

MEJO 332: Public Relations Writing

Professor Carter

Benevolist.org Communication Audit

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I. INTRODUCTION

Benevolist.org is a Raleigh, North Carolina-based organization founded and owned by Cari Newton. After trying to organize and plan a donation drive for her church in 2016, her idea for Benevolist.org was born. Newton found the behind-the-scenes work rather messy, unorganized, and difficult to conduct, as she knew there was a better way to run a donation drive. After doing lots of research to find an organization that helped streamline the collection drive process, Newton could not find one, so she created one. Newton's background in the world of marketing spans more than three decades, starting with her degree in marketing from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Throughout her time in college and beyond, she's explored various aspects of the field, from advertising to promotions and sales. As she navigated her career path, Newton's experiences have shaped her into a seasoned strategist and practitioner in the ever-changing world of marketing. Newton worked tirelessly in the corporate world and was tired of making money and working for companies that already had a huge profit, she felt like her calling was helping those in need at no cost to them. She began founding Benevolist.org and worked practically the entire day as she worked at her 9 to 5 then with her husband would work on her organization in her hours away from the office. Creating this organization from the ground up took a lot of hard work and dedication, but, for Newton, was worth it to see how much this organization can help others.

Benevolist.org is a technology-based approach to organizing and conducting donation drives. This free platform is solely reserved for nonprofits to use, making it an exclusive way of assuring that Newton's vision remains in line with her number one priority: helping others. Organizers can make an account with Benevolist.org and start making "benevolists", which are essentially wishlists for what their nonprofit needs. These lists then create their own, shareable link allowing the nonprofits to optimize the amount of donors and donations they can get. With just a click of a button, donors can buy the exact product and amount the nonprofit is asking for. The items then get delivered directly to the nonprofit's designated location, hassle-free. The website then does all the tracking and "dirty work" for the organizers and donors. Organizers have the option to request items from a variety of Benevolist.org's merchant partners: Amazon, Target, The Home Depot, and Walmart. With Benevolist.org, drives are simplified and sped up allowing an increase in the number of donors for all the charitable item collection drives.

This communication audit will delve into some surface-level and core-level concerns and suggestions for Benevolist.org as it continues to grow in the early years. The audit consists of a meticulous thought-out S.W.O.T. analysis as well as some recommendations for the organization. With Benevolist.org being an exclusively online platform, communication with their audience is crucial for the company. There is a lot of potential for the organization and with the incorporation of the team's social media, web design, and other suggestions, Benevolist.org can truly become a household name.

II. METHODOLOGY

The team reflected and discussed what they thought were the most important aspects to address about Benevolist.org's organization after working closely as public relations interns

throughout the semester. At the end of the semester, the team met to talk over the things that Benevolist.org did well and things that need improvement.

III. RESULTS OF AUDIT

The following section breaks down the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that were seen by the team from working closely with Benevolist.org throughout the semester. After performing the SWOT analysis, the team offered some recommendations for Benevolist.org to take as they continue growing in the coming years.

IV. S.W.O.T. ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

One of Benevolist.org's key strengths is its mission to make purchasing easier. Benevolist.org is an online platform that streamlines the collection drive process for all nonprofit organizations and their donors. This is done by having a wishlist creator for nonprofit organizations to list and link items needed for their donation drive on one of Benevolist.org's partners. Benevolist.org has four huge merchant partners including Amazon, Walmart, The Home Depot, and Target where organizations can link their needed items. Once the wishlist is created and posted, the nonprofit can share the link to their donor network to let people begin to purchase the needed items for each specific drive. Benevolist.org has a role for anyone from nonprofit organizations to list their drive to donors and volunteers to purchase items, anyone can use Benevolist.org.

Since Benevolist.org is a completely online platform, this allows them to work with nonprofits across the nation and eventually the world. Benevolist.org currently has donation drives in North Carolina, Florida, Texas, Ohio, and many other states across the United States. Being available to thousands of nonprofit organizations across the United States is a huge strength that Benevolist.org uses to its advantage.

Benevolent.org has several components on their website that are very strong. To start, the front page of Benevolist.org clearly states their mission along with a picture carousel that shows a picture of a few nonprofit organizations that have used Benevolist.org. This helps allow people who are new to the website to visualize how Benevolist.org is helping the community. Benevolist.org also has a tab located on the website dedicated to every active drive that nonprofit organizations are doing all over the country. This page makes it makes it easy to find any drive. This page also has a search drive function, which allows donors to search by a keyword, cause, and state that the drive is located in, which helps streamline finding listed drives.

WEAKNESSES

While Benevolist.org has a multitude of strengths there are a few areas of weakness that, by focusing on, Benevolist.org can improve its overall brand image. Through a comprehensive analysis of Benevolist.org's online presence, our team suggests two areas of weakness that offer

room for improvement. Our team suggests that the Benevolist.org website and their social media presence are the two most pertinent weaknesses facing the brand.

When first loading onto Benevolist.org's website we are greeted with a homepage that seems somewhat sterile. The design is somewhat reminiscent of that of a medical insurance provider. This design can be somewhat off-putting to guests and make them feel slightly uneasy. While the color palette of Benevolist.org's brand is very complimentary and one that fits its brand message, the colors don't translate well to the current website design. Not only is there room for improvement with the web design, but the website does not currently work on mobile devices. There are a lot of HTML elements that overlap each other in the aspect ratio of mobile phones. This is a weakness because many donors will be accessing the website from their mobile phones and without the option to do so, it could be a hindrance to the brand's goal of purchasing that matters.

