

10 Ways of Expressing Your Nonprofit's Brand

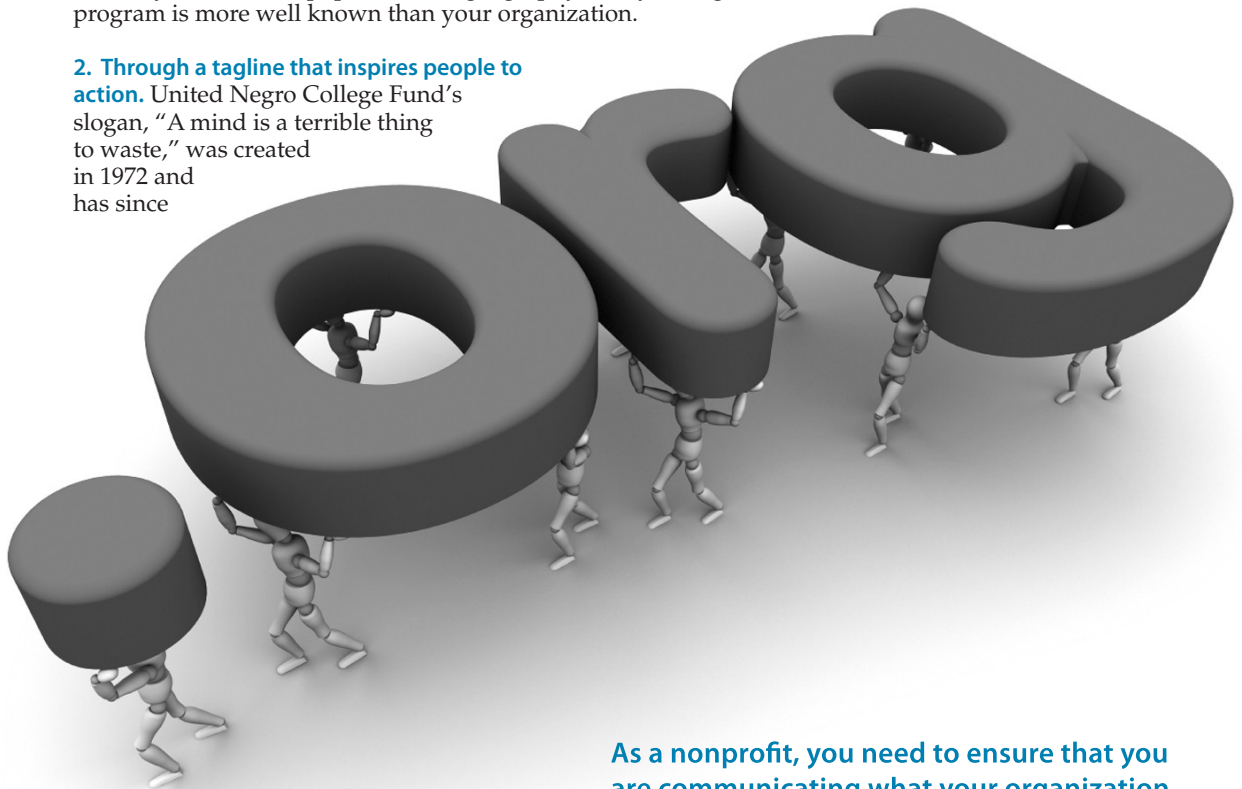
Howard Adam Levy, Principal of Red Rooster Group and Founder of The Nonprofit Brand Institute

Think about all the ways that people might encounter your organization. How well do you do in making those opportunities as memorable as possible? As a nonprofit, you need to ensure that you are communicating what your organization stands for quickly and effectively. Let's face it, there's a lot of competition out there, with a growing legion of nonprofits vying for donors' attention, so you need all the help you can get. Here are 10 ways that your organization can express its brand successfully.

1. It helps to have a great name.

As the easiest and quickest way to convey what your nonprofit does, people will make assumptions about your organization from its name. The key is to make sure that those perceptions are accurate and to pack as much punch into your name as possible. For example, the name Make Me Sustainable is a direct all to action for people and helps explain the organization's mission in helping people go green. Changing your organization's name is a big decision, but might the right one if your name no longer reflects your services, population, or geography, or if your signature program is more well known than your organization.

2. Through a tagline that inspires people to action. United Negro College Fund's slogan, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste," was created in 1972 and has since



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become one of the most famous taglines of all brands — business or nonprofit. With many nonprofits using cliched terms such as “transforming lives,” and “building community,” how memorable is your tagline?

3. Through a consistent use of color and symbol that becomes linked to your cause.

Susan G. Komen for the Cure co-opted the color pink and the pink ribbon to symbolize breast cancer, putting breast cancer research on the map through their walks involving thousands of volunteers and donors. How do your organizational logo mark and colors differentiate your organization and stake your territory?

4. Through advertising that conveys your message in a memorable way.

Advertising is not just for businesses. Once shunned by nonprofits, many are now turning to this medium to reach a wider range of people than possible through their own lists. In New York, it's common to see nonprofit advertising on the subways, bus shelters, billboards, even in taxi cabs — any opportunity to capture people's attention.

5. Through a celebrity, personality or spokesperson that embodies your vision.

Jimmy Carter has been bringing credence and visibility to Habitat for Humanity since 1984. Now it's common for singers and actors to support specific charities. Aligning your organization with someone well known by the people you want to reach can be a winning strategy. Spokespeople don't need to be rock stars, just people who have credibility with your audience. Reach out to your board, donors, vendors and other contacts to see who might fit the profile of someone who shares your organization's values.

6. Through your events.

This is where your donors experience your organization first-hand, so it's an opportunity to connect with existing and new donors, and educate them the impact that you have. Don't just view your event as a way to make money, but as a chance to forge personal connections. Also, remember that every event invitation is an opportunity to promote your organization to potential donors, especially for the people who won't be attending your event, which will be a certain portion of your mailing list.

7. Through branded merchandise.

What can be better for your brand than to have your donors wearing it for others to see. The classic example of this is the yellow Livestrong bracelet for Lance Armstrong's cancer organization — it's not just a way to support the charity, but a fashion statement as well. The best

strategy is to develop items that inspire people and allow them to show their support for your organization. Choose items that are visible, easy to use, and can be used for a long time.

8. Through social and other interactive media.

Technology has provided many more ways to engage donors — through online gaming, text-to-pledge, and smart phone apps to name just a few. Even Facebook keeps evolving, with Pages replacing Groups as organizations' primary presence. If you're like most nonprofits, it's difficult to keep up. But the ones that do have the advantage. So encourage your organization to adopt a marketing mindset to consistently think about ways to use technology to promote your brand in all the things you do, not just your fundraising.

9. Through a new business model that focuses on customer needs.

The Doe Fund took homeless people off the street, trained them for a job and created an enterprise that generates revenue — solving social problems with a profit. Many nonprofit organizations are exploring earned income ventures, partnerships with other organizations,

as well as other models to help them evolve their organizations to changing needs. These new models can become strategic advantages to donors looking for responsive and innovative organizations. How is your organization evolving?

10. Through dramatic action that captures the attention of the media.

Greenpeace's focus on a key message delivered dramatically (though not always legally) at the right time and place has been a winning formula for getting media attention and keeping the pressure on decision-makers. Look to see how your organization can respond dramatically to timely issues related to your cause in order to gain news coverage.

While it's not likely you'll be able to adopt all these measures, it is important to take some steps toward distinguishing your organization. Remember, the sooner you start investing in your brand, the sooner you will reap the rewards.

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