



Public relations is the art of using *relationships* to promote your organization. Relationships with donors, prospective donors, clients, your community and others are developed through your personality, image and activities. Relationships can be distant (with the general public via the image you create in the news media) or intimate (with ongoing donors built over time). Here are a few tips that don't cost a lot of money, but can reap big rewards.

Be a Shameless Self Promoter

1. Pay attention to the news – what it is and, even more importantly, what it isn't.

Have a unique, compelling angle to generate media attention. Blatant sales pitches won't get ink. Tell your story in human terms. People, not things, make news. Watch as many TV newscasts as you can and read several newspapers. Pay attention to stories about nonprofits and nonprofit issues and note what made them interesting.

2. Learn to write news releases; use them *sparingly*.

Use a one-page news release to generate interest in a feature story or a major achievement (a professional award or certification), new management hires or significant milestones. Consider professional newsletters, journals, community papers, radio and TV in addition to dailies.

3. Cultivate relationships with reporters.

Learn who covers your issues and offer to provide ideas or perspectives. Compliment reporters on good stories. Don't be a pest!



4. Write an article for a professional journal.

Find publications related to nonprofits and/or your issues on the Internet. Read those publications, follow their guidelines for submitting articles, then write one.

5. Write a letter to the editor.

Speak out on something that impacts your organization. Keep your letter short and to the point. Sign with your name, position and organization.

Raise Your Public Profile

6. Conduct an image audit.

Take stock of how you look to the outside world.

What do your print materials say about your organization? Is there a consistent look and tone to your brochures? Does your logo reflect who you are? If you cannot afford professional help with your image audit, convene a committee of Board members and staff to review your image and recommend improvements.



7. Expand your image audit to the outside.

Take a look around your building(s). Is there an outdoor sign that tells the world who you are? Is the reception area welcoming, and do visitors have an immediate opportunity to learn about your organization by picking up brochures, annual reports, newsletters, etc. when they walk in? Invite a group of donors to survey your building and grounds and make recommendations for improvements.



8. Encourage your staff and Board members to be PR ambassadors.

Your employees and Board can be your very best spokespeople, yet often, organizations invest little time in educating them about the organization's programs and mission. Don't assume they know about and can articulate what you do. Take the time to involve and inform employees and Board members and encourage them to speak proudly to others on your behalf.

9. Organize opportunities to involve your staff and Board members in community events.

You're not the only nonprofit in town! Support other causes by giving staff and Board members an opportunity to form teams for charity walks or to attend plays, museum exhibits or sporting events as a group.

10. Step out of the box to promote your events.

Every one of your events is an opportunity to sing your song to your community. Consider these inexpensive publicity efforts:

- Ask volunteers to stand on street corners and wave signs promoting an upcoming event.
- Produce flyers and ask area businesses to display them in their windows.
- Display a banner promoting your event across the face of your building.
- Cultivate new participants from unlikely places. Putting on an auction with a springtime theme? Invite local garden clubs to provide a centerpiece for each table (and, of course, to attend to see their work appreciated.) Hosting a benefit performance of a play with a religious theme? Send flyers to all the churches in town.
- Many high schools now require students to complete community service activities. Look into partnering with a nearby high school for ways to involve students in promoting or taking part in your event.

11. Make your facilities available to smaller organizations, clubs and civic groups.

Do you have a conference room that can accommodate relatively large groups? Offer to let organizations without that capacity to use your facilities free of charge or for a nominal fee. It makes you a good neighbor and introduces countless others to your cause.



12. Plaster your logo on everything!

Logo items – tee-shirts, coffee mugs, notepads, etc. – can be surprisingly inexpensive and effective in prompting others to ask, “What does ___ do?” Be creative and purchase items reflective of your organization’s personality. Mini-Etch-a-Sketches for an arts organization; colorful pencils for a children’s group; first-aid kits for health agencies – the possibilities are endless.

13. Invest in a well-done, professional Web site.

Your web site should tell your story powerfully and emotionally at the very first glance. It should not only visually articulate the impact you make, but provide useful information to visitors. More and more people are using the Internet to investigate charitable opportunities, donate online and register for events electronically. Strive for this capability.

Maximize Existing Relationships and Build New Ones

14. Have a written donor relations and stewardship plan and update it regularly.

Don’t assume the same old thank-you’s will do. There is more competition than ever for donor dollars and loyalty. Without constant stewardship – and creative ways to thank and involve donors – nonprofits risk losing their loyal support base.

15. Volunteer for boards of other organizations.

Successful nonprofits share a lot with successful civic groups, professional associations and other nonprofits – sound fiscal management, great customer relations, good PR. Your expertise may be welcome on their boards and you’ll make valuable connections with other Board members. Mention your interest to donors and ask them to be on the lookout for opportunities.

16. Get personal with the people you meet.

Make notes on the backs of business cards with info you learn about people. They’ll be flattered when you remember. “You must be so proud of your son’s acceptance to Yale, Susan. If you do decide to start volunteering more now that he’s away from home, we would love to have you involved with our luncheon.”



17. Join a professional association.

There is an association for virtually every profession and issue. Find one that represents yours and join a local chapter. Then go to the meetings and get involved.

18. Join civic or business organizations.

The Rotary Club, League of Women Voters, Chamber of Commerce, etc., are excellent places to meet potential donors and volunteers.

19. Join an athletic/social club.

If you’re not already getting regular exercise, you should! Many fitness clubs also are long-standing social organizations and are great places to meet community opinion leaders and to share your story.

20. Be a speaker.

Are you an expert in your field? Of course, you are! Offer to speak at a meeting, conference or trade show.



21. Carry business cards everywhere.

You never know where you’ll meet a new supporter! Don’t be shy about speaking proudly of your work in casual conversations at PTA meetings, standing in line at the grocery store, cheering at a sporting event, etc. “It’s been great talking to you about the YWCA. Here’s my card. Call if you’d like to learn more.”

22. Attend professional development seminars.

Lifelong learning is a must for every professional, no matter what their field. Enhance your knowledge – and make these opportunities available to others in your organization, too – and also use these training events to network and develop new relationships.



23. Develop your “elevator speech.”

Imagine you’re in an elevator and someone asks, “What do you do?” You have 20 seconds to tell about your organization. “I’m the executive director of Youth Haven”

does nothing to distinguish your organization from a million others. “As the executive director of Youth Haven, I give abandoned children the security of a home and pair foster and adoptive parents with kids who need them.”

At All Times...

24. Be passionate about your work.

Let your enthusiasm and belief in your organization shine through. People want to be involved with others who care deeply about their work. Your dedication will be infectious if you let it show.



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