

TOOLS FOR ALIGNMENT: *Your Organization's 2011 Editorial Calendar*



TO: Do-Gooders and Nonprofit Communicators
FROM: Holly Minch and Heath Wickline
RE: 2011 Editorial Calendar
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Once upon a time, newspapers employed journalists and editors whose job it was to seek out important stories and share them with the paper's readers. Filling all those column inches every day was a difficult task, and in order to make their lives easier, many publications developed an editorial calendar to help them ensure they were producing timely stories tied to major upcoming events they could plan for. The Fourth of July meant patriotic stories and barbecue recipes. September would bring a wealth of stories connected to children going back to school. And nonprofit communicators spent a great deal of time thinking about how to connect their work with one of these dates to make it easier for reporters to cover their organizations.

There are still reporters out there with column inches to fill, of course, but less of them than there used to be. There are, however, a heck of a lot more new tools that allow nonprofit organizations to connect directly with their supporters and key audiences. From email blasts to Facebook pages, in many cases it's now the nonprofits themselves that find themselves with channels in need of content to share. Now that nonprofits are the publishers managing their own communications channels, an editorial calendar can be a great way to manage your content pipeline.

The secret behind an editorial calendar is the way in which it allows a publisher to create content that's in tune with readers' expectations—what's happening in their own lives and, therefore, what they're in the right frame of mind to hear.

The editorial calendar in this document contains our ideas on 2011's tailor-made opportunities for your organization to get coverage, as well as other red-letter dates to help spark your own creativity.

As you map out your work plan for the year ahead, we recommend you augment our list with a review of your staff's 2011 work plans to identify key areas of focus—gold mines of content for your communications platforms. At an upcoming staff meeting, you might create a chart for each month and post it around the room, then ask staff to mark key dates on the charts—including events, conferences, key issues up for consideration in the legislature, or program milestones. In this way, your editorial calendar becomes a tool they can use to ensure that communications is in line with and supportive of your day-to-day work, which creates alignment and efficiency in your efforts for the year ahead.

There are still reporters out there to pitch these ideas to, of course. But there's no reason you can't be your own publisher and plan your communications and outreach efforts around your own editorial calendar.

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JANUARY

1. New Year's Resolutions

Let's kick the year off right with an easy one that almost all organizations working for social change can use. New Year's Resolutions are all about making changes in your life—but who's to say those changes can't serve a larger purpose? Environmental organizations can push stories about changing energy use habits. Organizations working on public health can pitch reporters on healthy eating in the New Year, and organizations working on civic engagement can launch a volunteerism campaign. Whatever kind of change you want to see in the world, there's no better time to promote it than at the New Year.

5. 112th Congress convenes

If you're working on national policy issues, prime the conversation from the start. If you expect or hope that Congress will take up issues relevant to your cause in this upcoming session, let your constituents know now how they can help you keep your issues in the spotlight during this Congressional session.

16. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

For organizations working toward inclusion and diversity, this annual remembrance of Dr. King has always been about much more than a long holiday weekend. In recent years, the Obama Administration has also made an effort to peg the celebration of Dr. King's birthday to a day of service, thus making the holiday relevant to nonprofits of every stripe.

22. Anniversary of Roe v. Wade, 1973

In the years since this landmark court case, the nation has continued to debate sexual politics of all stripes. If your organization works on women's health, sex education for teens or anything in between, there's sure to be public conversation relevant to your work on this date.

26-30. World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland

This annual meeting brings together top business leaders, international industry and political leaders, selected intellectuals and journalists to discuss the most pressing issues facing the world, such as climate change, global health and the environment. The 2011 theme "Shared Norms for the New Reality" reflects that we are all living in a world that is becoming increasingly complex and interconnected, and yet at the same time experiencing an erosion of common principles that create public trust in leadership as well as future economic growth and political stability. In the past decade, the World Economic Forum has become an important event for groups protesting globalization, and have given rise to a counter event known as the [World Social Forum](#), which will take place in Dakar, Senegal February 6-11.

