

Proving Your Worth:

10 WAYS to Measure the Impact of Your Communications

A Guide for Public Interest Communicators

FENTON | communications

NEW YORK
260 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10001

WASHINGTON
1320 18th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036

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

www.fenton.com

Introduction

Those of us who work in communications are often asked how we measure success and whether we can show a return on the investment for the dollars put into media campaigns. We'll be the first to acknowledge that appraising the results from communications work is not as straightforward as counting the number of people served by a food bank or the number of women who walk through the doors of a prenatal clinic every year. But communications can be measured — in more ways than one.

Success is much more than a book of news clips at the end of the day. And earned media is just one facet of a communications program, which can include everything from an online presence to advertising and the strategy work needed for a solid foundation.

In this practical guide, we outline 10 key questions to help evaluate whether your communications are effective. Did you:

- 1 Advance your advocacy goals?
- 2 Change behavior?
- 3 Raise money?
- 4 Grow your membership?
- 5 Build the skills of your staff?
- 6 Build new relationships with influentials?
- 7 Reframe your issue?
- 8 Introduce a new word into the lexicon?
- 9 Strengthen your organization's position, brand and power?
- 10 And, are you quantifying and qualifying your results effectively?

This list is by no means exhaustive, but if you can answer these questions, you'll be light years ahead in articulating the value of communications. That's good news. Because the better case you make for communications, the more likely your organization will invest in it — and the more good you'll be able to do in the world.

Lisa Witter
Chief Operating Officer
Fenton Communications

#1

Everyone Loves a Winner: Did you advance your advocacy goals?

Moving legislation means pressuring decision-makers to do the right thing. Communications is essential — whether it involves building “grass tops” alliances or mobilizing your grassroots base to add flame to the fire.

Case In Point: Protecting the Alaska Wilderness from Oil Drilling

The heart of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska is its coastal plain, a 25-mile band of tundra wetlands considered by many to be a national treasure. The plain is critical spawning ground for wildlife including caribou and polar bears. It is also viewed as prime real estate for drilling by the oil industry.

The Alaska Wilderness League (AWL), the group at the center of a large environmental coalition, had fought for years to protect the coastal plain from pro-drilling members in Congress. As gas prices spiked after Hurricane Katrina, so did pressure to open up the Refuge. For nine months leading up to a critical vote by Congress, AWL and the coalition waged an aggressive national media campaign to pressure policymakers to do the right thing.

With Fenton’s help, AWL raised the media profile of the issue by reaching beyond environmental beat reporters to D.C.’s top political reporters. As the “King Kong” movie remake hit the theaters, AWL unleashed a hard-hitting ad, starring drilling proponent Sen. Ted Stevens (R-AK) as “King Stevens” in a “story of oil and money.”

Media exposure in *The Washington Post*, *Forbes*, *BusinessWeek*, Fox News and elsewhere, combined with lobbying and a grassroots rally on the Capitol, contributed to a major victory when both houses of Congress voted to protect the coastal plain from drilling.



Bonus tip for communications directors:

Make sure you’re involved from the very beginning with your policy team so there is a communications strategy to match the advocacy strategy. When it comes to maximizing the full power of communications, getting in on the ground floor is a must for success.

#2 Did you change behavior?

True behavioral change, which often falls under the purview known as “social marketing,” is difficult to come by and even harder to measure for most organizations. But with a targeted strategy, it can be done.

Whether it’s convincing American teenagers not to binge drink or women in sub-Saharan Africa to use condoms to prevent HIV/AIDS, success hinges on the right combination of message, messenger and harnessing the vehicles most likely to reach your audience.



Case In Point: Stick With the Flu Shot

With flu season approaching, the American Lung Association worked with Fenton to kick off a public education campaign encouraging people to get vaccinated.

As part of the Lung Association’s *Stick With the Flu Shot* campaign, we helped them conceive of and release a new study on the number of children hospitalized each year in emergency rooms because of the flu. B-roll and satellite media tours gave our medical spokespeople national bandwidth, and a new user-friendly feature on the Lung Association’s Web site enabled visitors to type in their zip code to find a flu shot dispenser near them.

The campaign reached more than 100 million people through media outlets including *USA Today Weekend*, *Parade*, *Good Housekeeping*, and local newspapers and TV affiliates across the country. At its peak, the American Lung Association’s Web site received millions of hits a day.

