Nonprofit Organization Analysis

Muscular Dystrophy Association

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SCC 425-01

Overview

Throughout this semester, I followed the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) to learn about how communication is used in nonprofit organizations. During my freshman year at Chapman, I was diagnosed with Limb-Girdle Muscular Dystrophy (LGMD), so this project was very personal to me. I wanted to be able to report that the MDA has excellent communication and marketing tactics, but that wasn't what I found. In this paper, I'm going to present my findings and suggest ways to make this an organization known by the American public, not just muscular dystrophy patients.

The MDA's mission statement is "We're here to transform the lives of people affected by neuromuscular diseases" (MDA, para. 1). Based on what we've learned in class, a good mission statement should establish who the organization is helping, what needs are addressed, how those needs are addressed, and be motivational and distinctive. This mission statement clearly states who they are helping (people affected by neuromuscular diseases), but fails to mention specific needs or how those needs are addressed. It is very bland in its word choice, and therefore not motivational to the audience. Since it doesn't mention what they specifically do, it isn't distinctive either. I think they were trying to make their mission statement short so it could be memorable, but in that attempt, they are lacking crucial information. I would recommend making the phrase a little longer to make the mission clear to the audience.

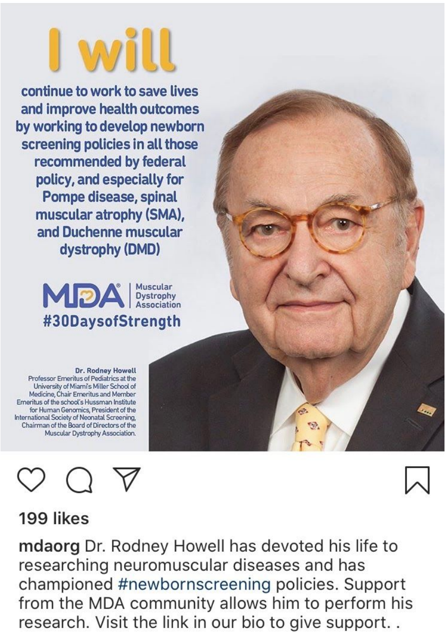
According to the MDA's 2018 financial report, the annual revenue was over 106 million dollars, 97% of which comes from donations (MDA, p. 31). Charity Navigator states that 72.4% of expenses go towards programs and services (Charity Navigator, para. 7).

Branding

MDA®
Muscular
Dystrophy
Association

The MDA's logo is simple and noticeable. The organization keeps with the blue and yellow theme throughout their marketing to spark brand recognition. The color scheme, however, is one of the only things that differentiates it from similar organizations, such as Cure SMA. I looked through both websites, and they are almost identical except that Cure SMA is focused on Spinal Muscular Atrophy, while the MDA encompasses all neuromuscular diseases. In order to differentiate themselves from similar organizations, I would recommend that the MDA put more effort into marketing their unique offers, which I will discuss in the next section.

The MDA is active on multiple social media platforms, including Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. I think that their posts are too wordy for the platforms they are using. In the first image below, there is so much text that they had to put it in a font too small to read. It is important to keep messages consistent, but I think the MDA has taken that too far in their social media presence. Most of the posts are exactly the same on each platform, which isn't using each platform to their fullest. Different audiences tend to use different social media. For example, Facebook has an increasing number of users over the age of 50, while Instagram and Twitter are dominated by users between the ages of 18 and 30 (Kiger, para. 3). Instagram is visually dependent, so the MDA should find more interesting pictures to post (instead of primarily head shots of people the audience has never heard of). Twitter and Facebook have a better capacity for text, so longer stories should be posted on those platforms. Below are examples of their marketing via social media.

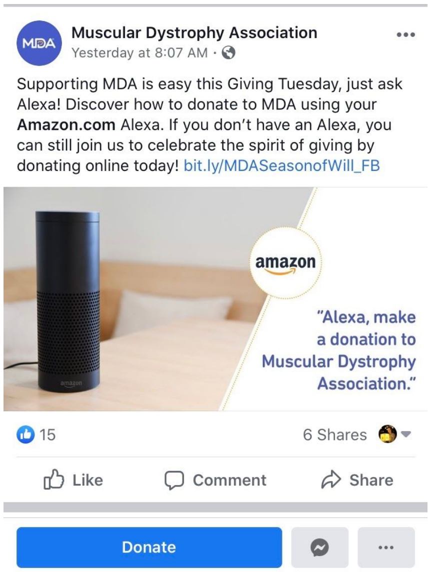


199 likes

mdaorg Dr. Rodney Howell has devoted his life to researching neuromuscular diseases and has championed #newbornscreening policies. Support from the MDA community allows him to perform his research. Visit the link in our bio to give support. .

