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The 9 Laws of Successful Advocacy Communications

NEW YORK
260 Fifth Avenue, 9th Floor, New York, NY 10001

WASHINGTON, D.C.
1000 Vermont Avenue, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005

SAN FRANCISCO
182 Second Street, Suite 400, San Francisco, CA 94105

INTRODUCTION

Not too long ago, the former U.S.Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Andrew Cuomo, spoke to a group of nonprofits and progressive organizations assembled together on the eve of the 2001 Presidential Inaugural. He said something that struck a particular chord in me: "Compassion and competency equal success."

Most of the work we do to improve the lives of others and the lives of generations to come is born of our compassion and stubborn hope that, if we just keep at it, we will make a difference. We will protect our natural resources. We will guarantee in practice that everyone has equal protection under the law. We will not let American children die in poverty. We will help the millions in far away places conquer the raging killer, AIDS.

But our persistent hoping and sometimes aimless grinding away, and yes, our compassion,are only good for so much. Ultimately, we are effective only when we are competent — when we buy or develop the right skills for a job, think creatively, focus resources, exploit opportunity and come out of our world long enough to listen to the people in the worlds we want to talk to. The change we seek will elude us forever if we do not bring the right skills and the right strategy to bear on the problems we so desperately wish to solve.

This report,written by Kristen Wolf of FENTON Communications, is about competence — and really, common sense in communications. Communication is not an end. It can be a powerful means to changing hearts and minds and changing votes. We live in the information age and negotiating our time and place in history requires good communications.

The "no nonsense" voices of communications professionals and advocates for social change, who were crucial in helping to develop "Now Hear This," challenge us to hold fast to our compassion and dedicate ourselves to competence.

— Maggie Williams

Nonprofit organizations are at work on issues of critical social importance.

To succeed, they face the challenge of trying to educate, motivate and mobilize a public that is too often stressed out, overextended, even apathetic. This process has never been easy, but now it is harder than ever. Even interested and well-meaning people are cynical, confused and difficult to reach. Public opinion is not easily moved. People hear more "noise" than ever and they tune out far more than they tune in.

This document is not intended as a blueprint for creating communications campaigns, but offers a way of thinking about campaigns from a strategic marketing and communications perspective.

Good communication cuts through the clutter, it doesn't add to it. It does this by getting the right message, in the right medium, delivered by the right messengers, to the right audience.

People working in the nonprofit world sometimes have trouble adopting a marketing mindset, but in the end, the goal is for people to "buy" our ideas — ideas for a better world. That means we need to find or create willing consumers. And we can't simply hit them over the head. Browbeating is rarely a successful sales technique.

From a marketing perspective, when nonprofits conduct communications campaigns they have assets:

- They have tremendous public trust.
- They have credibility.
- They work on inspiring issues that by their very nature garner attention.
- They have a strong record.

"Nonprofits are experts on the issues that affect all of us, but are not always experts on the best way to communicate what they know. They have staff who believe, who care, and who are really passionate about what they do. They just need to learn how to harness that enthusiasm."

— Candy Cox, DDB

They also face challenges:

- Sometimes they go from being right to being righteous, losing supporters along the way.
- They often want to win the battle and the war in one step, when history tells us this is not the way it works. They have to be committed for the long-term.
- They often build campaigns and initiatives on assumptions — not tested, well-honed strategies
- They sometimes think the issues are too complex for simple, concise messages.

In preparing this report, we searched for common denominators that helped to define the most successful campaigns — as well as the Achilles' heel of some failures.

"It's not only about being righteous, it's about being righteous and smart."

— Bobby Muller, Co-founder,
International Campaign to Ban Landmines

One conclusion: there are three **must haves** for any successful campaign:

1. Clear, measurable goals.
2. Extensive knowledge of whom you are trying to reach and what moves them.
3. Compelling messages that connect with your target audience.

We all know this, yet too often we move forward on campaigns without using these three criteria as our guide. How do we ensure these three core components are at the center of the campaign?

4. Start with systematic planning that is reviewed and then revised.
5. Specify for people what to do, how to do it, and why.
6. Make the case for why action is needed now.
7. Match strategy and tactics to target audiences.
8. Budget for success.
9. Rely on experts when needed.

What follows is a closer look at these common denominators, along with words of wisdom from some exceptional communicators from the nonprofit sector.

1. Clear goals, measurable progress.

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines made their goal simple: Ban them. So far 111 countries have ratified the 1997 treaty banning landmines.

> **"People start from the wrong place and have the wrong goal. Ask yourself: what behavior do you want to achieve and by what degree. Is it doable…?"**
>
> **— Bill Novelli, AARP**

Winning campaigns have clear, measurable goals. Ban landmines. Secure a federal management plan for North Atlantic swordfish (Give Swordfish a Break). Decrease litter on Texas highways (Don't Mess with Texas). Decrease incidents of drunk driving (Don't Drink and Drive). These are clear goals. A communications program can be put in place to support such goals.

We can measure our progress toward achieving these goals. How many countries have signed a treaty to ban landmines? How many chefs have said they won't serve swordfish until a fisheries management plan is in place? How much have we saved in Texas highway maintenance fees because fewer people are throwing trash out the windows of their cars? Are drunk driving related accidents going down?

Many organizations were talking about the problem of landmines, and the toll they were taking on humans, especially children, around the world. But no one had articulated a plan of action. Bobby Muller, who co-founded the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, was sitting in his office one night and said, "Why don't we just ban the goddamn things." He just articulated his goal — so clearly that everyone understood what the International Campaign to Ban Landmines was out to do.

According to Bill Novelli of AARP, picking the wrong goal is one of the mistakes nonprofits repeat the most. "Too often, people create an elegant plan around the wrong premise or the wrong goal."

"A successful campaign, no matter how we define it, has got to begin with very clear, realistic, measurable goals," says Barbara Beck of the Pew Charitable Trusts. "Campaign goals that are not explicit and realistic are very hard to evaluate. You've got to evaluate so you can see where you've made mistakes. You need to know where the holes are. That's how we move forward."

Jon Haber of Fleishman-Hillard reminds us that goals need to come before everything else, especially in coalition politics. "Is your goal to have a pure coalition of people you agree with or is your goal to save the trees? If your goal is to save trees, let's figure out how to do that, and it might mean picking up people who are not normally politically on our side, but will help us win."

> **"You can never really say what you've accomplished, or whether you've accomplished anything at all, unless you have very specific and quantifiable goals against which you can measure your effect."**
>
> **— Carl Safina, National Audubon Society**

2. Audience identification and segmentation.

"Give Swordfish a Break" successfully reached key gatekeepers in the seafood industry.

> **"Today's social marketplace is increasingly crowded and competitive. Targeting and segmentation are crucial to breaking through and having the edge to persuade."**
>
> **— Celinda Lake, Lake Snell Perry and Associates, Inc.**

There's an old saying in advertising: If you want to sell to fish, don't use skywriting. Fish don't read. People often spend a lot of time figuring out exactly what to say, without a lot of consideration of to whom it should be said.

Don't say you are trying to reach "the general public." While this might be true in a very broad sense, the more pertinent fact is that you need to persuade the small group of people who can actually change things. The trick is to find out who those five, 50 or 5,000 people are.

Consider the "Give Swordfish a Break" campaign. The goal was to get a strong fishery management plan in place. The U.S. Secretary of Commerce, who oversees the National Marine Fisheries Service, is responsible for fishery planning. How does one put pressure on the Secretary? A group could get masses of U.S. consumers to agree not to eat the fish, but that would take a long time. Action was needed within two years. It takes a lot of money to get to individual consumers one at a time.

Who makes decisions about food for consumers? Chefs, among others. SeaWeb and the Natural Resources Defense Council, the groups behind the "Give Swordfish a Break" campaign, targeted chefs as the second most important audience for their campaign (the Secretary of Commerce being most important). And they didn't need every chef in the country, they needed famous chefs, the trendsetters, the ones who regularly appear in the media. The audience target has been refined from massive to manageable, e.g., from the general public to famous chefs. Now the campaign can create messages, materials and outreach programs to reach this very specific audience. This was much easier, and a far more strategic thing to do, than trying to reach the general public. In the end, "Give Swordfish a Break" had more than 750 chefs not serving swordfish.This captured the attention of the press, and, ultimately, of the Secretary of Commerce.

Once you know who to reach, you need to figure out how to reach them. You must assess their belief system and find common ground. "We have to study our target audiences and find out what we can say that will make them change their behavior," notes AARP's Bill Novelli. In Texas, they had a litter problem. When GSD&M, the ad company hired to develop a campaign to decrease litter on the Texas highways, conducted research to find out who was responsible for the majority of litter, they identified their target audience: Young men 15-24 years old. Once they knew who they needed to reach, they created a theme and position that resonated with this group — being cool and macho. GSD&M made it uncool to litter. Andy Goodman, a communications consultant to foundations and public interest groups, notes that when guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughn uttered four magical words "Don't Mess With Texas," within 12 months, litter decreased statewide by an astonishing 29 percent.

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) wanted to reduce teenage pregnancy rates. Their target: Teens. They could have made the mistake that Bill Novelli says nonprofits often make — starting with messages that appeal to them, as opposed to developing messages that actually resonate with the target audience. We may be inclined to tell teens to abstain from sex for moral reasons or that teen pregnancy often leads to poverty, but these messages may not be nearly as effective in preventing teen pregnancy as developing messages that are credible and have an immediate relevance to teens' lives. For example, as CDF did, tell them about the serious negative consequences sex has on a teen's lifestyle, like how they look or what parties they can't go to. This they can believe.

CDF took this approach and disseminated these kinds of messages. The one message that tested best with the teens featured a close-up picture of a pregnant stomach with the words "If You're Embarrassed By a Pimple, Try Explaining This."

CDF staff personally preferred some of the other ad concepts created for this campaign. There was one that said, "It's like being grounded for 18 years." The visual is a young woman holding an infant. But when CDF tested their concepts in front of teens, teens themselves connected most with the "pimple" concept. The target audience is the most important critic of your message and approach. It is essential to go with what is most effective in reaching your key audience, not what most appeals to those within your organization.

Vikki Spruill of SeaWeb thinks we need to pay more attention to the target audiences' beliefs and attitudes. "We think we are the audience. We don't pay enough attention to who the ultimate audience is. We don't assess where they are on a certain issue so that we can be more sophisticated in our messages to them. Nonprofits don't listen to the audience and they don't pay attention to how the audience perceives the problem. If anything, they are condescending about what the audience doesn't know."

Remember: It is easier to motivate someone around something they already believe than to convince them of something new.

Media wizard Tony Schwartz has written about "responsive chords" — plucking a value in your audience with your issue. Good persuasion, according to Schwartz, doesn't tell people anything new; it reminds them of something they already know. The "Don't Mess With Texas" campaign had nothing to do with litter and everything to do with being a Texan. The goal was to associate the idea (cleaning up litter) with something the target audience (Texans) already believed (being from Texas is special).

Identifying your audience's key values will help you persuade them initially. You will also have an idea where your effort may be vulnerable to messages from your opponents. This will enable you to prevent, preempt or defeat those attacks.

Think strategically about your audience and the best ways to reach them. Only then can you create effective messages.

Whenever you think: "The fact that I am right should be enough," think about the nerd at the frat party, who, around midnight, starts warning people about toxicity levels in beer.

3. Clear, simple, concise messages.

The "Don't Mess With Texas" campaign tapped directly into Texans' macho pride to get young Texan males to stop littering.

> **"We realized our audience was 15-24 year old males and that 'crying Indians' were not going to appeal to them."**
>
> **— Judy Trabulsi, GSD&M**

Clear goals and measurable steps toward them are supported by simple, concise messages that resonate with target audiences. And that resonance is important. Making an emotional connection that touches a pre-existing belief turns passive support into action.

Messages are designed to achieve goals. A winning message takes into account what will work with the audience to build support. This does not mean restating your goals. It means making your case in a way that will be compelling to your target audiences. According to Billy Shore of Share Our Strength, "Nonprofits suffer from literal sclerosis. They are so literal about everything that they don't translate things into language that people can understand."

"Everybody else in communications makes big bold claims for things that they don't really know. 'The best part of waking up is Folger's in your cup.' Is that really the best part of waking up?"

Some nonprofits would argue this last question for weeks, hold a summit on it, and then decide they couldn't make the claim without more documentation. They would stick to outlining the numerous physical and psychological benefits of caffeine ingestion when trying to get going in the morning, buttressed by data and charts.

One method sells coffee. The other puts people to sleep.

Let's go back to litter in Texas. As we said in section 2, this was a problem. In 1987, $2 million in tax revenues went to pick up trash, and that cost was escalating 15-20 percent every year. Yet by 1997, trash on Texas highways was down 76 percent.

How did this happen? Andy Goodman asserts that the "Don't Mess With Texas" campaign is a case in point of how important the right message can be. The goal of the anti-litter campaign was to protect the environment and save taxpayer dollars. However, the litterbug population, 15-24 year old men, was indifferent to messages about scenic beauty and oblivious to the costs of cleaning up the roadsides. Clearly restating the goal of the campaign was not going to work.

GSD&M, the agency charged with developing a campaign to decrease litter, did not assume that a) littering is bad, b) everyone knows it, and therefore, c) Texas Department of Transportation simply needs a creative way to tell people to stop littering. GSD&M's research showed the public didn't care about litter. As Andy Goodman notes, "Once GSD&M identified they needed to reach 15-24 year old males, they were able to come up with a compelling message: Don't Mess With Texas. If they would have had Stevie Ray Vaughn saying 'Come on, everybody. Let's put litter in its place!' it's doubtful if anybody would be writing about this campaign. But when Stevie uttered those magical four words, he tapped into something deep in the heart of every Texan: state pride."

The message "Don't Mess With Texas," which didn't sound anything like the goal, "Keep Texas beautiful and save tax dollars" did the trick because it persuaded the target audience to take the action needed in a way they understood and that resonated with them.

Messages need to be "spot on" from the get-go. "Once you've defined the playing field, the game is over," says Jon Haber. "If it's birds vs. jobs, you're dead. You lose. If it's corporate greed versus protecting the forests, that's good. We should be going after companies that pay off their junk bonds by razing forests. That's a winning message."

Another good example comes from Michael Shellenberger of Communication Works. "We are developing a campaign plan to stop the expansion of the San Francisco airport's runways because it will require paving up to two miles of the Bay and destroying wildlife habitat.The airport is justifying the expansion by promising fewer flight delays. So first we have to go after the airlines for over-scheduling flights — a major reason for the delays — and then we'll propose alternatives like a better radar system. It may be that we'll talk about the impact of noise pollution before we talk about habitat destruction. That's where people are at."

Shellenberger continues, "A lot of nonprofits want to speak the whole truth to power. Once the whole truth is known then everyone will follow — so the thinking goes. Advocates need to identify wedge issues and specific messages that capture the public's attention if they are to succeed."

The point is: Create messages that help you meet your goal.

Chris DeCardy of Environmental Media Services says nonprofit professionals often have a hard time doing this: "There is a great TV episode of The Simpsons where Homer gets Marge a bowling ball for her birthday that has the name 'Homer' engraved on it. This is what environmentalists do all the time. We try to give bowling balls to people who don't bowl. It wastes time and money. If you know the people you need to reach and know what they like, give it to them. The great thing about the environment is that it's all around us and means different things to different people. If we weren't so hung up on winning for 'our' reasons, we'd be smarter about listening to everyone else's reasons and appealing to them."

Some people still balk at tailoring their messages to their target audience. They want to win campaigns, but they want to win them with arguments that are complex, hard to follow, and highly nuanced. In other words, they want to win based on their own knowledge and beliefs. "Inevitably the messages will be too detailed and not persuasive to the target audience," says Jon Haber.

No one likes to be preached to or talked at. As Judy Trabulsi says, "A non-preachy message has a better chance of cutting through." Candy Cox of DDB agrees, "Nonprofits spend a lot of time telling people that they should do things. Most of us do very little simply because we should. Rather the message from consumers is often 'tell me how I can have everything I want and still feel good about myself.' "

Motivating messages need to hit an emotional chord. People are busy.They resist change. In order to get their attention and support for change, you have to connect with people by plugging into their belief system, not trying to rewire it.