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FEBRUARY

Black History Month, American Heart Health Month

2. Groundhog Day

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals made Punxsutawney Phil the poster child for their efforts to champion animal rights in this [classic case study](#) of using timely calendar events for a cause. Or if your organization aims to persuade policymakers to make a change that will prevent repetition of the same old mistakes over and over again, perhaps you can reference the film in which Bill Murray wakes up to the same day over and over again?

3. Chinese New Year

For organizations working with Asian and Pacific Islander communities, the lunar New Year is a time of celebration and good luck. How will you ring in the Year of the Rabbit?

6. Super Bowl Sunday

Many organizations have begun to offer alternatives to the traditional snacks-on-the-sofa-in-the-man-cave. For example, many nonprofits that feed the hungry are offering “[Souper Bowl Sunday](#)” volunteer opportunities. And for many, watching the ads is just as much fun as watching the game—perhaps your nonprofit could create an online video of the commercial you’d air if only you had the \$2.6 million it costs to run a 30-second ad during the Super Bowl. And perhaps you can even use [LoudSauce](#) to raise the money to air that ad in your local community!

14. Valentine's Day

In February, thoughts turn to love—and how to leverage hearts and cupids for maximum impact for the causes you care about. Valentine’s Day brings with it an entire iconography that can be enlisted in the service of campaigns. Health organizations have a tailor-made opportunity to talk about HIV/AIDS-prevention strategies. Environmental organizations can take a page from the [San Francisco Parks Trusts “Love Your Parks” campaign](#) encouraging public displays of affection for the landscapes (or animals) they’re working to protect.

21. President's Day

As we celebrate the birthdays of Presidents Lincoln and Washington, it’s a time to revisit and revive the values of our nation’s Founding Fathers. The estimable Molly Ivins once wrote: “It is possible to read the history of this country as one long struggle to extend the liberties established in our Constitution to everyone in America.” Your organization can link its cause to American history by connecting your work to themes of equality, justice, and the ongoing work of forming “a more perfect union.”

The popular education online giving forum DonorsChoose.org came up with a clever idea to [co-opt popular President's Day sales](#) for their cause: they staged a “philanthropy sale” that highlighted

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classroom projects focused on American history and civics, encouraging contributions to those projects in conjunction with the holiday.

27. Academy Awards

Awards are on the brain as the Oscars come 'round, so why not link your organization's awards program to the trend? Whether you're recognizing the best performance or the worst offender, your awards will tie into all the awards coverage. And increasingly, many Oscar contenders are films that are linked to a cause, such as the 2010 movies *The Cove* or *Food Inc.*—use these tie-ins to highlight your issue as it pops up in the nominated films. Of course, groups working to highlight fair trade have also had great success drawing attention to conflict diamonds amidst all the flash and bling of the big event.

MARCH

Women's History Month

1-4. TED Conference

Starting in 1984 as a conference bringing together people from the worlds of Technology, Entertainment, and Design, [TED](#) has grown in to a global phenomenon of ideas worth spreading. Many of the [featured speakers](#) are professionals tackling the greatest challenges of our day including the emerging green economy, community policing, leadership in a changing world, and much, much more. Many of the talks are available online, so you can share those related to your cause – or you can even organize a [TEDx conference](#) in your community.

8. International Women's Day

Marking the economic, political and social achievements of women, this is the perfect day to highlight how your issue affects women and girls around the world, and the role that women and girls play in making our world a better place for all.

8. Shrove Tuesday (Mardi Gras)

Better known as Fat Tuesday, this marks the last day of indulgence before the Lent season of penance and restraint. Many communities host gala benefits or casino nights to mark this day of decadence, so why not put people's inclination to let the good times roll work for your cause?

13. Spring Forward

After a long winter, setting the clocks forward is one very real way we know that warmer weather and longer days are really on their way. And what better time for your organization to provide innovation, optimism or a new take on an old problem? The beauty of this hook is the way it connects on such a deep level with what your target audiences are already feeling. An idea that they might not have

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given a second look amidst the cold and dark of February suddenly seems more appealing come March. These themes also work for March 20, which marks the first official day of spring.

17. St. Patrick's Day

This celebration of the patron of Ireland is now commonly marked by the consumption of copious amounts of alcohol, so many organizations working to prevent drunk driving will often peg cautionary communications to St. Patrick's Day, when incidents tend to spike.

