6 Ways to Report on the Social Impact of a Cause Campaign

by Robert Rosenthal on January 14, 2011 · 0 comments

in Reporting & Metrics

 Whether the currency is time or money, it's essential for anyone who is engaging supporters, donors or volunteers to be able to illustrate the social impact of their campaign.

While debate might always rage as to how *best* to show off the social return on any cause investment, over at Cone Inc. the team has published a list that neatly summarizes six types of SROI reporting. The list is a great entry point for newbies who are planning and budgeting for an upcoming cause marketing, employee volunteering, or crowdsourced fundraising campaign.

The reporting types include:

- Ongoing Tracking – Where results are continuously updated in real time
- Interactive Impact Calculator – Where impact is shown through an interactive calculator
- Storytelling – Where impact is communicated by sharing personal stories of people who were affected by the issue and helped by the program
- Customized Mapping – A customized map shows consumer impact – locally or globally
- Mosaic – Consumer effort (making a donation, signing a pledge) helps complete a visual mosaic representing the campaign
- Social Math – Potential consumer impact is demonstrated through a simple, clear (often one-to-one) equation

What I like most of all is that the list makes impact reporting sound doable… not something far off, abstract, or difficult to visualize.

VolunteerMatch, for example, uses four of the six methods in sharing our successes. We're doing ongoing tracking on our About Page, which update in real time. We have stories of volunteers and nonprofits. Though our Live Map we're showcasing real local and national impact as it happens. And we use a custom "social equation" in our Annual Report — we call it our SROI — to demonstrate our annual social impact.

Come to think of it, our hosted solutions for VolunteerMatch Solutions corporate clients also have dynamic "thermometers" on volunteer dashboards — essentially, an interactive impact calculator. Which makes five ways VolunteerMatch is reporting on social impact.

Again, it's a great list to get you started with your planning. But Cone advises managers not to forge that this is only part of the story of the program. As they put, these are all outputs (numbers and data), not outcomes (real changes in the world). Most likely, there's still some story left to tell.

How to Demonstrate Cause Impact

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As consumers become savvier about social and environmental issues, organizations are continually challenged to deliver sophisticated programs with an eye toward transparency. One way companies can keep up with consumer expectations is by communicating progress toward stated goals or measuring the results of programs in relevant and compelling ways. We took stock of the ways organizations are reporting results and consumer impact and identified six common approaches:

1. **Ongoing Tracking –** *Results are continuously updated in real time*
   Pro: Real-time reporting motivates consumers to get involved to help move the ticker
   Con: Demonstrates collective impact, not necessarily impact of individual

Example: "[GE Plant a Bulb](#)" - every time someone views a video on its website, GE will donate a flower bulb. It keeps a running tally of bulbs planted on the campaign page.

2. **Interactive Impact Calculator –** *Impact is shown through an interactive calculator*
Pro: Invites consumers to crunch the numbers and instantly understand how their personal donation or action will impact the cause
Con: Does not necessarily capture the ongoing, collective progress of the campaign
Example: Starbucks "[The Big Picture](#)" - Starbucks shows its impact through a customized impact calculator where consumers can enter the number of cups they save per day by using a reusable mug to see how many trees they save over 50 years.

3. **Storytelling –** *Impact is communicated by sharing personal stories of people who were affected by the issue and helped by the program*
Pro: Makes the outcome real through human connections that satisfy consumers' emotional needs
Con: Is abstract and lacks a quantitative component to demonstrate overall progress
Example: Downy "[Touch of Comfort](#)" – Downy demonstrates impact by providing follow-up stories of kids who spend their nights away from home and benefit from the gift of a quilt from Downy.

4. **Customized Mapping –** *A customized map shows consumer impact – locally or globally*
Pro: Makes the contribution tangible to each individual and is an excellent way to localize a national or global campaign
Con: Does not necessarily show the collective impact of the campaign
Example: Odwalla "[Plant a Tree](#)" – for every visit to related parks, Odwalla will pay for a tree to be planted. Consumers can choose a state and locate their tree online.

5. **Mosaic –** *Consumer effort (making a donation, signing a pledge) helps complete a visual mosaic representing the campaign*
Pro: Makes consumers' contribution fun and essential to "complete" the whole picture
Con: Although they are a necessary part of the whole, consumers may feel lost in the large picture
Example: The Body Shop "[Stop Sex Trafficking](#)" – by signing the petition, consumers will help The Body Shop raise awareness about the terrible crime of sex trafficking. With the visual roster, consumers can see the names of those who have signed the petition.

6. **Social Math –** *Potential consumer impact is demonstrated through a simple, clear (often one-to-one) equation*
Pro: Makes overwhelming issues (e.g., preventable diseases) more approachable; showcases how consumer action has a true, measureable result
Con: Consumers still want to know the overall outcome which requires additional reporting (e.g., 1 pack = 1 vaccine, but ultimately how many lives are saved?)
Example: Pampers "[1 Pack = 1 Vaccine](#)" – for every product bought, Pampers will provide UNICEF with funding for a life-saving vaccine to protect a mother and baby against tetanus.

There are a variety of fun and compelling ways to share results with consumers and help them understand their contribution – but don't forget that these are reporting outputs (e.g., one million

online signatures), not outcomes (e.g., reduction in sex crimes). Reporting results is step one in the process, but consumers still want to hear the full story of how you've made an impact on the social or environmental issue at hand.