

The Art of Making People Care

You've got it all going on: carefully crafted position papers, an e-mail activist network, troubling statistics, an encyclopedic Web site, a passionate staff. So why haven't you changed the world yet? Maybe your key audiences don't care—or don't care enough.

After all, they're not nursing your particular outrage hangover every morning. They have other problems. Tap into those, and you can make people care. While you're at it, engage their hearts as well as their minds. Provide food (not medicine) for thought. And give skeptics a reason to believe.

What's in it for me? Sure, doing the right thing should be its own reward, but it never hurts to sweeten the pot. If you're promoting legislation, get to know key legislators' interests, and relate your interests to theirs. Spell out how the issue touches the politician's voter base—and get the affected voters to help you make your case.

Trying to rouse an apathetic public? Show them how solving this problem will save their kids from harm, improve their job opportunities, or otherwise rock their world. If people know how

your issue relates to their lives, you'll get their attention.

That story made me cry. Move people emotionally, and you'll move duffs out of chairs and dollars out of wallets. If you can tell real people's heartbreaking or inspiring stories in an honest way, you can motivate activism.

Best of all: get people to tell their own stories. Amnesty International has motivated a worldwide army of letter writers by bringing them harrowing first-person accounts by prisoners of conscience. Encourage human connections and you'll get a response.

Reading can be fun! You have to educate people; you don't have to make it painful. Lively, fat-free backrounders make it easy for people to learn about your issue—and you'll keep them engaged long enough to persuade them. Dull, difficult, or

insubstantial material pushes away everyone who isn't already convinced. Why would you want to do that?

That'll never work... No, wait, maybe it will. Sometimes people don't care because they don't let themselves. Maybe they've volunteered or contributed before and seen no results. Maybe they don't want to get engaged in a struggle with no end in sight. Maybe they're just cynical.

You need to prove to them that they can make something happen—and that you *have* made something happen. Talk up your successes everywhere, all the time. In this context, bragging is good. Don't be afraid to tout small victories—they show people how each step takes you closer to the goal. Profile volunteer or activist achievements. And demonstrate that you have a viable plan—share your strategy (in everyday language) and provide evidence that it will work.

People won't care because you tell them to; they'll care because you touch them where they live—and because you leave them no excuse not to. ▶

To SEO or Not to SEO?

Search engine optimization (SEO) is a top concern among attendees at our workshops and presentations. The main questions are, "What is it?" and "Do I need to do it?" followed by "How can I do it?"

Basically, SEO fine-tunes site text (page copy, titles, and keywords) to help Google and other search engines find the site. Keywords, which are embedded in text and HTML code, reflect what your organization is and does, in words that people would use to find you.

SEO is crucial for businesses that rely on Internet marketing. For others, such as service businesses and non-profits, it's less important because most people will learn

about you in other ways. But that doesn't mean you should ignore SEO: it ensures that potential clients and supporters can find you online, and that journalists, policy makers, and others researching your field know you exist.

So where to begin? We recommend Search Engine Watch (www.searchenginewatch.com), a terrific resource with a head-spinning array of free information: articles, software reviews, forums, a blog, and an e-newsletter. Start with "Search Engine Submission Tips" if you're a novice; you'll soon know enough to do some SEO on your own.

Then jump over to the ClickZ Network (www.clickz.com), the Internet marketing outfit that produces Search Engine Watch. ClickZ has a ton of helpful info, including Web usage statistics and advice on search engine marketing. ▶