

THE FIRST MONDAY REPORT

Thoughts on Fundraising for Campus Ministry

May, 2007

Playing to Your Audience

Consider these brief scenarios:

1. You have a favorite aunt whom you haven't seen in quite a while, and you want her to know about a recent turn of events in your life. Do you: (1) put it on your Web site; (2) send her a long letter with a few pictures thrown in; (3) design a bumper sticker for your car and drive past her house; or (4) fly over the area where she lives and drop a few thousand notices from a helicopter at midnight.
2. You have an urgent need fix the plumbing before the water in the basement rises another foot. Do you: (1) call an aquarium and order some catfish; (2) give crowbars to a local Boy Scout troop and tell them to have fun; (3) call a certified plumber; or (4) learn how to tread water.
3. You have a message from God and you feel the need to share it with the world. Do you: (1) get a bullhorn and stand on the street corner, yelling at passersby; (2) put a note in a bottle and send it down the river; (3) go under the cover of night and spray-paint it on your neighbor's garage door; or (4) gather a community of attentive listeners to reflect on your thoughts with you.

Obviously these are both appropriate and silly responses to significant circumstances. Your aunt may see you as you drive by, a Boy Scout may get lucky with a crowbar, or a bullhorn may strike the fear of God into someone's heart. But you are more likely to accomplish your task and get your message across if you consider the proper tools and discern your audience carefully at the onset. This First Monday Report nudges the question of communication—how, when, and with whom—that so often goes unexamined in our campus ministries.

Personality inventories have been in vogue for the past couple of decades. They are fine, useful tools for building teams and looking at individual styles of relating and engaging the wider world. They certainly make for more interesting conversation than “What's your sign?” or “Which village in Norway are you from?” Tom Ahern¹ has taken this soft science of describing personalities and preferences in a new direction. He has written some very helpful material about how to understand the various audience segments of the population that reads our publications—letters, email, newsletters, Web sites, etc. What does our audience look for in our communications? What excites

¹ Thomas Ahern, *The Mercifully Brief Read World Guide to...Raising More Money with Newsletters Than You Ever Thought Possible* (Emerson & Church Publishers: Medford MA, 2005).

them; what gets their attention? Ahern uses four personality types—Amiable, Expressive, Skeptic, and Bottom-line—to describe the potential makeup of our readership. A sampling of his approach is as follows.

The **Inner Amiable** empathizes with others.

To reach the Amiable use:

- Photos of faces, especially close-ups
- Anecdotes
- The word “you” in abundance

The **Inner Expressive** is easily excited, easily bored.

To reach the Expressive use:

- The word “new”
- Words and phrases that promise “secrets revealed”
- Brief, vivid, action-oriented verbs in your headlines

The **Inner Skeptic** demands proof.

To reach the Skeptic use:

- Credible testimonials from people who have used your services
- Lots of background information
- Frank answers to frequently asked questions

The **Inner Bottom-liner** is impatient.

Reach the Bottom-liner fast by:

- Making every call to action easy to spot
- Making every call to action easy to do
- Making every call to action tightly focused.

As you sit at your computer screen, wondering just who is going to read what you have to say, imagine four faces looking back at you, each representing one of the four types mentioned above. What would you say to each person, how would you say it, how would you get your message across? Good stand up comics and good preachers know their audiences. The joke or the sermon has to be delivered in just the right way for it to be heard and appreciated by the audience. Otherwise the joke falls flat and the congregation is already looking up the next hymn. A good communicator knows how to reach her/his audience. It’s no different with campus ministry publications. We have a message well worth sharing. We have stories, pictures, announcements, invitations, reports, visions, and tons of important news.

A professional newsletter editor and critic, Ahern says that nearly every newsletter he reads suffers from one or more of seven fatal flaws:

1. Failing the “you” test
2. Lacking emotional triggers
3. No news is not good news
4. Hogging the credit
5. Expecting people to read deep
6. Non- or feeble headlines
7. Stat crazy, anecdote light

Let's look at how another expert in the field of communications helps us to look at our problem. Peter Alexander, Executive Director of the Biodiversity Project writes about strategic communications in a recent series of articles offered by Grant Station.² He begins by acknowledging the place where most of us are—a worthy cause with limited resources and little time to communicate. This is the very reason, he suggests, that we need to “focus on reaching the people who can actually change things—your target audience (not the general public.)” Certainly we do have limited time and resources, as well as an urgent need to share the news about our ministries. Also, the word “strategic” is important, because it forces us to be careful in our use of the resources we have to reach those who will respond most favorably to our message.

What is the best way to reach that consistent group of donors who avidly support your ministry year after year?

What means will you use to encourage strong supporters to make a major contribution to a building campaign or endowment?

How will you communicate the core values of your ministry to parents, to new students, to university faculty and staff, to delegates to synod assembly, and to members of local congregations?

When is it effective to make personal visits? When is a worth writing a letter? When will email suffice? How does a newsletter fit into your strategic communications plan?

Alexander writes, “When thinking about potential target audiences, keep one question front and center: ‘How will reaching this audience help us achieve our goals?’ Using your goals as a reference point this way will help ensure that you don’t waste valuable time, energy, and resources trying to convince people who don’t need convincing, or even worse, trying to ‘convert’ people who are ideologically opposed to your cause or viewpoint.” Curiously, he says that communications professionals use the categories of “saved,” save-ables,” and “sinners” to designate those who are affirming of your message, those who might be convinced, and those beyond hope of ever understanding.

Defining your target audience is a crucial task in any communication project. You need to determine who your public is, what they care about, and what their core values are. Unless you are speaking directly to those core values—and aligning them with those of your ministry—you are missing the mark. You get to know the values of your audience by listening to them. Don’t assume that everyone cares about the same things. Step back and listen, either in conversation or direct research, such as a questionnaire. Think about creating a focus group like those used by political candidates to tell you what they think and care about.

Give your audience a reason to care about your ministry by appealing to what you now understand to be common values. Help them to see how their concerns are addressed by your organization and how their commitments and contributions move forward your common agenda.

² www.grantstation.com Alexander’s series is titled, “How to Build Support for Your Cause.”

Once you realize that you have many very different segments to your audience, you can begin to plan for all the ways that are effective to reach them: letters, phone calls, personal visits, Web sites, newsletters, synod publications, or email. Make a grid, listing vertically all of the various audiences you need to reach, and horizontally all of the communication tools at your disposal. Then place a check mark under each audience type and align it with the appropriate tool. This may help clarify your communication strategy. It may end up saving you some precious dollars, too. For example, you may forgo expensive newsletters, that most people round file very quickly, in favor of well-placed personal mail. A phone call may be worth a dozen letters. A personal visit with your best supporters may be the most effective communication tool of all.

Whatever you do, before you drag the next trunk load of bulk mail to the post office, think about what you are send—and to whom.

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