214 likes

mdaorg Devin Argall is living with neuromuscular disease, but he won't let that stop him from one day walking across a stage to receive his diploma. Make an impact on the MDA community and remarkable stories like Devin's by visiting the link in our bio.



Muscular Dystrophy Association
Yesterday at 8:07 AM ·

Supporting MDA is easy this Giving Tuesday, just ask Alexa! Discover how to donate to MDA using your **Amazon.com** Alexa. If you don't have an Alexa, you can still join us to celebrate the spirit of giving by donating online today! bit.ly/MDASeasonofWill_FB

MDA USA @MDAorg · 10/12/19

Join MDA, Dr. Charles A. Thornton, & other myotonic dystrophy experts for an MDA Engage Symposium, November 9. We will discuss current research and opportunities to obtain treatments, best practices in clinical care, and more. Register today!

2019 MDA Engage Myotonic Dystrophy Sy...
mda.org

MDA USA @MDAorg · 10/15/19

MDA's Care Center network provides 200+ appointment locations and includes access to 2K+ clinical providers for individuals living with #neuromuscular diseases nationwide! Donate to support continued care for the MDA community: bit.ly/MDA_Cares_TW

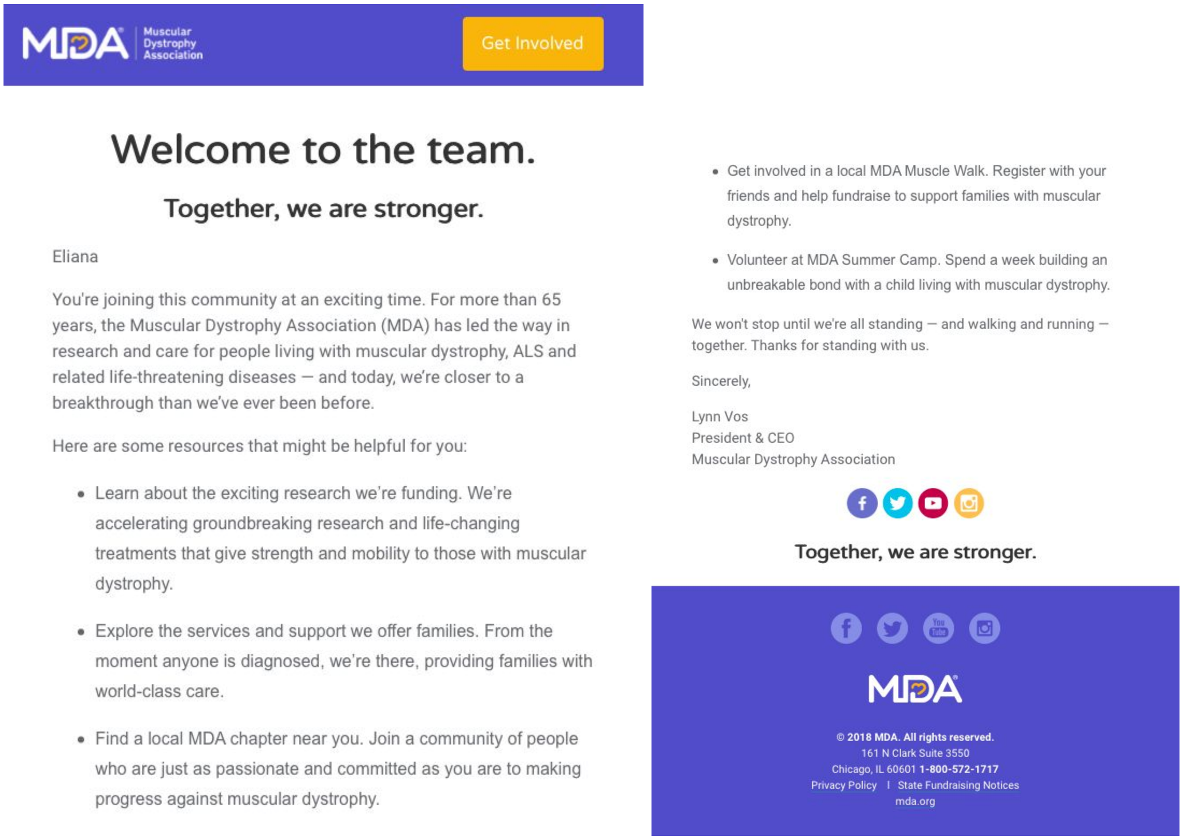
Offers

The most unique offer is the MDA Summer Camp. Every year, children with muscular dystrophy are invited to a camp that is designed for them to have fun and to give the parents a break. The camp is very successful; the camp has operated for over 60 years, and approximately 3,500 kids attend camps across the county each year (Santos, 2015). There is no monetary price that the families have to pay to go to the camp. Transportation to and from camp is not provided, so that would be a non monetary cost. That price would vary depending on how far away you live from the campsite. The summer camp is promoted heavily on the MDA website, but I was unable to find any advertisement outside of that. My suggestion is just to increase advertising and get some articles written on other websites to promote this excellent offer.

The MDA also hosts over 150 Care Centers in the United States. When going to regular doctor appointments, a patient with a neuromuscular disease is almost always referred to a neurologist, who is usually in a different building, or even a different city. The neurologist will then send them to a physical therapist, occupational therapist, dietician, genetic counselor, sleep consultant, and/or a speech therapist, depending on how the disease affects the patient. These professionals also tend to be scattered in different places, which makes treatment very difficult and communication