

Increasing Eye Donations with an Effective Marketing Program

Noël Mick Moschetta

ABSTRACT

As non-profit organizations, most eye banks wanting to increase public awareness in their service areas pursue similar methods of reaching their audiences. Typically those methods include creating public service announcements (PSA's) and supplying the media with human interest stories.

Historically, The Eye-Bank for Sight Restoration in New York City relied on those methods as well. However, in 2006, when legislation was enacted to allow New Yorkers to give first person consent in an electronic donor registry, the time was right to develop a marketing program that would more successfully address The Eye-Bank's need to increase eye donations in the Greater Metropolitan New York Area.

This was accomplished through a paid, multi-media advertising campaign (including television, radio, print and outdoor ads).

The first advertising campaign consisted of a six-week media buy and while the cost was approximately \$150,000, it was funded initially by assessing a one percent (1%) increase in our cornea processing fee. Subsequently, The Eye-Bank received a three-year grant from a private foundation to fund an enhanced marketing program.

Method: In order to create an advertising campaign, we sought outside expertise and found a media buyer well-versed with the New York media market who also recommended we enlist the support of a creative director.

It was important to stay focused on our objective which was to get New Yorkers to enroll in the NYS donor registry and we accomplished this by working closely with both the creative director and the media buyer to create an effective message and to identify the target audience for media planning.

Results: The results of the initial campaign were significant. Hundreds of calls came in to The Eye-Bank and hits to our website soared from an average of less than 100 to 200 per day to more than 2,000 per day. While the goal of the advertising campaign was to get people to sign up in the registry, it also had an immediate impact in increasing eye donations because the public now had an increased awareness of The Eye-Bank and its mission from the ad campaign.

Conclusion: Our successful marketing program significantly increased eye donations in our service area. It had a residual

benefit of increasing awareness for organ and tissue donation as well. Since the advertising campaign resulted in a definitive positive return on investment, it was decided (and approved by The Board of Directors) to continue the marketing program and to budget for it accordingly with an increased level of funding.

Overall, the components of The Eye-Bank's marketing program can be replicated by all eye banks with some location-specific tailoring. Regardless of the initial size of the plan and the commensurate budget, a successful eye bank marketing program can yield positive results that can grow over time.

CREATING AN EFFECTIVE MARKETING PROGRAM

Prior to 2006, The Eye-Bank for Sight Restoration, as an independent, non-profit organization, had relied on the traditional means of getting the message about the importance of eye donation out to the general public in its service area.¹ These efforts ran the gamut of communication methods, including publicizing the cause through public relations and press releases with varied degrees of success, much of which was difficult to measure. We had periodically invested in the production of 60- and 30-second public service announcements (PSA's) for radio and television. This costly process would involve the professional scripting; videotaping and audio recording of the PSA's (typically called "spots") followed by the duplication, packaging and distribution of the "spots" to the hundreds of television and radio media outlets in our geographic area. Even after that entire process was conducted, the PSA's success was still reliant on its being selected for use in free air time by the station's public service director, since the PSA's were non-paid advertising. Typically, our PSA's would get some attention, but more often than not they would get aired in the off hours when the station's number of listeners or viewers was the lowest. Understandably, prime time viewing and listening slots were reserved for paid advertisements, not free public service ads.

Author Affiliation: The Eye-Bank for Sight Restoration, New York, NY

¹ The Eye-Bank's service area consists of the Greater New York Metropolitan area including New York City and the surrounding counties of Nassau, Suffolk, Westchester, Rockland, Orange and Putnam.

This already difficult process was compounded by the fact that our eye bank's audience is in the nation's number one ADI² (area of dominant influence) media market. Being in the most competitive of advertising environments meant we were essentially competing against the country's largest number of both paid advertisers and non-paying non-profit causes vying to reach the same audience.

Need for awareness

Simultaneously, The Eye-Bank had a growing need to increase its own brand awareness. Among the audiences who were in direct contact with us—primarily, the surgeons we served and the hospitals where donor tissue was being recovered—The Eye-Bank was widely-recognized and well-respected as a quality service organization. However, the general public, while somewhat aware of organ and tissue donation and transplantation in general, were not aware of The Eye-Bank for Sight Restoration specifically or our important mission of recovering eye donations for the purpose of providing quality donor tissue for cornea transplants, medical education and research into cures and treatments of other blinding eye diseases.

