heard of one organisation involved in changing its strapline which had 80% of staff opposed to the change when it was first announced internally. But by continuous communications, explanation, dialogue and senior management input this figure had dropped to 30% by the time that launch arrived. It is absolutely VITAL that staff, volunteers, supporters (even trustees) are seen as a key audience that needs to be trained and consulted in the development of a new brand or new core message.

Integrated activities.

Changing a brand or a strapline or a logo is a once in a lifetime activity (or least only once per communications director's tenure!). That doesn't mean that nothing can be done. The best organisations create whole organisation activities which can be tailored so that the whole organisation can talk about the same issues in the same time period but to their own respective audiences. Look at the way Friends of the Earth used its Big Ask campaign on climate change across a range of activities: in parliament, at events and festivals, through cinema advertising, in its direct mail, through the media and so on. While many organisations have been working on climate change, MPs at least are more aware of the Big Ask campaign than most others.

What is the opposite of integration? It's launching a report on a topic getting a few media hits, while the fundraisers talk about a different issue altogether, the volunteers and staff didn't even know there was a report, and the website tucks the

story away on a page or two away from the home page. Any by the next week – the whole issue is forgotten and the organisation has moved on.

Integration over time

For awareness to build over time messages need to be repeated – fairly remorselessly. So the best charity campaigns create vehicles which allow repeated core messages to get out but with subtle variations that maintain the interest. Look at the way that RSPCA has used its annual cruelty statistics report to gain local messages (animal cruelty in your region) and to emphasise specific issues (sentences too low or increase in abandoned exotic pets). The core message of ‘people are cruel to animals and the RSPCA is on the frontline of tackling cruelty’ is behind everything. Its amazing how few other organisations have adopted a similar approach.

Integration is about money but also energy and time.

In many ways it is far too easy to do some awareness advertising than it is to persuade the whole of the organisation to talk with one voice on one issue at the same time. But most organisations can’t afford awareness advertising however all organisations have the capability to get the whole organisation to work together, no matter hard that may be in practice.