



HOW TO GET YOUR MESSAGE RIGHT

Sunny Thinking creatively for charities

Here at Sunny Thinking we're incredibly proud to work with a number of charities, providing them with branding, creative design and marketing, website and digital services. We've got a growing reputation in this area, so much so that Jonathan was asked by Fundraising Magazine to write a feature stressing the importance of a charity's branding to growing their income.

It's well documented that as a result of the Coronavirus, charities, like so many other businesses and organisations, are facing challenging times. So we thought it was a valuable time to share that feature with you again. Aimed originally at charities, there's much to be learnt from this article no matter the nature of your brand or business.

How to get the messaging right

No matter how worthy your cause, if you don't get your tone, brand and messaging right with your donor communications you are unlikely to stand still let alone see a growth in your income streams. In the increasingly digital, social media driven world of nonsense and clutter we now live in, not a day goes past without someone tugging on your heartstrings and asking you for their support. So how can your branding make you stand out from the noise of other charities and capture hearts and minds?

Your brand identity is your biggest asset

Brand identity is a mixture of tangible and intangible attributes, symbolised in a trademark, which, if properly managed, create influence and generate value.

(The future of brands)

As with any business or product, charities have a fundamental need to develop a strong brand identity. Charity brands, more than any other, simply can't afford to be lost in the crowd. At Sunny Thinking, an award-winning creative marketing agency with many clients in the charity sector, we help charities to better understand and maximise their own identity: principally by how they look, but also in how they sound and behave.

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Design brings your brand to life

In a crowded marketplace, good design will definitely help a charity tell its story really quickly. Whether it's an advert, brochure, leaflet, sponsorship form, poster, website, email campaign, social media graphic – or anything for that matter – people need to take notice of your communications.

All your communications need to have a strong sense of consistency and continuity across the tone of your voice/message and design style. That's the fundamental key to building brand awareness. Once people have taken notice of you, it's down to how compelling your core proposition actually is – what are you asking people to actually do? And why should they even care?

Have a unique and authentic story

Improving your communications for the better, which includes visual identity, can have a massive transformative effect on any charity. Inevitably, charities both big and small, frequently survive on donations – and the only way you get donations is by offering audiences a story that they believe in. Often, many charities have been doing great work for years, or even decades, but they've forgotten how to articulate their mission, and their story, to their key target audiences.

They often forget what makes them unique and authentic in the first place and mistakenly take a copycat approach to branding – looking at something like a bigger charity or any brand for that matter, and trying to then do the same. Some charities ultimately make the fundamental mistake of becoming a bit 'me too' in their approach to branding.

It's particularly apparent when you look at how charities behave through social media. Their tone of voice is often no different to any other charity, or brand or product. It's important to keep unique and true to the roots of who you are and what you're about.

Does anyone really care?

It takes a lot more than good design to build a great brand, but it is a fundamental crucial ingredient and major catalyst in on-going success. Imagine a potential donor is looking to give money to a charity – it needs to be a cause, and an organisation, they care about or have an emotional connection with.

Bad design won't necessarily stop people from donating, but it might paint an inaccurate, or even damaging, first impression. The old adage of 'don't judge a book by its cover' has its roots in reality. Ultimately, if you read a book, your enjoyment will be mainly based on whether you liked what it had to offer, not the cover design. BUT – and it's a very, very big but – if the cover is badly designed and unappealing, fails to excite you or gives a misleading impression of what's inside, you'll probably never read it in the first place. That's the power of design, and it's true for each and every charity with their fundraising communications.

Their 'cover' needs to be as compelling as the story inside once you've captured a potential donor's attention.

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Don't be me too, dare to be different

Bring your charity values and vision to life through a unique visual brand expression. To resonate with your audience, communicate your unique personality and your unique culture. Think what makes your charity different. What's your history? Your back-story? What are your vision and values? What's your structure? What are your ambitions and goals? What challenges or 'pain points' are you facing? Is your perception of yourselves the same as what the outside world actually perceives? Only by understanding the answers to these typical questions will you be able to appreciate the true essence of what makes you different and how you can then dare to be different with your communications.

It's really important that brand design never becomes a 'sausage factory'. Each charity needs are different, and our challenge as designers is to respond accordingly. The work we do with a mental health and social care charity such as Making Space, will have a very different approach to that we take with our other charity clients such as GreaterSport, a sports partnership charity, or Friends of Lancasterian and Children's Adventure Farm Trust, two small local children's charities. We have to be capable of changing our styles – sometimes a visual identity is led by typography, photography or illustration. No two charity brands should be the same, because no two clients are the same. Dare to be different – don't be a copycat.

Does size matter when it comes to branding?

Size really doesn't affect the visual style as such. However it can definitely sometimes change how a charity is perceived by the outside world. For instance, a relatively small charity may want to look bigger – to increase people's perception of its reach. Other larger clients may want to look smaller and more personable and approachable to increase donations. There's really no golden ticket to success or magic Willy Wonka formula.

One undeniable fact is the importance of 'getting it right' whether a big or small charity, particularly smaller ones in theory where the budgets have to work harder and harder. Large national charities spend many millions on marketing and promotions, whereas some smaller charities often can't, or maybe don't, invest sufficiently in marketing themselves. When they do, it can revolutionise their organisation's impact and reach.

Make your charity branding a top priority

In a nutshell, and this isn't meant to sound like an exercise in teaching 'grandma to suck eggs', but please make sure you take your charity branding seriously and a priority. It's not just a bolt on and something to consider at the bottom of the agenda of your next management and trustee meeting. It shouldn't be seen as a knee-jerk reaction to hit fundraising tactics; it's a true long-term investment in to the future success of your charity. It's an on-going organic process that should help shape your charity not be shaped by it.

If you want help with your creative marketing contact ideas@sunnythinking.com

Cheers and thanks for reading.

Team Sunny Thinking