The Eye-Bank's goal was to increase awareness of the need for eye donation and the good that it can do among New Yorkers so they would take appropriate steps that would lead to an increase in eye donation. There was a need to reach the general public more effectively.

Change in the Landscape

A major change in how New Yorkers could sign up to become organ, eye and tissue donors occurred in 2006. After conducting much advocacy and education of legislators about the importance of organ, eye and tissue donation, New York State passed legislation allowing individuals registering in the state's organ and tissue donor registry to authorize and execute an anatomical gift, making the computerized registry one of first person consent. This gave a much simpler, clearer "call to action" for The Eye-Bank for Sight Restoration to utilize. If New Yorkers, 18 years of age and older, enrolled in the state's Donate Life Registry, they would be giving consent in advance to someday leave the beautiful gift of sight. The Eye-Bank would be in a position to ultimately increase eye donations by increasing the number of New Yorkers in the Donate Life Registry.

Now that a tenable call to action existed, that of getting New Yorkers to sign up to be donors in the Donate Life Registry, the next step was to create a Marketing Plan which would work toward that goal.

Enlisting Expertise:

Having already ascertained that public service announcements (PSAs) were not cost-effective in New York City's highly competitive media environment, The Eye-Bank began to consider the options for buying paid advertising. It became instantly clear that the marketplace for buying advertising was very complex and that outside expertise would be essential. The Eye-Bank sought the services of a professional media planner, who coincidentally was also personally interested in advancing the cause of organ, eye and tissue donation because his daughter was an organ transplant recipient. As an experienced media planner in the New York City market, he was able to contribute many added values in terms of negotiated media buys and some highly-reduced production costs benefitting the ad campaign. He also referred us to an experienced creative director to create ads that effectively communicated our message to New Yorkers.

Tip: Examine your eye bank's service area for local advertising agencies and/or media placement professionals who may be interested in supporting your mission by providing services at reduced rates and/or pro bono assistance.

Data and Demographics:

Identifying the audience for the ad campaign would be the first step in selecting what media to utilize. The Eye-Bank examined its own demographic data in terms of the average age of eye donors and the assumed average age of family members who had given consent for their loved ones to be donors. We were also able to access data provided by the state's previous donor registry as to the most prominent age range of individuals already enrolled to be donors. This information coupled with media demographics helped our media consultants identify our target audience to be between the ages of 35 and 64.

Tip: Review your eye bank's own donor/recipient data for geo/socio trends that will help identify an appropriate target market, which media to pursue and what message to deliver. Establishing a marketing committee that may include skilled volunteers as well as staff can help to propel the project forward.

Examining Strengths and Weaknesses

Geography:

The Eye-Bank's service area includes the urban area of New York City (five boroughs) and the suburban areas of Long Island (Nassau and Suffolk counties) and the Lower Hudson Valley (Westchester, Rockland, Putnam and Orange counties) with a total estimated population of 12 million. It would not be possible to include all available media with

² <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/area-of-dominant-influence-ADI.html>

our limited budget, so it was determined to focus on media with a primary reach of New York City (8.5 million residents) with the expectation that it would in many respects also reach the suburban areas.

Tip: Depending on budget constraints, not all media can be pursued. Media planners can advise on the best reach for advertising dollars.

Brand identity:

The Eye-Bank for Sight Restoration, Inc. was founded in New York City in 1944 as the world’s first transplant organization and much history and brand value is attached to that name. However, the full name was considered too lengthy for advertising purposes, especially for radio when it would only be heard not seen and when every second of audio messaging must be optimized. It was therefore determined that a shorter name be used for the primary purpose of advertising and marketing. Legal permission was sought and received to use **The Eye-Bank of New York** as our “DBA” (Doing Business As) identity. However, our website address is always identified as www.eyedonation.org.

Tip: If using a DBA, consider maintaining a common URL for easy website access.

Messaging:

Historically, The Eye-Bank’s public awareness messaging was focused on the results of eye donation as reflected in the recipients of sight-saving cornea transplants. With the new call to action being to get New Yorkers to enroll in the Donate Life Registry, that message was modified to focus on the importance of leaving the gift of sight. The decision to donate and to sign up to become a donor was the action we wanted individuals to emulate. Part of the message would become “Say ‘Yes’ to Donation,” by enrolling in the New York State Donate Life Registry. We also wanted to appeal to New Yorkers in a way that would resonate in a uniquely New York way.

