

The Community Benefit Story: Are You Giving It the Marketing Attention It Deserves?

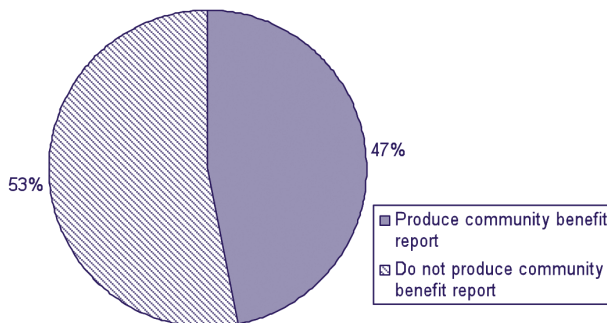
Don't rely on a financial form to tell your hospital's story.

Hospital marketers, along with public relations and communications practitioners, have always been at the forefront in telling the story of what their organizations provide to the community. Surprisingly, though, the majority of healthcare marketers do not list a community benefit report as one of the tools they use to tell that story. With the advent of the revised IRS Form 990 and its new Schedule H, which requires tax-exempt hospitals to report charity care policies, the availability of community benefit reports, and the costs of certain charity care and other community benefit programs, the community benefit story is a key strategy every marketing team should plan to deliver.

Survey Findings Reveal Challenges for Marketers

StayWell Custom Communications recently completed a survey of more than 800 hospitals and health plans across the country. Less than half (47 percent) of responding organizations report that they create a community benefit report (Figure 1).

Figure 1.
Prevalence of Hospital Community Benefit Reports



Source: StayWell Custom Communications, 2010

A number of survey respondents indicated that the marketing department is not the team driving the creation of the community benefit report. Data collection is typically left to the finance department, while marketing is sometimes involved in drafting written responses to the open-ended questions on Schedule H.

Shaping and telling the community benefit story can be challenging. Respondents to the survey reported struggles with:

- Defining a formal, consistent way to collect the data required for the community benefit report, and pulling together the resources required to gather the data from activities that happen in many different parts of the organization.
- Determining the best way to integrate messaging across disparate programs and, in health systems, across multiple organizations.
- Fully understanding the definition of community benefit.
- Defining the role marketing should play in the overall process.

Why Should Marketing Tell the Community Benefit Story?

Marketing's integral role in telling the community benefit story has never been more important, and the story itself has never been more relevant. The 2010 Edelman Trust Barometer (www.edelman.com/trust/2010/) showed that for the first time U.S. opinion leaders rank transparency and trust as more important than quality of products and services in determining corporate reputation. What better way to build the trust of key stakeholders than to quantify and communicate the benefit your organization contributes to the community it serves? It's an important story—far too important to be buried in a complicated IRS form or deep in the minutes of a board meeting.

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Tips for a Successful Community Benefit Report

- Be at the table as part of the data collection effort. Partner with Finance and other departments throughout the process, not just in the final drafting of the report.
- Know the guidelines about what counts as community benefit; don't report on something that doesn't count! (The American Hospital Association's *AHA Guidance on Reporting of Community Benefit* and the Catholic Health Association's *A Guide for Planning and Reporting Community Benefit* offer helpful guidelines for defining community benefit.)
- Know your audience.
- Be humble and don't exaggerate.
- Involve your community and all key stakeholders. Collaboration is a key component of success.
- Consider undertaking a community needs assessment as a valuable part of the process.
- Make sure all employees can cite the community benefit story. As with all marketing endeavors, they are the best ambassadors.
- Don't leave it to the not-for-profits! The importance of trust and transparency in determining corporate reputation makes the community benefit story relevant for *all* organizations.

The Community Benefit Story: Are You Giving It the Marketing Attention It Deserves?


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What can you gain by adding a community benefit report to your marketing arsenal? A community benefit report can:

- Demonstrate the positive impact your hospital makes on the community.
- Show how funds, grants, and donations are being used effectively, providing support for efforts to seek further funding.
- Boost staff engagement in community benefit activities, and build brand ambassadors who can tell the community benefit story inside and outside the organization.
- Strengthen and increase brand awareness, enforcing the critical qualities of trust and transparency in the perception of your brand.

Examples from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and Staten Island (NY) University Hospital on the facing page demonstrate the power of an innovative approach to community benefit reports.

The lessons learned from the StayWell Custom Communications survey, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, and Staten Island University Hospital demonstrate that while telling a compelling community benefit story does not come without effort, the payoff can be significant in improved brand awareness, reputation, and relationship with your community. At a time when trust and transparency mean so much, there's no better way to start an open dialogue with your community, and there's no one better poised to lead that dialogue than marketing and communications professionals.

To see more examples of hospital community benefit reports, please visit www.staywellcustom.com/hospital/community-benefit-reports.asp. 

