



MEJO 332: Public Relations Writing

Communication Audit

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Audit Goal

The goal of this communication audit was to provide Independent Animal Rescue (IAR) with strategic recommendations to improve communication operations. The basis for these improvements was sourced from a comprehensive analysis of the nonprofit's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The recommendations within this audit were designed to assist IAR in developing effective communication strategies with current and potential volunteers as well as other key community members important to its cause.

Background

Founded in 1994, IAR is a nonprofit animal rescue organization based in Durham, North Carolina, that received its official 501(c)(3) status in 1995. It serves the Triangle by providing rescue, care and adoption services to dogs and cats in need. IAR achieves this by funding and facilitating spay and neuter services and educating the community on the importance of animal welfare. IAR is currently overseen by a board of directors and supported by more than 300 unpaid volunteers. Donated time and resources are key players in sustaining the organization's mission.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

Website

- Uses very clear adopt, donate and volunteer call-to-actions on its landing page.
- Offers comprehensive informational resources for current and potential volunteers, adopters and donors.
 - There is a great page dedicated to pros and cons to consider before fostering.
 - Volunteer information is easy to access and simple to sign up with.
 - Includes an organized, user-friendly calendar that highlights events for volunteers and people interested in adopting.

Facebook

- Clearly recognizable and easy to locate.
- Introduction box immediately delivers users with information they would likely be searching for.
 - There is a brief explanation of IAR and its mission, page type, address, email, donation button and rating.
- Posts featuring specific pets include visual and written information regarding the animal that is easily accessible to users (clear call-to-action).
- Uses engaging and friendly captions that are representative of IAR's brand.
- Updated frequently and has a lot of viewable content.

Instagram

- There is a consistent posting schedule with approximately one post every day.
- Every post features animals, making IAR's mission and purpose as an organization clear.
- Timely posts for events give followers enough time to plan in advance.
- Has a substantial following of over 3,700.
- There is a series of pinned posts that grab followers' attention and make information easily accessible as soon as they get to the page.
- Posts are packed full of information so followers do not have to jump through hoops to find what they are looking for.
- Features many posts dedicated to "tips" for pets.
 - Ex. How to keep dogs exercised when it's raining, etc.
- Currently, IAR is trying to tap into current trends.
 - Ex. Yearly recap modeled after Spotify Wrapped.
- Posts are eye-catching and use bright colors.
- Good use of hashtags to drive like-minded people to posts.
- Features a partnership with Google Pixel which was very popular, being their most liked post.

TikTok

- Generated a significant following (18,000+).
- Consistent posts that engage with the audience.

Weaknesses

Website

- Their TikTok is not advertised on their website.
- Has redundant and outdated content and links on certain pages.
- Parts of the site have an overload of unorganized information that could be confusing and stressful for users.
- No presence on X (formerly Twitter) since 2020 despite it being linked in their website.
- Inconsistencies with IAR's address across social platforms and their website. Some use a P.O. box and others have a direct Durham address.

Facebook

- Banner is too wordy and the mission statement within it isn't entirely visible due to the profile photo covering it.
- Informational posts are not popular.
 - Ex. Pet enrichment posts.
- Most posts have under 10 likes and shares.

Instagram

- Lack of engagement on posts. Currently, IAR is averaging 20 to 40 likes per post.

- Inconsistency in style choices for posts.
- Underutilization of reels.
- Story highlights are dated and not updated with current events and recent stories.
- Not much mention of their spay and neuter services.

TikTok

- Lack of engagement considering their follower account (18k followers but only average around 300-600 views and 20-50 likes).
- Does not have a consistent posting schedule.

Opportunities

Website

- Connect social media content to make it viewable via the website.
- Simplify content on the landing page to make it more engaging and user-friendly.
- Search engine optimization can drive engagement.
- Ensure the website is fully optimized for mobile devices to cater to the growing number of mobile users.
- Adopt new design trends to better convey messages and improve the aesthetic appeal of the website.

Facebook

- Include a donate button at the top of the page.
- Take advantage of fundraiser and event feature widgets.
- Incentivize followers to leave a review.
- Create and advertise Amazon wishlists for certain pet supplies.
- Look into organizations that specifically help dogs and observe how IAR can better advertise their adoptable dogs.
- Create reels and other short-form video content of adoption events or specific adoptable animals.

Instagram

- Use reels to drive engagement and reach a wider audience.
- Use a set list of hashtags to increase engagement from people who are likely to interact with the organization and use its resources.
- More partnerships with brands like Google Pixel can increase IAR's reach considering it is their most popular post. It also reaches consumers who use the partnership product but don't know about the organization.
- Utilize live streams during adoption events.
- Use the boost feature to push the page to more peoples' feeds.
- Report other companies and organizations—and vice-versa—could help drive engagement and reach new customers and volunteers.
- Put direct links in posts to drive more people to the website where they can donate and sign up for events.