Advertising Campaign

With the help of the creative director, these focal points were combined with a straightforward call to action and our first branding and advertising campaign was established. The theme included New York City icons to appeal to New Yorkers’ sense of pride in their city’s distinct features. The resulting campaign featured New York City’s unique landmarks – The Brooklyn Bridge, Statue of Liberty, Empire State Building, Grand Central Station and Times Square. The simple call to action was “Sign Up, Today.”

The ad copy emphasized that “*thousands of New Yorkers were losing their sight and we’re counting on you to help.*”

The overall branding included an additional tagline copyrighted to go with the campaign that focused on The Eye-Bank’s mission: “*See what your eyes can do for others.*”®

Tip: In order to retain exclusive use of a tagline or phrase, a registered copyright should be obtained.

Celebrity and Famous New Yorker

Having an appropriate national celebrity linked to an advertising message can provide a big boost to a campaign’s effectiveness. The Eye-Bank was able to benefit from such an endorsement with the donor family’s permission. In 2004, Jerry Orbach, an award-winning actor of film, television and theater, and a native New Yorker, passed away while starring in one of his most well-known roles on NBC’s popular television drama *Law and Order* and donated his eyes to The Eye-Bank. Approximately two years later, in 2006, The Eye-Bank sought and received permission from his widow, Elaine Orbach, to honor Jerry’s generous gift by featuring him in our first ad campaign letting everyone know that he gave the gift of sight to two New Yorkers. She readily agreed that her husband’s generosity might inspire others to do the same. The subsequent Eye-Bank multi-media ad campaign resonated with New Yorkers. The creative copy stated that “*Jerry Orbach gave his heart and soul to acting and the gift of sight to two New Yorkers.*” New Yorkers were urged to “Sign up” and enroll by going to The Eye-Bank’s website at www.eyedonation.org.



Initial Media Plan:

The print ads appeared in New York City subway cars (outdoor advertising category) and the New York Daily News. The multi-media campaign also featured 30- and 15-second radio ads and 60- and 30-second cable television ads. Due

to budget constraints, television ads were limited to cable TV which is less expensive than broadcast network stations (i.e. ABC, CBS, and NBC). The media buy began the last week of December, 2006 and the first few weeks of 2007 from January through February when advertising costs are least expensive.

Tip: If possible, the media buy should include a combination of two or more types of outlet for reinforced messaging. (E.g. radio and newspaper.)

Reach:

The potential reach of the campaign can be measured by the number of viewers (television), listeners (radio) and/or readers (circulation) of the media utilized and can be provided by the media outlet itself or the media company that is used to implement the advertising buy. In The Eye-Bank's service area the potential reach is in the millions.

Results:

Initially, hundreds of telephone calls to The Eye-Bank were tracked on paper forms to provide some measurement of where the caller had seen or heard the ad. Plus many callers wanted to have a brochure and enrollment form mailed to them which could then be completed and return.

Others visited our website at www.eyedonation.org and many submitted a request to receive an enrollment form. As a result during the peak of the ad campaign, the average number of visits to the organization's website multiplied by more than 200 percent from approximately 100 visits per day to more than 2,000 per day during the peak of the campaign. The hits to the website could be measured through the website analytics.

The initial campaign was highly successful and ultimately resulted in a measureable increase in eye donations within The Eye-Bank's service area. To extend the value of the investment in the creative costs of the ad campaign, it was decided to use the campaign for two years instead of one. The savings on creative and production costs could be applied to the media buy itself. In terms of the first campaign featuring actor Jerry Orbach, the show in which he became ubiquitous, NBC's "Law and Order" can still be seen in syndication, so he remains very much a familiar celebrity to New Yorkers.

