

# How to produce great Annual Reports for your Non-Profit Organisation

## Does your Annual Report sell your cause?

After 22 years of working in the non-profit sector in Australia I've seen organisations of all sizes make the same, common mistakes in their Annual Reports:

- failing to “sell the cause” to potential sponsors, donors, and supporters
- diverting an excessive amount of staff time away from their core role
- failing to present a professional, contemporary image that's true to their brand
- wasting an excessive amount of money on fees to third parties (consultants, photographers, writers, designers and printers).

Regardless of your budget, there are a few specific, practical steps which can help you streamline the production process and transform your Annual Report from a compliance document into an effective marketing tool.

(Let me say up front: I'm a marketer not an accountant. You should consult your Accountant or Finance Manager regarding the governance and financial statements within your Annual Report.)

I usually break the Annual Report process into four steps. In this article I will just focus on the first, most important step:

## Step 1. Setting the Direction

This first step involves a round table discussion with your CEO and your senior management team which leads to the team agreeing upon the answers the following questions:

### a) Who are your key target markets? (I mean the real ones - not just the “lip speak” ones)

Which markets are absolutely KEY to your long term sustainability? Who exactly are your current core customers and who are your ideal future supporters/ clients?

### b) What is your key “take away” message?

Have you ever flicked through an Annual Report and come away with a single stand-out memorable message? You need to ask the question: *What is the single most important message we want our key target markets to receive and remember from this year's Annual Report?* Then ensure your content consistently addresses this message!

### c) What “Look and Feel” do you want?

The overall look and feel of your Annual Report should fit your organisation, your brand, your key target markets, your services and your audience. It's always helpful if you can find examples of Annual Reports you admire and give them to your designer at the first briefing.

### d) Determine the Format

Once you know your key target markets, you can then choose the best distribution strategy for your annual report. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. It all depends upon how hard you need to work to attract and hold the attention of your key audiences. Selecting the correct format is critical.

You can save money by placing a digital copy of your Annual Report online and printing only a small quantity. Options include: the traditional printed document, the two page “infographic” soft copy, or, if you already have outstanding brand awareness, you might choose to produce a soft copy of the financials with a combined CEO and Chairman’s report.

However, if you’re a small, relatively unknown charity, then you need your Annual Report to sell the effectiveness of your organisation and raise your brand awareness.

### **e) Confirm your contents**

What worked from last year’s Annual Report and what didn’t? Look at other Annual Reports, and decide what ideas you can use and modify your contents list accordingly. Some other tips regarding content:

1. Pictures really do say so much more than words. Use great images and include a visual snapshot of the year’s activities with pie charts and graphs
2. Focus on your achievements not your activities. Relate your activities to your mission
3. Include personal stories.
4. Minimise the admin stuff.

### **Make your Annual Report work for you!**

Your Annual Report has the potential to become your organisation’s “flagship” marketing tool. If you have to produce an Annual Report compliance reasons, then it just makes good business sense to turn it into a silent salesman for your cause.

*This article first appeared in the FIA magazine, Fundraising Australia. It is a summary of the first chapter of the eGuide, ‘Managing Your Non-profit’s Annual Report’. The second edition of the eGuide will be released in April 2015 and available online at [www.fcmarketing.com.au](http://www.fcmarketing.com.au).*