Besides the design, our team suggests that the website incorrectly prioritizes information about the brand itself. Throughout the home page, some elements could be moved to separate pages to make sure that any visitors to the website are greeted with the most relevant information. Certain elements, such as the board of advisors being on the home page may confuse some visitors not knowing that they don't work for Benevolist.org. The FAQ being on the home page is also one area of weakness because it is information that doesn't need to be directly on the homepage.

Our group also suggests that the "About Us" page is missing some information that visitors may expect. This would include such things as a picture of the founder, Cari Newton, or even headshots of everyone who works at Benevolist.org. Focusing on this page of the website will help further create a more emotional bond with visitors.

The second area of weakness that our group uncovered was Benevolist.org's social media platforms. When first looking at Benevolist.org's social media presence it is somewhat bare. Social media is of the utmost importance being as though Benevolist.org is exclusively online. On Instagram and X, Benevolist.org sporadically posts, although they have started posting more recently which our team believes will positively impact their brand image. Another area of weakness in their social media is the content the brand interacts with. On X, Benevolist.org has liked specific tweets that could be seen as offensive or inflammatory. These tweets liked by the brand include one which states, "ELON MUSK JUST ANNOUNCED HE IS GOING TO END ANTHONY FACUI'S CAREER A SECOND TIME IN ONE MONTH BY RELEASING THE FAUCI FILES THIS WEEK," and "Critical Race Theory is bigoted and it is based on a mountain of lies," and "Truth! I don't want to see a black Marilyn Monroe in the future or all of John Wayne's movies remade with black actors. Respect white culture too. Enough is enough." By liking these tweets Benevolist.org is putting out a brand image that is not welcoming and could be severely harmful to Benevolist.org as a brand.

OPPORTUNITIES

Since Benevolist.org is an online platform, they have a unique opportunity to tap into the online space to help increase its brand recognition and overall presence. If Benevolist.org wants

to expand its reach and make its brand more known, one of the key things it can do going forward is increase social media activity. Interacting with nonprofits, preferably starting in the Triangle area, since Benevolist.org is located in Raleigh, allows Benevolist.org to expand its reach. Benevolist.org should focus on making online content that promotes their platforms. Content, such as posting tutorials on how to start a donation drive, the benefits of using Benevolist.org versus competitors, and answering common questions about the platform are all ways that Benevolist.org can increase their trust with potential donors and partners who wish to use Benevolist.org's services.

Benevolist.org currently partners with many nonprofits. These nonprofits who use Benevolist.org's services create the opportunity for Benevolist.org to lean into the name recognition of these nonprofits to bolster their profile. Benevolist.org should invest in a logo that certifies any nonprofit hosting a drive as a "benevolist.org partner." This logo can go on the websites of nonprofits that work with Benevolist.org, and when clicked on, will redirect individuals to the appropriate drive on Benevolist.org's website. Creating this feature would increase the brand recognition of Benevolist.org with the donor base of nonprofits and can help create awareness for the drives of the nonprofits themselves

Another thing that Benevolist.org can do is they can use its unique position as a completely online brand and platform to create a more global outreach. This means Benevolist.org can respond to natural disasters, social causes, or other moments where Benevolist.org's services would be required. Benevolist.org should look into establishing a way to monitor current happenings and have a ready-to-go response that includes reaching out to local nonprofits in the area to try to establish a partnership in which Benevolist.org services would be useful.

THREATS

The biggest threat that Benevolist.org currently faces is a lack of name recognition. Benevolist.org is a relatively new platform, and since it operates in an online space it makes it hard for other people to pay attention to them. This is a threat because the lack of name recognition makes it hard to build relationships with potential clients, as nonprofits might be weary that their donor bases would not want to use Benevolist.org or would be weary about privacy and security concerns.

Other corporations, such as Amazon, offer the ability for individuals to set up wishlists. Individuals can share these wishlists digitally, and since Amazon has stronger name recognition, people are more likely to trust their services.

Another major threat that is posed to Benevolist.org is the fact that many nonprofits already have established donation drives. Since many nonprofits already have systems set in place that they use to organize their donation drives, they are less likely to use the Benevolist.org platform as it could potentially confuse already existing donors. Switching platforms could potentially be a messy process and many organizations that could benefit from using Benevolist.org's services might prefer to continue with their methods for the sake of comfort.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our team recommends that Benevolist.org hone in on its strengths of being an online platform. This means that Benevolist.org should lean into its weaknesses and try and work on them. By redesigning the layout of the website to be more modern and welcoming, while incorporating more of their brand colors, Benevolist.org can create a more tailored user experience for not only its donors but also for the nonprofits that use the site. We also believe by focusing on the website that Benevolist.org can leverage itself in the local community and globally as a brand.

We also suggest that the brand focus more on partnerships with local non-profits. Providing a graphic for each organization that states that they are an official Benevolist.org partner not only provides Benevolist.org with some publicity but also shifts users' attention back to Benevolist.org.

This also would increase Benevolist.org's social media presence. Which is one of our team's other recommendations. We suggest Benevolist.org implement a posting schedule with more active content types. By utilizing platforms such as Instagram, and X, and utilizing their tools such as stories Benevolist.org can increase its audience and donations to the nonprofits they are partnered with. Each recommendation will help Benevolist.org become a household name.