

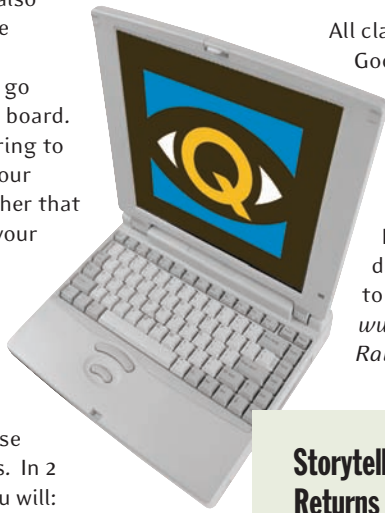
Raise Your Eye-Q

Learn the basics of graphic design and make sure all your communications look as good as your cause.

Your organization relies on graphic design every day: to make your website “sticky,” your newsletters engaging, your direct mail compelling. It may also rely on *you* to decide which designs are approved and which go back to the drawing board. The expertise you bring to those decisions is your “Eye-Q,” and the higher that number, the better your choices will be.

“Raising Your Eye-Q” is a brand new online course created precisely to prepare you for those important moments. In 2 one-hour classes, you will:

- **Learn** the ten questions to ask when evaluating new web pages, e-newsletters, annual reports, direct mail, or any other professionally designed communication pieces;
- **Share** samples of your organization’s current work and have them evaluated by graphic design experts;



- **Emerge** with new confidence that when you’re asked to approve or comment on any new design, you’ll make the decision that best serves your organization.

All classes will be led by Andy Goodman and R. Christine Hershey, co-creators of *Why Bad Ads Happen to Good Causes*, and *Why Bad Presentations Happen to Good Causes*.

For a schedule of course dates and times, fees, and to register online, visit www.agoodmanonline.com/Raise_EyeQ.

Storytelling iSchool Returns in January

The popular online course that can help you tell better stories for advocacy, development, recruitment and more returns January 8, 15, 22, and 29. Enrollment will be limited to 25 students, so find out more and register online at www.agoodmanonline.com/ischool/index.html.

Free-range thinking™ is a monthly newsletter for public interest groups, foundations, and progressive businesses that want to reach more people more effectively. For a free subscription, send your request to: andy@agoodmanonline.com or call 323.464.3956. Back issues are available on the web at www.agoodmanonline.com.

Free-range thinking™ is written by Andy Goodman and edited by Lori Matsumoto.



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GOOD IDEAS FOR GOOD CAUSES

444 north larchmont blvd, suite 102
los angeles, ca 90004



Pro Bono Prima Donnas...

...and other perils to ponder before selecting an advertising agency to help promote your cause.

Last month, I urged nonprofits to take their communications as seriously as their causes (“Sometimes It Is About Us”), and my open letter provoked more responses than usual – mostly positive. One came from Susanne Frank, a veteran public interest communicator herself, who encouraged me to go one step further.

If nonprofits take my exhortation to heart, she said via email, they might decide to hire an advertising agency. Finding just the right agency, however, can fall somewhere between online dating and walking through a minefield where moving forward with confidence is concerned. So Frank suggested I devote the December newsletter to advice on what to look for and what to avoid.

Since Frank has worked on both the nonprofit and agency sides, I know she has a better perspective on this

process than I do. She started her career at Planned Parenthood of NYC, guided many nonprofits through campaigns at M&R Strategic Services, and most recently worked for a commercial agency in Portland, Oregon. So I offered her the editorial reins for this month’s edition – i.e., if you’re so smart – and she graciously accepted the invitation. Her firsthand and hard-won wisdom is inside.



Susanne Frank,
guest editor

► Whether you're planning an annual report or launching a national advertising campaign, hiring an agency can add a level of creativity and professionalism that greatly extends your in-house capabilities. To make the most out of this collaboration, though, you may want to consider the following ten tips:

1. Don't buy a bulldozer when a shovel will do.

Hiring an agency might be overkill if you have a small project such as a brochure on the drawing board. Unless your next communications initiative absolutely requires a project manager, creative director, copy writer, and graphic designer, you will probably get more value for your dollar from an experienced freelance writer and graphic designer alone.

2. Look beyond the two P's:

Some choose entirely on price, seeking the least expensive alternative. Others are swayed by prestige, defaulting to the powerhouse agency with The Name Everyone Knows. Go the extra mile by conducting a comprehensive search, giving special preference to agencies that have:

- Already worked with your target audience (and may have relevant audience research)
- Completed a successful campaign for another public interest group of your size
- Lots of enthusiasm for your cause
- A firm commitment to strategy

3. Beware pro bono prima donnas.

Without strong support from the top, agencies often neglect pro bono projects the minute their cash cows

start lowing. You may also have a key creative on your account who decides that, since you're not paying, he can disregard your opinion and goals and follow his personal muse. ("I think we can really tell the global warming story with a snowmobile race through Yosemite!") Just remember: Many agencies will consider working with you at a reduced rate. Paying for services gives you more control.

4. Meet the key members of the creative team before committing.

Just because an agency has a breathtaking portfolio, do not assume the brilliant folks behind those greatest hits will be on your team. Find out who will be assigned and make sure they fit your needs. If you are considering a highly conceptual advertising campaign, for example, the creative director will be critically important. If you are producing an annual report, you should love your copywriter.

5. Set clear, measurable goals.

"Getting out the word out about our issue" is not a goal. It's lazy thinking. "We want to make a really cool video" is not a goal either. It's a *tactic*. Persuading teens not to smoke – now *there's* a goal that's both clear and measurable. A good agency can help you sort the goals from the non-goals, as well as identify tactics that have the best chance of reaching your audience without blowing your budget.

6. Get a schedule. In writing.

Your agency should provide a production schedule that outlines when drafts/concepts are due to you, when you are

expected to review and return comments, printer/shooting deadlines, etc. Your contract with the agency should also spell out how many rounds of review are covered in your budget (usually three) and what additional costs will be charged should you exceed these limits.

7. Be ready to respond and do it promptly.

Make sure your key decision makers are involved early in the process. You can't afford to let the creative team wander in the wrong direction for more than one round. Establish regular meetings internally – your creative team will lose momentum and interest if they have to wait three weeks for you to review their work.

8. Good feedback is specific feedback.

"This isn't working for me" does not help your agency. If something isn't working, force yourself to articulate why, and do so in writing. (Is it the wrong tone? Wrong emphasis? A word or color choice you don't like?) The more specific you can be, the more responsive the agency can be. And remember: A typical first draft or first round of concepts functions as a *conversation starter* – it's going to be very rough. Don't freak out! Expect it, and use it as a tool to clarify what you really want.

9. Don't be intimidated by brilliant creative directors, copywriters, or directors.

Sure, their eyeglass frames are more fashionable than yours ("I didn't even know they could be made from soy"), but *nobody* knows your issue like you. Even the most gifted auteur needs your feedback and insight. By the same

token, you must trust their creative judgment. They live and breathe advertising and have great instincts about what's fresh and what's feeble.

10. It isn't truly clever if it isn't truly you.

Like a sailor navigating past the sirens, resist the temptation to stray off message when a saucy concept or eye-popping execution comes calling. The ultimate test of any communications piece – even after it's been unanimously judged creative, catchy and cool – is whether or not the audience will believe it comes from you. ■

(Susanne Frank now runs Frank Communications and can be reached at sfrank@earthlink.net.)

