

## Fundraiser Publicity Tips

The best publicity contains all of the important details about your event, just like a newspaper story. You want to tell the public all about the who, what, when, where, why and how of your event, all in an easy and concise manner.

In addition, give everything you distribute about your fundraiser a common “hook.” A hook is a catchy tag line that gives a strong reason why the community should participate. An example would be, “Mondo Yard Sale, Saturday only, at the High School.”

Another example would be an auction style fundraiser that had some signed donated goods from celebrities – “Don’t miss your chance to bid on a basketball signed by the national champion Duke Blue Devils and an autographed Michael Jordan jersey this Monday night.” You’ve given them a “hook” by publicizing a sought after item with limited availability that can only be obtained by attending your event.

When you’re doing a fundraiser, increasing community awareness before sales begin is key. Advance promotion generates interest. Movie trailers are a good example. When you see a movie trailer that looks interesting, you want to see that movie. Advertising circulars in your newspaper for a special sale are another. An advertisement for “take an additional 50% off” always gets my blood pumping.

It’s critical when constructing your publicity campaign to utilize effective marketing techniques. Look within your group for someone with advertising experience or a marketing background. If you don’t have in-house talent, read articles about the effective use of the media.

There's an art to advertising. It involves not only getting your message across to the community; it creates a "call to action" with the recipient. Your publicity campaign should tell them all the relevant details.

### **Who**

Get your organization's name into every aspect of the publicity. Build on your "brand." Think of it as making your group a household name. That's branding.

### **What**

Give a capsule description of the type of fundraiser. Your flyer should describe in a few words what you are offering. An example is a band fundraiser selling Florida oranges. "Direct from the groves – Fresh Oranges!"

### **When**

Communicate details on the specific dates of your event or sales period. Again, be succinct. "Saturday, Oct 22nd only – The Pumpkin Patch."

### **Where**

If you want anyone to show up, you have to tell your audience where it's going to be and provide any specific directions. Example: Celebrity Auction, Mission Church Auditorium, 2500 Jones Road, just past the State Park.

### **Why**

Always mention the organizational benefit from this fundraiser. People are more likely to support your cause if they know why the money is needed and what it will be spent on. Having that knowledge makes them feel better about their decision to help. One example of this telling "why" would be the seller talking about the new computers their school will be buying with the proceeds.

Be sure to put this particular fundraiser into a specific perspective:

- We're raising money for a new computer lab
- Our band needs to pay our way to The Rose Bowl parade
- We're trying to buy new sports uniforms

### How

Explaining how you're raising funds is important when the type of fundraiser you've covered in the "what" category is somewhat vague. An example of this would be a drive to have goods donated for auction. You're trying to reach all potential supporters to tell them to bring any consumer electronics items they no longer want so your group can sell them on eBay's subsidiary, half.com.

"Our auction will turn your junk into funds for our group." Or, remembering the hook concept, you could say: "Your junk is our new computer."

### What now

Once you've determined what your message is and tweaked it to maximize results, you are ready to spread the word.

## Utilize these communication methods:

### Press releases

When was the last time your group actually put out a press release? Next to never? If you want to broaden your potential audience, get creative. Copy a press release off the Internet and modify it with your message. Mail, email, or fax a copy to all the media outlets in your area.

### **Newsletters**

Utilize both your organization, along with the various neighborhood and church newsletters in your vicinity. Start telling everyone what's going to happen at least a month in advance.

### **Posters**

Besides putting these up in your familiar environs, think outside the box. Can you get permission to put them in the window or on the bulletin board at a local merchant? See if any organization members own a small business or manage a retail space. Work your merchant base by reminding them how many of your supporters shop there.

### **Roadside signs**

A lucky group like a school might have roadside signage already. However, there's no reason other groups can't have some as well. Remember those flocks of candidate signs from the last election?

You can make your own signs and plant them in the ground in conspicuous areas. Be sure to remove them when you're finished, follow all local laws, and save them for future re-use.

### **Flyers**

These can be stuck to neighborhood mailboxes or placed under windshield wipers at the supermarket, sporting events, local businesses, etc. They are also good for placing on the bulletin board at the local supermarket.

