



5 ESSENTIAL first impressions

THAT YOUR ORGANIZATION NEEDS TO MAKE TO
DEVELOP LONG-TERM RELATIONS WITH YOUR BASE

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Thank you for downloading this guide!

Did you know that 55% of a brand's first impressions are strictly visual? Or that your organization has only 7 seconds to make a good first impression? That means your visual communications need to *immediately* stand out as professional and trustworthy.

This guide is intended to make you pause and think critically about your organization's current branding, communications, and the first impressions it makes. There are several quick exercises to get your wheels turning and make you really think.

One thing you want to keep in mind: the question will ask about your "organization." You can easily replace the word "organization" with "department" or "program." The exercises will still equally apply.

Let's get started and take a closer look so you can develop long-term relations with your base.



01

Your website



Want some eye-opening stats?

- 94% of visitors' first impressions of a website are based entirely on its visuals.
- It takes just .05 seconds for a visitor to form their first impression of your website.
- 75% of visitors judge your credibility based on their first impression of your website.

Added together, that means you have less than a second for a website visitor to deem you a credible organization. Your website could be costing your organization revenue. So answer this question: What first impression is your website making to first-time visitors?

Below are some quick items to consider. *As you do the exercise, do your best to put yourself in the shoes of someone who has never seen your website before or knows little of your organization.*

Quick exercise

Does your landing page hero make you want to learn more?

Are your photos and/or videos high-quality?

Is your text clear and legible against its background?

Is your message clear and easy to understand?

Do you use complicated terminology?

Does your homepage have a clear call-to-action?

Is it clear where to click to make a gift?

How long does it take to make a gift?

Does your website have proper hierarchy as you navigate?

Does your navigation have more than 5-7 items?

Do your pages take more than 2 seconds to load?

Do you have broken or incorrect links?

Does your website's visuals match your organization's visual guidelines and marketing designs?

Does your website respond well on different devices (laptop, large monitor, tablet, mobile)?

Based on your answers, how confident are you that your website is making a strong first impression to new visitors and potential new donors? Are you in need of a third-party audit to truly dive deep into your site and find what works and find missed opportunities?



02

Your mailings



When you go to your mailbox, what do you see? Probably a lot of white #10 envelopes with bills, junk about your "soon to expire home warranty," and/or letters addressed to "Current Resident" (ooh, real personal). You probably also get a lot of brightly colored postcards from local businesses and politicians that make you at least look twice.

Do your direct mail pieces stand out when stacked up with everything just mentioned?

Now, don't just spam your base—like any marketing, you must be strategic—but just as your digital first impressions, your physical first impressions matter, too.

- Per a USPS study, 75% of people say they remember receiving a direct mail piece from an organization.
- Per a Direct Marketing Association study, direct mail is responsible for 39% of consumers to try a brand for the first time.

Below is a list of questions to consider when thinking about your mailings. Based on your answers, are you confident your print mailings are making a strong first impression?

Quick exercise

- What do your physical mailings look like?
- Do your mailings immediately catch someone's eye?
- In a stack of white envelopes, how do you stand out?
- Do you segment your marketing?
- Are you strategic in what you send and to whom?
- Are you authentic?
- What message are you trying to send?
- What is the goal of *each* mailing you send?
- Do you show impact? Or do you only ever ask for money?
- Are you focused or trying to say everything to everyone all at once?
- What do your newest donors receive when they make a gift?
- Are your invitations...actually inviting? Do they entice people to learn more or attend?



03

Your imagery



Let's not overthink things here: put yourself in a consumer's shoes (whether it is purchasing a product or making a donation).

Quick exercise

If you saw marketing materials for two different organizations side-by-side (whether photography or video), which would you be more likely to gravitate towards?

ORGANIZATION 1

Hi-resolution
Good lighting
Flattering angles
Authentic imagery
Candid shots
Clear sound (for video)

ORGANIZATION 2

Blurry/pixelated
Poor lighting
Unflattering
Feels fake
Posed/forced shots
Poor sound (for video)

Dive deeper: Once you see the imagery, would you even bother to read the content—now matter how well-written—for Organization 2?

Which organization would you find more professional? More likely to accomplish their goals? Even more trustworthy? More likely to use your donation well?

We make these judgments every day through shopping, social media, restaurants, etc. When it comes to first impressions, people *will* equate your imagery with your brand and then your brand with your organization:

high quality imagery = high quality organization
low-quality imagery = cheap organization

People like to support and be a part of high quality, well-run organizations. What message does your photography and videography send?



04

Your office spaces and culture



Branding is SOOO much more than a logo, a color palette, and a font. There are many elements that go into it, primarily how people *feel* about your organization.

We have all experienced both terrible and wonderful customer service...either in the corporate and nonprofit world. We have all experienced disgusting and pristine work environments. All of this is quite memorable and will affect how you make decisions in the future and where you will send your money.

These all evoke feeling and emotion, both of which people will act on when making decisions. Below is a list of questions that will absolutely impact how people view you. Get it right the first time you make an impression.

Quick exercise

- How clean and organized is your entryway or welcome area?
- Is your physical space and tech consistent with your brand? For example, if you market yourself as modern and cutting-edge, does your space reflect that or does it look like it hasn't been updated in 20 years? (*Hint: that's not consistent with your brand.*)
- What does your background look like on a video call? We've all been through the challenges of working from home, but do you look professional or are you sitting in front of a messy bed?
- What is the tone and attitude of you and your colleagues in the office?
- When someone calls your office with a question, are they just endlessly forwarded from person to person? Or do you look for the solution and personally call them back? (*This is especially problematic at universities with many departments.*)
- How long does it take employees to return a call or email?
- How professional and clear is your signage? Your stationery? Your forms?
- How clean are your bathrooms? Don't laugh; I can guarantee there are gas stations, restaurants, or office that have stood out to you because of clean bathrooms.
- Does your office feel safe and secure?



05

Your email domain



This one is geared more for nonprofits than schools, but what is your email domain?

- Are you organization@gmail.com? Or hotmail.com? Or even aol.com?
- Or is it jane@organization.com?

Being a small organization—even of just one—is no excuse to not have a professional email domain, especially when there are options out there that offer no financial burdens for nonprofits. I assume you have the domain already secured for your website, so why are you not using it for your emails, too?

When I see email from an organization not using its domain—whether it's a nonprofit or a small business—my mind makes a few judgments, fair or not:

1. They are not committed for the long-term.
2. They do not care about looking professional.
3. They do not know how to do basic marketing (which makes me wonder if they are going to market the organization well).

This might seem super harsh, but unfortunately, I have found that—more often than not—those who do not have a professional email domain also struggle with their website, their mailings, their imagery, and their office spaces as well. It's just not a good first impression.

Those organizations might have excellent missions, writing, content, and be really skilled at what they do, but their poor first impressions hurt them more than they know.



What is next?

Hey there,

I hope this guide has helped you step back and ask some tough—though critically important—questions about your communications strategy and the memorable first impressions you make.

If you find yourself stuck and/or needing assistance, Wessel Creative is here to have your back and help you stand out. There is so much more to communications and branding than simply how things look. Whether you are working on a campaign, website, appeal, or your overall communications strategy, Wessel Creative crafts **unapologetically bold communications** that make strong first impressions and increase your odds of developing long-term relationships with your base.

Learn more about how we serve clients through an **in-depth process** from discovery to creation. You can reach out to me directly via email or phone if you are interested in learning more about our process, capabilities, and offerings. Schedule a call and see what possibilities exist.

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