

CAUSE MARKETING

Be a storyteller to generate empathy for your cause

by LuAnne Speeter

You've chosen a cause for your business to promote. Now you need to explain the cause, and ask for support from your audience. How do you draw them in?

Before asking for a financial handout or volunteer commitment, engage your audience with the cause story. Whether the cause will benefit people, animals or the environment, present a narrative that turns your appeal into a three-dimensional reality. For example, your message could feature:



- A recipient whose life has changed for the better through support for the cause
- A donor telling why she contributed and how it made her feel
- An employee offering a first-hand account from the volunteer site
- A spokesperson giving a clear picture of the need for action

The appropriate medium for your story will depend on a number of factors, such as cost, in-house expertise and audience. But you can maintain a poignant, personal style even on a tight budget. Consider:

Video. Script and shoot a video that captures significant moments throughout your campaign. Embed it into an email and/or display on your Web site's home page. [View Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity video gallery.](#)

Photography. Done well, photos of recipients can be poignant – especially in black and white. Weave the photos throughout all your media, including a direct mail brochure and your corporate social responsibility report, for an integrated message with greater impact.

Social networks. Set up a dedicated Facebook page and encourage volunteers or contributors to upload their own videos and comments about their experiences throughout the campaign.

Press releases. Tell one or two personal accounts of beneficiaries within the release. If the newswire service allows, italicize the paragraphs to visually set the stories apart from the rest of the copy.

Corporate blog. Have a volunteer contribute a guest post to your corporate blog with an up-close-and-personal perspective. Be sure to include photos.

While telling the story will help engage your audience and draw greater attention to your cause, be careful not to overdramatize or appear too sentimental. Such efforts can be perceived as manipulative. Before releasing your promotion, pass it by a focus group and make any necessary tweaks.

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