

Thoughts on Fund Raising for Campus Ministry

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“Reaching Your Audience”

My father was not what I would describe as an avid hunter. We lived in rural Iowa, so I would see him occasionally tramping through a cornfield in search of an elusive pheasant or rabbit. But he didn't have an orange jacket (or in those days a red flannel shirt), and our family dog was a Chihuahua for Pete's sake! He would have had better luck training a Holstein to flush out the birds. Nor did he have a gun appropriate to the task. He had an old single-shot .22 rifle, which could hit the broad side of the barn, but not likely a bird in flight. He did, however, come home with a tasty meal on occasion. One shot did the trick if it was aimed accurately.

I want to spend some time in this First Monday Report thinking with you about the communication tools you use to reach your audience. From the looks of the newsletters and mailings I receive from many of you, you do a fine job communicating your campus ministry programs and priorities. Perhaps some of what I have to share can help you do it better or give you truer aim. Let's think first about “audience.”

Those who are professionals in the marketing and communications world remind us continually about the necessity of knowing our audience. Judith Nichols has brought together her interest in culture and communications, as she helps us look at the generational differences in giving and dealing with money. She asks, “Are the marketing keys for reaching mid-life and younger donors different from those that reached donors who came of age during the Depression and lived through WW II?” The answer is a definite “yes.” Back in 1994 she published a classic study titled, *Pinpointing Affluence* (Precept Press, Chicago)¹. In that study she reported the different giving styles and preferences of five generations of givers. It's worth a serious read. She also writes a regular column called “Trend Watch” for *Contributions*. (Another good reason to subscribe to this helpful publication).

Recently in another feature column called “My Nichol's Worth,” she reports the results of a study titled “Boomers! Navigating the Generational Divide in Fundraising and

¹ Her newest books are *Growing from Good to Great* and *Global Demographics* (Precept Press). Her email is judnich@aol.com

Advocacy.” The study was conducted in July, 2005 and is available online free at www.donortrends.com Interested? Here are some thumbnails from the report.

BABY BOOMERS

This is the largest percentage of adults in all developed nations. They are the “adult idealists” born between 1945 and 1964. They were told early on that they could do anything and that life was basically a journey of self-discovery. (Notice how much “journey” language we use in the church today?) They are inclined toward self-absorption, perfectionism, and individual self-esteem. They believe in changing the world, but not in changing themselves to fit the world. In mid-life they will be find virtue in austerity and a well-ordered inner life. They will also discover the importance of community values.

For the most part they have no memory of the Depression, only what they have heard from their elders. They understand that money is not to be saved, but put to use. Buy it, enjoy it—especially on credit. When all that money (or credit) will buy no longer satisfies, they will finally, in later life, turn to a spiritual quest for meaning.

GENERATION X

These “reactive” young adults were born between 1965 and 1977. They are rudely aware that life for them will not necessarily be better for them than it was for their parents. Instead of being perfectionists, they often feel that they can do nothing right. They are portrayed as latch-key kids who are the throw-aways of divorce and poverty. Conservative in many ways, they will look for indications that your organization is reliable and will not further complicate their lives.

They see their lives pragmatically and prefer a message that is blunt and brash. They want a fix, rather than a change. They search for intangibles such as a good family, a rewarding job, a chance to help others, and a deeper spiritual life. They are highly influenced by television and technology, and prefer a cashless financial world.

GENERATION NET (or Y)

These are the children of the Boomers, born between 1977 and 1985. They hold many civic values like their grandparents, but within a larger global context. They live in a world without boundaries, thanks in large part to technology. They are generally optimistic about the future and are amazingly confident about their financial future. Nearly one-third are convinced that they will be wealthy by their mid-thirties. They are not as concerned about pursuing a career as they are with experiencing the world. They prefer a communications style that is multi-layered and interactive.

The point that I want to make, with the considerable influence of Dr. Nichols, is that the age and experience of our audience is a primary factor in designing our communication style and content. For the most part we are used to sending out a “one size fits all” mailing or newsletter that we assume will address the interests and proclivities of our readership. I want to encourage us to step back from that process and consider the wider

implications of the research done by Nichols and others. Before you launch your next newsletter, think about the audience. How can you speak to their life experiences? Their sense of how money is to be used? Their interest in investing in long term vs. short term projects? Their awareness of community, from global to individual? Their experience in the church or interest in spirituality? You might look into the possibility of “segmenting” your audience and sending a somewhat different letter to each generation. If you have a listing of alums, do you know when they graduated? How can you be more intentional about knowing your audience through the lens suggested above?

