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Communication Audit: Ship Community Outreach

Background

Ship Community Outreach (also known as Ship Outreach and Community Center) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Pastor Chris Jones founded Ship Community Outreach in 2010 with a focus on preventing food insecurity and crime, alleviating poverty, promoting healthy living, and preparing community members for employment in Southeast Raleigh. Although Ship Community Outreach was founded with Christian principles in mind, the program serves community members of all faiths. Jones' original goals are achieved through four initiatives: Galley Grocery, Bread of Life, The Ship Yard, and The Transitional Employment Initiative.

Galley Grocery and Bread of Life both prevent food insecurity. Galley Grocery is a subsidized grocery store located in a food desert, while Bread of Life is a food pantry and distribution center. Serving 24,000 individuals monthly, Bread of Life distributes 36,000 loaves of bread each month. The Transitional Employment Initiative is an eight-week job readiness program that helps participants gain life skills and discipline. The program particularly targets young people who grew up in unstable families, were exposed to violence or criminal activity, or have a lack of job opportunities. The Ship Yard is a workout yard that provides a safe and free place for community members to exercise. Its focus is on encouraging healthy living and preventing crime. It also offers youth weightlifting camps free of charge to community members.

In addition to the four main initiatives, Ship Community Outreach sponsors "Community Day" on the second Saturday of every month. Located at Ship of Zion Church, the event provides community members with meals, medical screening, food, clothing, and support. Ship

of Zion Church also hosts a summer camp dedicated to helping students learn and receive academic help between school years. Additionally, Ship Community Outreach has recently established the Anti-Trafficking Initiative to help women who have been trafficked deal with their trauma and establish a stable life.

Overview of Current Communications:

SWOT Analysis: Ship Community Outreach Website

Strengths:

Ship Community Outreach has a variety of media styles that are included on the website (print, videos, photo galleries, etc.) that contribute to a well-rounded view of the organization. The story of the program is also very clear; the organization's work aligns directly with their focuses and they provide examples of this throughout the website. Visitors to the website will understand why Ship Community Outreach was founded and why it is needed in Southeast Raleigh. One significant strength of the website is the page dedicated to video testimonials. This page is well organized and helps website viewers to understand the impact of the initiatives.

In addition to the website features that encapsulate the mission of the organization, Ship Community Outreach wisely has accessible tabs on the website for audiences to view a summary of their media relations tools. The drop-down tabs show an option to be brought to "Newsletters," "Ship Blog," and "Press Releases." This makes it very accessible for people to see the primary media relations tools the organization employs and pursue which one they may want to read further into or follow.

Ship Community Outreach's monthly newsletters are consistent and have timely and relevant updates. The newsletter is engaging overall and the photos included help show the

impact Ship Community Outreach is making. The recently added Ship Blog contextualizes the organization's focus, along with clear summaries of the community programs and corresponding pictures that are connected to hyperlinks to help viewers learn more about specific programs.

The press releases page has a neat setup so viewers can scroll through the different releases, which are briefly presented with a central photo and short synopsis about the feature and/or article. Viewers can then click anywhere on the photo to be directed to the webpage that has the feature and/or article. At the bottom of the scroll-through releases, there is a promotional text box addressing media organizations that includes convenient contact information.

Additionally, the website lists ways for volunteers to help and events for community members to attend, along with contact information included with the different opportunities. The layout is simple for English and Spanish speakers to navigate; there are clear titles and an "español" option that describes the company in Spanish.

Finally, donating is simple on the website. An online donation tab is seen clearly and when accessed, has clear instructions and information on the donation, including details about tax deductions and confirmations.

Weaknesses:

Even with the boasting strengths, Ship Community Outreach does have some major weaknesses to their media relations tools that harm their ability to effectively communicate and connect with all of their audiences alike.

Firstly, the Ship Blog, which has posts that were well-executed, lacks posts. Consistency is very important with communication, so the negligence to maintain this blog weakens its

impact and ability to reach audiences. It is clear that this blog started and stopped over the Summer as there has not been a new post since August.

The website has a few weaknesses that diminish its appeal to audiences. Looking from a visual perspective, there are some font inconsistencies throughout the website that are not aesthetically appealing. With that, the color scheme could sometimes be improved; designers should choose a background and text color that complement better for easier reading.

From an organization standpoint on the website, navigating information about Ship Community Outreach's four main initiatives is difficult. It is covered thoroughly throughout the website, but almost to the fault of being too much. For example, the "Our Initiatives" tab is located under the "Home" tab, but information about the initiatives is also found on the "Our Mission and Vision" tab under the "About Us" tab. It would be easier to navigate the website if all the information about each of the initiatives was listed in the same place. Many of these tabs are redundant, so consolidating information and narrowing down the number of tabs could help with brevity.

