

Getting to Engagement: Leveraging Program and Marketing Expertise (Wed, 6/27)

Contributed by Meredith Vaish
Monday, 16 July 2007
Last Updated Monday, 16 July 2007

Session co-leaders:

- Dorcey Baker, Director of Communications and Planning, Brown University
 - Meredith Vaish, Director of Marketing & Communications, Stanford Alumni Association
- Key Desired Takeaways from this session
- Best Practices/Tips for self marketers
 - How to partner to make the most of cross-departmental efforts
- Most of the attendees have not only a program role but a marketing role as well
- Best Practice: "Single Lasting Impression" concept (SLI) — Prioritize your message: what do you want the audience to walk away with? — Focus on one key point rather than try to do too much.
- If you try to deliver five messages, the reader will take away NO message.

For the Stanford Alumni Association, the Single Lasting Impression is "I should be involved with Stanford," which conveys a feeling, rather than being literal.

Key messages or "reasons to believe" that support the Single Lasting Impression are:

- o Stanford is part of who I am
- o I have a stake in Stanford's success
- o I make a difference
- o I help Stanford make the world a better place
- o I carry on the tradition

The action messages are:

- o I should be informed
- o I should be in touch
- o I should spread the word
- o I should attend an event
- o I should join a Stanford group
- o I should volunteer
- o I should support

Christie Goeller, Stanford's manager of class marketing and communication, shared how she leveraged SLI in her work by identifying one primary "call to action" for each communication. This not only made the copy shorter, but easier to act upon.

Best Practice: Identify your primary audience

You need to write your communication with a primary audience in mind. Understand their motivations, speak to their barriers. That message may well be relevant to others who see the communication, but your goal is to motivate and/or influence your primary audience.

Best Practices to reach young alumni:

- o No brochures
- o Try peer-to-peer messaging
- o Keep young alum voice
- o Young alums can sniff out “corporate” communications

Dorcey at Brown commented that this year for the fifth year reunion, they just sent out one postcard to say “we’re going paperless” and followed up with e-mails to encourage registration. Also, by waiving the reunion registration fee for that class and taking \$5 off the charge for the big dance, they were able to boost attendance by at least 30%.

Several universities are no longer doing print invites for 5-10-year reunion invitees, even up to 20-year reunion invitees.

Best Practice: Brand Position/Key Messages

To connect the dots at Brown, they used focus groups to test 10 possible positions/ messages and emerged with a Brand Position and four Key Messages. The messages represent what resonates for alumni, based on the focus group research. For maximum effect, they incorporate them consistently, repetitively and distribute widely -- e.g. communication about an individual program would incorporate the key message or messages that are most relevant to that program.

Issue: Alumni office positioning in relation to Office of Development

One key question was “How do you appear separate from Office of Development?” All felt it required a delicate strategy to communicate differences between OOD and alumni associations. One point was to make sure that the alums feel valued: “We’re here for you --- and we support our development colleagues.” In some cases, the development officer and alumni officer work together to carry both messages. By working together, they can get speakers, and feel like they are supportive of the regional clubs. The consensus of the group seemed to be that differentiating alumni relations from development could be a slippery slope and prove more alienating than helpful.

Discussion: For those program directors that are doing their own marketing, they mentioned that the benefits of having a marketing person on staff are:

- o Ability to cut costs
- o Share design expertise

Discussion: Another question came up about “exit messaging” for when an event is over. Suggestions included:

- o Include a thank you and additional resources on the program
- o Direct them to more information
- o Send a follow-up e-mail
- o Judy Heller from SAA’s Alumni Communities team mentioned that she has a standard template she uses at her events that help alums “stay connected”