Bonus tip for communications directors:

Every behavioral change campaign should be evaluated by the numbers. Create a benchmark map so you can chart your “before and after” progress. Share these quantitative results with your leadership staff and board. These numbers will help you get budget support for next year’s campaigns.

#3

Make it Count: Did you raise money?

Shaking the money tree involves a lot more than grant proposals and direct donor appeals. A targeted media campaign can help you reach a broader pool of new donors who are inspired to give when they learn about your work.



Case In Point: Fund the Research, Find a Cure

In 2004, for the first time, Californians and New Yorkers had the option of making a donation to prostate cancer research by filling out a line on their state income tax returns. The Prostate Cancer Foundation worked with Fenton to help raise funds through the donation line.

The public outreach and media campaign, *Fund the Research, Find a Cure* put former Super Bowl champion Roosevelt “Rosey” Grier and Tony Award-winning actor and cancer survivor Mandy Patinkin of “Evita” and “Yentl” fame on the talk show circuit.

Coverage included *The Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek.com*, National Public Radio and an Associated Press story which was picked up by nearly 70 local newspapers in our target markets.

More than 20,000 New Yorkers donated \$224,000, which ballooned to \$672,000 thanks to matches by public and private sources. In California, donations totaled \$188,000, for a combined coast-to-coast total of \$860,000 for prostate cancer research.

Bonus tip for communications directors:

Because raising money is so essential for every nonprofit's survival, you should be connected at the hip with your development team. Make sure you have regular meetings so you can support their important work and identify opportunities between fundraising and other programs that can be maximized with communications.



Strength in Numbers: Did you grow your membership/e-mail list?

Membership is the backbone of many nonprofit organizations for both activism and funding.

When the Polly Klaas Foundation undertook its winning advocacy campaign to create a national Amber Alert system, a welcome benefit was that the public exposure helped beef up their income from new donors and activists in the form of 50,000 new members.

Case In Point: Standing Up to Religious Right Extremism

The Campaign to Defend the Constitution (www.defconamerica.org) is an online grassroots movement combating the growing power of the religious right. In just one year, “DefCon” grew its membership to 100,000, thanks to an aggressive communications campaign that combined traditional media relations and online marketing to drive member sign-ups.

The group made its mark publicly by taking a strong stance on issues like stem cell research and the showdown between evolution and so-called “intelligent design” in the classroom. These high-visibility efforts drove people to a dynamic Web site where they were encouraged to sign up for action alerts, follow a blog, join community forums and check out a frequently updated headline news section. These parallel on- and off-line tactics are keeping old members active and continuing to attract new ones.

Bonus tip for communications directors:

Robust e-mail membership lists are an organization’s backbone in today’s digital age. Work with your IT staff to receive regular reports of your Web activity so you can connect the dots between increased traffic and your communications activity. These measurements will allow you to refine and improve your program. They’re also great numbers to put in front of your executive director and board of directors.

MEET AMERICA'S MOST INFLUENTIAL STEM CELL SCIENTISTS.

Rev. Pat Robertson
"Before long, we'll be harvesting body parts from fully formed people. Once you begin this sinister use of cells, then everything is up for grabs!"

Rev. Jerry Falwell
"The President was right to use federal money going to that dangerous and unethical research."

James Dobson
"Experiments on the blastocysts, which are fertilized eggs, has a Nazi-esque aura to it."

It's been a year since the House of Representatives passed stem cell legislation. Since then, the bill has languished in the Senate, held hostage by religious extremists who hold excessive sway over Majority Leader Bill Frist.

Our leading biologists and medical researchers believe that healthy cells created from stem cells offer the promise of combating every debilitating condition, from teenage alcoholism to the ravages of Alzheimer's disease, stroke, spinal cord injury, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, autism, heart disease, and many other conditions we're willing for the Senate to act. Fully 70% of Americans support this research, but hope to bring another landmark of the inappropriate intrusion of the religious right.

First since the Dark Ages, when religious leaders held their desperate power over scientific research... Join us at www.DefConAmerica.org and start our Summer Fund to put our health above the agenda of the radical wing.

With DefCon, protecting the Constitution truly means the future. We believe our elected leaders put their hand on a Bible and swore to uphold the Constitution. Not the other way around.

DEFCON

The Campaign to Defend the Constitution (DefCon) is an online grassroots movement to combat the threat posed by the religious right to American democracy. Join us at www.DefConAmerica.org.

Produced by The Campaign to Defend the Constitution, a Project of Fenton Group.

#5

Strength from Within: Did you build skills of your staff?