After two years of the ad campaign that featured Jerry Orbach leaving the gift of sight, The Eye-Bank was able to produce a second campaign featuring a celebrity whose father had passed away and left the gift of sight to New Yorkers. Highly popular singer, actor Vanessa Williams

(who at the time was starring in the ABC-TV sitcom "Ugly Betty") and her brother, Chris Williams who is also an actor, agreed to share their family story about eye donation. Since they were sharing their father's story, it was possible to script, record and photograph them for original television, radio and print ads. In the ads, they spoke about how proud they were that their father, a music teacher, "gave his love of music to 10,000 students and the gift of sight to one New Yorker." Once again, the ads focused on urging New Yorkers to sign up in the state's Donate Life Registry.

Tip: When considering a local or national celebrity (sports figure, performer, business leader) to feature, be mindful of any potential for negative publicity that might hurt your message.

Targeted Audience

The Eye-Bank created its only geographically targeted campaign to date in 2011 when permission was provided by his family to share the fact that James E. Davis, a New York City Councilman was an eye donor. Mr. Davis, a widely-respected community activist, had been tragically slain while performing his duties at City Hall in 2003. The Eye-Bank ads with the creative "James E. Davis was a passionate visionary who gave the gift of sight to two New Yorkers," were placed in the New York City Subway and on MTA buses servicing routes in the former Councilman's district in Brooklyn, where he was well-known and admired among his constituency.

Seek Stories Within your own Eye Bank:

Within the scope of all eye banks' mission of providing donor eye tissue for sight restoring surgeries reside countless, compelling stories of donors and recipients. Many of these stories can easily translate into effective campaigns depending on the desired outcome of the marketing effort.

A very poignant example this occurred for The Eye-Bank in 2013 when our ad campaign featured our own long-time Medical Director Wing Chu, M.D., who was an eye donor when he passed away. With permission from his wife and son, The Eye-Bank campaign featured Dr. Chu with the creative, "He dedicated his life to restoring vision, and gave the gift of sight to two New Yorkers as an eye donor." His wife, Gloria Chu and son, Robert Chu, were recorded for the campaign's television and radio segments.

Customized message:

Every eye bank's need for a marketing campaign or the goal of its marketing program may be different. Overall, The Eye-Bank seeks to increase eye donation and typi-

³ The Eye-Bank for Sight Restoration refrains from asking donor families to participate in public awareness efforts for a period of 18 to 24 months following a loved one's donation.

cally the call to action is for New Yorkers to sign up to be donors. However, there have been additional messages The Eye-Bank has wanted to emphasize. It became evident that increased numbers of individuals enrolled in the New York State Donate Life Registry would have a positive impact on the number of eye donations being recovered. As a result, The Eye-Bank launched a campaign that focused on signing up to be donors in the registry. It featured real individuals who had done so with a creative substitute of the word “Eye” for “I” as in “*Eye signed up.*” The same campaign emphasized the importance of eye donation by having actual cornea transplant recipients testifying, “*Eye can see again.*”

Yet another customized message was included in a subsequent campaign to encourage families to honor their loved ones wishes to donate and help facilitate that donation. The ads featured actual donor family members accompanied by the ad copy, “*Eye am so proud.*”

Addition of Digital Advertising:

In 2010, The Eye-Bank’s multi-media campaign began to include a digital component. Initially this consisted of running Eye-Bank banner ads on radio and print media websites that the outlets maintain in conjunction with their terrestrial media properties. For example on WCBS-AM Radio’s website (<http://newyork.cbslocal.com/station/wcbs-880/>). More recently, in 2014, the media buy expanded to also include real digital buys utilizing display, search engines (Google), social media (Facebook) and videos across the digital landscape.

Digital marketing offers an enhanced capability for measuring campaign performance. By placing assigned digital pixels (including tracking, conversion and re-targeting pixels) on pages within The Eye-Bank’s website, it is possible to measure impressions, clicks, CTR (click-thru-rate) and conversions from traffic to the website.

Performance is further measured by media channel (search, display, Facebook/Instagram and video), as well as measured by device (desktop, mobile and tablet) and by creative execution. These measurements are valuable in determining which media channels and/or elements perform the best in order to maximize which advertising to buy.

Website activity continues to be one of the most direct (and least expensive) way to measure the impact of the marketing campaign. In the first campaign, recording more than 2,000 hits to The Eye-Bank’s website in a day was impressive. By utilizing Google Analytics, The Eye-Bank’s more current campaigns now measure upwards of 18,000 hits in a similar period as well as other activity on the site.