between doctors limited. At the MDA Care Centers, all of those medical professionals are in the same building, so it is much easier for patients to seek medical attention, and their doctors can discuss treatment plans together. The MDA Care Centers accept most major health insurances, but medical expenses can still be great even with insurance. Most people with disabilities live on a limited income. According to the Social Security Association, "Social Security paid an average monthly disability benefit of about $1,234 to all disabled workers. That is barely enough to keep a beneficiary above the 2018 poverty level (12,140 annually)" (SSA, 2019). I think that a worthy update to this program would be to provide free care to those who are unable to work because of their disability. Again, the Care Centers are promoted through the MDA website, but nowhere else that I have seen.

Direct marketing

I signed up to get more information from the MDA in September, but haven't received much. I haven't had any mail correspondence, but have received a few emails. When I first signed up, I got an email within five minutes, which was a great start, but they failed to communicate much after that. Below is that original email.



Welcome to the team.

Together, we are stronger.

Eliana

You're joining this community at an exciting time. For more than 65 years, the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) has led the way in research and care for people living with muscular dystrophy, ALS and related life-threatening diseases — and today, we're closer to a breakthrough than we've ever been before.

Here are some resources that might be helpful for you:

- Learn about the exciting research we're funding. We're accelerating groundbreaking research and life-changing treatments that give strength and mobility to those with muscular dystrophy.
- Explore the services and support we offer families. From the moment anyone is diagnosed, we're there, providing families with world-class care.
- Find a local MDA chapter near you. Join a community of people who are just as passionate and committed as you are to making progress against muscular dystrophy.
- Get involved in a local MDA Muscle Walk. Register with your friends and help fundraise to support families with muscular dystrophy.
- Volunteer at MDA Summer Camp. Spend a week building an unbreakable bond with a child living with muscular dystrophy.

We won't stop until we're all standing — and walking and running — together. Thanks for standing with us.

Sincerely,

Lynn Vos
President & CEO
Muscular Dystrophy Association

Together, we are stronger.