In other words, you need to capture hearts first, then minds. Every imaginable gimmick has been employed by commercial marketers to raise what Malcolm Gladwell calls 'the stickiness factor', a way to involve the consumer more effectively by linking emotional experience to purchases.

The nonprofit community can be seduced by the complexity of issues, losing their audience in scientific ambiguities. It isn't necessary to be inaccurate or to dumb down issues. But it's essential to engage peoples' passion, whether the issue is the environment, their children's health or social justice. You need to reach people emotionally first, and only then educate them. Hearts first, then minds.

Messages also need to distinguish you from the opposition. "Nonprofits are often too soft," says Jon Haber. "They tend to see the world as good versus evil. The problem is that reporters, elected officials and others see the world as light gray versus dark grey. The key therefore is to use your messaging as a way to distinguish yourself from the opposition — and to do so in a factual, non-inflammatory way and in a manner that your audience will understand and accept."

"Nonprofits forget that Americans experience sophisticated, high-quality messaging all the time," says Candy Cox of DDB. "They're used to it and they expect it. If you create something that isn't high quality, it's not likely to grab people's attention. It may be a perfectly good message, but if people aren't listening, it will do nothing to advance a cause."

"People start from the wrong premise: 'if the public only knew the truth, they'd do the right thing.'"

— Alan Metrick, Natural Resources Defense Council

4. Planning.

The less money you have, the more you need to plan.

> **"The laziest thing people do is go right to tactics."**
>
> **— Jon Haber, Fleishman-Hillard**

We all know it pays to plan before executing a big campaign. But let's define "good" planning.

1. Spend time and money planning. Plan for the best-case and worst-case scenarios. Look at the issue from every angle. Understand the problem backwards and forwards. Review potential solutions. Who are your allies in pushing a specific solution? Who are your enemies?

   It does cost money to plan, but thorough planning means clearer goals, more concise messages, the right target audiences and a road map leading to success.

2. Think strategy before moving to tactics. Jon Haber of Fleishman-Hillard says "the laziest thing people do is go right to tactics." A press breakfast is a tactic. You have to start with what you are trying to get done, who can get it done for you, what you have to tell them and who has to tell them to persuade them.

3. Pursue communications activities that move you closer to your goal. As you put together the elements of your marketing/communications campaign, ask yourself with each strategic and tactical choice: does this move me closer to my stated goal? If not, don't do it.

4. Find your niche. There are a lot of campaigns out there; how is yours adding to the landscape? Assess what others are doing. Review who is doing what in research, advocacy and legislative efforts; identify gaps and duplication. Figure out what you can do that adds value.

5. Base every campaign on research — not assumptions. For example: When the federal government launched its "Just Say No" campaign, no one did the simple research to learn that teens trusted their peers more than anyone else. One of the last people they would listen to was Nancy Reagan, and certainly not Nancy Reagan telling them what they should do. TheTruth.com didn't make the same mistake to get teens to say no to tobacco. They wanted to develop a campaign that resonated with kids, so they asked them. In the end, they decided to let kids do the whole thing. The moral: Test your ideas before going forward.

6. Pre-test. Nonprofits often have limited budgets, making it critical that every communications dollar be spent wisely. This can lead nonprofits to "skip" pretesting. Unfortunately this increases the chances that the goal, messages or target audiences are wrong; and instead of finding out early when you can still change strategies and tactics, you only find out after spending $95,000 on a full-page ad in *The New York Times*.

   Pre-testing actually saves time and money. Pre-tests need not be prohibitively expensive. If you can't afford focus groups and a national poll, simply take your messages directly out to your audience. Troll a shopping mall and show people creative materials with your draft messages. Ask them for feedback. They will give you a reality check.

7. Be flexible. According to SeaWeb's Vikki Spruill, "Communications is 90 percent opportunistic." Long-term campaigns encounter obstacles and moments of serendipity. Your campaign needs to be adaptable enough to overcome hurdles and leverage opportunities as they occur. If the environment changes, rethink your plan.

8. Keep planning. Like a book, campaigns have a beginning, middle and end. Plan for everything. Most energy and resources are usually spent on the launch. The middle is often when creative thinking is needed most to make sure the campaign doesn't sputter out. And the end is the legacy. Too often we declare victory and leave the field before the game is over. Have a strategy to ensure that the public education effort was viewed as important and lasting, and that the work we initiated moves forward. Preserving the legacy of the campaign often involves partners.

   This isn't an ego thing; it's rear guard protection. Take, for example, guns. Anti-gun advocates have made enormous strides to get stringent gun safety laws in place, but many go unenforced. The pro-gun activists say these laws are a failure. If gun control advocates don't set the record straight, the criticism is adopted by the media and then by politicians. It becomes accepted wisdom. An exit strategy is just as important as a launch.

9. Review and revise. When your campaign gets funded, there is good news and bad news. The good news is, you have money. The bad news is, you often are given money to do a very specific campaign in a very specific way. This creates a disincentive to review strategies and plans. Yet, when you wrote that budget at midnight for a five-city television buy, you may have had too many cups of coffee. Or those messages you developed at an internal staff meeting were actually a flop with the soccer moms at the mall ...you know, the ones we have to motivate to create social change. Sometimes a slight modification is in order; other times, a complete overhaul is needed. Either way, build expectations with funders and partners that provide for changes once you're underway. And it is important to ask ourselves every day: is this working? Are we moving closer to our goal? If the answer is not a resounding "Yes!" go back to the drawing board.

   In the end, funders want successful campaigns. The only way to ensure success is to continually review and revise based on new developments, not the first draft of the communications plan.

10. Secure funding that fits your needs. When the President of the United States suddenly makes your issue "the issue of the week," be in a position to leverage this. Get funding that is flexible enough to give you leeway to deal with huge unforeseen obstacles and leverage unimaginable opportunities. After ingenuity,money is the most important ingredient for successful rapid-response communications. Build flexibility into your grant requests. Make deals where money will come sooner if you hit certain goals early.

11. Measure success. Everyone involved with your campaign will want to know: "How are you doing?" This means funders, mobilized constituents, even your family. Have benchmarks in place to answer this question. Send out frequent reports. Tell interested parties how you are achieving your goals every week. These are your stakeholders; just like in a business, you want to show that you are meeting and exceeding expectations.

"There's confusion about outputs and outcomes. People are not evaluating outcomes and not changing their resources in order to affect outcomes. They are instead measuring campaigning by outputs, but this doesn't actually deliver the results," says Chris Rose, a former Greenpeace campaign director.

"Hope, as in 'here's hoping it works,' is not a sound communications strategy."

— Maggie Williams

"It is necessary, but not sufficient, to know what you want to say. You also have to know how your audience hears your words and responds to your images. So you survey how different audiences understand your message when you use different approaches. After you discover the most convincing way of stating your message, you can safely spend serious money actually delivering the message."

— Denis Hayes, Bullitt Foundation

5. Specify what people should do.

People were told to race for the cure and they did. The Sudden Infant Death campaign told parents to put their babies on their backs.

> **"Your dry cleaner closes at seven. The earth will eventually fall into the sun. We panic about the first, but the second will be forgotten before you finish this page."**
>
> **— Peter Loge, The Justice Project**

You've done your planning right, created messages that work for your target audience and you have their attention. Now what? They have the facts; they know something needs to be done. They are willing to help. Now is NOT the time to give vague instructions: "Stop Global Warming." "Save Our Oceans." "Justice For All." People have no idea how to do this.

> **"People aren't mind-readers; don't ask them to be."**
>
> **— Maggie Williams**

But "Race for the Cure"? That's doable. If you can run or walk, if you don't mind asking friends and acquaintances for money, you will help conquer breast cancer. It's just like "Don't drink and drive." Short, sweet and easy to understand.

To decide what you want people to do, you need to determine several things, among them:

1. Are you asking for a one-time behavior change or a long-term commitment to a new way of life?
2. Are you talking to a willing audience or a skeptical one?

The campaign to prevent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome had to get out one important message: put sleeping babies on their backs. The audience (concerned parents) was very willing to do whatever was necessary to prevent crib death.

Similarly, the Ask campaign run by PAX had one simple suggestion for parents: Before sending your child to play, ask neighbors or friends whether they have a gun in their home, and if so, whether it is stored properly. Again, a willing audience and a simple "ask."

Recycling, however is a more complex "ask." People have to separate their trash, put out recycling on different days and follow instructions about what can and can't be recycled. Cities have to provide curbside pick up. In this case, the "ask" was still simple and concise: "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle." The target audience was less willing to consider these behavioral changes than the parents for the SIDS campaign or the gun control campaign.

Before designing a campaign, ask yourself: How many things do you want the audience to do, which is most important, and what comes first? Bill Novelli advises people to start with what you want to achieve. Then define the steps to get there.

Our world is really complex and we often feel as though we have little control over it. Consider this from Peter Loge of The Justice Project, "Your dry-cleaner closes at seven. The earth will eventually fall into the sun. We panic about the first, and the second will be forgotten before you finish this page. This is true for several reasons: If you don't pick up the dry cleaning, you'll run out of clothes; picking up the dry cleaning is doable — stopping the "earth's collapse" is not. There is a timeliness issue with the dry cleaning — by seven today. A specific consequence of failure — wearing your old "Van Halen" tour t-shirt to a client meeting. There's a reward — a pressed and lightly starched shirt. And your action will solve the problem — drive down the block, write a check, get clothes. Effective campaigns work the same way."

Another example: At an Eddie Bauer store, there's a sign asking you to give a dollar to plant a tree. The sign doesn't say, "The global environment is being threatened, so do something — here's hoping it works!" By making a specific request in response to a specific problem and providing a specific solution, Eddie Bauer is successful. Don't make people guess or jump over hurdles. Give them bite-size doable tasks that, when finished, help you build the support necessary to achieve your objective.

6. Make the case: action needed now.

Larry Bohlen bought 10 kinds of taco shells and tested for presence of bio-engineered corn. Positive results put Larry and the issue center stage.

> **"For so many issues, we use the campaign to force the issue, force a dialogue for a debate that otherwise wouldn't occur."**
>
> **— Vikki Spruill, SeaWeb**

There is a lot of noise out there. Forget about competing against eBay and Amazon.com. There is also a lot of "social issue noise" out there. An overload of noise leads to fatigue; people simply want to tune out.

You may think: "But this issue of homelessness is really important." And it is. But people have been homeless for a long time. People have been starving for a long time. Lands are polluted, nations are ravaged and human atrocities occur every day. Why is today the day to look at your issue? What is special?

Effective campaigns are built on decision points, real or manufactured. Maybe legislation is possible now or an international conference is addressing the issue soon or some event has made your issue timely. Tell people why now.

Vikki Spruill insists that if there aren't milestones, you have to create your own. "For so many issues, we use the campaign to force the issue, force a dialogue for a debate that otherwise wouldn't occur."

Friends of the Earth wanted to capture the public's attention about bioengineered corn. Although not approved for human consumption, there was concern it could find its way into food. FOE kept saying this COULD happen. They wanted to dramatize the fact that current government regulations are utterly inadequate. They had no hook, since the FDA had no plans to alter its position about bioengineered corn being used in food.

That is, not until Friends of the Earth's Health and Environment Director Larry Bohlen visited a half-dozen supermarkets, bought 10 kinds of taco shells and sent them to a testing lab in Iowa. Sure enough, two of the samples contained bioengineered corn that had been approved only for animal feed. The story hit the headlines and stayed there for weeks. Now Bohlen had the public's attention. He could have waited for someone else to force the issue, but with a lot of ingenuity and a little cash, he was able to get his message heard.

Drama helps. "Nonprofits are incredibly literal. They don't make the translation from the difference between the what and the so what. The nonprofits tell you what they've done. Fed this many people. Built this many trucks. They don't get to the 'so what.' The need to legitimately dramatize what I think is the real power of what we do. We change people's lives. There are millions of people watching which ad exec will survive on Survivor, as opposed to which kids are going to survive in Anacostia next week. That's the really dramatic story," says Billy Shore.

The public wants to know what to do, how to do it and why now. Answer the question by highlighting one of the upcoming decision points.

Brainstorm possible developments that might push your issue into the spotlight. Check the legislative calendar. Look for state action. Think of related lawsuits, anniversaries, and big announcements. If there aren't any, think like Larry Bohlen and get creative.

> **"Nonprofits often don't understand the difference between the 'What' and the 'So What.' "**
>
> **— Billy Shore, Share Our Strength**

7. Match strategy and tactics to your target audience.

Your audience listens to those they trust. Teens didn't trust Nancy Reagan, but kids do trust their peers.

> **"I get discouraged when I hear that part of the strategy calls for 'the cover of the New York Times Magazine.' You need to focus not just on your headlines, but what the impact is going to be."**
>
> **— Barbara Beck, Pew Charitable Trusts**

You've thought about the goal, the audiences and the message. You've done your planning and pre-testing. Now you will pick how to reach your audience: What strategies and tactics will you employ?

Your first instinct: Earned media. It's cheap. Your staff calls reporters. The articles will help you change the world. Hold a press conference and all will be well.

If only this were true. Too often, we go for the "tried and true" rather than think about who we are trying to reach and how best to do it. Maybe it's a letter. Perhaps chalking the sidewalk in front of their house. Think of all the ways to reach the people you need, then decide which best fits your resources and goals. It may be earned media. It may be a bullhorn.

"There is a sort of 'Rule of Three' that applies to getting someone to act on a cause you believe in," says Chris DeCardy of Environmental Media Services. "If they hear about it once, they may ignore it. If they hear about it from another source, they may stop and think. If they hear about it one more time, they may actually do something. Our goal should be to figure out as many ways as possible to reach our target audience."

"They should read about us in the paper, see us on TV, hear about us from a neighbor and a friend at a soccer match, have their kid mention us from school, read about us on the Internet, get a postcard about us in the mail, see us in skywriting and so on. There are a million ways to reach the 'Rule of Three' but it takes discipline to think of them and to make sure each avenue really does connect to our target person. If older Americans don't watch music videos, then an endorsement by a band on BET is useless."

"A mistake we make is finding one thing that works really well and simply applying it all over the place. In a basketball game, if you find a play that works, you stick with it until the defense stops you. In our work, the rules of the game are rarely the same twice. And if you focus on just one way of reaching people — 'I know, let's send an editorial board mailing'— you limit your chance to get your message in front of the same person from many different directions. You fail at the 'Rule of Three'."

David Fenton, Chairman of FENTON Communications, agrees: "A major goal of any communication campaign must be to achieve frequent repetition of a message in a short period of time. People only learn by repetition — campaigns should be planned and structured to achieve it. A one-shot news event is usually of only limited value, but when backed by other newsworthy events (legal, Congressional, direct action, celebrity involvement, etc.), and direct contact with the public (through advertising, the Internet, and grassroots action), much more power is achieved for your goal. Also, politicians respond to a story in direct proportion to how often it repeats — a one day story has limited political clout, a two day story much more. By the third day committees are being formed and announcements prepared."

"Paradoxically, while people learn from repetition, the culture of the media is structured against it. It takes careful creative planning to overcome the media's reticence to report anything that isn't 'new.'"

To break through the noise and get your target's attention: Think differently, try something new. If you have limited resources, this is even more important. The Natural Resources Defense Counsel (NRDC) wanted to get the Giant Sequoias of California designated a national monument. They could have taken out a *New York Times* ad to get the Clinton Administration's attention. Instead they decided to motivate influential Californians who were most likely to support their efforts to send letters, emails and faxes to Clinton urging him to act.

Their chosen tactic (with Underground Advertising's help): Buy the biggest billboard in the U.S. to save the largest trees on earth. They hung vertical banners on a building on a major corner of Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles with attention-getting taglines: "Nobody says let's go to California and see the largest stumps on earth." They also went for a Hollywood appeal — "Around here when you make it big, everyone wants to take you down." The effort generated tremendous local media attention and lots of website traffic. In August, Clinton declared the Sequoias a national monument.

Think different. There is so much fog out there already that doing the same old stuff often won't cut it.