Design your flyers with an eye toward getting the print size as large as possible. Consider using an eye-catching color of paper. If cost is an issue, check for connections to a local printer or ask for help from volunteers to print some on their home printer.

### **Newspaper coverage**

You can't get mentioned in the local paper if you don't ask. Many papers have sections that focus on community events. Check the paper for other mentions. If there aren't printed instructions, ask right away about submission procedures.

Be sure to invite the media to come and take pictures if there's a potential story. Even though the publicity will be after the event, it will help for the next fundraiser and generate community awareness of your group. This is useful for getting more volunteers and merchant supporters. "Did you see the story about our group in the paper last week? Well..."

### **Radio coverage**

Invite local radio personalities to participate in a fun-type event fundraiser. Many have mobile broadcast vehicles that can also serve as an extra attraction for your event. "WXYZ 108FM will be there! Don't miss out on meeting your favorite DJ's."

### **Local merchants**

Create awareness via a local merchant's program. Use window decals and other "branding" or "co-branding" strategies like the "Thanks a million" dollar bill with your local merchant sponsors listed on the back.

### **Publicity stunts**

Shameless attention getters will often get you media exposure. Be sure not to do anything too risky that could end up portraying your organization in a less than stellar light.

### **E-mail**

E-mail all sources offering public service announcements. Check around ahead of time for specific lead-times and requirements. An example is to send information about your event to the local PBS station.

## Website

Use a website to post all the relevant information. Liven it up with pictures and creative copy. This is a good place to post a thank you list of volunteers and organizers. Merchants like being credited here as well.

If you don't have your own website, start one today. See the **Tips and Techniques** Section, and **Website Benefits** Section for more details.

## Summary

A fundraising event is not like the movie "A Field of Dreams" in that, if you build it, they will come. Think of your last fundraiser and the general awareness of who, what, when, where, why, and how. Do you really believe that everyone that was a possible supporter heard your message?

You'll have problems if potential supporters:

- 1) don't know who is raising funds
- 2) don't know what you're doing
- 3) haven't a clue as to when it is
- 4) can't find out where it will be
- 5) don't know why you're doing it
- 6) are baffled as to how it all works

Spend some time strategizing about communicating your information to your community. Have a publicity plan and work your plan. Then, your fundraiser will be a "dream" and indeed, they will come after all.

## Communication

Every organization needs all the help it can get from its supporters. Provide meaningful communication of your message to everyone involved – sellers, buyers, sponsors, parents, volunteers, etc.

In order to maximize your success, all of this needs to be done early and often. Let's take a look at the three main areas of fundraiser communication – what to communicate, how to communicate, and when to communicate.

### What to communicate:

- Specific reason for this fundraiser
- All financial goals
- Type of fundraiser selected
- Timelines for all activities
- Specific directions for those activities
- Supporting sales materials
- Updates on milestones
- Key reminders
- Final results

Your organization, your participants, and to some extent your supporters need to know the who, what, when, where, why, and how of your fundraiser. Getting this information out accurately on a timely basis is a critical factor in your group's success.

### Specific reasons

As discussed elsewhere in this book, a fundraiser works best when all of its participants and supporters know the specific reason why money is being raised. This motivates the sales group to work harder toward a defined objective. It

gives the supporter an emotional reason to make a purchase or an outright donation.

### **Financial goals**

The goal itself needs to be a specific dollar amount. That sum needs to be translated into sub-group goals and individual goals. Everyone involved needs to understand what their part in the project is.

### **Fundraiser details**

The operational aspects of the fundraiser need to be communicated clearly. All roles and responsibilities should be in writing. Everyone should have a copy of their job description and a clear expectation of their time commitment.

### **Timeline information**

Two weeks before the kickoff, everyone involved should know all the key dates of the project. This is important because you want to have a clearly defined start and stop date that is well known to both your sellers and to the community.

### **Directions on activities**

Provide the most detailed set of instructions possible. The more detailed the instructions given, the fewer questions are asked and the better the results.

### **Sales materials**

The sales participants need to have their order forms, sales scripts, brochure or catalog, and instructions in hand. That means getting everything assembled and bundled into delivery stacks. Allow enough time for them to become familiar with the materials before putting them to use.

