

# HELLO my name is

## Who do you think you are?

### The Role of Vision in Nonprofit Marketing & Communications

*The first in a 3-part series by Howard Levy, Red Rooster Group*

#### VISION, BRAND, AND MARKETING

You need to have a vision in order to be relevant and inspire donors – a vision bold and audacious enough to inspire people to action around your mission, and realistic enough to be believable and measurable.

A nonprofit needs to tell people what it stands for and what it wants to accomplish, what promises it will make to its stakeholders – both clients and donors – and how it will go about keeping those promises.

That's its *vision*.

Vision takes into account new ways of accomplishing your mission, including:

- Trends in the sector;
- Economic issues;
- Demographic changes;
- New business models, including partnering and collaboration;
- New ways of giving, such as online campaigns;
- Combining advocacy with services in order to be more effective in solving social problems.

Vision is great, but if no one knows about it, it is inconsequential.

Your organization's brand is its reputation for keeping the promises it makes and living up to its vision. A brand is more than a logo or a color scheme: It is how your agency is viewed by the public as a

result of what it stands for and what it has done. Your brand is what you stand for, so if you have done a good job conveying your vision, people will have an accurate perception about your organization.

That's its *brand*.

*Marketing* is the extent to which you have a say over what people think; it includes what you say and how you say it.

Your marketing and communications plan is integral to fundraising and advocacy efforts. It is the message that prompts a response from foundations, individual donors, volunteers, community and political leaders, and clients. You want that response to be positive. A recognized, well-presented, strong brand will support your fundraising efforts by:

- Attracting donors;
- Improving community relations;
- Improving the effectiveness of advocacy efforts for your issue;
- Positioning your organization as a leader in your sector (as a valuable source of knowledge, information, and connections).

Combined, your vision, brand, and marketing help people understand and value what you do. And that is the foundation for the long-term success of your organization.

Now that we understand how vision, brand, and marketing work together, let us take a look at each component.

#### DEFINING YOUR VISION

The best way to define your vision is through a strategic planning process that starts from the bottom – line staff, clients – and works its way up the board. During this process, the organization will:

- Define its mission, which may have changed from its founding;
- Identify the programs that further its mission and those that do not;
- Develop a plan to implement its mission (possibly a redefined one) in the future.

When you have decided who you are and what you stand for, you have to develop a succinct way to communicate that vision. You need a brand and a marketing plan.

#### CREATING A BRAND

To reach the people you need to reach – donors, volunteers, community leaders, referring agencies – you need to have a distinct brand. To do so, you must know the target audiences, the ways in which they access information, and the visual representation – logo, tagline, colors – that will evoke their interest and commitment.

You have to do research both inside and outside the organization. If you have already developed a strategic plan that clearly delineates your vision, you are part way there. Now you have to think not just of the clients you serve and how you want to serve them, but to the community in which you work and the donors you seek to attract.

You will have to think about what media to use and what words, colors, and graphics will be most meaningful and effective for each audience and in each media.

Staff, board members and clients can all contribute to this research but you also need to go outside the agency. Are there other nonprofits who offer the same services you do? What is their brand? How is it presented? Is any organization already using the words or graphics that you are considering?

So many questions! But the answers will determine how you present your brand – your vision and reputation – effectively, in a way that will generate trust in your organization and encourage support from donors, government agencies, and volunteers.

### MARKETING THE VISION AND THE BRAND

The marketing plan defines how, when, and with what resources your organization will communicate its key message about the problem it is addressing and the unique and effective way in which it is doing so.

The marketing plan also includes accountability: who is responsible for

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each part of the plan, a schedule of actions to be taken, and a means of tracking the expenses and effectiveness of each aspect of the plan.

A good marketing plan will:

- Convey your organization's unique vision;
- Establish a system to ensure consistency across all forms of communications including internal materials, website, and newsletters;
- Lay out the most cost-effective way to produce materials, whether in-house or through outside vendors;
- Raise the level of professionalism of your organization's marketing materials;
- Provide a foundation for growth and ongoing marketing by strengthening your organizational capacity.

At every point of contact with all stakeholders – website, newsletter, email, social media, printed material – you must convey your vision, not just your services. It is your vision, not your services, that will inspire donors, staff, and clients to engage and support your organization.

Vision and marketing are inextricably linked. If you do not market your brand – that vision of who you are and where you are going – you are winking in the dark: Nobody knows what you are doing and no one is going to care if you need money.

*Howard Adam Levy, Principal of Red Rooster Group, is an award-winning designer and brand strategist who has been helping nonprofits improve their branding, marketing and design for the past 17 years. Working on national regional and local levels, he has helped organizations to define their marketing strategy, create compelling websites, launch award-winning publications, and appeal to donors. He serves on nonprofit committees and speaks at conference and business associations on branding and fundraising issues. For more information, visit [www.redroostergroup.com](http://www.redroostergroup.com)*



You're passionate about making a difference. So are we. We have professionals dedicated exclusively to non-profits, serving over 150 organizations. We fully understand the hurdles you face. We're proactive and stay on top of emerging issues. Call partner Lori Budnick at 860-561-6828 to learn more.

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