"It's about calculated risk," says Chris DeCardy: "Wall Street understands smart risks and diversifying tactics. In an investment portfolio, you mix stocks with high risk and return with those of lower risk and return. You know the high flyers may not hit, but when they do you get a big reward. Too often, we act without thinking through the risks. If we do think them through, we shy away from those that may fail. A lot of foundations have guidelines that reinforce this cautious approach. The problem is that if we avoid risks — even smart risks — every time, we miss the big opportunities. Failing shouldn't be seen as a negative, as long as the effort was well thought out."

There are many strategies and tactics you can consider when deciding the best way to get messages to your target audience. Below are a few to consider:

Picking messengers

When researching the messages your audience will find persuasive, you also need to know who your audience trusts. "The American public listens to people, not organizations," says Denis Hayes of the Bullitt Foundation.

Hayes also says in many cases, lack of an effective messenger is the big hole in a campaign. "If you ask people to name a consumer advocate, they say Nader. If you say, 'name a feminist leader,' they say Steinem. If you say, 'name a civil rights leader,' they say Jackson. But ask them to name an environmental leader... Not having a well-known spokesperson limits the effectiveness of our communications. You have to have somebody who takes command of the issue."

Find the *best* spokespeople to raise the profile of your issue. If you want to bring an issue into the mainstream, use mainstream spokespeople. "When AIDS was an issue defined by perceived extremists," Hayes says, "marketers and advertisers had a tough time getting behind it. When it became a cultural issue to everyone, when entertainers and the media got involved and spoke out, all of a sudden companies, foundations, everyone started jumping on the bandwagon to support AIDS related charities."

Messengers can also be used strategically to thwart the opposition. The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids used children as spokespeople. Kids were compelling on this issue; they were also a tough target for the tobacco companies to attack. In many ways, CFTFK inoculated its messages from attack by having kids say the messages. The same messages coming from adult advocates, lawyers, etc., likely would not have had the same impact.

Considering both "earned" and "paid" media

Whether to advertise or rely on "earned media" is often a question. Both are important vehicles to consider when disseminating messages. Earned media is often cheaper, but harder to control. Your message can take a real beating when it goes through a reporter, editor or producer. Also, "earning" the coverage is sometimes impossible; your issue just isn't getting the attention it needs. When considering earned media, always think about the downside. What can go wrong? Once the media has characterized you, it is difficult to recover. The front-page article that denounces you as "on the fringe" has more impact than the correction several days later on the inside. Advertising can be quite costly, but you get exactly what you pay for. You get to say what you want, but you still need to think about the audience reading it. Will they read a text-laden ad? Do they care if many allied groups are signed on? Coalitions often are challenged to produce effective ads while still meeting the needs of the coalition. Remember the audience. If it isn't the heads of the coalition you are trying to persuade, then using them as your focus group is a mistake. Have someone outside, who doesn't know the internal politics, write the ad for the intended audience.

Getting interactive

People receive information differently in the age of the Internet. The first place many people look is the web. It's a new and different beast. To communicate effectively with target audiences, we have to know how to reach them online. Be familiar with tactics like viral marketing. The interactive component is key. Consumers expect tailored, easy to read, eye-catching information in this format. It's not as simple as digitizing a brochure.

Using experiential approaches

Sometimes our issues become stagnant. It happens. The stream is still polluted, racism is still a problem, but there's nothing new. Consider an experiential approach. The Virginia Cooperative Extension put this idea into practice with great success. Low-income people face all sorts of obstacles in daily life — a reality that the higher-income majority may realize but never experience. This organization puts on a realistic welfare simulation program, designed to give participants an idea of what the typical low-income family experiences. What was initiated as a one-time program has now been implemented 60 times throughout the state with a total of more than 3,000 participants. Past participants, drawn from churches, health and social services departments and volunteer groups, report higher awareness of poverty issues and an increased interest in lending a hand in their communities.

Branding

Branding — associating a cause or goal with an organization or person and imbedding that combined image into the public's brain — is today's hot communications buzzword. Is it right for your organization or cause? As a strategy, branding should undergo the same scrutiny as any other strategy or tactic because branding, like everything else, is not a communications panacea. There are several types of branding to consider.

Organizational branding. There are good institutional reasons to brand an organization: To reach membership goals, increase credibility among policymakers and simplify messaging, among others. Organizational branding usually takes tremendous resources. Only do organizational branding if it clearly will contribute to the organization's objectives. Greenpeace uses its brand to draw attention to issues it deems important. Companies worry when they hear "Greenpeace is on site." It works for Greenpeace, but it may not work with your organization.

Issue branding. There is also issue branding, where an organization or coalition frames a specific issue. In the early 90s several groups decided to "brand" breast cancer. They wanted to set it apart from other cancers and make it the disease of the decade. They did it 1) to raise awareness about the prevalence of the disease to improve prevention — get mammograms, do monthly breast exams, 2) to raise its profile and generate new funds for research, and 3) to make the point that this disease affects everyone — countless women and their families. The raised profile benefited many groups and helped to achieve their goals.

Behavior/lifestyle branding. TheTruth.com, a campaign developed by Crispin, Porter and Bogusky, aimed to convince kids to stay away from tobacco. Faced with the fact that the coolness of smoking is a higher priority than health risks, CP&B focused less on teen mortality and more on the fact that teens were victims of manipulation and duplicity by a callous older generation. Teens, upon hearing that tobacco and advertising industries were colluding to cavalierly take teens' money and abuse their bodies in return for billions in profit, got mad. This anger provided the key to a new brand: "The Truth." The campaign effectively unveiled a new (and evil) oppressor and made the rejection of cigarettes a hip way to strike back.

"There is a downside to creating advertising by coalition or committee. Group gropes invariably result in muffled, mediocre messages."

— Art Silverman, FENTON Communications

8. Budget for success.

Budget realistically, fundraise vigorously, and don't start a campaign you can't afford to see through to a successful finish.

> **"Unrealistic goals that try to change entrenched attitudes are really difficult if you are not going to throw a boatload of money at it. You have to have a lot of resources."**
>
> **— Barbara Peck, Pew Charitable Trusts**

Money may not be the root of all evil, but a shortage of money is nearly always a recipe for failure. Budget realistically, fundraise vigorously and don't start a campaign you can't afford to see through to a successful finish.

Spend part of your resources on planning and testing. If you don't plan right, you will waste money on untested assumptions. R&D is rarely a waste of money. It is smart to plan for ways to best use your resources.

Candy Cox of DDB says, "A planning budget needs to be inversely proportional to the budget for the campaign. Small budgets often tempt project managers to reduce or even eliminate planning, unintentionally placing the success of the effort at risk. A small budget requires laser-like targeting and strategy and cannot afford anything else."

The campaign takes off beyond anyone's wildest dreams. The response from the target audience is overwhelming. Problem is, there's no budget for wild success, just regular success. If possible, make deals with a funder to have a "reserve" of money to kick in if things go better than expected — more people want to get involved and the opportunities are greater than anticipated.When opportunity knocks, it is not the time to be writing fundraising proposals.

Keep an open line of communication. Generally, funders know that everything will not go 100 percent as planned. Keep them in the loop. Usually, they would rather know the "real deal" and hear about changing circumstances than keep the project on a track that leads to defeat.

Success often means more money. Plan for it. Success brings opportunities that weren't possible at the start of the campaign.

Benchmark. If you are spending money to create impact, show what that impact is.

Tap corporate partners, when possible; they bring a lot to the table. Billy Shore of Share our Strength found this out when he joined forces with American Express for the "Charge Against Hunger." Over three years, Amex spent close to $40 million branding this annual Share Our Strength event. Amex got glory; SOS got $40 million worth of exposure.

Work with allies to enhance efforts and leverage resources. If one group has a great report that supports another organization's goal, combine resources to disseminate it. It is more cost-efficient to use existing research and spend pooled resources promoting it, than it is to fund new, duplicative research, just so the information is proprietary. The Justice Project found out that Professor James Liebman of Columbia University's School of Law had a report coming out about the error rate in death penalty trials. This research would help

The Justice Project's efforts to pass federal legislation to reduce mistakes in capital trials that lead to innocent people wrongly sentenced to die. They agreed to fund the dissemination of this report and spent significant resources promoting a report that didn't have their name on it. Liebman got the exposure and The Justice Project raised their profile as a valuable resource to the media, moving their cause forward.

> **"A planning budget needs to be inversely proportional to the budget for the campaign... A small budget requires laser-like targeting and strategy and cannot afford anything else."**
>
> **— Candy Cox, DDB**

9. Bring in the experts.

Rely on people who have the core competency to do communications really well.

> **"When you are working on really important issues, use all the firepower you can get your hands on."**
>
> **— Ken Cook, Environmental Working Group**

Some people reflexively think they have to do everything themselves rather than relying on people who have the core competency to do communications really well.

The nonprofit world brainwashes people to believe they don't have access to these kinds of resources. Billy Shore gave this example: "An unnamed university brought together 12-14 brain scientists to spend a morning presenting research on cognition, nutrition and early childhood development. These were the smartest people you've ever heard. Then they spent the afternoon talking about how to communicate their research results, but they don't know anything about that. They know how to do brain research. Their conversation about communications was at the level of 'let's have a bake sale.' It's a real problem."

Effective communications is a key component of a successful social change campaign. It has value just like fundraising, grassroots organizing, and lobbying. If you want to communicate effectively with target audiences, hire strong communications counsel either in-house or out-of-house.

This doesn't necessarily mean hiring a firm with a big retainer. Find a board member, a friend, somebody that looks at issues from a marketing and communications perspective and get their advice. Ken Cook of the Environmental Working Group notes, "I find people who eat, live and breathe communications to be valuable and useful. It provokes me to consider methods not always readily apparent on first blush."

"Americans in France are convinced that if they simply say it LOUDER and s-l-o-w-e-r they will get directions to EuroDisney. It doesn't work," says Peter Loge of The Justice Project. "Policy experts make the same mistake —details about Medicare Part B don't make sense at any volume. Smart tourists hire experts — guides — to translate for them. Smart nonprofits do the same. They bring in communications experts to bridge the gap between policy details and public motivation."

Conclusion

The key to creating and implementing successful advocacy communications efforts is to honor the process. Make sure you account for all nine components when contemplating communications activities to support your goals. Use the checklist below.

If we go through this rigorous process, campaigns will be stronger and we will meet the common goal of running incredibly successful social change campaigns.

Our issues not only deserve this kind of attention and thoroughness, they demand it.

- Create clear goals
- Target audiences
- Utilize concise messages that resonate
- Develop good planning skills
- Tell people what to do
- Make a case for why action is needed now
- Match strategies and tactics with audience
- Budget for success
- Rely on experts when needed

About FENTON Communications

For more than 25 years, FENTON Communications has partnered with nonprofit clients to make social change. We work to protect the environment, improve public health and advance human rights and social justice. This guide is one in a series that we've produced to help build the strategic communications capacity of the nonprofit sector. To download a free copy of this and other FENTON guides, visit www.fenton.com.

Contact Us

Questions? Comments? We welcome your thoughts and ideas.

New York
Lisa Witter, Chief Operating Officer
(212) 584-5000
Lisa@fenton.com

Washington, D.C.
Ira Arlook, Managing Director
(202) 822-5200
Ira@fenton.com

San Francisco
Parker Blackman, Managing Director
(415) 901-0111
Pblackman@fenton.com

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"IN A STUDY RELEASED TODAY..."

10 Tips to Get More Ink on Your Next Report

NEW YORK
260 Fifth Avenue, 9th Floor, New York, NY 10001

WASHINGTON, D.C.
1000 Vermont Avenue, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005

SAN FRANCISCO
182 Second Street, Suite 400, San Francisco, CA 94105

INTRODUCTION

"Putting a report together takes considerable resources, so we make sure each study counts. This requires a careful calibration of strategies and tactics to make sure that at the end of day, we've hit a home run in the media and seized the attention of decision-makers."

— Russlynn Ali, Executive Director, The Education Trust-West

Ever feel frustrated that the only "ink" that you got for your last report was the ink it was printed with?

Many nonprofits spend considerable time and resources producing studies to advance their issues, only to have them gather dust on the shelf of some academic or government office. Why? Invariably, it's because the report received little to no media coverage.

The good news is, it doesn't have to be this way.

This guide offers 10 tips for turning your report into a morning headline or a segment on the evening news. No matter what your issue is or what type of research you're releasing — from scientific data to a public opinion survey — these tried and true tips can help you insert your hard work into the news cycle.

But before you dive in to write even one word of your report, we recommend that you take a step back and answer these important questions:

- **What is your goal** and how will your report move you closer to that goal? Is it to shape policy? If your goal is to raise public awareness, ask yourself, to what ultimate purpose?

- **Who are your target audiences?** If you're thinking "general public," think again. Make sure you're clear on which people you want to influence and who can help build your powerbase.

- **What's groundbreaking about your report?** How would you finish this sentence: "This report is the first to..."? In other words, what does your research do that has never been done before?

Even once you start writing and through the editing process, circle back to the questions above to make sure you're responding to your audiences and keeping your eyes on the prize.

Every report release is different. This means there are no fast and hard rules. This guide is just that — a step-by-step guide to help you position, package and promote your report so it gets the media attention it deserves.

POSITION

1. Framing is everything.

How well you frame your report can determine how the media covers your story and how much play it gets.

When you hear a newscaster say, "In a study released today…" what follows is a pithy wrap-up of the study's central finding. "High housing costs are driving out teachers, firefighters." Or "School bus diesel fumes raise asthma risk." Every report needs a good frame. Think of framing as you would the plot of a good movie or book. Who are the good guys? Who are the bad guys? What's the conflict? Journalists rely on these essential narrative elements to craft their news stories. As human beings, we rely on frames to understand the world around us.

How well you frame your report — the very words and analogies you use — can determine how the media covers your story and how much play it gets, according to Robert Bray, veteran media strategist and author of "SPIN Works: A Media Guide for Communicating Values and Shaping Opinion." In other words, framing is everything.

Context is also critical for effective framing. The key to moving your target audiences is to meet them where they are. The same goes for framing. Reporters are more likely to find your report newsworthy, if it dovetails into the existing news cycle.

What's happening in the world that will make your report even more relevant? The state budget crisis? A new cultural or social trend? A heavily anticipated policy decision? Leverage current events as a jumping off point for introducing your study and why it matters.

Case in Point: A "Perfect Storm"

In the coming decade as Generation Y booms and demand for college skyrockets, California community colleges and universities may be forced to turn away as many as 1.8 million students. Yet the policy debate has been shortsighted, focusing on short-term fixes rather than the long-term solutions.

To help launch a new organization, the Campaign for College Opportunity, and put the issue squarely on the radar, FENTON encouraged the campaign to partner with the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and its forthcoming report release. We pitched the study to reporters as the first to document the looming "perfect storm" of budget crises, enrollment caps, and a record number of high school graduates poised to strike California's higher education system.

Nearly every major daily newspaper in California covered the story, including the *Los Angeles Times, La Opinión, San Francisco Chronicle, The Sacramento Bee, San Jose Mercury News, The San Diego Union-Tribune* and *Riverside Press-Enterprise*. Headlines across the state echoed the campaign's frame: "Colleges in Eye of the Storm" and "Community Colleges Face Storm."

2. "If it bleeds, it leads. If it cried, it flies."

News stories that make the cut often contain an elements of surprise or controversy.

This age-old TV newsroom adage speaks volumes about how editors decide which stories get assigned or tossed in the trash. Stories that make the cut often contain an element of surprise or controversy. It's not news if it doesn't tell you something you didn't already know. A report is also more likely to get the green light if the issue affects a large segment of the population.

For example, to set conventional wisdom on its head and drive home the point that a child is more likely to be kidnapped by a family member than a stranger, the Polly Klaas Foundation released the report: "America's Hidden Crime: When the Kidnapper is Kin." The study found that 81 percent of Americans are unaware that family abductions account for nearly 80 percent of all child kidnappings.

Case in Point: Danger: Breast Milk May Contain Hazardous Materials

In 2003 the Environmental Working Group (EWG) conducted the first nationwide tests to determine the levels of chemical fire retardants in American women's breast milk — the last place you'd expect to find something harmful. Brominated fire retardants are found in hundreds of products including computers, TVs, cars and furniture. Research on animals shows that fetal exposure to minute doses of these chemicals can cause adverse health effects including developmental damage.

