

Art for Kids' Sake
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To achieve success in global operations, organizations require an effective PR strategy to translate their core mission, products and services into local cultures and languages. Developing and disseminating a globally resonant message in turn requires energy, expertise and financial resources. So how did a small nonprofit gain international recognition as undisputed leader in its sector?

This article highlights the approach taken by the International Child Art Foundation (ICAF), an international umbrella organization dedicated to promoting children's creativity and cooperation through the arts. Lessons from this study can inform social marketing strategies and aid non-profits aspiring to play a role beyond their borders.

ICAF's global impact rests on connections made through shared emotions; connections made through shared purpose; and a flagship program to achieve cost-effective outreach.

Connections through Shared Emotions

Charitable organizations' appeals often rest on urgency and the consequences of the failure to act. ICAF relies on this tactic as well, for example to garner financial and in-kind donations for its Healing Arts for Tsunami Survivors program. Urgent appeals are less effective, however, when seeking strategic and sustained support for long-term programs. For ICAF, these include the international Arts Olympiad, which focuses on leadership, critical thinking skills and cross-cultural understanding among youth, and the Peace through Arts program, which imparts skills for conflict resolution.

The emotional potency of the image is well understood. The simplicity of children's art makes it all the more honest, powerful and profound. ICAF uses its network of teachers, parents, volunteers, and institutional partners in more than 80 countries to encourage children to generate works of art. By disseminating the children's artworks through festival properties, strategic corporate alliances and licensing agreements, ICAF shares with a world beset by poverty, conflict and lack of opportunity the hope in a child's eye.

ICAF emphasizes the affective dimension of child art to create shared meaning and experience across cultures. ICAF's quadrennial International Child Art Festival (next scheduled for June 2007) provides a platform for children to become members of a creative community.

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As relayed by Dianna Mazzone, an 11-year old Arts Olympian from New York State:

In my favorite workshop, Sergey, from Russia, taught us the art of silk screening ... this workshop proved to me that even language differences do not have to prevent someone from learning a new form of art. ... With the help of (featured artist) George Rodrigue, all the child artists created a mural about world peace. Each of us painted our vision of peace on part of the mural, which later formed a great pyramid.



Connections through Shared Purpose

One of ICAF's greatest challenges is to convince potential supporters that its mission is relevant and significant, especially when compared to programs to alleviate child poverty and eradicate childhood diseases. ICAF seeks to overcome this challenge through the consistent dissemination of a provocative message linked tightly to its mission: when a child's creativity is suppressed, it can be lost forever.

ICAF makes the argument that support for children's art programs is a foundational means to help children develop the leadership and critical thinking skills necessary to participate in the digital, biotech and communications revolutions, and to solve seemingly intractable problems. In its messaging, ICAF relies on the root metaphor of the *creative process*, which is transferable across multiple contexts. Visualizing an image, dipping a brush in paint, and applying color to paper to create meaning for others, is akin to working with text to generate and share ideas, or working with molecules in a laboratory to generate new vaccines. To effectively convey this message, ICAF relies on advocacy, engagement with internationally recognized educational and cultural organizations, specially selected child art exhibitions at major gatherings of world leaders, and reliance on influential surrogates.

Cost Effective Outreach

By definition, a non-profit has a mission and a set of services aimed to attain that mission, without regard to recipients' ability to pay for the benefits provided. As non-profits achieve greater visibility and demand for their services, expenditures rise without the attendant revenue that a for-profit concern would realize. A self-sustaining third-party network of donors, supporters and volunteers is a critical success factor for any non-profit seeking to achieve a global reach.

ICAF builds its name identity through a least-cost marketing strategy centered on its flagship program, the Arts Olympiad. Inspired by the Olympic Movement, ICAF founded the international Arts Olympiad to prepare youth for a creative and cooperative future. The Arts Olympiad begins with free lesson plans for schools to encourage children to

participate in local art competitions on a universal theme. National and regional exhibitions and festivals follow, culminating in the aforementioned international celebration at the National Mall. ICAF then organizes a year-long awareness campaign utilizing traveling exhibits of artworks presented and created at the International Festival. The Third Arts Olympiad (2005 – 2008) celebrates the artist-athlete, with the theme “My Favorite Sport.”

As a means to generate free media, focusing on a flagship program has the following benefits:

- For U.S. domestic outreach, ICAF works with Members of Congress to invite participation of local school districts and involves the Congressional Arts Caucus in the awareness campaign.
- Internationally, invitations to organize national-level competitions enlist the support of the Washington-based Ambassadorial Corps.
- ICAF’s Education Partners including the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, the National Art Education Association, and UNESCO promote the Arts Olympiad to their networks through newsletters, conferences and other vehicles.
- ICAF builds on the Arts Olympiad theme to co-locate its events for maximum exposure. For example, the European Children’s Festival, to be held June 2006 at Olympia Park, coincides with the 2006 FIFA World Cup.
- The Olympiad process provides generous opportunities for ICAF to gain local as well as state and national level recognition, through feature articles on individual Olympians representing their state or region at the World Children’s Festival in Washington.
- ICAF also utilizes in-house channels such as its monthly e-newsletter *Sketches* (15,000 subscribers), its quarterly magazine *ChildArt*, and its web site (www.icafe.org) which records approximately 250,000 views monthly.
- Solicited and placed articles round out the communications strategy; articles on the Arts Olympiad have been featured in *State Education Standard*, *The Artist’s Magazine*, *SchoolArts*, *Children’s Voice*, and *Arts & Activities*.