

Habitat for Humanity of Orange County
Communication Audit

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Executive Summary:

Habitat for Humanity of Orange County is a nonprofit organization that partners with families to create better, healthier, and more financially stable lives. Habitat's mission is "seeking to put God's love into action, Habitat for Humanity of Orange County brings people together to build homes, communities, and hope." Its vision is that "everyone in Orange County has a decent place to live." Through the use of volunteer labor and donations, Habitat builds homes for families in need. Homes are sold with low-interest mortgages and homeowners make monthly payments set at 30% or less of their income. Habitat also partners with families who live in non-Habitat homes to assist them in making repairs to their homes. Habitat for Humanity of Orange County offers comprehensive support services and resources to empower families on their journey toward homeownership. From financial literacy workshops to homeownership education courses, they equip individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed as homeowners and active members of their communities.

Habitat for Humanity of Orange County utilizes a website, variety of social media platforms, direct mail letters, and email newsletters to connect with the public.

Habitat for Humanity of Orange County utilizes a user-friendly website to connect with the public. People can go to the website to find information about the organization, how to volunteer, and how to donate. The website shares stories of people who have been impacted by Habitat and has a place for people to sign up for email newsletters to become more aware of current and upcoming happenings.

The social media platforms that this organization utilizes are Instagram, X, Facebook and YouTube. The main platforms used are Facebook and Instagram where there are consistently several posts uploaded per week. These are visible to those in need of Orange Habitat's assistance, donors and volunteers. The posts are geared to spread awareness and updates on builds. Some noteworthy posts share personal stories that are engaging to social media users, but some captions have jargon that may be difficult for the average person to understand. Social media presence is important in this era, but it is equally important for social media posts to be accessible to all intended audiences. Our team suggests that the posts are simplified and captions are shortened for heightened ease.

The direct mail that Orange Habitat sends out varies. The organization partners with Habitat for Humanity International to send out solicitations. The targeted outreach audience for direct mail is higher-level donors. The annual report is mailed out as well as event invitations.

The email newsletter is available for subscription on the website and people can select what types of information they want to receive. Email lists for Orange Habitat include Advocacy, Family Days (childcare for volunteers), Regular Weekday Crew, Building Pride, General, Global Village (international trip) and Women Build. This is helpful to mitigate high volumes of unnecessary extra information aside from a volunteer's potential areas of interest. Too much outreach can harm an organization's use of email, so this is helpful to mitigate excessive emailing.

This communication audit will examine Habitat's communication strategies. Through our research, our team has developed three recommendations that will help Habitat for Humanity of Orange County expand its reach and awareness. These recommendations include creating a TikTok page, improving website features, and expanding outreach to nearby schools and organizations.

Introduction:

Habitat for Humanity of Orange County is more than just a housing organization. It is a catalyst for positive change, a champion of social justice and a beacon of hope for families in need. Through its efforts and unwavering dedication, Habitat is transforming lives, strengthening communities and building a brighter future for all. Habitat for Humanity of Orange County's vision is that "everyone in Orange County has a decent place to live." This communication audit will analyze Habitat for Humanity's communication strategies and provide recommendations for Habitat.

Methodology:

To conduct our research and provide insight for Habitat for Humanity of Orange County, we maintained consistent contact with the communications manager, Kaitlyn Kopala, and Johnson Service Corps intern, Charles Mullis. We met with them multiple times to gather information and discuss Habitat's communication strategies. For example, we looked through binders of past newspaper clippings to gather information on the history of Habitat for Humanity. Additionally, we interviewed Kopala and Mullis on their work and experience with Habitat. We conducted a SWOT analysis to determine Habitat's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. All of our research methods allowed our team to recommend strategies for Habitat's communication mix.

Results of the Audit Process:

The SWOT analysis presents our findings from analyzing Habitat's communication mix. The channels of communication we examined include the website, monthly newsletter, and social media platforms. By looking into the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of Habitat's communication mix, we were able to establish areas of improvement for Habitat.