- Schedule posts on a platform like Hootsuite to be posted at specific times when followers are more active.

TikTok

- Utilize earned media through social media trends.
- Repost videos to reach more users.
- Cross promote by using TikTok to drive traffic to other platforms and create a comprehensive online presence.
- Unique creative tools allow for businesses to produce captivating content that can set them apart from their competitors.

Threats

Website

- The amount of information on the landing page could overwhelm visitors, leading them to look to another organization.
- The website is outdated and has information that is no longer relevant, again making it possible for users to seek out other organizations.

Facebook

- Some other local animal rescue organizations have a significantly higher following base.
- The page's ratio of followers to engagement is low.
- Not all opportunities for clear call-to-actions are on the page for donating, events and volunteering opportunities.

Instagram

- Other shelters in the area have much larger presences on their social platforms and clearer communication messaging, which could negatively impact IAR's relative credibility.
 - Competitors like Hope Animal Rescue have a consistent theme for their posts, utilize reels consistently and have a large following and engagement level due to this (averaging 300 to 700 likes per post).
 - Competitors like Saving Grace also have consistent themes and high levels of reel usage leading to higher engagement (around 100 likes per post and a large following).
- Social media has made it easier for people to adopt without going through a shelter meaning that IAR must work harder to emphasize their mission.
- Changes to the algorithm make it increasingly harder for posts to be discovered.
- Increasingly people are using other platforms more than they are Instagram.
- User preferences shift quickly so IAR must find a way to continue to engage them despite these changes.

TikTok

- User preferences and trends on TikTok are constantly changing, meaning that IAR must constantly be in the position to adapt.

Recommendations

IAR can enhance its communication efforts, increase engagement with its audience and overall further its mission of rescuing and rehoming animals in need by doing the following:

- Strengthen Social Media Engagement
 - Encourage more interaction and engagement on Facebook and Instagram by using polls, Q&A sessions, and contests.
 - Utilize Instagram Reels and TikTok to create short, engaging videos showcasing adoptable animals, adoption success stories, and behind the scenes footage of rescue operations.
 - Utilize a set list of hashtags.
 - Explore photo dumps and Instagram Lives at events as popular trends to drive engagement and connect with followers on a more personal level.
 - Repost content from other companies and organizations to diversify content and reach new audiences.
 - Maintain consistency in style choices for posts to maintain a cohesive brand image.
 - Hope Animal Rescue's page is a great example.
 - Update Instagram story highlights regularly with current events, recent stories, and highlights from adoption success stories.
- Improve Website Organization and Content
 - Simplify the content on the website landing page to make it more engaging and user-friendly.
 - Address inconsistencies and outdated content on the website by doing a thorough content audit and updating where necessary.
 - Connect social media content to the website to make it directly viewable via the website.
- Call-to-Actions and Donation Opportunities
 - Add a donate button at the top of the Facebook page to facilitate easy access to donation options similar to the website.
 - Take advantage of fundraiser and event feature widgets on Facebook to promote fundraising efforts and increase visibility.
- Leverage Partnerships and Collaborations
 - Explore partnerships with brands and organizations similar to the Google Pixel partnership to increase reach and visibility.
 - Consider collaborating with other animal rescue organizations and local businesses for cross promotion and mutual support to reach a bigger audience.

Limitations

IAR is a nonprofit organization with only two paid employees. Every other contribution is made by volunteers who graciously give their time to support IAR's mission. However, many of the volunteers have full-time jobs, families and leadership positions aside from IAR. Therefore, it may be hard to maintain and update all of IAR's communications channels in the same way a full-time staff would. With that being said, IAR's social media and website are very informational and engaging but it is important to note this potential limiting factor to create a realistic communications plan.

Additionally, the ages of the IAR volunteer population are skewed towards the older range. With very few Generation Z contributors, current trends may be hard to pinpoint and execute on the social media pages. While this is a factor that cannot be controlled by current volunteers, it is important to note when analyzing IAR engagement and content. It may be beneficial for IAR to begin to target younger volunteers who would have a more in-depth understanding of current trends and aesthetics that drive engagement and interest.

Conclusion

IAR boasts a very impressive social media presence and website. With a significant amount of information on all platforms, IAR's mission, volunteer information and services are well-communicated to its community members. All of its platforms are defined by a friendly and energetic tone that's illustrated through engaging captions, bright and colorful content and consistent posting on numerous platforms. However, IAR falters with an overcrowded website that provides good, but not concise, information. Condensing pages and removing outdated content will give the site the breath of fresh air it needs. IAR posts consistently on most social media platforms, but with the lack of current trends and diverse content, engagement has fallen significantly. We recommend that IAR engage with current trends, consider partnership posts and connect social media to their website to help introduce more people to the services and resources it provides.