

10 Tips on Nonprofit Annual Report Writing & Design

Annual reports are more than a year in review. They are more than financial statements. They are a marketing piece that should illustrate and tell the story of your nonprofit. And, if done effectively, it should inspire support not just from donors, but all stakeholders. These tips will ensure your annual report paints an inspiring picture of your hard work.

TIP 1 Consider all types of readers

Some will read every word and some will flip through and only look at the illustrations and pictures. So, make sure both readers will come away with the same feeling by using large fonts and a balanced combo of copy and imagery.

TIP 2 Tell your story

Ultimately, ARs are fundraising vehicles. If you're going to spend time on copywriting and graphic design, make sure it is a powerful fundraising piece. Don't just recount the past year's highs and lows like a corporate AR. Instead, tell your story with subtle facts, figures, stories and reports from the previous year.

TIP 3 Cut down your content

This seems counterintuitive, but it will help keep the AR readable and succinct. Even the person who is willing to read every word in your AR will get overwhelmed by too much content. So, when you've finished copywriting and editing, a rule of thumb is to cut the copy by at least a 25%.

TIP 4 Use Emotion

Emotion always trumps facts and figures. Keep top-of-mind that you want all of your AR content to focus on your mission. How are you delivering that mission? How are you changing the world? How are you changing lives?

TIP 5 Invest in good imagery

It's no lie that a picture can tell a thousand words. Use good imagery throughout your annual report – images that have 1 main subject, no more than 2 people and are high-resolution.

Examples of AR's we ❤

[Save the Redwoods League](#)

A simple e-brochure.

[Salvation Army](#)

A series of videos, text, and downloadable PDFs.

[The Silkroad Project](#)

An e-brochure with YouTube videos, a photo slideshow, pop-up quotes and an interactive timeline.

[Austin Children's Shelter](#)

An e-brochure that uses imagery, typefaces and graphics to tell their story.

[Nature Conservancy](#)

A PDF organized into sections that focus on a single strategic initiative with feature stories and powerful imagery.

TIP 6 Don't be afraid of white space

When there is too much content on the page there is no focal point for the reader. No visual roadway. So, often, they skim and move on. So, white space is good. It helps cut down on clutter. Don't limit the size of your document so that each page can breathe and not get filled to the brim.

TIP 7 Ditch the table of contents

If your AR is less than 25 pages, you don't need a table of contents. Instead, treat each page as a one-pager that could stand alone. That way, each page will have a beginning and an end and the reader can flow easily from page to page.

TIP 8 Don't print

OK, we know, you will probably have to print *some* amount of ARs, but consider more current ways of presenting your AR. And a PDF doesn't count – the file size is often too large to email or takes too long to download. Instead, think digital. You'll want to make it easy for anyone to read online, on their mobile or their tablet. Try an online publication publisher like Treesaver, Issuu or ZMags or summarize on a webpage with links to one-page PDF downloads.

TIP 9 Turn numbers into graphics

Let's face it, readers want to get to the hard facts quickly. And then they want to be blown away. Statistics and financials are more easily digestable in charts and infographics that offer a colorful and simplified visual.

TIP 10 Avoid standard layouts

An easy way for your AR to stand out, get noticed and remembered is to stay away from standard layouts like 8 1/2 x 11" sizes or newsletter-type page layouts. Also, don't be afraid of a full page of just a photo and a few words.

More AR's we ❤

Kids in Distress

Each page has a balanced combo of images, graphics and copy – they could all be used as one-pagers.

IREX

A webpage on their main site.

Mercy Corps

Short, succinct and relies heavily on infographics.

Volunteer Match

An annual report in a Prezi.