EWG found the average level in the milk of American mothers was 75 times the average found among mothers in Europe, where they have banned the toxin. The report received widespread media coverage, including "Good Morning America," which reaches millions of viewers, as well as "CNN Headline News," "ABC World News Tonight" and MSNBC. In a landmark decision following the media blitz, the Environmental Protection Agency negotiated a phase-out of two of the three most widely used fire retardants in the country.

3. Be at the right place at the right time.

Choosing a compelling calendar hook can help amplify your report's main messages.

When you release your report can help you both frame and amplify ***what*** you want to get across in your findings. If your goal is to influence legislation, for example, you'll want to time your release to sway policy-makers before they vote. Depending on your issue, other timely pegs could be:

- Seasonal trends or calendar hooks during the year (back-to-school, flu season, summer vacation);
- Anniversaries of major events (September 11, the tsunami in Southeast Asia, landmark Supreme Court rulings); and
- Events that matter to targeted decision-makers or stakeholders (corporate shareholder meetings, professional conferences).

Case in Point: 50 Years After *Brown vs. Board of Education*

In 2004, in anticipation of the 50th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Institute for Democracy, Education and Access (IDEA) at the University of California, Los Angeles released a report on the grim state of California's public schools. FENTON helped frame the Harris poll of 1,000 California teachers as a "sobering report from the front lines." We drove home the primary message that, 50 years after *Brown*, California's students of color are still denied equal opportunity to a quality education, by underscoring how crumbling buildings, rat infestations and textbook shortages are exponentially more pronounced at schools serving high percentages of African-American and Latino students.

Thanks to the early jump on the anniversary, stories appeared in leading newspapers such as the *Los Angeles Times, San Francisco Chronicle* and *Sacramento Bee* and more than a few included IDEA's survey findings in editorials related to *Brown*.

PACKAGE

4. Go local!

If you want to make the local news, make sure your report offers local-level data. In other words, to play in Peoria, it's got to have news for Peoria.

The late House Speaker Tip O'Neill was known for saying, "All politics is local." He could just as well have been talking about the news. All news is local, and the trend in newsrooms to prioritize local news is only intensifying. This is particularly true of local television news, which is where most Americans, no matter where they live, get their information. So if it's important for you to penetrate local media markets, the best formula for success is to offer local-level data in your report.

Providing "top 10" lists or an A-F report card for specific regions is a great way to package data. America and the news media are obsessed with lists: They're easy to digest and we love to see how things measure up, from best to worst to what's hot and what's not.

Case in Point: Top 10 Reasons Why Journalists Love Top 10 Lists

Every year the American Lung Association releases its "State of the Air" report, an analysis of air pollution levels and the health risks to communities nationwide. In a recent release the Lung Association reported that 159 million Americans live in counties with unhealthy levels of both ozone and particle pollution. But even more enticing for reporters was the break-out of how their region fared in comparison with others.

The Lung Association singled out the "worst" cities in the nation for air pollution, from Los Angeles and Fresno in the West to Cleveland and Detroit in the middle, and Newark, N.J., and Bridgeport, Conn., in the East. And because the report is annual, local reporters can also follow their region's progress from year to year. The annual report card is an effective way for advocates to hold policy-makers and polluters accountable for cleaning up the air.

AMERICAN LUNG ASSOCIATION®

Top 10 Cleanest U.S. Cities for Long-Term Particle Pollution

1. Cheyenne, WY
2. Santa Fe - Espanola, NM
3. Honolulu, HI
4. Great Falls, MT
5. Anchorage, AK
6. Kennewick – Richland – Pasco, WA
7. Farmington, NM
8. Tucson, AZ
9. Bismarck, ND
10. Bellingham, WA

Top 10 U.S. Cities Most Polluted by Year-Round Particle Pollution

1. Los Angeles – Long Beach – Riverside, CA
2. Bakersfield, CA
3. Visalia – Porterville, CA
4. Pittsburgh – New Castle, PA
5. Fresno- Madera, CA
6. Detroit – Warren – Flint, MI
7. Hanford – Concoran, CA
8. Cleveland – Akron – Elyria, OH
9. Atlanta – Sandy Springs – Gainesville, GA
10. Weirton, WV – Steubenville, OH

5. Put a face on your numbers.

Bring your data to life with human interest stories.

To quote communications consultant and former sitcom writer Andy Goodman, "Numbers numb, jargon jars and no one ever marched on Washington because of a pie chart."

We're not saying your report shouldn't be chock-full of rigorous quantitative data. It should. But you can make your report even more compelling if you bring your numbers to life by doing two very important things: Telling human interest stories and creating a visual narrative to tell your story.

Press conferences can be a tough sell for TV. One option is to produce and distribute a short video package of images and footage clips related to your issue, otherwise known as "b-roll," that can be played during a news segment accompanied by the anchor's voiceover. Unless the footage is extremely rare or difficult to secure, national TV networks will not use b-roll, but resource-strapped local TV stations often will. B-roll is ideal when you need to saturate multiple media markets at once. And don't forget news radio! If you do, you're missing out on the countless Americans who get their news from their radios — from the moment that the radio alarm clock goes off in the morning to their "drive time" home after work. What radio lacks in visuals, it makes up in intimate storytelling. A good radio news story makes a listener feel like they're eavesdropping on a conversation.

Before you pitch radio stations, think through the characters and personal stories that will make your story come alive on radio. You can take it a step further by offering suggestions for and access to "ambient sound" — identifiable, environmental sounds that create mood and establish setting. For instance, a story on how pollution from diesel school buses affects children might include the sound of an idling bus with the distinct voices of children in the background.

Case in Point: The Children Behind New York City's Asthma Epidemic

Children who live in New York City's poorest, minority neighborhoods are 21 times more likely to be hospitalized for severe asthma compared to children in the city's wealthiest neighborhoods, according to a report by the Mount Sinai School of Medicine's Center for Children's Health and the Environment.

To release the report, FENTON worked with community groups in Harlem and the South Bronx to gather stories about asthmatic children to pitch as human interest angles to local TV, radio and print media. The images of the children's living conditions helped underscore the point that socio-economic factors contribute to asthma problems.

In addition to stories in *The New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*, coverage was especially thorough on New York radio stations and local television news broadcasts.

6. Don't hesitate to point the finger.

Use the media as a spotlight to put public pressure on decision makers.

Nonprofits sometimes make the mistake of releasing a terrific report that draws attention to their issue, only to drop the ball when it comes to holding decision-makers accountable for fixing the problem. When you have the media spotlight, take full advantage of it by casting it on the right targets.

Who has decision-making authority? A corporation? A regulatory agency? The governor? Who's the "bad guy" in your story? Who simply needs a prod in the right direction? Use the recommendations section of your report as a platform for urging decision-makers to do the right thing. Help reporters understand who holds the levers of power and how they can be tipped. Naming names also gives news outlets an element of conflict that adds drama to their story — and an opening to get a reaction from an opposing point of view.

Case in Point: This Bud's for Your Child

To draw attention to the dangers of underage drinking, the American Medical Association released a study that revealed the long-term, but little-known neurological damage that drinking has on the developing brains of teenagers and pre-teens.

To give the report more teeth, FENTON recommended that the AMA couple the science with a challenge to the TV network and cable stations to limit alcohol advertisements during prime viewing times for children. The story aired on "CNN Headline News" repeatedly for days as well as on more than 500 local stations around the country. Newspapers nationwide picked up the story and more than a few editorialized in support of the AMA's position.

7. Make the report reader-friendly.

Think of your executive summary as the "CliffsNotes" to your report for journalists under deadline.

Make your report easy to scan, especially for reporters on deadline. An executive summary in particular gives them a useful "CliffsNotes" version of your report so they can get a quick snapshot and decide whether to read further.

Developing a brief executive summary: The executive summary should be no more than two to three pages long. It should give reporters an abbreviated overview of key findings and recommendations, an explanation of what makes the report unique (think "first," "most comprehensive," and other superlatives), as well as a brief description of your methodology. If your report includes technical language and jargon, you should consider assigning a member of your communications staff to write the executive summary.

Shorter is sweeter: Resist the temptation to throw in everything but the kitchen sink. Think of the summary as the document that a harried reporter on deadline reads when he or she doesn't have time to read the entire report. The essential messages you want headlining your news coverage should be the focus of your summary.

Break up blocks of text: In the body of your report, be liberal with headers and sub-headers that will help reporters index findings when they return to the study to pull out key points. Pull-quotes and graphic representations of your numerical findings can also help you emphasize points while offering visual flair.

Case in Point: The Status of Women in Post-War Iraq

How are Iraqi women faring in the post-war reconstruction period? What are their most pressing needs and hopes for the future?

These were the questions Women for Women International set out to answer in their report, "Windows of Opportunity: The Pursuit of Gender Equality in Post-War Iraq."

To help reporters wrap their heads around the lengthy report, which included the results of a 35-question household survey of 1,000 Iraqi women, Women for Women International drafted a two-page executive summary. The summary briefly set up the backdrop for the findings: ongoing violence, societal restrictions, yet optimism in the wake of Saddam Hussein's oppressive regime.

It also highlighted the report's "take away" messages: Iraqi women overwhelmingly identified legal rights for women and their right to vote as their two primary concerns on the Iraqi national agenda. Mindful not to bury key findings with too many numbers, Women for Women highlighted just seven survey results in the executive summary with bold subheads so reporters could zoom in on them easily.

8. Build broad-based support for your recommendations.

When it comes to shifting the debate, the messenger can be as important as the message.

Recruit third-party validators — prominent, well-respected individuals within their field — who can enhance the credibility of your findings and recommendations to participate in your release. Depending on your issue, these validators can range from elected officials to business and religious leaders. You can use third-party validators to:

- Speak at your press event;
- Author an introduction for the report;
- Offer a quote for your press release;
- Be on hand to do follow-up media like radio and TV shows; and
- Author a supportive op-ed.

Reporters will be especially interested in unlikely allies that go beyond the "usual suspects" you'd expect to see on an issue. For example, a report on sprawl endorsed by both environmental leaders and developers is likely to grab attention. The same goes for a liberal politician joining forces with conservative evangelical Christians to oppose violence in children's video games.

If you have supporters who are strange bedfellows, think about pitching them to radio and TV public affairs shows. These shows offer an opportunity for a longer, more substantive conversation about your report's findings and recommendations. And having the message come from an unlikely ally will help broaden support for your issue.

Case in Point: Strange Bedfellows Drive Energy Debate Forward

In June 2003 the newly formed Energy Future Coalition — an alliance of business, labor and environmental leaders including prominent senior advisors to former Presidents Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush — released a report in Washington, D.C., that doubled as a call to action to reduce oil consumption and carbon emissions in the United States by one-third over the next 25 years.

The report itself was meaty, but it was the unusual alliance of Republicans, Democrats and other leaders who typically find themselves on opposite sides of the fence that drew the media's attention. FENTON, which helped release the study, framed the coalition as a breath of fresh air in a policy debate mired in partisan gridlock and special interest lobbying, and secured coverage in the Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, NPR and elsewhere.

PROMOTE

9. Give reporters enough lead time.

Reporters aren't waiting by the phone for your call. Make their jobs easier by giving them advance notice – and the report – well ahead of time.

Want to get on a reporter's bad side? Hand her a 50-page report one day before you want your news to break. Be mindful that reporters aren't sitting at their desks waiting for your call. Like you, they are busy juggling multiple assignments. You'll increase your likelihood of better coverage if you make it easier for them to do their job. Here are some time-tested FENTON tips:

Start pitching three to four weeks out: This doesn't mean that you have to give reporters a copy of the report a month before you're ready to go public. In fact, we recommend against this. But you should give them a heads up that a report is forthcoming so they can prepare for it. In return, you might find out from them information on upcoming related events that may help you frame your report or influence your release date (for example, any news stories that might compete with your report release).

Three to four weeks before your official release date, send a teaser e-mail to targeted reporters letting them know your report is coming down the pike. Reporters are more likely to pay attention if you're able to tie your upcoming report to future events that reporters are likely to be following, such as a major state budget decision or a hot election race related to your issue. It's also a good idea to give beat editors who cover your issue an advance call because they are the ones who will ultimately decide whether the story runs and assign the right reporter.

Share embargoed copies with reporters at least three to four days before your release date: In place of snail mail, create PDF versions of your report that you can e-mail to reporters. You can also post your report via a password-protected link on your Web site for reporters to access. This can give you tighter control of when the media receives your information — and save you money on postage.

When you set an "embargo" on your report, you are telling reporters to respect an official deadline for release so no outlet will scoop the others. We often advise our clients to set the embargo for the time of their press event. While embargos are an industry standard, we highly recommend taking the time to speak individually with editors and reporters to get their agreement that they will honor the embargo. Sending out a blast e-mail or fax with an embargo date, without these conversations, may lead to outlets breaking the embargo.

Hold a press conference on your release date: If your report lacks visual flair, forego the in-person press event in favor of a press conference via telephone. Tele-press conferences allow you to connect with reporters around the country, state or region who wouldn't otherwise be able to cover your event in person. Reporters can listen from the comfort of their desks and your spokespeople (no more than four to five) can also save on travel time which is better spent on follow-up media interviews. Author a supportive op-ed.

10. Hit the editorial pages.

The editorial page is prime real estate for reaching opinion leaders.

When you map out your media targets, don't forget to include editorial page editors. The editorial page is prime real estate for reaching opinion leaders. Policy-makers, elected officials and their staff read the editorial page religiously as a barometer of public opinion.

Also consider submitting an op-ed, especially if a newspaper gave your story a negative slant. The op-ed can come from your organization's leader, the lead researcher of the report, or an individual who represents the community or group most directly impacted by the issues raised in your report, such as a college student concerned about rising tuition or a mother outraged by the influence of alcohol ads on her children.

Editorial writers can be some of the toughest people to get on the phone. So start by building a relationship with their gatekeepers, the editorial assistants. When you e-mail an editorial request or op-ed, make sure to "cc" this gatekeeper. If you build relationships with these gatekeepers, they will help shepherd your request to the actual decision-maker.

Case in Point: Lift the Veil on Teacher Salaries

To draw attention to the unequal distribution of funding for California schools, The Education Trust-West released a report called, "California's Hidden Teacher Spending Gap: How State and District Budgeting Practices Shortchange Poor and Minority Students and Their Schools."

The report lifted the veil on how much each district spends on teacher salaries, which is a strong indicator of teacher quality, the single largest contributor to student success. FENTON's publicity for the report included outreach to editorial board editors and writers, generating a total of seven editorials from some of the top newspapers in California.

The Sacramento Bee **cited the report in its editorial criticizing Gov. Schwarzenegger's reform proposal on teacher pay. An editorial in the** ***Los Angeles Times*** **("L.A. Schools' Silent Scandal") used the report as a rallying point for school reform that fixates less exclusively on test scores and more on the needs of poor and minority students who are dropping out at alarming rates.**

About FENTON Communications

For more than 25 years, FENTON Communications has partnered with nonprofit clients to make social change. We work to protect the environment, improve public health and advance human rights and social justice. This guide is one in a series that we've produced to help build the strategic communications capacity of the nonprofit sector. To download a free copy of this and other FENTON guides, visit www.fenton.com.

Contact Us

Questions? Comments? We welcome your thoughts and ideas.

New York
Lisa Witter, Chief Operating Officer
(212) 584-5000
Lisa@fenton.com

Washington, D.C.
Ira Arlook, Managing Director
(202) 822-5200
Ira@fenton.com

San Francisco
Parker Blackman, Managing Director
(415) 901-0111
Pblackman@fenton.com

FENTON | communications

FENTON | communications

TAKE A POSITION

10 Steps to Set Your Organization or Cause Apart

NEW YORK
260 Fifth Avenue, 9th Floor, New York, NY 10001

WASHINGTON
1000 Vermont Avenue, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005

SAN FRANCISCO
182 Second Street, Suite 400, San Francisco, CA 94105

INTRODUCTION: A Tale of Two Creams

You're in the frozen food aisle of the supermarket, staring at ice cream choices. On the top shelf is Godiva, with signature flavors like "Belgian Dark Chocolate with Mint" and "Milk Chocolate Hazelnut Praline." Just below that is Ben & Jerry's. The packaging, a riot of colorful cartoons, appeals to the kid in you. So do irreverent flavors like "Cherry Garcia" and "Chunky Monkey."

