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**CONTACT:** Nancy Schwartz  
[nancy@nancyschwartz.com](mailto:nancy@nancyschwartz.com)  
973-762-0079

**Nonprofit Marketing Crisis:  
Survey Shows Organizations Fail to Connect With Key Audiences**  
Marketing Messages Confused, Inconsistent, Off-Target

**More than 8 in 10 nonprofits describe their key messages as difficult to remember**

Maplewood, NJ—A new survey of more than 900 nonprofit leaders reveals a major crisis among charitable organizations: They’re doing an inadequate job of connecting with their key audiences and characterize their primary messages – intended to motivate donors, volunteers and advocacy – as poorly targeted, difficult to remember and uninspiring.

“Nonprofit marketers say their key messages are failing to connect with the people who need to hear them and that is a serious problem,” says Nancy Schwartz, president of Nancy Schwartz & Company (<http://nancyschwartz.com>) and blogger at *Getting Attention* (<http://gettingattention.org>).

“The way nonprofits talk about themselves to the public is a core competency critical to any organization’s success. The bad news is that most nonprofits admittedly are doing a very poor job, despite a great deal of effort. The good news is that fixing the problem is highly do-able and promises vastly greater success than they are experiencing now.”

Schwartz says it’s incumbent upon executive directors, their boards and key marketing and communication leaders within organizations, to repair these critical marketing and communication problems.

The survey results included:

**Most Nonprofit Messages Don’t Connect Strongly with Key Audiences:** Eighty-four percent of 915 nonprofit leaders who completed the survey last month said their messages connect with their target audiences only somewhat or not at all. Respondents represented organizations of all size, issue focus and geographical location.

**Behind the Disconnect—86% of Nonprofits Characterize Their Messages as Difficult to Remember:** Most nonprofits report that their messaging suffers from lack of inspiration (73%) and poor targeting to audience wants and needs (70%), and is difficult to remember (86%). Few communicators laud their messaging for its strengths: Only 13% of organizations characterize messaging as cogent while 8% describe their messaging as potent.

Here are some comments from survey participants explaining why their messages fail to connect:

- “Our messages need to be more succinct to communicate how effective we really are.”
- “We don’t move our base to action.”
- “We have individual elements that are OK solo, but no unified path.”
- “Our messages aren’t hard-hitting or targeted enough. So they fall flat.”
- “We need to shape messages that are simple enough for staff to remember and feel comfortable in repeating it to others.”
- “Too much jargon. I can’t even understand what we’re saying.”

**Inconsistency Reigns, Leaving Confusion and Annoyance in Its Path:** Less than 50% of nonprofits report consistent use of their positioning (organizational tagline, positioning statement and talking points). That means that even though most organizations have taken the effort to craft messages, those messages aren’t used consistently across channels (website, direct mail, email), audiences or programs.

Schwartz says there are numerous tactics for nonprofits to follow in order to craft *more* relevant messages. However, when aiming to increase relevance, it’s imperative to go beyond delivering a few relevant messages here and there. The real challenge is to *consistently* deliver messages that connect.

### **For More Information, Complete Report and First-Step Recommendations**

Complete survey results, plus specific recommendations on how nonprofits can start to immediately improve key messaging, are available at

<http://nancyschwartz.com/articles/index.php/messaging-crisis-for-nonprofits/>

Or contact report author Nancy Schwartz for more information at [nancy@nancyschwartz.com](mailto:nancy@nancyschwartz.com) or 973-762-0079.

### **About *Getting Attention*/Nancy Schwartz**

The *Getting Attention* blog and e-update (<http://GettingAttention.org>) are no-charge, high-value sources of ideas, tactics, and tips for nonprofit communicators focused on helping their organizations succeed through effective marketing. Publisher Nancy Schwartz also provides nonprofit marketing services via Nancy Schwartz & Company (<http://nancyschwartz.com>)