Lastly, there are things out of date or in need of updates on the website. For example, there is a calendar feature on the "Events" tab that should include all of the listed events and volunteer opportunities– but does not. Their monthly "Community Day" is a major event each month for the organization and community, but it is not on the calendar when it should be included.

Opportunities:

Since Ship Community Outreach already has a well-organized newsletter, growing a following on social media makes sense. The organization already has an Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn, so sharing content from the newsletter would help grow the online presence.

Ship Community Outreach already has 9 featured partner businesses on the website. Partnering with those companies on social media (asking to be featured on the websites, doing joint social media campaigns, etc.) could help advertise to the wider community. Furthermore, Raleigh has a strong community, with an abundance of potential partnerships and volunteers, to help this organization thrive.

Lastly, this organization has the potential to increase its engagement during this time as their focus on food and job insecurity have become larger issues in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. They can work the appeal of timeliness and proximity to media outlets for news stories and features regarding the pandemic's effect of exasperating these pre-existing issues.

Threats

Ship Community Outreach faces multiple threats. First, the organization's website has a lot of information, graphics, and tabs that could lead to the most important information getting lost or seem confusing to a potential volunteer, donor, or someone who is looking into their services.

The information on how to utilize the resources that Ship Community Outreach offers is also not as accessible or clear. Therefore, they are missing communication with one of their most important audiences: the people they are serving! The website is more suitable for volunteers than people seeking these resources, leaving this key audience out of communications and preventing the organization from serving a larger population.

The website also does not include information about how to donate cash or checks. Instead, they only utilize PayPal. This could also limit the amounts donated as PayPal users continue to decline with the rise of other money transfer platforms. More sources of accepting donations could open the door to more donations and the expansion of Ship Community Outreach.

Overall, the website and its original online presence are at risk of being ineffective due to their out-of-date practice and unclear presentation of information.

Another potential threat that Ship Community Outreach faces is that the website does not address the impact of COVID-19 which could play a significant role in the execution of their initiatives. For example, the increase in unemployment relates to their initiatives centered around assisting individuals in getting and maintaining jobs. Another example of how COVID-19 ties into their mission is how Ship Community Outreach focuses on health and physical wellness. Community Days offer basic healthcare, however, they should publicly address how they are incorporating the reality of the current pandemic into these events. If they are not already incorporating it, they must consider appropriate ways to do so to prevent the organization from falling behind in their services. All of this puts them at risk of straying from their mission. On the topic of COVID-19, the organization seems to rely heavily on in-person events and volunteer work. They have not addressed any safety precautions that will be taken at these events on their website which also puts them at risk of losing the engagement of participants and volunteers.

Recommendations

The communication challenge that Ship Community Outreach should focus on this year is clarity. While the company is very successful at sharing its mission and personal focuses, a

viewer of the website could easily get overwhelmed and confused when looking for the date and time for an event or program. Ship Community Outreach has an extensive list of programs that tie into their mission of working towards social and economic change in their community, but the website could have the next upcoming event featured on the home page or somewhere that is identifiable. To maximize the website's potential, Ship Community Outreach should re-organize the navigation bar. That is the biggest communication challenge that currently needs to be improved on their website. Consolidating the number of tabs on the bar and moving information into fewer, but relevant categories is a powerful starting place. Reducing the number of sub-categories under each tab is also important to prevent viewers from feeling overwhelmed. Currently, the "About" tab has nine subcategories, so consolidating that one is especially important.

The organization also needs to detail its COVID-19 protocol and how they plan to implement this during in-person events and programs. In addition to the COVID-19 protocol, they must address how COVID-19 has impacted the local community and how this can be addressed with their organization's work. Overall, the website's areas of improvement connect back to the need for clarity.

Ship Community Outreach could also work towards expanding and reaching a greater audience. Their mission is very beneficial to not only the people being serviced– but the people doing the service as well. If the organization were able to reach a greater audience, the community outreach and support would change people's lives on a much wider scale and benefit the organization. This expansion would allow for the opportunity to introduce more initiatives, as an influx of donations and partners would eventually pour in, which could further improve the self-discipline and self-esteem issues Ship aims to fix within the community, while

simultaneously benefiting a wider pool of individuals. Although an expansion would be more difficult for Ship—being a nonprofit organization—this could still be a goal they hope to reach at some point in the future.