Are you in the mood to dust off your fine china and best silver and treat yourself to a gourmet dessert? Or are you ready to dig directly into a carton with a plastic spoon on the car ride home? However you choose to indulge, you've just been the target of positioning.

In this guide, FENTON Communications provides 10 key pointers to positioning your organization or cause, including why it's important to do so. We draw from real-life examples of nonprofit groups and businesses that have successfully gone through a positioning process and conclude with practical tips on how to make positioning work for you.

POSITIONING: A Crash Course

I. What is Positioning?

Positioning describes the "space" a product or organization occupies in your audience's mind. It is an internal understanding of the essential qualities that set your brand apart from peers and competitors. Good positioning sets off positive associations people will have when they hear your name.

According to Jack Trout and Al Ries, authors of the marketing classic, *Positioning: How to Be Seen and Heard in the Overcrowded Marketplace*, "Positioning is not what you do to a product. Positioning is what you do to the mind of the prospect. That is, you position the product in the mind of the prospect."

When done well, positioning is a powerful trigger. Think "Apple" and you "think different." It's the computer for consumers who self-identify as creative and outside-the-box thinkers. Hear "Rolex" and you think "luxury watch." Motel 6? No frills, dependable budget lodging. Positioning helps these companies carve out their slice of the market by connecting with their consumers.

Sometimes people confuse positioning with branding. Here's one hard and fast rule: You can't develop a successful brand if you don't position first. Or think of it this way: A position establishes who you are, and what you want to be known for, so you can then dress the part with your *brand* (a graphic look and feel, name, tagline and color palette). All of the above should serve and communicate your unique identity.

II. Why Take a Position?

But positioning isn't just for businesses looking to make a buck. It is equally important for nonprofit organizations and foundations looking to make a difference.

Think of the most recognizable brand names from the nonprofit sector and you'll have a short list of organizations that have positioned themselves well.

American Red Cross? *The #1 name in disaster relief*. World Wildlife Fund? *Protects endangered animals and the environment.*

At last count, there are 1.4 million nonprofit organizations operating in the United States. In this crowded environment, positioning is critical. A strong position can help you:

- **Set yourself apart from your peers.** Most nonprofits go through life with a handful of *doppelgangers* they get constantly confused with or compared to. The more sharply you chisel your position, the more likely you'll stand apart.

- **Raise money.** Funders are more likely to pull out their checkbooks for organizations that make a clear and compelling case for the important work they're doing -- and for delivering results.

- **Rise above the data smog.** Four hundred-plus TV channels, 30 million Web sites and ads on everything from billboards to plastic dividers at the check-out line at the grocery store: We are an information-overloaded society. A strong, clear-cut position will help you break through the clutter.

- **Trade in your old suit for a new suit.** Sometimes organizations outgrow their original purpose or new challenges demand center stage. Repositioning can help new and existing target audiences transition with you when you make a change.

- **Protect your credibility.** If you're an advocacy organization engaged in a policy battle, you may face opposition groups or individuals with an interest in positioning you in a negative light. Don't wait until you've been branded as "fringe" or ineffectual before you take action to cultivate your image in the public arena. Position yourself first.

American Red Cross

WWF

III. The Positioning Universe

Generally speaking, there are three groups of people you should have top-of-mind as you set out to position your organization.

1. **Stakeholders:** These are the individuals who hold the keys to your kingdom – the ones most invested in your future and most influential in shaping your success.

2. **Target audiences:** The people you need to persuade to take action in order to achieve your organizational goals.

3. **Players on the playing field:** Part of figuring out your position is having a firm grasp of the other players on your playing field, your relation to them and what makes you unique. These "players" generally fall into two categories:

- Peers or "Competitors": Organizations that do overlapping or similar work to yours – or that are *perceived* as doing such.

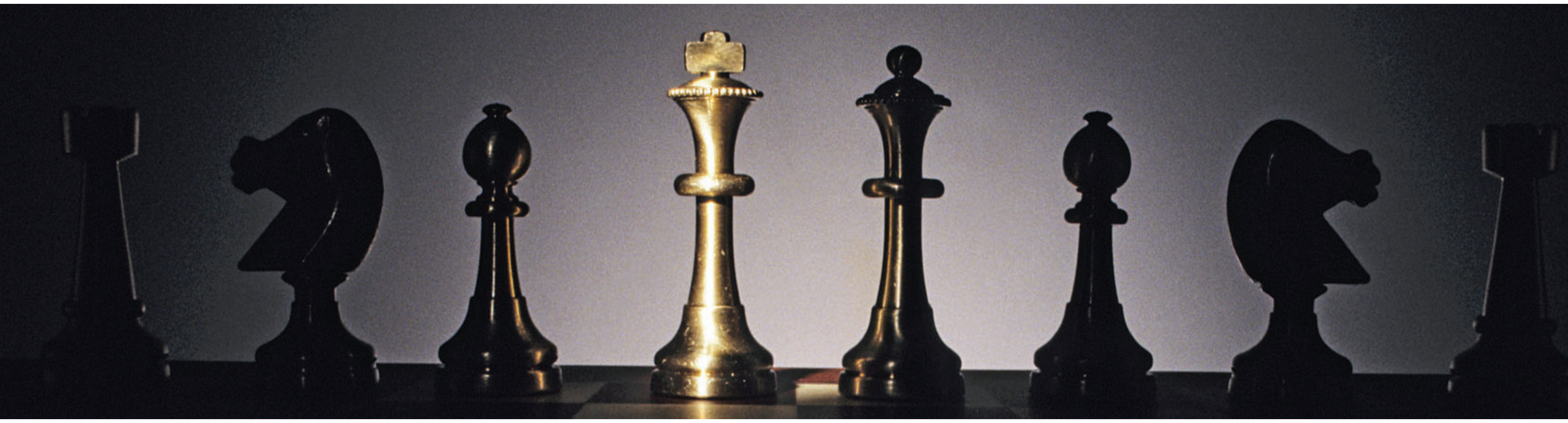
- The Opposition: Those that are working against your organizational interests. This group could include companies, industry groups and nonprofit organizations with opposing agendas.

How to Position: 10 Tips

In this guide, we lay out 10 key pointers for positioning your organization. We draw from real examples of nonprofit groups that have gone through this process and conclude with practical tips on how to integrate your new position organically into your work. The 10 tips are:

1. Get buy-in from the beginning.
2. Identify target audiences.
3. Start with what your audience wants, not who you are.
4. Know what position you want to own.
5. Zero in on what you do that no one else does.
6. Promote your personality.
7. Know what you're up against.
8. Match messages to your new position.
9. Show, don't tell, your position.
10. Get in position by getting on message.

1. Get buy-in from the beginning.



The first rule of successful positioning is to involve the stakeholders closest to your organization in the positioning process. This typically means your leadership (executive director, associate director); key staff (communications, policy and fundraising directors) and select members of your board. Here's why integrating them into the process is so important:

- **Positioning is personal.** It cuts to the very heart of your organizational identity, which is why, when your positioning changes in any way, those closest to your organization are likely to feel deeply affected. It's also why your stakeholders' input, insight and experience are critical to shaping the final outcome.

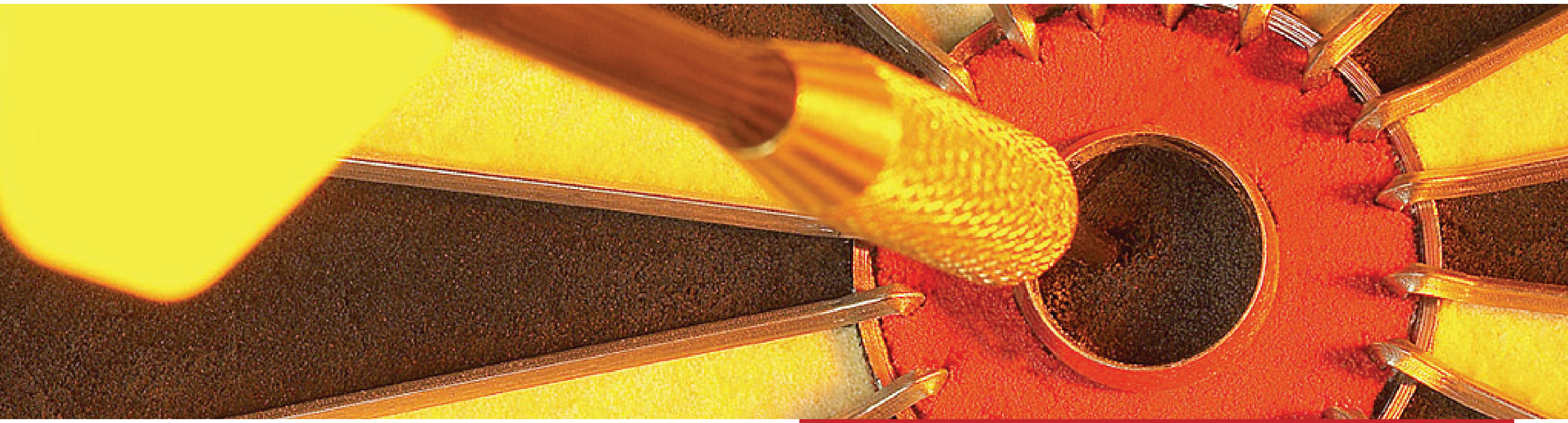
- **Positioning is political.** Involving key stakeholders at the starting gate of a positioning process will go a long way to building ownership, consensus and support for the final product. Not everyone may agree at the end, but they should all feel that they have had their say.

- **Positioning is a group effort.** What if you positioned your organization and no one else came? Your stakeholders are your most important ambassadors and marketers. Their buy-in on the front end makes for success at the back end.

It's not unusual in the positioning process for there to be at least one individual who plays the role of the provocateur. This was the case when Mike Smith, a vice president at FENTON, helped position an environmental group. Early on, Smith identified a stakeholder who fit the bill as someone who thrived on pushing buttons – and pushing back.

"When you encounter someone who has very strong opinions, the key is to make sure that he's fully integrated into the positioning process so his views are being heard. This makes it much less likely that he'll throw bombs from the sidelines," Smith said. "When it came time for the organization to agree on the final positioning and messages, this stakeholder gave his blessing, even though some of his points ended up on the cutting room floor."

2. Identify your target audiences.



Recently, we met with the head of an organization working to draw attention to the health risks of genetically modified food. We asked, "Who is your most important target audience?"

She thought about it for a second and replied, "People who eat."

As you can imagine, we wanted to narrow that down just a *little* bit.

If you're uncertain who your priority audience or audiences are, try working backward from your goals. Who has the power to take action and make decisions? Who, or what, influences them? Who funds you? Whose behavior are you trying to change? Once you've answered those questions, you'll need to know what makes them tick so you can position yourself accordingly.

Case in Point

Air travel is a notoriously cut-throat industry when it comes to grabbing customers. When Virgin Atlantic spun off Virgin America to offer U.S. domestic flights, the company hired a marketing firm to analyze its target customer and refine its positioning. After conducting online surveys and qualitative research, the firm, Questus, came up with this psychographic profile of the "Virgin American" customer:

Who are the Virgin Americans? They're young professionals, urban in mindset and sophisticated in taste. They're managers and junior executives, with higher than average wealth for their age. They're the trendsetters and fashion forward crowd: Mavens of what's cool and hip right now. Virgin Americans are also consumers of the newest time-saving technologies, latest forms of media and entertainment and the hottest restaurants, night spots and entertainment venues.

Virgin's in-flight experience is designed to appeal to this customer versus the budget-conscious Southwest flyer. Instead of harsh fluorescent track lighting, Virgin cabins are lit with "mood lighting;" windows are color-tinted to ward off glare. Seats are covered in black leather. The entertainment system has touch-screen navigation and other high-tech features. In addition to the usual TV and movies, you can also order food, listen to mp3s and communicate with fellow passengers in chat rooms.

3. Start with what your audience wants, not who you are.

Some nonprofits make the mistake of believing that if they lay out the facts and "speak truth to power," the public will fall right in step behind them. But they would do better to speak directly to the concerns of their target audience.

Car companies do this all the time. That's why a luxury brand like Infiniti plays up sleek design and high-performance engineering, which appeal to its high-earning demographic, whereas Volvo, the safe car, has become synonymous with protecting your family.

The first rule of marketing is research. What makes your target audience tick? You don't need a fat budget for focus groups to get inside your audiences' heads. One-on-one interviews with a handful of representatives from your target pool or an online questionnaire can be cost-effective alternatives.

Case in Point

Lenders for Community Development (LCD) started out as a consortium of banks focused on making small business and construction loans for affordable housing projects. Since then it has evolved into the largest microfinance lender in the Bay Area for low-income individuals interested in starting or expanding a business and an investor in large commercial real estate projects benefiting low-income communities.

Something else needed to change, too: Their donor base. Executive Director Eric Weaver wanted to diversify LCD's funding portfolio. He saw enormous potential in Silicon Valley business entrepreneurs.

FENTON worked with Weaver and other staff to reposition the organization to appeal more directly to this group of would-be donors. We knew, for example, that these entrepreneurs had something in common with LCD's clients: determination and drive to make their dreams happen. We also figured many entrepreneurs would remember what it was like to start small before striking it big and how critical the support of a few individuals was in getting their vision off the ground.

This spirit and the values associated with entrepreneurship were integrated into LCD's positioning as a great choice for donors who want to pay it forward by helping small-business owners realize their own dreams.

4. Know what position you want to own.

AMBER ALERT

Positioning is often a two-part process: You first have to define the position that you *currently* own. From there, nail down the position you *want* to own. This involves taking stock of your own capabilities *vis à vis* the other major players in your field.

Case in Point

A few years ago, the Polly Klaas Foundation found itself at a crossroads. Named after a Petaluma, Calif., girl who was abducted and killed in 1993, the Foundation quickly established itself as a rapid response search center for missing children and a strong advocate for abduction prevention. But it wanted to do – and be – much more.

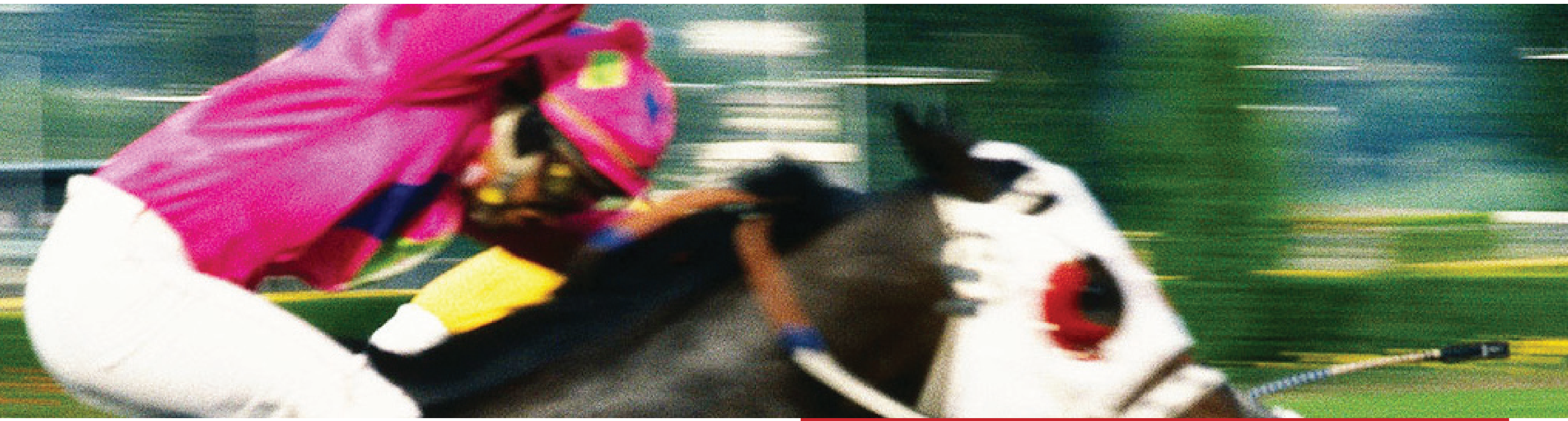
To help the Foundation chart this course, FENTON took the staff through a strategic positioning process, which included an extensive mapping of organizations that do overlapping work, as well as interviews with law enforcement and missing-children experts. We found was that, while there were a handful of smaller, national missing children's groups, there was a need for a strong, national policy advocate in the field.