One of the core principles of effective communications is uniformity of message, especially in our information overloaded culture. Getting your staff on the same page with the same message is important hygiene for every organization's success.

Case In Point: On Message, On Point

Only a few years old, the Social Work Leadership Institute (SWLI) at the New York Academy of Medicine's goal is to grow the workforce of social workers needed to care for the population boom of adults over 60.

In a short amount of time, SWLI had launched an ambitious policy agenda and was funding 41 graduate programs in social work across the country to offer aging-infused curricula. What they didn't have was institutional language to describe their programs to their target audiences, a diverse group that included university deans, service agencies and policymakers.

SWLI worked with Fenton on an in-house "style guide" that formalized and streamlined specific language to describe each of their programs, the most compelling stats to put forward, as well as branding guidelines for when and where to use their suite of graphic logos. The guide is now a quick, shorthand reference for all their communications.

Bonus tip for communications directors:

If you're hiring an outside firm to help with your communications campaign, leverage your investment by getting some on-the-ground training from your consultant so you build your in-house communications capacity.

#6

Make New Friends: Did you build new relationships with influentials?

One of the most effective ways to position your organization as an authority in your field is to raise your profile and influence among opinion leaders and experts.



Case In Point: Getting the Ear of the Right People

Few nonprofits can claim to have been on “The Oprah Winfrey Show” seven times. Women for Women International’s founder Zainab Salbi can. But she also knew she wanted to steer the organization in a new direction — which meant reaching new audiences.

Salbi’s goal was to improve Women for Women International’s positioning as an authority on global affairs and policy. Fenton worked with her on a campaign, “Stronger Women, Stronger Nations,” that included Capitol Hill briefings on women in post-Saddam Iraq, an unprecedented survey of 1,000 Iraqi women on their future, and a conference focused on ensuring the rights of women in the then-new Iraqi constitution.

Within a year, Women for Women International appeared in a number of national opinion-leading media outlets, including a 12-minute segment on “ABC News Now,” “NBC Nightly News,” *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, *US News & World Report*, and numerous times on CNN and CNN International. The exposure helped position the organization as an authoritative source for political reporters and state department officials and created a space for women at the grassroots to have a voice in issue debates that affect their lives.



Same Picture, Different Frame: Did you reframe your issue?

The news media is a key battleground for influencing people's perceptions and beliefs about an issue, or how they choose to live their lives. Rewiring how people think doesn't happen overnight — but the right communications strategy can help push your message through.



Case In Point: “Older Entrepreneurs Rewrite Retirement Rules”

We couldn't have written the above “CBS Market-Watch” headline better ourselves.

San Francisco think tank Civic Ventures launched the Purpose Prize, a \$100,000 award for social innovators over 60, as part of its larger mission to tap the experience of older Americans and inspire millions to use their experience for the greater good. With Americans living longer, healthier lives than ever before, this “third age” is an opportunity for social entrepreneurship.

The strategy: get news bounce off trend stories about the first wave of baby boomers to hit retirement age. Media interest was so great, we realized we could get two bites of the apple: First announce the prize finalists to build buzz, followed up by the announcement of the winners, which included a farmer, a former car salesman and the first black mayor of Philadelphia.

Stories by “NBC Nightly News,” CNN, NPR, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Los Angeles Times*, and elsewhere helped create a counter-narrative to the perception that retirement is strictly a life of leisure by portraying Americans in midlife as social innovators.

There's “a new phase of life, between midlife and true old age,” Civic Ventures founder Marc Freedman told *The New York Times*. “The potential for the common good is staggering.”

Bonus tip for communications directors:

The first step to reframe a debate is to research the current frame. Examine how your issue is portrayed in the news media, pop culture, and the blogosphere. It may also be critical to audit target audience on how they perceive the issue. If budget permits, consider focus groups and/or polling to help put your finger on current frames as well as test new ones. Good execution often requires good research — don't forget to plan for it.

#8

The Webster Approach: Did you introduce a new word into the lexicon?

You don't have to be a fan of William Safire's weekly column in The New York Times Magazine to know the power of coining a new catch phrase or word. It's possibly the shortest path to getting your message across.



Case In Point: “Pink Washing” During Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Pink teddy bears, makeup, water bottles, watches, blenders, candles: It must be Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

For the past few years, Breast Cancer Action (BCA) has made it its mission to raise a different type of awareness in the month of October: how corporate cause marketing, or “pink washing,” may be doing more to push their products than helping women with breast cancer.

