



December 6, 2019

Communication Audit

Background

Each year, there are millions of children hospitalized across the nation. No matter the duration of stay, a visit to a hospital can be mentally, physically and financially taxing for the child and their family. Witnessing a child fighting for their life is scary enough, let alone the added pressures of wondering how you'll afford dinner, gas, or the electricity bill on top of the medical expenses.

Carolina For The Kids is the largest student run non-profit in North Carolina. It's based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and serves the patients and families of the UNC Children's hospitals across the state. Their mission is "to provide major emotional, medical and financial support" through a variety of programs. This includes events such as Parent's Night Out, in which students serve meals to the families in the hospital every Tuesday night, the For The Kids fund, which assists families with costs insurance doesn't cover such as gas cards and parking tickets, and research grants, which supports programs that attempt to better the future of child healthcare.

The thing that sets CFTK apart from other non-profits is that it's entirely led and run by students. The organization is composed of roughly 16 executive board members, 40 subchairs,

200 committee members, and 1,000 dancers each year. Since it's founding in 1997, CFTK has raised over \$6 million for the patients and families of UNC Children's hospital.

CFTK is best known for its annual dance marathon. This is a 24-hour, no-sitting, no-sleeping event in which students stand together in solidarity with the patients and families of UNC Children's. It is a celebration of the year's fundraising efforts and a defining Carolina tradition.

The target audience of CFTK's communications efforts is both students and members of the Carolina community. Dependent on the message, CFTK must tailor their strategy to reach the appropriate audience. For example, recruiting participants for dance marathon requires reaching the UNC-CH student body, while soliciting donations and sponsorships requires reaching local supporters and business owners.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- The website has consistent and professional branding across landing pages. There is a clear color scheme, font, and logo. It explicitly provides clear information on the organization's history, executive board, programs they fund, etc. The call to action 'Donate' button is at the top corner of every page.
- There is a blog that adds a more personal voice to the organization. It is written by the public relations committee, meaning it represents a variety of perspectives from students within the organization. Blogs include pictures to add visual appeal.

- There are multiple different ways to connect, including newsletter sign up box, executive board contact information, social media accounts, etc. attracting an audience on a multitude of platforms.
- The social media accounts are very active. There are consistent posts on each platform (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and Twitter).
- There is an organizational style guide on the press tab that lists organizational colors, fonts, and phrases in order to ensure consistency across communication tools.
- The organization has earned several pieces of media coverage featuring recent events and accomplishments from local outlets including ABC11, WRAL, Chapel Hill magazine, the Daily Tar Heel, and several others.

Weaknesses

- The testimonials on the website are outdated. The most recent one is from two years ago.
- Home page states the mission statement but doesn't explain the 'why' behind the organization or any further explanation into what the organization funds or how it operates.
- There is no vision statement or values posted publicly to drive the communications efforts and organization as a whole.
- A lot of the content is extremely text heavy. For example, the 'FTK Stories' page has no photos other than the header image, and several paragraphs of text.
- The organization has no presence on some of the smaller and emerging social media platforms such as Pinterest or TikTok, missing a segment of online users who may be in their target audience.

- Their media coverage has been solely local outlets, they have not earned any coverage from any national sites that could potentially broaden their reach.
- The listserv for their email messaging platform is outdated. The only new contacts they have received in the past few years are the ones that opted-in from the website box, though they have not.

Opportunities

- More infographics, images, and videos could be integrated to the website and social media accounts to tie in the cause and attract a wider audience and add more visual appeal.
- The professional image and branding of the organization across platforms brings up the opportunity to attract more professional sponsors rather than coming off as an inexperienced, student-led nonprofit.
- The 'in the news' tab is an opportunity to build mutually beneficial media relationships. The organization can use this to potentially increase the media outlets traffic by introducing their organization's supporters to the site. Additionally, the pre-existing media coverage allows for the opportunity for the team to reconnect with those journalists for future events.
- There are a lot of tools to engage with a wide variety of audiences (sponsors, donors, committee members, general UNC students) that are differentiated on the site in clearly labeled tabs that could help increase reach.
- There could be more use of a wide variety of public relations tools. They have strictly produced news releases in the past, though they could widely expand their media relations tactics through the use of PSAs, fact sheets, profiles, etc.

Threats

- Some of the content (including but not limited to social media, calendar, contact information, etc.) is out of date. This needs to be kept up with very frequently so that the organization is always reachable.
- Focusing the content too much on what they do rather than why they do it could produce an image that the money is the driving factor rather than the cause itself. This could defer people for wanting to get involved or donate if they don't see the clear connection to the cause.
- Sponsors receive little attention on platforms with the exception of a small section of the website. This lack of recognition may retract or reduce donations if they don't feel that the relationship is mutually beneficial.
- They have a lot of different publics they are attempting to reach (students, sponsors, donors, media, etc.) so they have to be sure their content attracts all of their different audiences on the different platforms. Often the exact same post with an identical caption and photo can be found on the organizations Facebook and Instagram, for example, rather than tailoring each message to use the platform's specific strengths to their advantage.
- A low public relations budget could lead to restrictions in their ability to run paid advertising campaigns and prohibit the use of public relations tools such as direct mail. This restriction cuts off an important line of communication with the organization's target audience.

Recommendations

The biggest communication challenge I think Carolina For The Kids should focus on is keeping their cause at the center of all communication efforts across all platforms. Ultimately, the children are the ‘why’ behind all of the endeavors of the organization. Clearly expressing this in all communications will not only help the internal staff stay motivated by remembering why they are doing what they’re doing, it will also attract more external traffic.

Ultimately, if they lose sight of why they are raising money, they will not be able to differentiate themselves from all of the other nonprofits asking for money in the community. It’s easy to say “we’re raising money for the kids”, but the organization needs to express why they’re raising money for the kids. The staff could potentially go about meeting this challenge by incorporating more pictures of the children they benefit throughout all pages in the website. Additionally, in every blog, social media post, press release, etc. they should attempt to tie it back to the cause.

Another effective strategy could be to humanize the cause by sharing real stories of families they have helped whenever possible. This will also potentially solve the threat of communicating to a wide audience with multiple different demographics background because giving back to the children in the hospital is the one thing that will consistently interest each of the groups. They could also bring these stories to life in the form of video content.

Finally, the organization should maximize all opportunities to increase earned and owned media, such as through emerging social media platforms. This is a free way for CFTK to reach even more people. Given the organization’s limited budget for any public relations, advertising, or marketing tools, this is a crucial method of communication.