Obviously, you will also have to look at the vehicle for communication. Don’t we assume that since a letter has worked for years it will continue to bear the impact of our ideas and dreams? M. Rex Miller, writing in *The Millennium Matrix* (Jossey-Bass, 2004), notes the shifts in communication media from the Oral Era to the Print Era to the Broadcast Era to the Digital Era. He charts it out like this:

	Oral Era	Print Era	Broadcast Era	Digital Era
Collective Memory	Bard	Book	Documentary	Database
Sense of Identity	Tribal Village	Independent individual	Crowded stranger	Cybersoul or anonymous intimacy
Building wealth	Land	Capital and manufacturing	Distribution and debt	Creativity and community

You can see the implications here; in fact, you live in these transitions yourself. The problem is that many of us haven’t moved beyond the print era and we don’t expect that our audience has either. The reality is that greater numbers of older Americans are online. A report titled, *Older Americans and the Internet*, based on a survey early in 2004, indicates that 22% of Americans 65 years or older have Internet access, up from 15% in 2000. By contrast, 58% of Americans age 50-64, 75% of 30-49 year olds, and 77% of 18-29 year olds currently go online for shopping, information, and communication.

The Non-Profit Times and Opinion Research Corporation (Advancing Philanthropy, September/October 2005) reports that 27% of those 45-55 and only 20% of those 55-64 go online to obtain more information before donating in response to a direct-mail solicitation. However, 31% of those under 34 and 34% of those between 35 and 44 do online information checks. The learning here is that your ministry needs to communicate at several levels. While a direct mailing will still get opened by a lot of people you send it to (especially if they know you and like what you’re doing), the reality is that many of them will do further checking on your organization by going to your Web site. If you’re wise, you will be sure to include your Web address in your letter, although you need to be sure that when you direct people there, your Web site is active, attractive, and shares

crucial information (including good quality photos). The second part of the learning is that you need to find a way that allows people to donate to your ministry online.

What about blogging? Gary Grobman² suggests that bogging is a worthy way of reaching our newer, younger audiences. Since I am not a “blogger,” I will lean on Grobman’s insights to stretch your imagination a bit. Blog is short for “Web Log.” It consists of a Web page that is essentially a frequently updated journal, its style fairly informal and personal. It often includes links to other online resources embedded in its content. Grobman thinks that blogs, if they are interesting and provocative, can draw readers that are interested in an organization that is vibrant and dynamic. A blog provides instant feedback and allows you to interact with your audience easily and personally.

There are disadvantages, he points out. You should not share any information that you wouldn’t want to see on the front page of the *New York Times*. Also, a blog can be time consuming. An AOL poll found that nearly half of bloggers do so because it is therapeutic. It is estimated that there are between 10 million and 17.5 million blogs to date. So before you get wrapped into a blog that promotes your organization, think twice.

If you are interested in seeing examples of non-profit blogs, point your browser to http://www.omidyar.net/group/compumentor/ws/nonprofit_blogs/ for a directory of blogs. He also suggests <http://blog.democracyinaction.org/> or <http://news.gilbert.org/> To set up a blog, use a provider such as Blogger (<http://new.blogger.com>) or Easyblog (<http://www.easyblog.com>) Both are free. Typepad offers a 30-day free trial with a fee starting at less than \$50. (<http://www.typepad.com>)

Grobman says that blogs are as much a reflection of a change in online communication style as it is in technology. What is different is the willingness of individuals to “let their hair down” and the informality of posts. However, he says, it provides an organization with still another way to personalize its communication and bond with donors. “Take a blog for a test drive,” he says.

I hope that you’re “hunting” with more than a single-shot .22 rifle and a Chihuahua these days. While there are some tried-and-true ways to share our vision and our programs with our wider audience, we need to expand our communication to include multi-faceted, multi-layered approaches. We need to know our audiences—all of them—in their various experiences and expectations.

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² “Blogging as Bonding” *Contributions*, November-December, 2005, p. 13f