20. Purim

Purim is one of the most joyous holidays on the Jewish calendar, and it's also a day with a special mandate for charitable giving, particularly toward organizations that feed the hungry and serve the most needy in our communities.

31. Cesar Chavez's Birthday

As we celebrate the birthday of one of our nation's great civil rights leaders, it's an excellent opportunity to revisit the cause he championed: decency, dignity, fair treatment, and fair pay for farm workers and working people everywhere.

APRIL

1. April Fool's Day

This is an excellent opportunity for advocacy organizations to caution their constituents not to be fooled by politicians' rhetoric, or to pull off a message-driven prank such as the elaborate hoax [edition of *The New York Times*](#) created by the Yes Men, which declared an end to the Iraq war back in 2008.

15. Tax Day

For organization's that spend all year fighting the good fight for working people, no day has a better chance of helping them connect with new audiences than Tax Day. Suddenly, arguments about progressive taxation are salient, intuitive and immediately relevant.

Tax Day can also be a great hook for organizations interested in examining our budget priorities. What portion of your audiences' tax dollars is going toward funding schools, infrastructure, or foreign aid? Tax Day can provide a great reason to provide a reality check for them.

22. Earth Day

As the green ethos takes hold with an ever-expanding portion of the population, Earth Day has practically become a national holiday. Whether it's energy efficiency, holding polluters accountable or

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teaching children to steward our shared natural assets, what new twist can your organization place on the green theme this year?

24. Easter

A time to celebrate spring's renewal, nonprofits can employ Easter traditions for savvy grassroots fundraising such as candy gram deliveries, rubber duck races, or a bunny hop. There are many ways to be creative with the spring theme—one LGBT organization we know even hosts a popular Easter bonnet contest.

MAY

Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month

1. May Day

International Workers Day is an opportunity to celebrate the eight hour work day, weekends and many other contributions brought to us by organized labor—and it's an opportunity to expand these and other protections to others who don't yet enjoy them.

8. Mothers Day

Just because it's obvious, doesn't mean you shouldn't do it. Sometimes it means that, if you get it right, your campaign is poised to get a viral boost from its connection to the holiday. Mom's Rising, for example, combined some clever web technology with a well-designed video to allow users to nominate their own "[Mother of the Year](#)" last year in support of their campaign—and men and women looking for something fun to share through their social networks did the rest. The end result? More than 10 million people saw the video and heard the organization's message, with millions of them added to the organization's mailing list.

30. Memorial Day

As the number of soldiers who've given their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan continues to mount, Memorial Day is an opportunity to remember them, and the service men and women who have come before them. It's also a time to revisit our national values and the policies that call our service members to sacrifice.

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JUNE

LGBT Pride month

End of school/ graduations

Throughout the month of June, families mark the start of summer by first celebrating the last day of school—some for the summer and some forever. The end of the school season and the graduation celebrations it brings marks a rite of passage for the young and old alike.

19. Father's Day

Whether you're working on men's health or the protection of wildlife habitat, Father's Day can provide an excellent hook for your message. If you're working to build homes for the needy or restore a local park, what about giving your donors the opportunity purchase a hammer, wrench or brick in Dad's name? Oxfam America hooked into the holiday by giving donors the opportunity to buy fishing rights on behalf of Dad, with a gift that would help subsistence fisherman in the developing world.

21. Summer begins

The summer solstice marks the longest day of the year—an excellent opportunity to remind elected officials to put in a long day's work on behalf of your cause!

JULY

4. Independence Day

The fourth of July is one of those days tailor-made for crafting a campaign around, because it comes with its own set of associations firmly entrenched in the minds of your audiences (if you're working in a domestic U.S. context). That means that the job of connecting your issue with these narratives is easier than it otherwise would be. For organizations working to tell the stories of marginalized communities like undocumented workers, that could be a real boon. Other organizations, working on civic participation, for example, also have a clear path to a campaign that taps traditional American values. For other organizations this might feel like more of a stretch, but there's a lot to be gained from figuring out where your work fits in with some of the values we celebrate on Independence Day.

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AUGUST

1. Ramadan

Fasting during Ramadan is intended to teach patience, humility, and self-restraint—and really, what cause couldn't use more of those qualities? For Muslims, Ramadan is also a time for charitable giving to help those affected by poverty and hunger.

