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Create communications that stand out in a world of AI

By: Laura S. Quinn

It's easy to churn out articles, newsletters, social media messages, and other content these days. Just give an AI tool a prompt and a bit of fodder, and it can brainstorm ideas and generate supporting content. However, this isn't always the best idea. The ease of using AI creates both a danger and an opportunity for nonprofits.



Laura S. Quinn

There's a real danger that messages from organizations without a strategic approach will get lost in a sea of generic AI-generated content. When you and everyone else are writing impersonally, nothing distinguishes your message to stand out from the noise.

But there's a great opportunity as well. To stand out, simply use your distinctive human voice; it will resonate with your readers. When more content is bad, high quality communication deepens connections with your audience, ranks high in search engines, and increases your impact. Plus, AI can save you time, allowing you to focus more on the strategic side.

So, how should your organization navigate this? How can you deliver genuinely valuable, well-crafted content that features a human voice while taking advantage of the efficiencies offered by AI? Let's walk through some core principles.

Focus on what matters to your audiences

Understanding your audience is the cornerstone of creating compelling content, whether it's articles, blog posts, social media posts, or anything else. You need to go beyond superficial engagement metrics to truly grasp what your audience cares about, what questions they want answered, and what inspires them to take action. High-quality content is always grounded in a solid communication strategy, which in turn is rooted in a deep understanding of your audience's interests—a task beyond AI's capabilities.

Define your top audiences and think through their preferences. What topics genuinely interest them? What information will align with their needs, rather than simply what your organization wishes to communicate?

To understand your audience better, consider exploring other websites or platforms they visit. Ideally, put some time aside to interview real people. [Four or more interviews with members of your audience can be incredibly helpful](#) in understanding what will resonate with them.

Highlight your organization's unique knowledge

Every nonprofit has specialized knowledge and insights—whether it's about a specific field, a proposed solution, or stories of success. You may have subject matter experts who can offer perspectives that very few others can.

Lean into this expertise. AI tools lack the ability to produce new insights or perspectives, so content rooted in your organization's distinct understanding will stand out.

Creating insightful content does require time and effort, but it can be a particularly useful part of an overall engagement strategy. Insightful content acts as a magnet, attracting individuals to your organization and its mission. This is a critical first step in building a relationship with your audience, effectively serving as the [foundation of an engagement pyramid or ladder for your nonprofit website](#).

Use AI to enhance (not replace) creativity

Tools like [ChatGPT](#) and [Gemini](#) can be excellent brainstorming partners. While they're not great at generating truly insightful ideas on their own, they're good at fleshing out an existing concept or framework.

For instance, when writing this article, I used ChatGPT to brainstorm sections that would apply to the title. Initially, it generated a lengthy list of ways AI can help create content more efficiently. But, as you can tell, that's not the overall theme of this article. However, when I provided a couple of sentences about the article's premise, it generated a more useful list that I was able to compare with my own initial ideas, sparking a few thoughts for additional sections.

Cultivate a distinctive voice

Even just a few months ago, it was challenging to get an AI tool to sound like a human—to find the right balance between business speak, grandiose words, and oddly informal text that greeted readers as if they were long-lost friends. But in just that small amount of time, these tools have really improved. If you feed them some basics on who your readers are, they can create something that sounds believably human.

However, this doesn't mean your content will stand out from most other AI-generated pieces. To differentiate yourself, you'll need to create a distinctive voice. Think through what relationship you want to have with your audience. Should your voice be that of a trusted expert, a knowledgeable and funny friend, or a supportive counselor?

Creating this kind of style guide for your voice can be a worthwhile investment if you create a fair amount of content. Once you've defined it, you can also feed examples of that voice into AI tools to help shape rough drafts toward your own distinct tone.

Use AI to polish or simplify

AI really shines on straightforward tasks that can be time-consuming and annoying to staff. For example, AI excels in areas such as:

- Creating ideas for LinkedIn posts derived from an article's content.
- Dividing a single article into multiple pieces.
- Doing a final copy edit by identifying grammatical errors.
- Generating a draft description for an article.
- Integrating specific phrases into an article's content for SEO purposes.
- Reducing the word count of a post to meet specific length requirements.

The new ChatGPT-4 is remarkably good at doing tasks like this without changing the tone of voice.

Consider featuring the author

If you have a person doing all the work to define original insights, review voice, and ensure accuracy in AI-generated content, consider crediting the author. This makes it clear there's a real person who's accountable for the information, which is unfortunately all too rare these days. Google has also announced changes, as of the end of 2023, that imply it will rank articles with authors or written in the first person (or both) more highly.

This could mean including a byline for the author with a link to their bio on a staff page or showing a brief bio on the article. Or the whole article could be a perspective piece, written with the opinions of the author.

Consider crediting AI tools

Giving credit for the AI tools you've used in an article or newsletter can show useful transparency. It's becoming a standard practice to credit AI-generated images—at least mentioning the tool, and sometimes even the prompt used to create them.

Crediting the tool makes it clear that you haven't relied on it for the entire article and shows readers that you're efficiently using the technology at your disposal. This credit can be neatly folded into an author summary. For instance, for this article, the

author summary could be: “Laura S. Quinn is a nonprofit website specialist who helps organizations as a coach and guide and with website strategy. She used ChatGPT-3 to briefly brainstorm topics to include in this article and ChatGPT-4 more extensively to polish a draft into a final version.”

Include personal experience

Real stories, experiences, and human emotions can't be easily replicated by AI. They are also key to genuine storytelling. Every organization has a gold mine of stories—what is your founding story? What are the proudest moments from your staff? What stories of impact and change does your organization have? Lean into this type of content, which distinguishes your work not only from AI-generated content but also from that of other organizations.

Engage openly with your community about ongoing discussions and challenges being addressed. Perhaps your content can even directly feature the personal voices of constituents.

In summary, be authentically, genuinely useful

As more and more companies produce spammy AI content, it's harder to stand out with just any content. But in a sea of generic material that doesn't meet anyone's actual needs, you have an opportunity to distinguish yourself by having a purposeful content strategy and solid communication basics. Understanding your audience, providing useful information in areas tied to your expertise, maintaining a distinctive voice, and telling compelling stories are now more important than ever.

By strategically using AI to handle the mundane, you can devote more energy to what matters—crafting content that resonates deeply and inspires action, marked by the undeniable authenticity of humans.

Laura S. Quinn is a nonprofit website specialist who helps organizations as a [website coach and guide](#) and with [website strategy](#). She's also the editor of the [Nonprofit Website Insider](#). She used ChatGPT-3 to briefly brainstorm topics to include in this article and ChatGPT-4 more extensively to polish a draft into a final version.