To solidify the Foundation's positioning as a national leader in quick response for missing children, we recommended that it make policy change a priority. Its first campaign was a successful advocacy effort to pass legislation that established a national "Amber Alert," a life-saving electronic alert system that announces that a child is missing.

Bonus Tip

A big policy victory – such as the one that the Foundation garnered when President Bush signed a law establishing a national Amber Alert system – goes a long way to positioning (or repositioning) an organization in the eyes of key audiences – donors, policymakers, members, etc.

5. Zero in on what you do that no one else does.



The most effective way to own your position is to call out what you deliver that no one else can – or does – as effectively. In other words, what makes you unique? This is especially important for funders and the news media. It could involve a fresh angle on an issue or addressing a segment of the population that would otherwise be left out of the equation. Like a winning race horse, the trick is to find the open pocket on the track and zip through it.

Case in Point

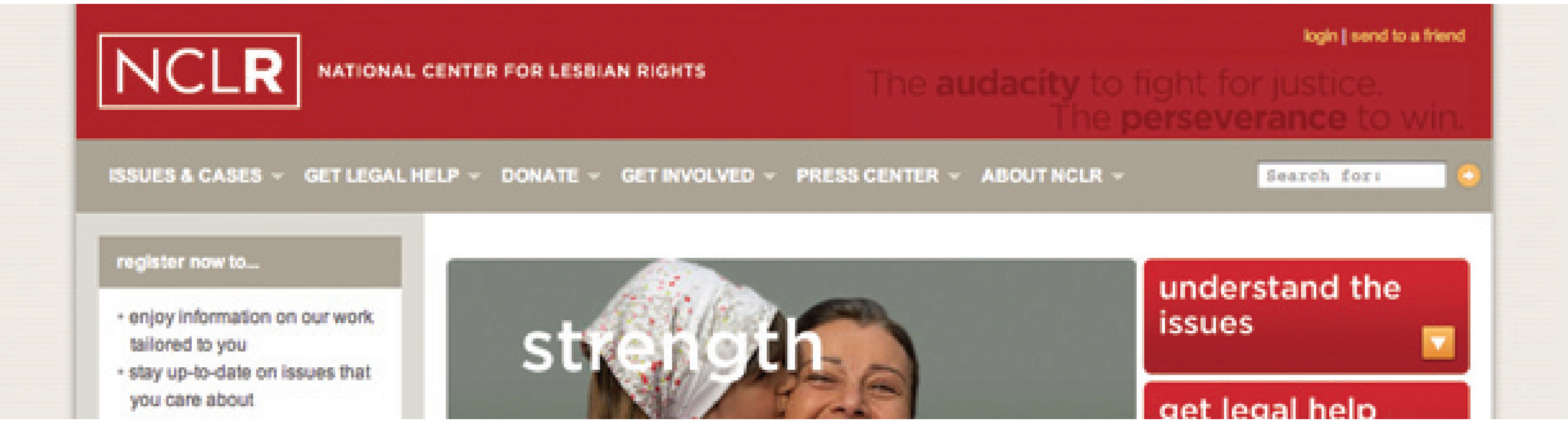
There are literally hundreds of breast cancer organizations across the country, from local support groups to major institutions like Susan G. Komen Foundation's "Race for the Cure." In the late 1990s, The Breast Cancer Fund, founded by the late Andrea Martin, created a unique area of specialization.

While other groups raced for a cure and advocated for early detection, The Breast Cancer Fund was one of the first to stake the claim that most breast cancers can be prevented. (Their tagline: "Prevention starts here.")

After securing federal funding for research into environmental links to cancer, the organization successfully campaigned for California legislation that established the first statewide bio-monitoring program to measure how ordinary people are exposed to toxic chemicals in the air they breathe, the food they eat and products they use. The group is also a founding member of the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics coalition, which has successfully pressured the beauty and cosmetics industry to phase out its use of some harmful chemicals.

Today, The Breast Cancer Fund is among the most "out front" breast cancer groups focused on identifying and preventing the causes of breast cancer. It has changed the public dialogue about mitigating that devastating disease– from being solely about finding a cure to one that includes preventing it from occurring in the first place.

6. Promote your personality.



Sometimes it's less about what you *do* that's different than who you *are*. A pair of sneakers, for example, is a pair of sneakers. But you wouldn't confuse a pair of Nikes with a pair of Converse.

In our work with nonprofit clients, some have been uncomfortable talking about other nonprofit groups as the "competition." If we're all working to make social change, how can they be our competition? That may be true, but at the end of the day, funders and others will still pose the question, "So what makes you different – and better?"

You don't have to cast your peers as an "evil twin," but you owe it to yourself to draw a clear and differentiating line in the sand. Because if people can't tell you apart from Adam, they may well decide to give time and money to Adam instead.

Case in Point

To kick off their 30th anniversary year in style, the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) asked FENTON to take them through a repositioning process to help make the most of this milestone.

Founded by then-recent law school graduate Donna Hitchens, now a San Francisco Superior Court judge, NCLR had been at the forefront of many legal gains for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. At the height of the 1980s AIDS scare, they successfully defended the parental rights of an HIV-positive father. The center pioneered advocacy for second-parent adoption laws and protecting the rights of same-sex partners.

Despite this track record, NCLR's leaders felt they were often overshadowed by other gay rights groups with greater name recognition. To set them apart, we conducted a peer analysis, comparing key attributes and public perception against an internal audit of NCLR staff and supporters. We concluded that while other groups were better known, NCLR inspired a "cult following" among a smaller, but extremely passionate, cadre of supporters who see the organization as an unwavering champion of even the hardest-to-win battles.

Armed with this unique positioning, we helped them develop a new tagline: *The audacity to fight for justice. The perseverance to win.* NCLR then used our positioning guidelines to inform the redesign of their logo and Web site, including a bold new color scheme (brick red) that reflects their fighting spirit.

7. Know what you're up against.

During the 2004 presidential election, Sen. John Kerry was dogged repeatedly by accusations that he was a "flip flopper" on the war in Iraq. On the stump circuit, he was greeted by people waving enormous foam sandals.

The image – and positioning – stuck, and it was no accident. Republican political advisor Karl Rove made sure of it, just as he made sure George W. Bush came off as an unwavering leader of conviction for these uncertain times.

Like political candidates, nonprofit organizations don't operate in a vacuum. The marketplace of ideas is crowded. For advocacy organizations in particular, you may be facing groups and individuals that are working actively against your cause (think clean-air groups against coal-burning power plants – or against industry front groups). If that's the case, it's important that you *reposition* the opposition to your advantage so fence-sitters and other audiences think twice about buying into your opposition's program.

"When you're working on a controversial issue against a well-organized opponent that is successfully pulling the wool over people's eyes, an important part of your job is to help lift that wool and expose your opponent for who they really are," said FENTON Senior Vice President Robert Pérez.

"For nonprofit organizations, just as with companies, brand is everything. When you successfully throw your opposition's credibility into question, you've damaged their brand and their political effectiveness.

"For instance, several anti-immigrant organizations have effectively positioned themselves as mainstream. However, if you scratch just below the surface, you'll find that they have relationships with white separatist leaders. By exposing these relationships, there's an opportunity to not only damage their mainstream brand, but also to render them politically radioactive among most politicians of either political party."

8. Match messages to your new position.

Your position is an *internal* communications tool. The external expression of your position is messages, the actual words and phrases you use to describe your organizational vision and what you do. Your position is reflected in other ways, too (your brand identity through programs and campaigns), but messages are where it all begins. Here are two good examples:

• **Meet people where they are:** Like positioning, the most effective messages draw on the shared values and beliefs of your target audiences. To borrow a page from UC Berkeley linguistics professor George Lakoff's *Moral Politics*, human beings make sense of the world through their own preconceived frames of reference. People see what they expect to see, which is why changing people's minds can be an uphill battle. To get people to go where you want them to go, the first step is meet them where they are.

• **Speak to the heart:** Our messages get muddled when we become the Nonprofit That Knew Too Much. Sometimes our messages get muddled because we simply know too much. As experts on our issues, we get wrapped up in the nuances of our arguments and slip into shop talk or the jargon of our trade. This is the reason why, when we take nonprofit groups through the positioning process, we ask them how they would describe their work to a 12-year-old.

"Whenever we ask this question, the nature of the responses is invariably the same: The language gets much simpler and much clearer. People are less likely to get caught up in technicalities and more likely to speak right from the heart," said FENTON Senior Vice President Bill Hamilton. " Being clear doesn't have to mean dumbing down. And when you evoke the emotions and passion behind your work, it can be contagious – and more memorable."

Bonus Tip

Rethink (but don't overthink) your brand: If your new positioning is a significant departure from your old one, you may need a new name, tagline or graphic identity for your organization that better reflects the change.

9. Show, don't tell, your position.

When it's time to unveil your new position to the outside world, "show, don't tell," is the way to go. Funders, members and allies are more likely to be interested in your work than in a formal announcement. Here are some steps for making the most of your position:

- **Revise your collateral.** Give your brochure, fundraising appeals, Web site and other externally directed communications a face-lift aligned with your new positioning.

Case in Point

The National Center for Lesbian Rights used their new positioning to help name Executive Director Kate Kendell's blog ("Out for Justice") and design its t-shirts (the word "Justice." in red on black). They also wove their positioning themes of *perseverance, tenacity* and *audacity* directly into a newly minted version of their "About Us" founding story.

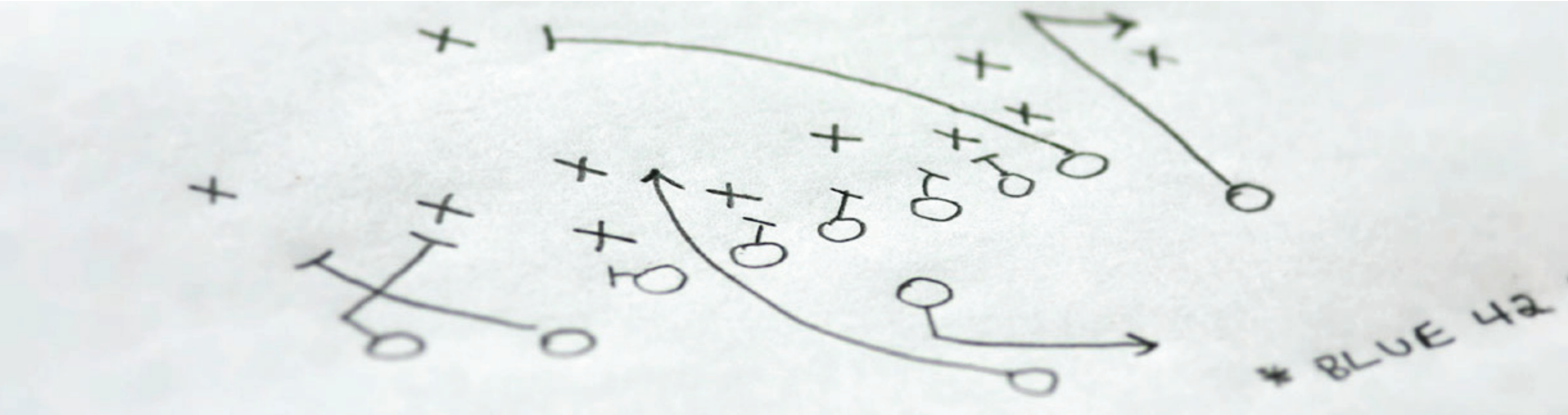
- **Launch a new campaign or initiative.** A sharply focused advocacy or public-education campaign can help drive your organization in a fresh direction and raise your visibility. A new campaign may help solidify your positioning by launching you in a space where you have not traditionally had a strong presence.

Case in Point

For example, when Women for Women International decided it wanted to be a more influential force for policy change, they kicked off a new campaign called "Stronger Women, Stronger Nations" and did something new: they released a poll of Iraqi women that offered a rare inside look at their hopes and fears for the future of their country. The report helped open doors in Congress and got them an audience with the editorial board of *The New York Times.*

- **Reach out to new partners.** A new position can mean forging new alliances with groups that broaden your appeal. It could also mean reaching out to news outlets outside your usual comfort zone, provided you have news they can sink their teeth into.

10. Get in position by getting on message.



The key to making your position stick in the public sphere is people. The staff, board members and other individuals close to your organization who are involved in the positioning process also make for ideal ambassadors.

"Your staff and board members are your offensive line for reinforcing your position," said FENTON Senior Vice President Lisa Chen. "If they don't follow the playbook, no one else will."

Here are some suggestions to help you make your position stick:

- **Organizational Style Guide:** Create an easy-reference style guide just for your organization that includes your target audiences, your positioning statement, your core messages, key stats and dos and don'ts for preferred terms and terms you want to avoid. It doesn't have to be fancy; the most important thing is to centralize the information.

- **Elevator Pitch:** Create a 30-second "elevator pitch" that quickly distills who you are and what you do. The phrasing should be colloquial. (Can you actually see yourself saying it in an elevator or at a cocktail party?) In addition to reflecting the essential attributes of your positioning, it should also concisely communicate the following: (1) a problem or need, (2) a solution – ideally your organization or program, and (3) a call to action inviting your target audience to become involved in some way.

- **Practice Makes Perfect:** Meet with your staff, board members and other key stakeholders to share the positioning statement and messages. Answer questions and concerns, and encourage them to practice their elevator pitch. Some clients tell us they keep a print out of their positioning statement handy on their desk or their computer desktop.

When to Position

Many nonprofits spring into being because their founders surveyed the landscape and decided no one else was adequately filling an important need. However, many organizations make the mistake of thinking that positioning is a one-time event. But healthy organizations continually review and refine their positioning over time to ensure that they remain relevant and indispensable. Here are some common spring boards for rethinking your position:

Before you brand or re-brand. Nailing your position is essential to a strong and coherent brand. There's no point in creating a graphic identity or adopting a new name unless you first have internal agreement on your position. Otherwise, your brand may sprout two heads that don't get along – or sprout the wrong head altogether.

When there is new leadership. New senior staff often means new energy and an opportunity to take stock of where your organization has been and where it wants to go. Positioning can help you get there.

As you approach an anniversary or other important milestone. An organization's anniversary year can be a great time to remind people of past accomplishments. It's also an opportunity to explain what you're doing now and the exciting challenges ahead. Strong positioning helps anchor your past to your present and your future.

During, or after, a strategic planning process. Strategic planning can result in new programs or new goals. When you shift gears, it's important to make sure you're clear with audiences about your new direction.

About FENTON Communications

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Contact Us

Questions? Comments? We welcome your thoughts and ideas.

New York
Lisa Witter, Chief Operating Officer
(212) 584-5000
Lisa@fenton.com

Washington, D.C.
Ira Arlook, Managing Director
(202) 822-5200
Ira@fenton.com

San Francisco
Parker Blackman, Managing Director
(415) 901-0111
Pblackman@fenton.com

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MAKING A NAME FOR YOURSELF

Branding for Non-Profits

NEW YORK
260 Fifth Avenue, 9th Floor, New York, NY 10001

WASHINGTON, D.C.
1000 Vermont Avenue, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005

SAN FRANCISCO
182 Second Street, Suite 400, San Francisco, CA 94105

INTRODUCTION

Think of the products you see every day. The ones you remember all have clear brand identities. Those brands stand for something—Volvo (safety), Apple (artful, intuitive design), Doctors without Borders (global medical relief). They are immediately recognizable and distinctive from their competitors.

That's the power of branding.

What a brand is. And isn't.

Branding gives you immediate currency in today's cluttered environment. It defines you and instills trust in your product, service or cause. For nonprofit organizations, this trust results in greater credibility, influence and fundraising power.

A brand is a promise. It is the expression of the core values of your organization that sums up what you do and why it matters. It articulates the unique benefit that only you can offer to your constituencies, whether they are internal staff, current supporters or new funders, or members and opinion elites.

A brand is not just a campaign, a logo or a color palette. It is all these things — and more. It is the essence of who you are, communicated and reinforced over time through the consistent repetition of graphics, messages and other elements. An effective branding campaign speaks with one voice in all your pieces of communication— from advertising and letterhead to signage and Web presence.

