

I DON'T KNOW YOU – WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO SELL ME?

A Famous Print Ad Provides the Rationale for All Marketing

The above headline is the essence of one of the most famous print ads ever created in 1958 for McGraw Hill Publishing. While both the artwork and copy might be considered “stark,” or “bland,” that is what contributes to its creative genius. The ad copy has been translated into French, Russian, German, Italian and Chinese. It was named the best ad of the 20th century by *Business Marketing* in 1999.

As my first job out of college, I happened to be working for McGraw Hill, and when I saw this ad in our files, I was struck by the impact of what is referred to as “The Old Man in the Chair” ad.

My job was to convince ad agencies and corporate advertising departments that they should advertise, and preferably in one of the 48 McGraw-Hill business publications. When I got some resistance about why businesses should advertise at all, I pulled out this famous ad and laid it on the executive’s desk. The copy and visual of this ad did more than anything I could say.

The Case for Public Awareness

*I don't know who you are.
I don't know your company.
I don't know your company's product.
I don't know what your company stands for.
I don't know your company's customers.
I don't know your company's record.
I don't know your company's reputation.
Now – what is it you wanted to sell me?*



Fast forward to the job I have now – distributing PSA campaigns to the media on behalf of non-profit organizations. In many cases, the PSAs we distribute support important social issues such as veteran’s causes, health and safety tips, etc., but often the sub-text is use PSAs to raise funds.

When it comes to raising funds via PSAs, there are two fundamental truths that every non-profit executive should know. First, there are some restrictions on what you can say or show in TV PSAs when it comes to fund raising. Secondly, if your organization is not well known, the job of raising funds becomes incrementally more difficult.

Regarding the first point, it is generally acceptable to use phrases such as “show your support for XYZ non-profit by logging onto our website....” whereas using a phrase such as “send your donation to XYZ non-profit...” may be too overt.

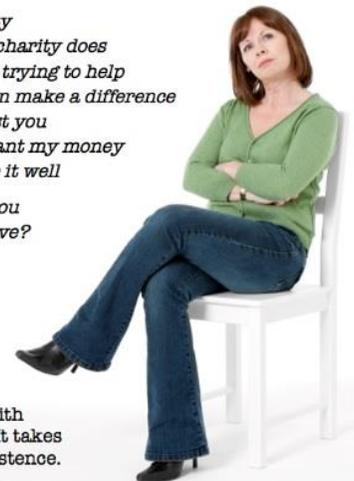
Overly Optimistic Expectations

The second important thing to know relates to this ad – a take-off on the “Old Man in The Chair.” Donors don’t normally contribute to causes they do not know, understand and believe in. We have had more than a few non-profits which believe if they do a national PSA campaign asking for funds, the floodgates will open, and the money will pour into their coffers. That is very far from reality.

*I don't know your charity
I don't know what your charity does
I don't know who you're trying to help
I don't know how you can make a difference
I don't know if I can trust you
I don't know why you want my money
I don't know if you'll use it well

Now . . . how much did you
say you wanted me to give?*

Moral: recruiting new donors means dealing with the fundamentals first. It takes time, patience and persistence.



Both of these print ads say essentially the same thing. Until you have carefully created widespread public awareness and credibility for your organization, the chances of developing a successful fund raising effort is about nil.

Some Factors to Consider

With the foregoing as background, how do we go about creating widespread public awareness and credibility? There are entire books written on this subject, but a few brief points are relevant:

- First, it takes time and lots of money. Ask any marketing executive who is introducing a new commercial product or service how much they will budget to gain even a modest foothold in the market place. Think millions, or perhaps tens of millions.
- As for time, think years, not months. I worked on the anti-drunk driving campaign in the early 1970's when about 26,000 people were being killed in what were called Alcohol Related Situations. Today, that number has been cut in half. That's the good news. The bad news is that it took about 45 years to convince the public that drinking and driving was not socially acceptable. The amount spent on various campaign messages about this issue is incalculable.
- Third, you will reach your goal much faster by hiring an experienced fund raising executive who knows how to shake the money tree on behalf of your organization. A word of advice....media, advertising and PR specialists are not fund raisers. Raising funds from recalcitrant donors who are being tapped by dozens of non-profits, is both an art and a science. You may want to visit the Association of Fund Raising Professionals at <http://www.afpnet.org/> to learn more about their work and how to find a fund raiser that is the right fit for your organization.
- Fourth, become very familiar with the term "Cause Related Marketing," which is a marketing specialty that can help your organization raise funds for important social issues. You can learn more about Cause Marketing on our PSA Research Center website at: http://www.psaresearch.com/biblio_cause_marketing.html



The Role of PSAs

I do not mean to infer that PSAs, public relations and other marketing tactics are not important in the fund raising effort. In fact, the more you pursue those initiatives, the more successful you will be in raising funds over the long term. We have created a mini-case history on how PSAs can support fund raising which you can view at:

<https://www.goodwillcommunications.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/USING-PSA-VALUES.pdf>

A very important part of this case history discusses the role of “In Kind Contributions.” This accounting rule requires that non-profits recognize the value of all donated services on their financial statements, including free media advertising time and space. These donations must be added to cash and other donations in arriving at revenues, to show the full amount of resources provided to the organization. Then, the organization must show the amount of free services provided as an expense, and these expenses are classified as either “cause/mission related,” or “overhead.”

According to accountants, non-profit organizations want their books to reflect the maximum spent on mission related activities, while minimizing the amount shown as overhead, or administrative expenses. Since PSAs are generally classified as cause related expenses, that helps your fund raising mission.

Keep Your Eye on the “Old Man”

In conclusion, raising funds among an increasingly skeptical donor community is difficult. If it were easy, every non-profit would be flush with cash to meet their mission. In reality, it takes a symphony of marketing musicians who can come together and play a tune so meaningful that it connects to those who can, and will, write a check out to your organization.

As you begin to plan your next media relations or fund-raising program, keep your eye on that “Old Man in the Chair,” because I guarantee one thing...he is looking at you and may not be sold.