VAAC Blog

Free or low-cost comms tools for charities

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Managing communications or marketing within charities is tough, especially if there's a very small team (maybe even only one staff member or volunteer) and a low or non-existent budget! So, to try and make life a little easier, we have collated a roundup of some of the free or low-cost tools that you can use to make your communications easier and more effective.

Design

Canva is probably the tool that I have found most useful over the past couple of years. With Canva you can design all sorts of publications including posters, fliers, reports, infographics, business cards, social media visuals, presentations, invitations… the list is endless! There is a free version available, however charities can sign up for a free 'pro' account which gives them access to all of Canva's features, elements, photos etc. Find out more here: https://www.canva.com/canva-for-nonprofits/

Copyright free image banks

Just because an image is on the internet doesn't mean you can use it on your website or market-ing materials without infringing copyright laws. However, there are a number of websites that offer a huge catalogue of royalty free images that you can use, such as Pixabay, Pexels and

Unsplash. In addition, the Centre for Aging Better has a library of age-positive images; you can find images of Black and Brown people on Nappy; and can download photos of South Asians from the Despora collection from The Unmistakeables. (Make sure to double check the terms and conditions of each site before using the images.)
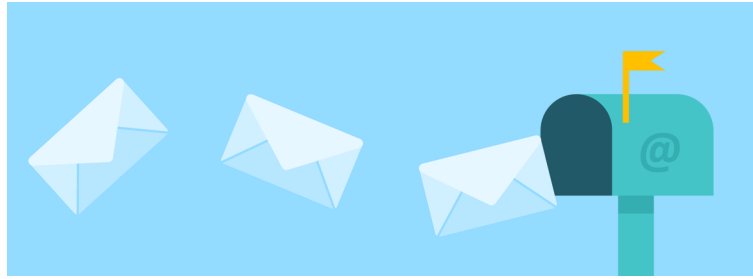
Email marketing

If you want to send out bulk emails to a mailing list, using a programme such as Mailchimp will allow you to create professional looking emails, manage your mailing list and automate campaigns to make your life easier! If you only have a small email list and won't be sending out many emails a month, then there is a free plan available. If you need to be sending more emails, then look out for charity discounts on paid plans.

Social media

Social media platforms offer a great source of free marketing opportunities; however, it can be costly in terms of time spent creating and posting content. Tools such as Hootsuite and Buffer offer scheduling functionality and analytics to monitor your channels. Again, there are free versions available, and both offer discounted plans for charities (Hootsuite, Buffer).

Website performance

If your organisation has a website, you will want to keep an eye on it to see how well it is performing, monitor which pages get more visits and see where your visitors are coming from (i.e., clicking through from other websites, social media posts or adverts). Google Analytics offers a free way of doing this. If you've not used google analytics before there are free online courses available to help you to understand and get the most out of it.

Virtual meetings

One thing that most organisations got really good at over the Covid lockdowns was the ability to meet/talk to people virtually rather than in person. At VAAC we even delivered all our training and events online. But if you've not yet mastered virtual meetings, then software such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams can make it super easy. Depending on your needs (how many people will be present, how long the meeting/call will last etc.) the free versions may be suitable, but if you need more functionality the paid for versions may be more suitable.

These are a few of the free or low-cost tools that are available that can make communication a bit easier, and the ones that we have found most useful in VAAC. If you have other tools that you think should be on the list – drop us an email to jenny.garthwright@vaac.org.uk. Or see the links below for more great resources around charity comms and marketing:

https://www.charitycomms.org.uk/

https://mediatrust.org/

https://charitydigital.org.uk/