The value of branding.

Branding is especially valuable to nonprofits that must compete, often with limited resources, in a crowded marketplace where ever-more appeals for support are directed to a limited pool of donors.

A strong branding program will help you:

- Communicate your mission persuasively.
- Encourage internal buy-in and support.
- Recruit and retain new members.
- Develop new sources of funding.
- Enhance your profile among decision-makers and influencers.
- Create more effective marketing and development materials.

Organizations engage in branding for a number of reasons, usually centered on a change in leadership, goals or position. Branding offers an opportunity to reach a different audience, to refresh an outdated image or to celebrate an anniversary. Sometimes it's just the realization that all the great things you do aren't being communicated to all the people you want to reach.

"FENTON helped us drill down to the heart of who we are as an organization and our driving mission, which is about making sure older adults get the care they deserve. They 'get' who we are – and, equally important, where we want to be."

–Jeannine Melly, Deputy Director, Social Work Leadership Institute at the New York Academy of Medicine

The branding process.

Branding doesn't just happen. It is a disciplined process that starts with an honest appraisal of your:

- **Profile**: who you are, what you do and why it's important.
- **Market situation**: what is happening in your world and why your organization is relevant or credible in this arena.
- **Target audiences**: who you are trying to reach, help or influence.
- **Competition**: how you compare to other organizations in the same field (size, message, function).
- **Perceptions**: how you are perceived, how you would like to be perceived, how you are different, better or more investment-worthy.
- **Key messages**: what you want your target audiences to know.
- **Measurement of success**: what you expect the new branding or rebranding to deliver (more and larger donations, more authority with legislators, more members).

Branding, the FENTON way.

FENTON's branding process is customized to the needs of each client and is designed to foster greater communication, understanding and consensus among all members of the team. Our typical branding process begins with three steps:

- Stakeholder survey (staff, board, members, funders) and their perception of your organization.
- Communications audit of your marketing materials.
- Competitive review of peer organizations' messages, positioning and communications materials.

For some projects we may conduct additional research and analysis:

- **Messaging and positioning workshop** to help you define your unique niche.
- **Target polling and research** to identify demographics, attitudes, awareness, behavior concerns, expectations and needs as elements of what your organization provides or delivers.

Based on our findings, we will then develop the:

- **Creative brief** to provide strategic direction for the development of a new brand identity.
- **Visual and verbal elements**, including a logo, tagline, naming and key messages.
- **Style guide** to ensure consistent graphic treatment, tone and execution across all brand communications.

If the budget permits, we may also recommend:

- **Testing** to measure how effectively the messaging and imagery resonate with the target audience.

A branding project at FENTON is an iterative process taking place over three months — yet it costs a fraction of the price of a single ad in *The New York Times*. Together, we will develop a brand that communicates your core values in a way that all your constituencies can embrace.

> **"FENTON was pivotal in a repositioning, renaming and rebranding process that has resulted in more effective campaigns, recognition and actual change."**
>
> **–Leslie Samuelrich, Deputy Director,**
> **Corporate Accountability International**

The FENTON brand.

FENTON Communications is the largest public-interest advocacy communications firm in the country. Since our founding in 1982, we have developed media relations and marketing campaigns for some of the most important social change movements of the past quarter century — from the fall of apartheid in South Africa to the rise of MoveOn.org as the pre-eminent online political organizer. Our branding work covers a range of clients and issues including education, energy and the environment, global peace, housing affordability, public health and women's rights.

Selected case histories follow below. To see more of our advocacy and branding portfolio, please visit us at www.fenton.com.

Client: William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
Project: Branding the Open Educational Resources program

OER
OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Taking a cue from the world of "open source" computer technology, the Hewlett Foundation created a breakthrough program based on the concept of "open source" educational information. FENTON worked with the foundation to position and brand its Open Education Resources program by focusing on its vision of making knowledge free and accessible to anyone in the world with access to the Internet. Our work included the development of a logo modeled after the African symbol for "knowledge." We also helped the staff distill technological jargon into everyday language and real-life stories about how "OER" resources have helped people globally, from a health worker in a refugee camp in Uganda researching nutrition to a high school student in rural Kentucky downloading advanced placement physics coursework so she can study on her own.

Client: Infact/Corporate Accountability International
Project: Renaming and Rebranding the Organization

CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY INTERNATIONAL
CHALLENGING ABUSE, PROTECTING PEOPLE
formerly Infact

In 2004, Infact knew it needed a makeover. Over the previous 30 years, the national nonprofit had scored a number of impressive grassroots victories against corporate giants like GE and the tobacco industry. But its name, "Infact," was actually a holdover from its first campaign in the 1970s against Nestle: Infant Formula Action Coalition.

FENTON took Infact's staff through a messaging and positioning process that got at the heart of who they are and what set them apart from other activist organizations. We determined that Infact needed to move away from the abstract what (fighting "transnationals") and move toward a positioning that speaks more directly to the why behind their work. With a new positioning statement in hand as a guide, we moved forward with developing a new name, tagline and logo for the organization.

The new identity system helps draw out the elements that best encapsulate the organization's strengths and its mission: International in scope and focused on protecting the lives of people endangered by corporate abuses.

Client: Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District
Project: Increasing the impact of the brand

SONOMA COUNTY
AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION AND OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

Fifteen years after local residents voted to create it, the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District had become one of the top five farmland and open space protection programs in the nation. But many current residents were unaware of the important work their Open Space District was doing to protect the family farms, scenic natural areas and unique character that make Sonoma County a wonderful place to live.

A year before going back to the voters to renew their mandate, the Open Space District hired FENTON to help create new messaging, branding and public education materials to support their outreach efforts. FENTON crafted a message platform and brand, including a new tagline and logo that showed why Sonoma County's farms and open space are "worth protecting." On election day, the Open Space District won the support of 75 percent of local voters, successfully providing funding for another 20 years of open space and farmland protection in one of the last remaining agricultural regions in the fast-growing San Francisco Bay area.

Client: The Blue Shield of California Foundation
Project: Branding within a brand

Blue Shield of California Foundation, funded by the not-for-profit health plan Blue Shield of California, is now one of the largest health philanthropies in California. The foundation sought to more effectively frame its unique role in the field for a range of important stakeholders.

After taking the foundation's staff through a positioning exercise, it was clear that marketing materials should convey the warmth and compassion of their focus on domestic violence and uninsured Californians — as well as the boldness of their dual strategy of meeting immediate funding needs while promoting system change.

After developing their Web site, we created a theme of "building blocks" as the "foundation" for future work for their first-ever annual report, which aimed to reintroduce the foundation to corporate staff and board members. We then began incorporating the building-block theme into their collateral materials, templates, and advertising, helping the foundation strengthen and standardize their brand — a unique identity that is appropriately aligned with their corporate parent's own brand.

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Contact Us

Questions? Comments? We welcome your thoughts and ideas.

New York
Lisa Witter, Chief Operating Officer
(212) 584-5000
Lisa@fenton.com

Washington, D.C.
Ira Arlook, Managing Director
(202) 822-5200
Ira@fenton.com

San Francisco
Parker Blackman, Managing Director
(415) 901-0111
Pblackman@fenton.com

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OVER HERE

10 Tips to Get U.S. Media Coverage on Global Issues

NEW YORK
260 Fifth Avenue, 9th Floor, New York, NY 10001

WASHINGTON, D.C.
1000 Vermont Avenue, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005

SAN FRANCISCO
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Introduction

International Affairs: Bringing It All Back Home

If you're a U.S.-based nonprofit organization that works on international issues, then you know getting media attention in this country can sometimes feel like an uphill battle.

Newsrooms are under increasing pressure from advertisers and shareholders to feature stories that will draw the most viewers and readers — and Americans prefer to tune into events at home, not abroad. The news that is devoted to international affairs tends to be narrowly focused on regions of the world where the United States has an enormous stake, like Iraq.

But whether you work on sex trafficking in Southeast Asia or economic security in Afghanistan, you can't afford to ignore the U.S. media. A story in the *New York Times* will reach policy-makers who have the power to affect change. And a segment on the nightly news can inspire your funders and members to ramp up their support.

Getting U.S. media coverage of international issues has its challenges, but it's not impossible. It requires persistence, agility and a sharply tuned news sense. This guide offers these 10 tips to help you cross the divide between events *over there* and the news *over here*:

1. Make the global local.
2. Snowball your campaign.
3. Send a delegation to a global hot spot.
4. Cycle into anniversary coverage.
5. Supply newsrooms with b-roll.
6. Be the media's on-ground eyes and ears.
7. Connect with immigrant communities.
8. Navigate the foreign desk.
9. Plug your story on the Internet.
10. Identify reporters with a personal passion.

Because sometimes making a difference in the world begins by bringing it all back home.

Lisa Witter,
Chief Operating Officer, FENTON Communications

1. Make the global local.

Sure, it's a bumper sticker cliché, but finding an angle on your international issue that connects back to domestic interests remains the single most important thing you can do to convince the American media to sit up and pay attention.

That's why when a plane goes down in Peru, the U.S. media is always quick to note whether there were any Americans on board. When the massive tsunami hit Southeast Asia in 2004, many news stories focused on the survival and ordeals of American tourists.

In the same vein, you are more likely to draw attention to your international issue if you can draw a link to the U.S. government or an American corporation, whether they are the problem or the solution — or both. It gives the media and your audiences back home the familiar hook they need to invest attention in the rest of your story.

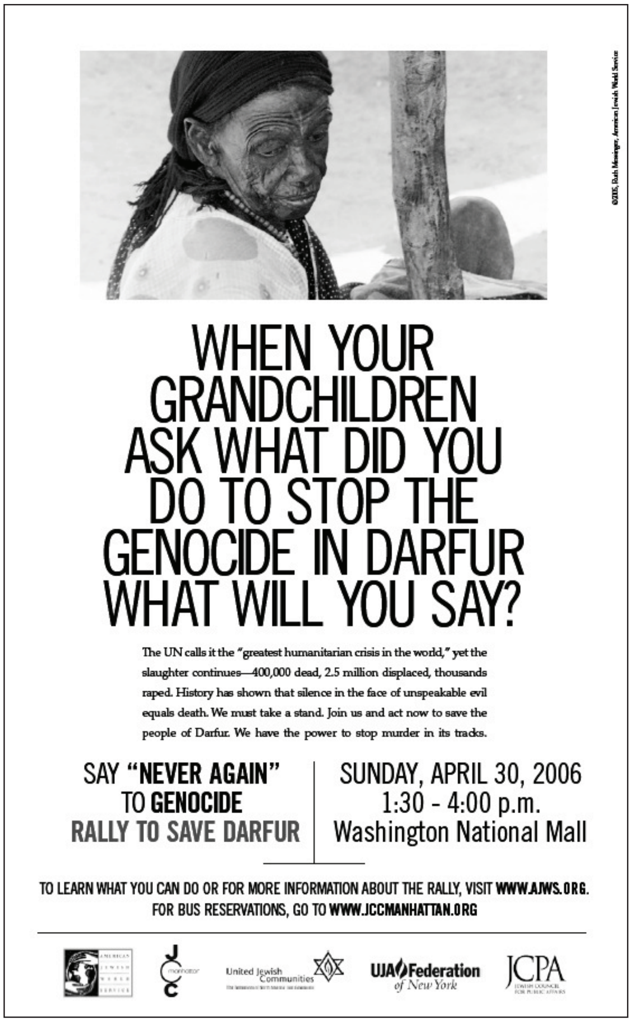
Case in Point: From South Africa to the South Bronx, HIV-Positive Mothers Connect

Mitch Besser, the founder of Mothers' Programmes, a ground-breaking project in South Africa that works with HIV-positive pregnant mothers, knew he had to take advantage of media exposure here in the United States when he and a group of graduates from the program touched down for a talk at the Women's Institute of the Gay Men's Health Crisis, which works with HIV-infected women in New York.

FENTON pitched the story as a Mother's Day feature: mothers from South Africa meeting mothers from the South Bronx to share their experiences as HIV-positive moms — from dealing with social stigma and the men in their lives to learning the regimen of medicines and nutrition necessary to reduce the risk of transmitting HIV to their unborn children.

Coverage included *Newsweek*, MSNBC, the *Los Angeles Times*, CNN International and BET Nightly News. CNN America, whose feature segments typically run four to five minutes, devoted nearly 15 minutes to the story.

2. Snowball your campaign.



Because international affairs are covered so sporadically by the U.S. media, it often falls on advocacy groups to keep the fire burning on the issues so public pressure does not wane.

Sometimes this is easier said than done. But you will increase your chances with the media if you plan well in advance and pull together a concerted response, such as combining a mass rally, a full-page ad, and a press conference with high-profile spokespeople. While each element alone may not make a reporter sit up and pay attention, the combination can demonstrate that you mean business

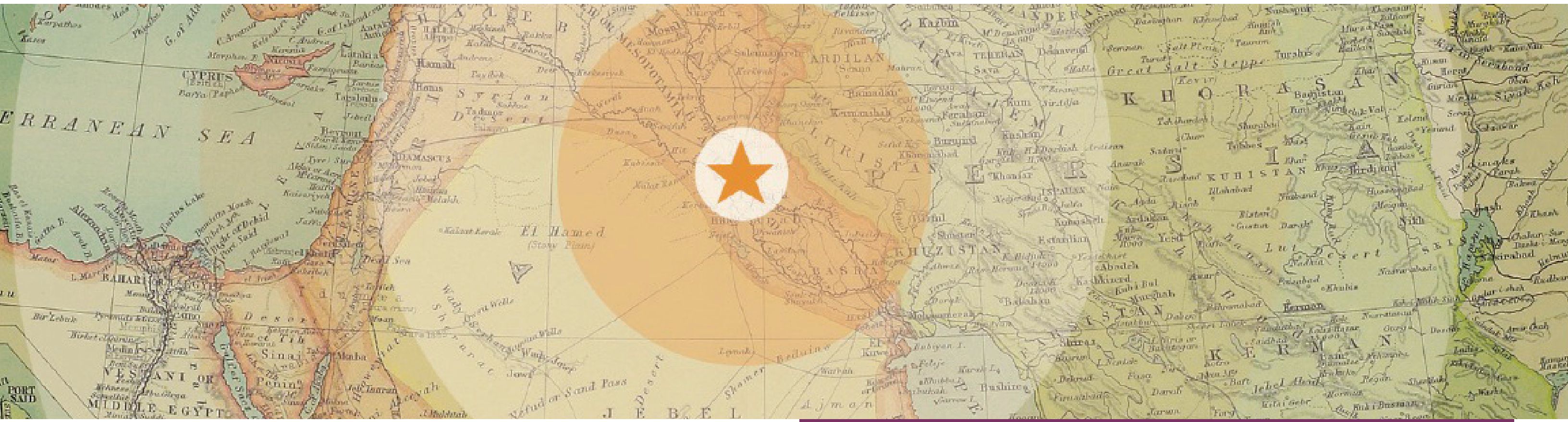
Case in Point: Shining the Spotlight on Darfur

Rallies on the nation's Capitol can be a tough sell to reporters. And when the purpose is to demand international intervention to the long-running genocide in Darfur, the challenge is even greater.

The American Jewish World Service (AJWS), co-founder of the Save Darfur Coalition, worked with FENTON to leverage the media advocacy toolbox to drive people to the rally and draw attention to the slaughter of more than 180,000 Sudanese. The media campaign included:

- **Media outreach to secure advance stories in the Jewish press with the message: "Never again." Media also responded to the "strange bedfellows" angle of Jews and Muslims united by a cause.**
- **An ad campaign that included placements in the *New York Times, The Nation*, and Jewish newspapers across the Eastern Seaboard.**
- **Human interest stories about local activists including Adam Zuckerman, 18, of Portland, Maine (home to the largest Sudanese immigrant population in the U.S.), who raised $6,000 to charter a bus to transport protesters to D.C.**
- **On the eve of the rally, civil disobedience by activists and Congress people led to arrests — and news coverage — in front of the Sudanese embassy.**
- **High-profile rally speakers including actor George Clooney and Olympic speed skater Joey Cheek. The story appeared nationwide on TV network and cable affiliates as well as in the Washington Post, New York Times, NPR and an AP story that was printed in more than 30 newspapers across the country including the *Los Angeles Times, Boston Globe* and *Houston Chronicle*. AJWS was able to double its fundraising for the campaign as well as for general operating support for the organization.**

3. Send a delegation to a global hot spot.



When the news media won't go to the region in question, it can pay to go there yourself and bring the news back home. Nonprofit organizations have a long history of sponsoring watchdog groups to monitor elections abroad. But more and more groups are customizing their tours to witness and respond to different conflicts and issues.