Back to School

As the summer comes to a close and school is back in session, families return to their routines and may be more focused and ready to hear your message. Of course, education organizations have been using the back to school hook to highlight their issues. Other organizations can use these hooks, too, with a little creativity. An environmental organization might choose to honor the labor of scientists working on renewable energy or launch a “Back to school on climate science” campaign.

SEPTEMBER

National Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15 – October 15)

5. Labor Day

As the summer draws to a close, people returning from vacation are back in the office, in front of their computers, and ready to hear new messages about important issues. Organizations fighting for workers rights have a holiday intended to honor their constituents to work with. Educational organizations have the “back to school” hook to play with.

11. 10th Anniversary of 9/11 Attacks

As we remember those who lost their lives on that fateful day in our nation's history, conversation will certainly also turn to the 10-year War on Terror and the policies in place as a result. A number of nonprofits have also teamed up to offer Americans an opportunity to [commemorate 9/11 as a day of service and remembrance](#).

28. Rosh Hashanah

The Jewish New Year marks the start of the High Holidays and is a time of introspection, looking back at the mistakes of the past year and planning the changes to make in the new year. The date—along with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, on October 8—provide opportunities to hold bad actors accountable for their actions. Environmental health organizations might call on polluters to atone for the damage they've caused, or economic justice groups might call on the big banks on Wall Street to atone for the harm they've caused struggling families while still posting record profits.

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OCTOBER

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

31. Halloween

Advocacy organizations can use this hook to point out scary policies proposed by lawmakers, or health organizations can propose more nutritious alternatives for trick-or-treaters.

NOVEMBER

Native American Heritage Month

6. Daylight Savings Time ends

As the days grow shorter and the nights grow colder, thoughts naturally turn to those who may be fighting the elements during the winter, including the homeless or those who can't afford to heat their homes. As people naturally hunker down for the winter, this news hook can serve as reminder to help those who need some extra warmth and support for the season.

15. National Philanthropy Day

This day acknowledges the entire spectrum of services provided by the nonprofit community and recognizes the profound impact that philanthropy has on the fabric of society. Can you challenge your donors to give a little extra on Philanthropy Day?

17. National Nonprofit Executive Director Appreciation Day

In 2010, one cheeky nonprofit strategy firm ([alright, it was us](#)) took it upon themselves to declare the third Thursday in November National Nonprofit Executive Director Appreciation Day. Our colleagues at CompassPoint and the Meyer Foundation were looking for responses to a survey in order to update their 2006 [Daring to Lead](#) report, and we thought a new holiday could provide a great hook for spreading the word. Turns out we were right—and you shouldn't be afraid to declare your own holiday if you find yourself in need of one. All you need is something worth celebrating and the gumption to declare a day to celebrate it.

24. Thanksgiving

As the holiday season begins, organizations focused on providing safety net services have traditionally conducted fundraising campaigns highlighting their work. Organizations working on issues related to food and agriculture also have a perfect opportunity promote their work as families gather around the holiday table. And as Black Friday inches ever closer to becoming an official holiday, organizations concerned with rampant consumerism and its environmental costs have an opportunity for “counter programming” with messages that remind audiences about what's really important.

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DECEMBER

1. World AIDS Day

The United Nations sponsors World AIDS Day each year to honor the victims of the AIDS pandemic and focus attention on the prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDS related conditions.

10. Human Rights Day

The United Nations sponsors Human Rights Day each year to mark the anniversary of the presentation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The day may also include protests to alert people of circumstances in parts of the world where the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is not recognized or respected, or where these rights are not considered to be important. Cultural events are also organized to celebrate the importance of human rights through music, dance, drama or fine art.

20. Hanukkah

The Jewish festival of lights is an excellent time to give thanks to the donors, volunteers, leaders and policymakers who've brought light to your cause throughout the year.

25. Christmas

As the year winds down, the holidays present a perfect time for end-of-year stock-taking, top ten lists, and reviews of the year gone by. It's the perfect time for nonprofit organizations of all stripes to reach out and thank supporters for all they've done and remind them why they supported your work in the first place.