## Updates

Periodic updates need to be provided to various individuals within your organization. Make sure your project plan includes a written list of all necessary communications.

The participants also need feedback during the campaign that lets them know how the group effort is progressing. Any interim prize level achievements should be included as motivational material.

## Key reminders

All deadlines need to be spelled out well ahead of time. Periodic reminders of those deadlines need to be made as well.

## Final results

How'd we do? It's surprising that after many fundraisers that the answer to that question is not widely known.

Communicating the results and goal achievement brings emotional closure to all members of the group. A lot of effort was expended. Let them know that it was all worthwhile. A popular idea is to have a thermometer or measuring stick sign showing attainment toward the goal.

## How to communicate:

Be enthusiastic about your organization and this fundraiser in particular. Give motivation to all participants to do a great job. Keep a quote file for inspiration.

*"The only thing to fear is fear itself."*

Well, that one is probably over done. How about these:

*"Your attitude, not your aptitude, will determine your altitude"* – Zig Ziglar

*“Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss it, you’ll land among the stars”* – Les Brown

### **Put a structure in place**

Give your organization a communications post, or better yet, a communications committee. Its work is just as important as the delivery committee. Lack of information causes lack of interest and lack of interest will definitely impact your results.

Be sure that record keeping needs are communicated clearly as an essential part of the process. All volunteers should be given the correct documents for recording the right data as you go.

### **Use hard copy**

Put everything in writing. It saves many a committee chair from having to answer the same questions repeatedly.

Put those documents in the hands of the people who need them. Don’t expect anyone to know exactly what they are supposed to do and when they are supposed to do it.

Keep a central archive of all documents and make sure that your organization’s leadership have backup copies of each set of important files.

### **Use posters and signs**

Create wall art that attracts attention and spreads your message. These large scale and colorful reminders will keep your fundraiser in the public eye. Have a contest among the kids for the most creative posters. Put a few rewards in place to spur competition.

### **Use calling trees**

Form calling trees to structure a rapid means of communication. A good rule of thumb is no more than six downstream phone calls per person. That means ten people can reach sixty, who in turn can reach up to three hundred and sixty more people, etc.

Make sure that your calling trees are structured to work in reverse as well. After all, communication is a two-way process. Don't have all the questions that arise get routed to one or two individuals. Most questions can be answered by their contact one level up and don't need to go all the way to the top.

Again, avoid overburdening your key personnel. Run your fundraisers like a business. Sure, anyone who wants to can call the CEO of their company, but most of the time they don't need to. Why? Because the answers they need are available at lower levels of the organization and the CEO has empowered those people to provide answers and to make decisions.

### **Use your website**

Your web site should be used as a focal point for communications, inbound and outbound. Make sure that the common questions that always arise are addressed there. Set up an e-mail address (and monitor it) for questions and concerns about fundraising activities. Provide names, e-mail addresses, and phone numbers of people to call for more information.

### **Keep information accessible**

Give as much access as possible via a website, bulletin boards, newsletters, FAQ handouts, etc. Put a volunteer packet together for each volunteer containing all the necessary documents and instructions. Don't expect anybody to know or learn everything through osmosis. Save everyone time (and redundant questions and assemble the information once. Then, it only needs slight updates as contact names change.

**When to communicate:****Weeks ahead**

“In two weeks, we’ll be starting our fall fundraiser. This catalog sale produces more than 50% of our annual budget, so we’re giving all our supporters a heads up on what’s coming this year.”

**Give periodic participation updates**

“It’s the start of week two of our fall fundraiser and we’re already at 89% of last year’s number. Keep up the GREAT work!”

**Give end results**

Give final fundraiser results and feedback to everyone – organization, customers, sponsors, participants, volunteers, etc.

**Give the future a look**

Communicate your results and recommendations to future members of your organization for reference.

**Give positive feedback**

Be sure to say thank you to everyone involved. You want them back next time as supporters and volunteers don’t you?

**Summary**

In closing, good communication is an essential part of every fundraiser. Don’t think of skimping on this part of the process. If you do, your results will undoubtedly suffer.

Put forth the necessary effort to get it right. It really isn’t that difficult to organize your communications. Remember that most of these materials can then be used repeatedly in the future with just slight tweaks for different fundraisers.