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charity views

The power of storytelling: using your
unique narrative to boost donations.

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It's Story Time

Every year, thousands of new charities are founded. Thousands. Of course, overall this is terrific. People have more opportunities to contribute to both nuanced and large-scale causes in increasingly unique and convenient ways. On the other hand, in what is already a highly competitive market, this presents interesting challenges for any non-profit organization.

In this quarter's edition of Charity Views, we discuss the importance of storytelling. As our sector continues to grow and evolve, with more players finding new ways to utilize technology every day, interestingly enough, it is the age-old art of storytelling that is perhaps more important to fundraising than ever.

Whether it's providing an authentic portrayal of the struggles your organization fights to resolve or finding the perfect balance of data and humanity to maximize impact—there's much to master, and in the coming pages, we unpack it all.

Thank you for your readership and support,

The IAA Team

The Power of a Story



No matter how big an organization is, how established, how well-funded or how innovative, stories are the great equalizer. Utilized correctly, storytelling can transform numbers on a page into an emotional connection with a prospective contributor. Storytelling can make a national initiative distinctly relatable and it can drive action. Quite simply, storytelling is your single most powerful tool.



Bringing DATA to Life



Every charitable organization can provide statistics that justify contributions to their respective causes. Even though many find unique ways to relay these numbers, more often than not, they don't garner the attention they deserve. While extensive data or flashy communication methods may help them get noticed, only by tying in these facts with authentic stories can organizations truly be heard.

Take for example, *the work* that Brandon Stanton, the photographer behind the successful "Humans of New York" Instagram account, did for Pediatric Cancer. A staggering number of children nationwide are diagnosed with cancer every year. However, the numbers alone don't necessarily elicit an emotional response. Stanton used his platform to humanize the data. The pictures he took and words he wrote about these remarkable kids (and their doctors and nurses) brought their struggles to life, and the results speak for themselves. In just two weeks, his impactful storytelling helped raise over \$3 million for the cause.

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\$3 MILLION

in two weeks



Relatability = IMPACT


You'll notice a common thread amongst all of the greatest storytellers in the philanthropy sector. They are able to make their organization's cause relatable to their donors—regardless of how mainstream or obscure it may be.

To fully understand the importance of relatability, let's take a trip to the small village Adi Etot, Ethiopia, where villagers struggle to find clean water every single day. For many Americans it's hard to imagine such places even exist, let alone comprehend the struggles of their inhabitants.

“The greatest storytellers in the philanthropy sector...are able to make their organization's cause relatable to their donors.”

That's why, to drive donations, [Charity: Water created the “Someone Like You” page on its website.](#) When potential donors entered their age and a few of their interests and values, they were virtually introduced to someone similar from Adi Etot through an interactive profile page. With relatable storytelling such as this, it should come as no surprise that the New York-based organization has already raised over \$250 million dollars since its founding in 2006.





Turning Emotion *into* ACTION

So, you've done it all. You've utilized the power of storytelling. You've humanized the data with compelling, authentic examples. You've established relatability between your donors and those your organization supports. Now all that's left to do is watch your fundraising increase, right? Not exactly. Getting the final step in the process right is pivotal—turning emotion into action.

Three Keys to DRIVING Donation



There are three keys to turning great storytelling into donor action.

The first is to strike the right balance. As inspiring as triumphant examples may be, too many success stories without a focus on the struggles that preceded them make an organization difficult to connect with. People need to see how and where their donations can make a difference.

Second is to link singular stories to the larger issues. Yes, it is beneficial to humanize the problems your organization works so hard to support, but you also run the risk of over-personalizing. Connecting the unique stories you share to the overarching problems serves two important purposes: You eliminate the possibility of people concluding that one person's struggles are exclusive to the individual and you identify a fundamental issue that affects a huge number of people.

“Strike the right balance... stories without a focus on the struggles that preceded them make an organization difficult to connect with.”

Finally, clearly establish a pathway to action. You've grabbed the attention of prospective donors, you've connected with them emotionally and you've compelled them to act—now, show them how.



TIPS & TRICKS

As you've seen, storytelling brings to light the crux of any organization—the human element. It highlights the reason we feel compelled to give and it allows charities to create lasting connections between donors and those in need, but it's not easy. Here are a few helpful tips & tricks that you can keep in mind during your next fundraising campaign.



Fill in the Blanks

Organizations find the most success when they leave room for their audiences to finish the stories they tell. For example, a compelling tale of an impressive low-income child who still needs a mentor will be more impactful than that of a child who has already found one.

Leverage Video

Many charities veer away from this medium due to unfounded fears of big budgets and difficult production processes. You have a terrific resource in your pocket at all times! Great footage can be shot and edited with a smartphone, and video always proves to be the most attention-grabbing communication method.



Listen

Storytelling isn't a one-way street. Hear what your prospective donors have to say, get feedback and conduct research. You'll learn which type of stories resonate the most and can build your communication strategies from there.



CONNECT with IAA

To have your organization's stories, events or important dates featured in the next edition of Charity Views, or on our social channels, please contact us at: marketing@iaai.com.

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