

Cohn & Wolfe Case Study
Amnesty International Toronto



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Amnesty International Toronto: Defense of Human Rights

Introduction

Young Indigenous women are five times more likely than other Canadian women of the same age to die as the result of violence. What is even more disturbing about this 1996 government statistic is that these women may be targeted for violence simply because they are Indigenous.¹ Freedom from violence and discrimination is a human right and Amnesty International (AI) campaigns to end these kinds of abuses.

Amnesty International (AI) is a global movement of over 2.2 million activists. Its members believe that every person has a right to an adequate standard of living and the right to food, housing, health and education. AI's campaign *Demand Dignity* aims to hold leaders accountable for the human rights violations that deepen poverty. In Canada, a major focus of the campaign will be to address the connections between poverty and the failure to protect the land rights and safety of Indigenous peoples.²

This study will analyze Amnesty International Toronto's (AITO) communications activities and provide recommendations for improvement. An interview was conducted with Elizabeth Berton-Hunter, the Media and External Communications Officer, who spoke about the following objectives, target audiences and key messages.³

(more)

¹ Retrieved from http://www.amnesty.ca/campaigns/sisters_gallery_intro.php

² Retrieved from www.amnesty.ca

³ Personal interview conducted at AITO office, 1992 Yonge Street, Toronto, on Monday, March 22, 2010.

Communication Objectives

- To engage Canadians in the fight for human rights and dignity for all.
- To shed light on human rights issues and foster international solidarity.
- To encourage advocacy for prisoners of conscience and the marginalized.

Target Audiences

- Youth and older people who have the time to donate and advocate.
- People who align with any of their specialized community groups. For example: French-speaking or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) groups.
- Human rights activists and organizations seeking current information.

Key Messages

- All people deserve dignity and basic human rights.
- Small groups of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.
- Shining a light on human rights violations ensures that action is taken to stop them.

Analysis of Communications Activities

AITO's main strategy is to become a visible presence in Toronto's community. Some tactics it employs to achieve this are public demonstrations, rallies and fundraising events. Candle-lit vigils are one of its strongest symbolic tactics; the effects are moving and demonstrate the key message of shining a light on human rights issues. A vigil at Parliament in Ottawa brought the plight of Indigenous women to the forefront.⁴ Representatives also attend many local festivals, manning information booths. Some of these tactics draw local celebrities and can result in increased coverage, which helps spread the key messages to a wider audience.

(more)

⁴ Retrieved from http://www.amnesty.ca/campaigns/sisters_overview.php

A second strategy is to build a strong network of members who will participate and spread AITO's message of solidarity. They have over 2 000 members to date⁵ and the number grows every year. Monthly email newsletters detailing upcoming events and frequent open houses at the AITO office are some ways to engage members. The website is easily navigable and visually appealing providing all target audiences with the information they need. Twitter and Facebook pages are linked to the website, but a weakness would be the current lack of reach of both. The Facebook page for AITO has only 184 fans and the Twitter link found on the website focused on AI, not the Canadian branches.

Analysis of Media Coverage

AITO has good relationships with many of the main Toronto newspapers, who consider AI to be the first organization to contact when a human rights story breaks. The alternative media is also very important to AITO's media strategy, magazines like *NOW*⁶ and *Eye Weekly*⁷, because they often publish opinion editorials written by Amnesty members. This is a great way to get the key messages out unfiltered and really inform people. Because AI is independent of all governments, political persuasions and religious creeds, being funded by members and donors allows AI to be objective about the issues it works on.⁸ This provides credibility for media who pick up the stories and results in positive and frequent coverage. Even if all key messages are not conveyed, most coverage achieves the objective of bringing attention to the issue of human rights.

(more)

⁵ Interview with Eizabeth Berton-Hunter, conducted at AITO office on Monday, March 22, 2010.

⁶ <http://www.nowtoronto.com/>

⁷ <http://www.eyeweekly.com/>

⁸ Interview with Eizabeth Berton-Hunter, conducted at AITO office on Monday, March 22, 2010.

Recommendations

- A good strategy would be to engage the younger audience more. They have the free time to donate and have a great understanding of networking due to all the social media they have grown up around. As a charity, AITO has limited resources and relies on volunteers to update its website and create promotional materials. Some tactics to be employed:
 - Personalize a Twitter account geared toward the Toronto community. Rather than use it for news releases and information like the current page, use it for calls to action, contests and other engagement tools.
 - Bolster the Facebook page to increase the number of fans. It is currently used to post AI videos and promote events, but without fans the messages are lost. Photo contests are a great way to increase numbers, because you are required to join in order to submit.
 - Currently only two universities in the GTA have groups. Encourage students to start AI groups by participating in volunteer fairs at GTA colleges. Students from technical skills would be a great asset for promoting AITO's key messages.

Conclusion

AITO is an essential organization and its members achieve amazing results. The strength of the organization is in its network of dedicated volunteers and members. The recommendations in this study strive to build upon this network and create new opportunities for growth. By increasing the number of members, AITO increases its presence in the community and its visual impact at any public demonstrations. Involving people at a young age will foster lifelong participation and create a network of activism and solidarity.