As a general principle for delegations, celebrities, young people and "ordinary Americans" are the most appealing subjects for reporters; a delegation of human rights organizations, however, is considered the "usual suspects" and therefore not as newsworthy.

To increase your chances of media coverage, invite a reporter to join your delegation. Elected officials can also lend your tour more political traction. Also think about inviting documentary filmmakers, photographers and other professionals who may help you capture the experience for use in your education and fundraising efforts once you return home.

Case in Point:
Faith Leaders Lead Fact-Finding Tour to Iraq

Before war broke out in Iraq in 2003, the National Council of Churches headed a humanitarian delegation of faith leaders and laypersons to bear firsthand witness to conditions in post-Gulf War Iraq and to report back to the American public.

Delegation members met with Iraqi religious and government leaders including the Iraqi deputy prime minister. They visited hospitals and schools, brokering their experience to appeal for peace and for the Bush administration to find an alternative to war.

"We went in to see the terrible impact of the sanctions in Iraq, particularly the impact on children, and came back feeling stronger than ever that we ought to keep talking…and negotiating with Iraq and not going to war with Iraq," said Bob Edgar, the council's general secretary, during an interview with Katie Couric on NBC's "Today."

In addition to prominent stories in the *Los Angeles Times* and NPR, the delegation also received coverage in the religious press and in the local papers of the delegation members' hometowns, including the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, The Ledger* in Lakeland, Fla., and *The Times* in Shreveport, La.

4. Cycle into anniversary coverage.

Sometimes the best way to get media traction in the present is to reflect back on the past.

History is viewed through major events — war, coups, genocide, natural disasters (Hurricane Katrina) and man-made disasters (the Exxon Valdez oil spill). The media is no different and will often follow up on the first, fifth, and 40th anniversary of important historical markers with "where are they now"-type retrospectives.

You can anticipate this type of coverage and insert your issue and organization into the news cycle in a number of different ways. For example, you can issue a "media availability" offering spokespeople for anniversary-related programs and stories. Or you can release something meatier, such as a report that provides "then and now" analysis based on on-the-ground research. Op-eds and meetings with editorial boards may also be appropriate, depending on how prominent the issue is in the public mind.

Case in Point: The Bhopal Chemical Disaster: 20 Years Later

Every year, the Goldman Fund recognizes six grassroots environmental activists across the world with the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize. Former winners have included Ken Saro-Wiwa and Love Canal activist Lois Gibbs. In 2004 two women were recognized for their campaign on behalf of survivors of the Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal, India that killed more than 20,000 people.

FENTON leveraged the 20th anniversary of the world's biggest industrial disaster to draw attention to Rashida Bee and Champa Devi Shukla's successful efforts to mount an international movement — with women like themselves on the frontlines — to hold chemical companies accountable for the gas leak's deadly legacy. The anniversary became the frame for news stories about the disaster then and now — and the latest efforts of activists like Bee and Shukla to push for compensation and cleanup.

The story, including reprints of AP and Reuters stories, appeared in dozens of news outlets including the *Wall Street Journal, USA Today, Washington Post, San Francisco Chronicle, Miami Herald, Houston Chronicle, Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, CNN and NPR.

5. Supply newsrooms with b-roll.

Industry-wide budget cuts and layoffs are forcing newsrooms to do more with less — or, in some cases, to simply do less. This is certainly the case with international news coverage, as many news outlets have closed down their foreign news bureaus and are less likely send costly camera crews abroad.

In this environment, your ability to deliver b-roll can help greenlight your story. B-roll refers to stock video footage of images that can be used as background as the newscaster provides voice-over. Given the considerable expense associated with gathering footage from other countries, b-roll is becoming an increasingly important tool in a TV news station's toolbox, especially at local affiliate stations.

"B-roll is the not-so-hidden secret of many TV newsrooms, which have come rely on it as a way to be in more places at once than their overstretched news teams would otherwise allow," according to Lai Ling Jew, a former NBC "Dateline" producer. "Nonprofits that can deliver b-roll will give themselves that much more leverage on whether a story gets covered."

Five Tips:

1. Stream each image for several minutes so producers can splice the footage to fit their segments.

2. Include a short 30- to 60-second spot of your spokesperson providing sound bites that can be woven into news segments.

3. Provide a detailed description of each image so producers know exactly what they're looking at. This is ideally documented in a frame before each image stream, as any paper documents can easily become separated from the tape in a frantic newsroom.

4. Generally speaking, unless you have exceptional or rare footage, national TV news will not use b-roll as a matter of professional principle. But this shouldn't stop you from giving them a copy. Your footage can stimulate ideas and images for the kind of story news editors can produce

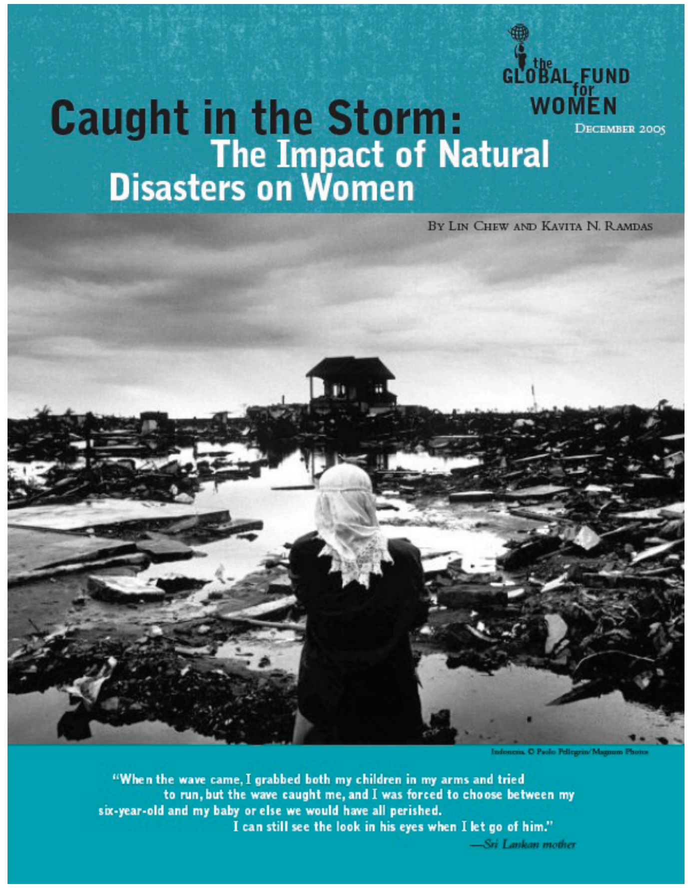
5. Format the b-roll on either Beta or mini-DV. Many newsrooms are also starting to accept DVDs. Steer away from VHS because the video quality is often unreliable.

6. Be the media's on-the-ground eyes and ears.

News professionals are more likely to be interested in what you have to say if you are on the ground in a foreign country, reporting firsthand on events as they happen rather than analyzing them from your desk in Washington, D.C. After all, many of them are doing the same thing.

When you know you have a trip coming up, alert reporters and TV and radio producers in advance so they can schedule interviews while you're on location, or immediately upon your return. Remember to strike while the iron's hot because the news cycle spins quickly and what's news in one week may not be the next.

Being on the ground abroad is also an ideal time to submit op-eds — the dateline will reflect that you're on the ground — or issue online letters to your members. The blogosphere is an ideal platform for on-the-spot news. If you don't blog already, consider setting up a temporary travel blog so people can experience your travels vicariously through you.



Case in Point:
After the Tsunami: Women Hit Hard

On the first anniversary of the tsunami that devastated Southeast Asia, the Global Fund for Women released a report that found three times as many women as men died in the massive disaster. Moreover, the social breakdown that followed led to a spike in rape and domestic violence against women.

The in-the-trenches credibility of the study, which also analyzed the aftermath of other recent disasters, captured the attention of reporters. The report included firsthand testimonies from women in Indonesia, Thailand, Guatemala, Pakistan and other devastated areas across the world, collected during fact-finding visits by 31 women's organizations.

"Every international story has a local angle," said Kavita Ramdas, executive director of Global Fund for Women. "Conflict in the Middle East reflects on U.S. foreign policy and how taxpayer dollars are spent. World Trade Organization decisions on China's exports determine if your clothes will be made by American or Chinese workers. The elections of women to the presidencies of Chile and Liberia inspire women in the West to vote for a change. Globalization,has connected the world together. It's your job to make the connections for the press."

Coverage included an Associated Press story that was picked up broadly; *San Francisco Chronicle, San Jose Mercury News,* and elsewhere.

7. Connect with immigrant communities.

The United States is increasingly a nation of immigrants, with many ethnic minority groups concentrated in particular metropolitan centers. So, depending on the country or region of your focus, chances are there's a corresponding city here in the states where many immigrants and their families from that country now live.

For example, San Jose has the largest Vietnamese population outside of Vietnam. Arab-Americans are concentrated in Detroit, while Florida is home to more than one-third of the nation's total population of Haitians. These cities and the media outlets that serve them can be fruitful places to pitch stories about your issue because many ethnic Americans continue to care deeply about events in their country of origin.

We recommend reaching out to the relevant ethnic press with the largest circulation and audience share as well as the mainstream press. For the latter, the reporter assigned to cover issues related to a particular ethnic minority group is often part of the "race and demographics" team.

Case in Point: Somali Environmentalist Makes Waves in Midwest

When Somali native Fatima Jibrell won the 2002 Goldman Environmental Prize, we knew a high priority for media outreach would be in Minnesota, where the African immigrant population has boomed in recent years, with Somalis making up the largest number.

FENTON booked a two-day media tour for Jibrell in Minneapolis, where she spoke about her victorious campaign to block the mass-scale logging of Somalia's acacia forests, which were being leveled at an alarming rate for charcoal — one of the country's biggest exports.

Jibrell was featured in the *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis), *Pioneer Press* (Saint Paul), local CBS affiliates and the state's leading TV and radio stations for Somali-Americans, including "Somali Life Radio," "Somali Life TV" and Somali Public Access TV.

8. Navigate the foreign desk.

As newsrooms cut costs, foreign news desks are being forced to reorganize and be more flexible with their staffing. Foreign correspondents are forced to cover more ground — literally — than ever. It's not unusual for a foreign correspondent's beat to encompass a vast continent, which means they are often on the move and not always accessible by e-mail.

Budget cuts also mean newsrooms are relying more heavily on freelance stringers (for example, Jill Carroll, the reporter who was abducted in Iraq and returned safely, was stringing for The Christian Science Monitor). To make sure your story doesn't get lost in the shuffle, contact the editor who oversees the foreign desk. He or she will have the lay-of-the-land knowledge to advise you on which reporter is best positioned to cover your story.

Three Tips:

1. Establishing strong, one-on-one relationships with the foreign correspondent and/or bureau chief in your targeted region is still the best long-term strategy for influencing news and placing stories. Be mindful that they are overstretched and likely to be devoting much of their time to chasing big stories, which means they may have less flexibility to jump on yours.

2. That said, foreign correspondents are always eager to meet new contacts on the ground in their given country. If you know someone you think would be a valuable resource, setting up this meeting can go a long way to building good relations for future stories.

3. Foreign correspondents rarely, if ever, cover news related to their beat if it happens on U.S. soil (for example, a protest march about the genocide in Darfur). This is not to say they won't integrate important U.S.-related news into their stories, but their focus is on providing color, detail and insight on what's happening on the ground in their assigned country.

9. Plug your story on the Internet.

As the bandwidth for international news in the mainstream media shrinks, online media is picking up the slack. By online news, we don't just mean Salon or Slate but the online versions of the major TV networks as well as newspapers and magazines like www.washingtonpost.com and www.newsweek.com. These online offshoots are typically hungrier for content, which means they are more likely to be receptive to global news. Most online news sites have their own team of editors and reporters. Many of them also have unique features you can pitch like www.wapost.com's "Live Online," which features daily chats in real time with selected experts and pundits.

A growing number of people now prefer to get their news through a subjective lens. Particularly if you have a strong "insider" angle or a pointed criticism to make, you should consider pitching stories and perspectives to popular public affairs and political blogs like Daily Kos, Talking Points Memo, and The Huffington Post. For example, when Fenton's own executive vice president and general manager Lisa Witter accompanied a delegation to Chile for the inauguration of Chile's first woman president, Michelle Bachelet, she contributed a piece to the progressive online news magazine Alternet's popular "Echo Chamber" blog.

Case in Point: Women's Rights and Islamic Law: The Blog

Plenty had been written and debated about the formation of the new Iraq Constitution. But there had been little to no ink devoted to how the constitution would, or should, support the rights of women in post-Hussein Iraq.

Zainab Salbi, the executive director of Women for Women International who grew up under Hussein's dictatorship, had a fresh perspective: On-the-ground surveys by her organization showed that Iraqi women overwhelmingly said they wanted their legal rights protected in the new constitution — including the right to inheritance and the right to divorce — regardless of whether the constitutional framework was religious or secular.

To grab the attention of the political elite, FENTON secured a spot for Salbi as a guest blogger on The Huffington Post. Since her first column on the Iraq Constitution appeared, the entry proved to be such a hit that the blog invited Salbi to be a regular contributor. She has since written commentaries on issues including the mass rape of women in Darfur.

"Raising our visibility on the Internet accomplishes two important and interconnected goals," said Salbi. "One, we reach new audiences; and two, we demonstrate to our funders and members that we know how to take advantage of the latest and newest evolution in communications technology to get our message across."

10. Identify reporters with a personal passion.

As the real estate for international coverage in the U.S. media shrinks, competition is growing fiercer. You need all the allies you can get. This requires doing some legwork to identify and foster relationships with reporters who harbor passionate interest for a particular issue or region in the world. Perhaps the most prominent example of this is Oprah Winfrey's dedication to Africa and Africa's children.

Columnists are a good place to begin because they actively choose the subjects they write about. For example, Nicholas Kristof, a columnist for the *New York Times*, writes frequently on foreign affairs. But he has a special interest in Asia and Africa, having devoted extensive columns to the genocide in Darfur and on victims of sex crimes and sex trafficking.

When you see an article or TV segment about your issue or the country where you are active, make note of the byline. See if you notice a pattern of coverage by that reporter on similar issues. As a first step, send the reporter a note of thanks for his or her coverage and begin cultivating the relationship for future stories.

Case in Point:
Wangari Maathi: The *Washington Post* Feature

When FENTON handled media relations for Wangari Maathai's first tour of the United States after winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004, we knew getting front and center of the media elite was a top priority.

We knew *Washington Post* reporter Lynn Duke had a long-standing personal and professional interest in African affairs, having served as the Post's Johannesburg bureau chief for many years and written extensively on leaders from Nelson Mandela to Mobutu Sese Seko. So when Maathai hit the East Coast, speaking before the United Nations and delivering a sermon at a Presbyterian church, we arranged to have Duke shadow her.

The end result: a front-page feature in the *Post*'s Sunday Style section with a six-photo spread that chronicled the transformation of a young girl fascinated by tadpoles to the leader of an environmental movement that planted 30 million trees, empowering and educating women to be community builders.

About FENTON Communications

For more than 25 years, FENTON Communications has partnered with nonprofit clients to make social change. We work to protect the environment, improve public health and advance human rights and social justice. This guide is one in a series that we've produced to help build the strategic communications capacity of the nonprofit sector. To download a free copy of this and other FENTON guides, visit www.fenton.com.

Contact Us

Questions? Comments? We welcome your thoughts and ideas.

New York
Lisa Witter, Chief Operating Officer
(212) 584-5000
Lisa@fenton.com

Washington, D.C.
Ira Arlook, Managing Director
(202) 822-5200
Ira@fenton.com

San Francisco
Parker Blackman, Managing Director
(415) 901-0111
Pblackman@fenton.com

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