SHSMD Datebook

May 3-14

SHSMD U online course: "Healthcare Marketing Plans & ROI," with David Marlowe

May 14

Deadline for nominations, 2010 Award for Individual Professional Excellence

June 7-18

SHSMD U online course: "Mastering Marketing Communications," with Joel English

June 9

SHSMD U webcast: "Integrating Messaging with Advanced Technology," with Ryan Weckerly and Tom Jensen (no fee for SHSMD members)

July 30

Deadline for early-bird Annual Conference registration

August 18

Cutoff date for reservations at the Hyatt Regency Chicago (1.888.421.1442)

September 8

SHSMD U webcast: "From Customers to Crusaders: Using Word of Mouth as a Marketing Strategy," with Anthony Cirillo (no fee for SHSMD members)

September 12-15

"Connections 2010: Healthcare on the Winds of Change," The SHSMD Annual Educational Conference and Exhibits, Hyatt Regency Chicago, Chicago, IL

Ongoing

SHSMD U webcast archives

For more information on these and other professional development opportunities, go to shsmd.org and click on the SHSMD U tab. For more information on the 2010 Annual Conference, click on the Annual Conference tab.

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AHA Resource Helps You Tell Your Hospital's Story

The IRS's Schedule H provides only a limited view of the work your hospital does in the community. Hospitals must go beyond Schedule H by illustrating and demonstrating the many ways they foster healthy individuals and families.

Telling the Hospital Story: Going Beyond Schedule H, a resource binder in AHA's Community Connections series, shows you how to tell your hospital's story more fully by combining statistics and tax information with personal stories of individuals and families your hospital helps every day. It includes a strategy checklist for hospital leaders; a discussion of communication strategy; a sample 2009 community benefit report, worksheet, and PowerPoint presentation; and examples of how hospitals across the country are assessing and communicating the benefits they provide their communities.

Telling the Hospital Story: Going Beyond Schedule H may be downloaded from the Community Connections website: www.caringforcommunities.org/caringforcommunities/content/09goingbeyondschH.pdf.

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

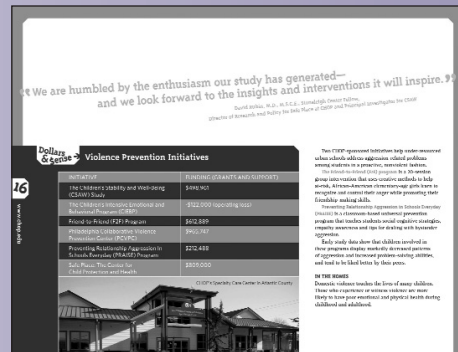
The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) has published a community benefit report since 2006. When attention began to be paid to the question of the community benefit provided by not-for-profit, tax-exempt hospitals a number of years ago, CHOP found itself fielding frequent calls from reporters requesting community benefit information. Rather than relying on a financial form to tell the story, the hospital decided to bring the story to life through a community benefit report to be shared with internal and external stakeholders.

CHOP has since realized the real value of the report as a key component of its ability to demonstrate how funds and grants received from the federal government and state legislature are being used effectively, and to show the hospital's positive impact on the community from both an economic and a health status perspective. Today, the community benefit report travels along to every advocacy call and is shared with a wide range of external and internal stakeholders (see box).

"We're proud that our community benefit report provides pertinent information to many different audiences and is also visually beautiful. It accomplishes many of our marketing communications objectives and has been a success from the onset,"



The cover and an interior page from *What Makes a Child Healthy?*, the 2009 community report of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.



Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Shares Its Community Benefit Report with Many Audiences

External:

- Legislators who serve any part of the hospital's service area.
- Community-based organizations within a 50-mile radius.
- Mailing list of people the hospital likes to stay in touch with.
- Donors and philanthropists.
- The community. The report is given away in earth-friendly bags at the hospital's Healthy Kids Day event.

Internal:

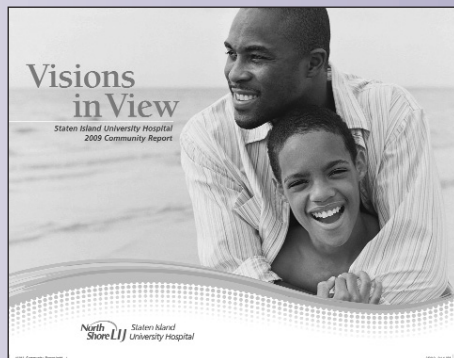
- Employees. The CEO sends an email announcement to all employees when the report is posted on the hospital's intranet. Employees can download a PDF or request a printed report.

said Suzanne Geissel, Children's public affairs manager.

Staten Island University Hospital

A mandate from the State of New York prompted Staten Island University Hospital, a member of the North Shore-Long Island Jewish (NSLIJ) Health System, to create its first community benefit report nearly a decade ago. Today, the hospital considers its community benefit report an integral part of its overall marketing communications plan, with the simple goal of telling the hospital story to the community. "Producing a community benefit report is a staple of our marketing communications strategy every year. It cements our credibility and forges a great relationship with the community," said Arleen Ryback, the hospital's director of public affairs.

The hospital will distribute more than 50,000 copies of its 2009 report to the community as a stand-alone piece. The report will also be available in PDF format on the hospital website and intranet, the NSLIJ corporate website, and Facebook.



The cover and an interior page from *Visions in View*, Staten Island University Hospital's 2009 community report.



Given the hospital's long experience with a community benefit report, the revised IRS Form 990 and Schedule H have not had much impact on its reporting goals or process. The marketing team does not participate in data collection, but partners with Finance to determine what

will be included in the report. To decide what will be featured, the marketing team applies the same strategic criteria as for other marketing projects, and they invest time in getting both administrative and clinical staff on board.