Pink washing is the sister of green washing — PR propaganda that coats polluting companies with a deceptive eco-friendly finish (think European oil giant BP's \$200 million “Beyond Petroleum” ad campaign). Except in this case, it's corporations' wrapping their products in pink ribbons that is raising questions about where the money goes, and whether women with breast cancer actually benefit. Most egregious of all are companies whose products (like

cars and certain cosmetics) are linked to incidence of the disease.

Take Yoplait, which says it will donate 10 cents to the Komen Foundation for every yogurt lid you mail in. To donate \$10, you'd have to eat 100 yogurts.

“What drives these companies is the bottom line. There's no better way to improve profits than to tie your product to a social cause, and there's no better cause than breast cancer,” said BCA Executive Director Barbara Brenner. “It's time for people to take a closer look, and to think before they pink. After all, if shopping could cure breast cancer, it would be cured already.”

#9

The Brawny Effect: Did you strengthen your organization's brand and power?

No news is neutral. A good media strategy can help control how a story is reported and how an organization is perceived. Shaping perception is especially critical if an organization is the new kid on the block. Smart communications can help build your credibility and brand quickly.

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Case In Point: Investing in Meaningful Change

When the Blue Fund, a progressive mutual fund, hired Fenton to help with the public launch of their organization, we knew that answering the skeptics up front would be the first order of business. If we could prove that a mutual fund that screens for Democratic-leaning companies could outperform Republican-leaning ones, the Blue Fund's positioning in the marketplace would be golden.

One week prior to the official launch, we helped the Blue Fund release a "white paper" to the business press with hard numbers to show that investing in companies whose top executives commit the majority of their company's and their own political action committee (PAC) contributions to the Democratic Party (and that meet progressive labor and environmental standards) actually pays off — not just politically, but financially: Over the past five years, the Blue Large Cap Index would have beaten the S&P 500 by slightly over 13 percent annually, and beaten companies that give the bulk of their political contributions to Republicans by over 15 percent.

A story on www.slate.com, "Blue is Green," swiftly became the online news site's number one forward-ed story of the week, helping drive more than 3,000 unique hits to the Blue Fund's Web site in just one 24-hour period.

#10 Are you quantifying and qualifying your results effectively?

So you got a story in USA Today. How many eyeballs did you reach? Media results in terms of audience share and readership can be measured — the bean counters at the TV networks and newspapers do it all the time to entice advertisers to buy space. The online world has its own easy-to-track benchmarks.



Subscriber services like Nielsen Media Research and Bacon's media directories provide this type of information. But if you don't subscribe, here are some cost-effective tips and shortcuts:

Measure print impact:

The Audit Bureau of Circulations provides independent, third-party circulation audits of print circulation, readership and Web site activity. Some of the information is accessible for free on their Web site: www.accessabc.com

Measure broadcast impact:

Check the Web site for the outlet and click on the section targeting advertisers. There you will often find something called a "media kit" which often includes information about the station's viewers and listeners.

Measure online impact:

An array of services can help you measure success, depending on your goals. For tracking online news coverage, traditional search engines like Google and

GoogleNews do a great job of covering online media journals, as well as the Web sites of mainstream news sources. You can pick up stories that appear on their online editions but didn't run in print or broadcast.

Sites such as www.technorati.com and www.blogpulse.com allow you to track which blogs are covering your issues, how popular these blogs are, and the traction your issue is getting within the blogosphere.

For meaningful results tracking activity on your Web site, we recommend that you track how many unique visitors are accessing your site, where they're coming from, and what percentage are "converting" (i.e., taking you up on your call to action).



TOOL: Comprehensive Evaluation Grid

To get results, you have to intentionally plan from the beginning. Below is a grid to help. Not all categories will apply, but this should get you started.

COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION GRID

	Planned for pre-campaign	Evaluated post-campaign	Results
Advocacy Impact			
Change Behavior			
Raise Money			
Grow Membership/ Email List			
Reframe			
Build Skills			
Build Relationships			
Lexicon			
Brand Power			
Quality + Quantity			

About Fenton Communications:

With more than 24 years of experience serving the public interest, Fenton harnesses the full range of multimedia services, from strategic planning and media relations to advertising and online marketing and advocacy, to help our clients protect the environment, improve public health and advance human rights and social justice. We produce guides like this because part of our mission is to help build capacity in the nonprofit sector. For free, downloadable copies 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, Deputy General Manager and Managing Director
(415) 901-0111
pblackman@fenton.com