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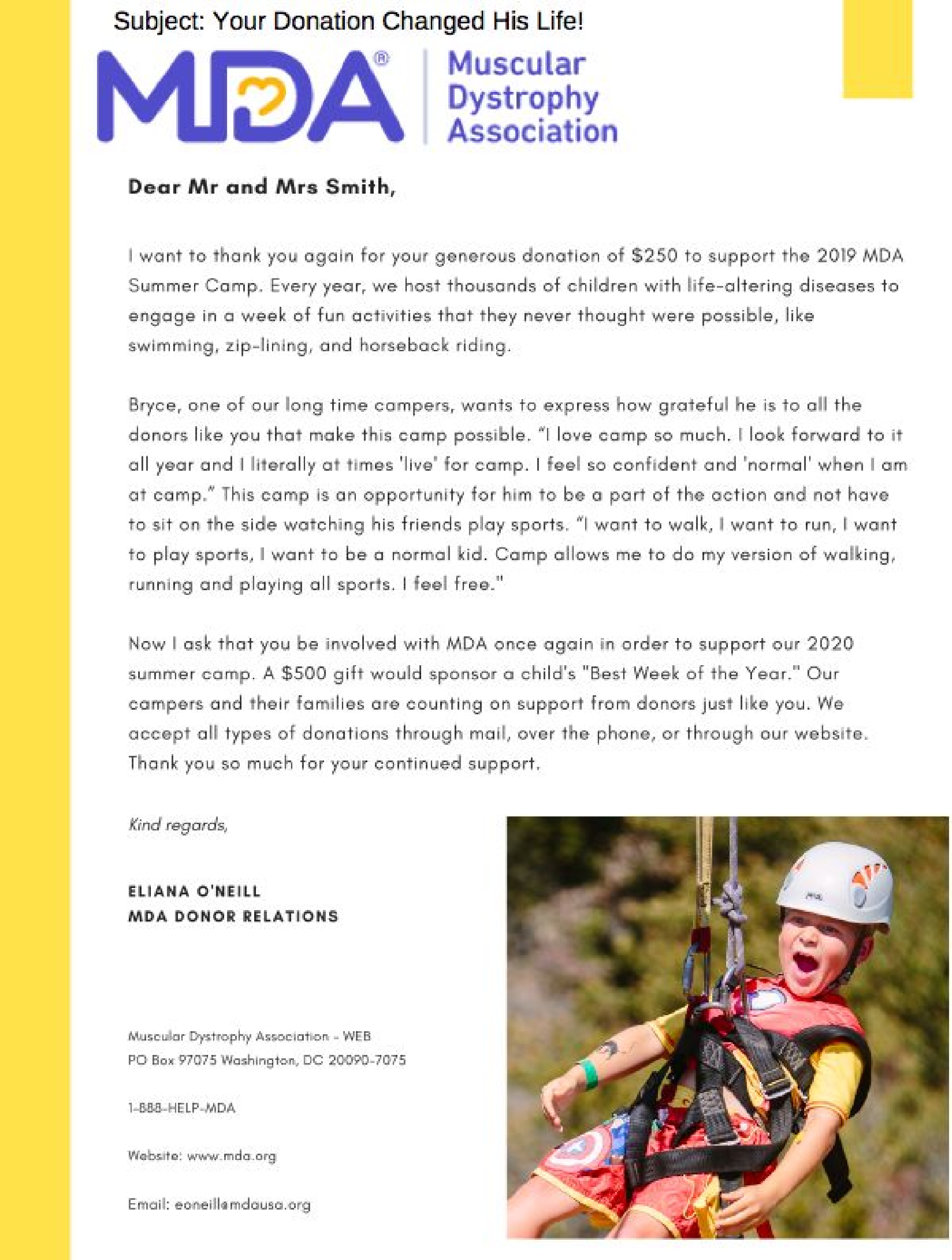
161 N Clark Suite 3550
Chicago, IL 60601 1-800-572-1717
Privacy Policy I State Fundraising Notices
mda.org

This email is fine, but not very motivating to get me to do anything. The bullet points are a great way to split up the information since it is a very dense message with a lot of text. If I was trying to gain a potential new donor or volunteer, I would write a letter prompting that person to do something and engage them more in the product. This email isn’t trying to persuade me to do anything or make me feel like I’m needed for the cause; it’s mostly listing the services that the MDA provides. A few weeks after this original email, I received an email from the local volunteer director detailing the different volunteer opportunities in the next few months. I didn’t respond to that message because none of the events fit in with my school and work schedules, and I never got an email again. For the most part, it seems like the MDA doesn’t chase after people, but instead wait for people to come to them. This isn’t an effective persuasion technique, especially for a non profit organization that survives off of donations and volunteers.