For example, the analytics below compare the number of visits to The Eye-Bank’s website in a nine-month period (December to August) in 2015 and 2016. In 2016, The Eye-Bank launched a second flight of advertising in June, which accounts for the steep increase in website traffic compared to the same period in the previous year.

EYE CAN SEE AGAIN.

There are thousands of New Yorkers who are losing their sight and they are depending on you to help. Sign up to become a donor today.

Go to eyedonation.org and find out how you can give the beautiful gift of sight to a fellow New Yorker. It only takes a minute to sign up. Do it today!

THE EYE BANK OF NEW YORK
See what your eyes can do for others.

212-742-9000
WWW.EYEDONATION.ORG

#EYESIGNEDUP

©2014 The Eye Bank for Sight Restoration, Inc.

EYE AM SO PROUD.

My wife signed up to become a donor and I was so proud to honor her wishes to give two New Yorkers the gift of sight.

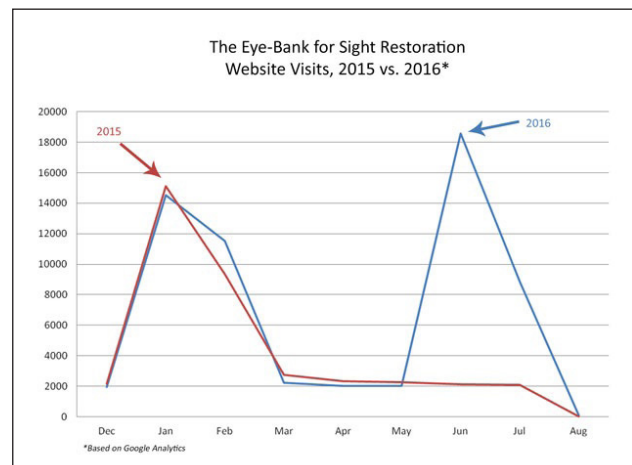
There are thousands of New Yorkers who are losing their sight and they are depending on us to help. Give the beautiful gift of sight and honor your loved one's wishes to be a donor. It only takes a minute.

Sign up online at eyedonation.org or call 212-742-9000.

THE EYE BANK OF NEW YORK
See what your eyes can do for others.

212-742-9000
WWW.EYEDONATION.ORG

#EYESIGNEDUP



Sustainability and expansion:

The budget for the first launch of The Eye-Bank's multi-media campaign began at \$150,000 and the media buy was contained within the first quarter of the year. Since the marketing program is solely a public education effort to increase eye donations, it was funded initially by assessing an approximately one percent (1%) increase in tissue processing fees. The multi-media campaign is not part of The Eye-Bank's fundraising efforts as a non-profit organization.

Subsequently, The Eye-Bank received a three-year grant from a private foundation to fund an enhanced marketing program. Over time, the success of the marketing program began to help pay for itself. Increased budget allocations were made possible, with Board support and approval, due to reduced costs associated with increases in local eye donations resulting from the successful ad campaign.

Over time, the advertising campaign has grown to include more media outlets including broadcast television (network stations) in addition to cable television, additional radio stations and newspapers. The media buy has also grown annually to include additional placement on radio in the second (March) and third (September) quarters of the year and an expansion of the digital campaign to include a monthly presence.

Going forward, The Eye-Bank's marketing program is designed to encompass all forms of traditional media (television, radio, newspaper), as well as to effectively embrace

new media in the form of social media, digital and mobile communications.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the added value of The Eye-Bank's marketing program and its subsequent increase in brand awareness has been realized in a number of ways. In addition to the direct increase in public awareness of The Eye-Bank's mission among New Yorkers, the increased brand recognition has had a positive impact on the organization's special events and fund raising activities, even though financial contributions are not a goal of the campaign.

The increased brand recognition has facilitated both volunteer and employee recruitment. Other public and professional education efforts have been enhanced with The Eye-Bank's increased brand recognition including relationships with stakeholders such as hospitals, funeral homes and other recovery agencies.

Lastly, the overall success of The Eye-Bank's marketing program must take into account the longevity of the effort. Growth, changes in messaging, exploring new media and benefits of measurement take place over time. A successful marketing program may require a long-term investment of both time and resources, but the yield can be measured in both immediate results and residual benefits.

