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Driving Impact: Media and Promotion Strategies for Charities



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For Canadian charities, media and promotion can build public awareness, strengthen trust, and connect communities with an organization's mission. These activities support donor engagement and staff and volunteer recruitment, but they also compete with service delivery for limited resources. A clear strategy helps charities choose where to focus their efforts and how to assess results.

This report examines the role of media and promotion in the charitable sector, distinguishing broad audience engagement from direct fundraising. It explores social media, artificial intelligence, traditional media, and earned media, and offers practical steps for developing a plan—from defining objectives and audiences to choosing channels, budgeting, and monitoring performance.

Drawing on Canada Revenue Agency filings, the report also examines reported advertising and promotion spending from 2020 to 2025, including participation, spending patterns, and the share of total expenditures devoted to these activities. Reported costs do not capture the full extent of promotional activity, particularly where channels involve little direct expenditure. Together, the findings and planning guidance provide a basis for considering how charities can pursue purposeful, cost-effective outreach.

Principle conclusions of the Report

We discuss why Charitable Organizations would consider adopting a media and promotion strategy, and note some of the reasons include:

- public awareness of the organization
- establishment of benchmarks for performance
- influencing donation intention
- audience interaction
- information sharing
- volunteer and staff recruitment

We note that 55% of companies donating to charities do so for financial benefit, and we discuss the specific financial benefits for companies donating to Charities.

We note that marketing is a one-to-many relationship, in which the organization attempts to communicate with and influence a large group of individuals.

Media and promotion strategies account for approximately 20 percent of the fundraising methods used by Charitable Organizations.

The most common tool for promotion and marketing today is social media. It is relatively cost-effective, available to a wide audience, easy to implement and maintain, offers extensive customization options, and integrates print, audio, and video components.

We present statistics to confirm the use of social media, how much is spent by Charitable Organizations, and what social media channels are used.

We present statistics on the use of Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, X, TikTok, Threads, and Bluesky

We discuss the use of Artificial Intelligence in media and marketing content development and note that 47 percent of fundraisers named AI as their top digital opportunity.

We discuss traditional media of print, television, and radio and note that 13.3 percent of all Charities use traditional media advertising. About 3 percent of donors cite television or radio advertisements as the channel that most inspires them to give, while print (newspapers/magazines) inspires roughly 15 percent (compared to 32 percent for social media and 30 percent for email)

Marketing and promotion can also be obtained through third-party participation and endorsements, otherwise known as Earned Media.

We present tips for creating a Media and Promotion Strategy.

Total spending by Canada's Charitable Organizations over the five-year period from 2020 to 2025 has grown at an annual rate of 7.6 percent, reaching an aggregate of $1.7 billion.

The average and mean amounts spent on advertising and promotion have grown by 8.9 percent and 10.8 percent, respectively.

For those charities that spend on advertising and promotion, this spending represents, on average, only 0.55 percent of their Total Expenditures.

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Our Vision

We will participate in a thriving Canadian philanthropic sector where the most impactful charities with the highest governance standards are celebrated and supported by donor capital.

Our Mission

The Veritas Foundation aims to be Canada's authoritative source for participating in the country's charitable sector and evaluating its effectiveness and impact.



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