I wrote my own version of a donor letter on behalf of the MDA as an example of how to persuade the audience to get involved with the organization. It is important to refer to the reader (using “you” multiple times throughout the letters) because humans are all egocentric and want to feel important and needed. Images and personal stories also have a significant impact when trying to convince someone to participate in an organization because they establish your credibility and make the cause seem more real to someone who doesn’t know much about muscular dystrophy.



Subject: Your Donation Changed His Life!

MDA Muscular Dystrophy Association

Dear Mr and Mrs Smith,

I want to thank you again for your generous donation of $250 to support the 2019 MDA Summer Camp. Every year, we host thousands of children with life-altering diseases to engage in a week of fun activities that they never thought were possible, like swimming, zip-lining, and horseback riding.

Bryce, one of our long time campers, wants to express how grateful he is to all the donors like you that make this camp possible. "I love camp so much. I look forward to it all year and I literally at times 'live' for camp. I feel so confident and 'normal' when I am at camp." This camp is an opportunity for him to be a part of the action and not have to sit on the side watching his friends play sports. "I want to walk, I want to run, I want to play sports, I want to be a normal kid. Camp allows me to do my version of walking, running and playing all sports. I feel free."

Now I ask that you be involved with MDA once again in order to support our 2020 summer camp. A $500 gift would sponsor a child's "Best Week of the Year." Our campers and their families are counting on support from donors just like you. We accept all types of donations through mail, over the phone, or through our website. Thank you so much for your continued support.

Kind regards,

ELIANA O'NEILL
MDA DONOR RELATIONS

Muscular Dystrophy Association - WEB
PO Box 97075 Washington, DC 20090-7075

1-888-HELP-MDA

Website: www.mda.org

Email: eoneill@mdausa.org

Corporate Sponsorships

The MDA has a list of partners on their website. At the top of the page are the “Elite Partners” that donate $5 million or more annually, including the International Association of Fire Fighters, CITGO, and Harley-Davidson (MDA, 2019). This seems like an odd group of companies to sponsor the MDA, but they each have something to gain from the partnership. Of course, they get the publicity of being on the website and at MDA events, but they also get a reputation boost for being involved with a non profit. For example, CITGO, like every other oil company, is known to cause environmental issues. But if they give large amounts of money to charity, the public feels better about buying their products. Harley-Davidson has partnered with MDA for almost 40 years, volunteering to give kids bike rides at every MDA summer camp. Just last year, MDA invited a Harley-Davidson executive to “accept a symbolic white research coat in recognition for Harley-Davidson's support and ongoing contributions to MDA’s research program” (Harley-Davidson, 2018). This partnership with the MDA shows audiences that Harley-Davidson can be seen as a family company, not just made for men in leather jackets.

Special Events

The International Association of Fire Fighters hosts an event called Fill the Boot, in which firefighters raise money for MDA by asking people to fill a boot with cash. This is an event hosted by fire stations across the country; in 2014, they raised over $26 million with this campaign (Donor Drive, para. 1). The costs for the event are low. All they need are volunteers and a boot. It is a successful event so far, as in they make more money than they spend, but I think they could do a better job of promoting the events when they happen. There is a website for the event, but I couldn’t find any information about it on any of the MDA’s social media sites. If

I was running the accounts, I would post something every day that this event was being held to raise awareness.

Marketing to Volunteers

Like I mentioned in the section about direct correspondence, the MDA does not do much to recruit volunteers. They have a section on their website to sign up for events, but they are not pushing hard to get those people to work. From what I can gather, most of the MDA's volunteers either have a neuromuscular disease or are a close friend or family member of someone affected. According to Eric Burger in his book about volunteer management, volunteers with a personal connection to your cause "can often be your organization's most valuable asset because they want to see your nonprofit reach its goals" (Burger, 2018, p. 329). This being said, maybe the MDA doesn't chase after volunteers because they want dedicated people who will stay for years. However, I think that they should put more effort into finding people instead of waiting for people to reach out to them. If I was the volunteer director, I would send out emails to everyone on my email list whenever an event needed people.

Summary

Overall, I think the Muscular Dystrophy Association is a wonderful organization that needs serious help when it comes to marketing and advertising. Nonprofits are expected to spend as much of their money as possible on programs, so advertising often gets put on the back burner, when it should be one of the top priorities. Their volunteers and partners are dedicated, but they will need to promote themselves in order to gain new donors and participants.

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