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths

S1: The website is easy to navigate, access and understand. The mission statement is clearly stated on the website giving the viewer an immediate understanding of the organization and its focus. There are shortcuts for opportunities to volunteer, donate, and apply for homeownership. Flow charts, timelines and flyers make it easy to understand each part of the process, whether it be for donation, volunteering, or applying for homeownership. The website makes it easy to stay connected through links to social media accounts such as Facebook, X, Instagram and YouTube.

S2: The website highlights inspiring stories of volunteers and home recipients. The "See More Stories" tab offers first-hand insight into families that have either helped or been helped by Habitat. The stories of home recipients show the impact a home can have on a family. Volunteers share the rewarding experience of helping out. The website also includes pictures of recipients and volunteers working on builds. The stories inspire people to get involved with Habitat and share the rewarding experience.

S3: The monthly newsletter provides updates and news to the Habitat community. It provides information about upcoming events, such as fundraisers or volunteer opportunities. Each newsletter highlights collaboration with a specific volunteer organization or an individual

volunteer. The newsletter includes pictures and hyperlinks to the website where people can purchase tickets to events. This is a convenient way to advertise events because recipients do not have to seek out information.

S4: There is a consistent and cohesive presence on social media. Habitat maintains a unified brand image by sharing identical posts on Instagram, X, and Facebook. Habitat posts multiple times a week, providing timely updates on ongoing progress, upcoming events, and new builds, keeping the audience engaged and informed. The 40 Stories for 40 Years campaign is impactful as it resonates with the community and reinforces the organization's mission and impact.

Weaknesses

W1: The annual reports and financial information presented on the website are not up to date. Annual reports and financials are from 2019 and 2020. Additionally, the impact report on the website is from 2018-2019. The website says "2019 Impact Study" but when you click on the file it is the "Impact Study Report 2020." The years need to be updated so they are consistent and current. Updated information allows donors to see how they are helping and impacting the organization.

W2: Workers and staff seem inaccessible. The website does not provide a biography or photo of board members, and there is no way to contact board members. There are pictures of Orange County staff, but no biographies. Each staff member's email is given, but no phone number.

W3: The color scheme and website theme feel distracting. The bright colors distract from and may not fully convey the severity and seriousness of the affordable housing crisis. Consider using brighter colors as secondary accents rather than primary colors to ensure the message resonates more effectively with stakeholders and target audiences.

W4: Outdated and Inconsistent Social Media Features. The website displays an outdated Twitter logo that does not reflect the company's rebranding to 'X'. The Instagram story highlights have not been updated since 2019 and have random cover photos. Implementing a consistent cover photo and regularly updating the content within the story highlights can significantly improve Instagram's visual appeal and provide relevant information to users.

W5: Short application period for homeownership. Applications are only open for two weeks. Potential homeowners need to ensure that they know when applications will open. Ensure that communication is strong with potential homeowners.

Opportunities

O1: Make it easier to connect with staff, members of the advisory board, and the board of directors. There should be pictures and biographies for staff members, members of the advisory board, and the board of directors. Emails for the board of members and advisory board should be provided to ensure that each member is accessible. Another option is to include a hyperlink to their LinkedIn pages. If it is easier to connect with members, more meaningful interactions can be made within the community.

O2: Provide a calendar of upcoming events and builds on the website. Give the 40th Anniversary a tab on the website. Improve the website’s user experience by providing a calendar for upcoming events and builds. This will make information more accessible and organized as it would be in one location. Additionally, highlight the 40th anniversary with its own tab on the website. This tab could provide the history of Habitat, upcoming events and feature the “40 stories for 40 years” series. Showcasing the 40th anniversary will not only celebrate Habitat’s impactful journey but will inspire and engage individuals to actively participate and contribute.

O3: Expand connection with local schools and organizations. The website should provide more detailed information about how to start a school chapter of Habitat or how organizations can collaborate with the Orange County chapter. Habitat should partner with local schools and organizations to improve fundraising efforts and expand its reach. Habitat could start a “High School Build Day” to encourage high school students to volunteer.

O4: Create a TikTok page to connect with younger generations. Launching a TikTok page can broaden Habitat’s demographic and expand outreach. The page could feature engaging video content such as a ‘day in the life of a volunteer’ to inspire others to volunteer with Habitat. TikTok can also be used to spread awareness of Habitat’s mission, share success stories, and highlight ongoing initiatives and progress.

Threats

T1: Economic downturn or other financial hardships could prevent people from donating money or materials. Volunteers might need to work paid jobs instead of volunteering. A challenge would arise in trying to balance the increase in affordable housing needs with the increase in the cost of production.

T2: Changes in government policies regarding housing, construction or nonprofit organizations can impose challenges and additional regulatory issues. The government can change budget allotment or reduce tax incentives for nonprofits which would affect volunteers and revenue streams.

T3: Pending congressional legislation may ban the use of TikTok in the U.S., hindering opportunities to expand through the app. Habitat for Humanity of Orange County has a large nearby student body population that receives much of its news information from the app. Its pending ban would inhibit the organization’s ability to reach out to them through the app.

T4: Political donations regarding the 2024 U.S. presidential election may thwart usual philanthropy geared toward apolitical causes. The coming election is expected to be one of the most competitive in history, and philanthropists may focus their charity on political fundraising over unrelated causes.

Conclusion/Recommendations:

While Habitat for Humanity of Orange County has many strengths within its communication mix, our team has developed three recommendations that will help Habitat for Humanity of Orange County expand its reach and awareness.

Habitat for Humanity of Orange County should create a TikTok page to connect with younger audiences. This page would help build brand awareness and expand reach on a platform that is not currently used by Habitat. The page could be used to share success stories, share Habitat's mission, and provide reasons why people should volunteer and donate to Habitat. By sharing personal accounts of families who have benefited from Habitat's services, as well as testimonials from volunteers and donors, Habitat can evoke empathy and inspire action within its community.

Our team recommends that Habitat improve upon its website features by implementing a calendar of upcoming events, a 40th-anniversary tab, and biographies and contact information for staff and board members. Offering a dynamic calendar of upcoming events will provide visitors with easy access to information about volunteer opportunities, fundraising campaigns, community gatherings and other relevant activities. The 40th-anniversary tab can be a section on the website to commemorate that milestone. It can serve as a digital hub for sharing the organization's rich history, highlighting key achievements over the past decades and showcasing the impact of its work on the local community. In addition, providing biographies and contact information for staff and board members can humanize the organization and foster transparency and trust among visitors. By providing insight into the backgrounds, expertise and passion of the individuals driving Habitat's mission, visitors can gain a deeper understanding of the organization's leadership team and feel more comfortable in their commitment to supporting.

Finally, our team recommends that Habitat prioritizes community partnerships, collaborations and expands its outreach and communication to nearby schools. By forging alliances with local businesses, civic organizations, schools and other non-profits, Habitat can amplify its message across various channels. The website could provide more detailed information on how to start a school chapter of Habitat. Additionally, Habitat could begin initiatives such as a "High School Build Day" to encourage high school students to volunteer. Collaborative events, joint campaigns and shared resources can not only extend Habitat's reach but also foster a sense of unity and collective action with the community.

By taking the recommendations above, Habitat for Humanity of Orange County could experience an increase in volunteers, donations, and more support. Through effective storytelling, multimedia engagement, and strategic partnerships, Habitat can continue to build a larger audience and advance its mission of building homes, communities and hope for those in need. To keep in contact with its community, Habitat for Humanity of Orange County currently utilizes social media, direct mail, email newsletters and a user-friendly website. Its communication strengths include active social media posts and engaging newsletters. However, areas of improvement consist of updating financial information on the website, enhancing staff accessibility, and refining key visuals. The previously stated opportunities and recommendations allow Habitat to have more transparent and coherent communication methods. Overall, Habitat for Humanity of Orange County is in a great position for continued success and carrying out its mission of improving Orange County.