

PROFILE

ST. VINCENT INFIRMARY MEDICAL CENTER

A Collaborative Publication Saves Money, Enhances Communication

Collaboration and cooperation are simple concepts, but making them work is not always so simple. At St. Vincent Infirmary Medical Center, a renewed emphasis on collaboration has helped the Communications Department launch *Vision*, a publication

that has saved the hospital money and enabled several departments to communicate more effectively with their constituents.

St. Vincent is a 691-bed tertiary care medical center in Little Rock, AR. A division of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Health Corporation

(SCNHC), the facility serves the Little Rock metropolitan area and is a referral center for the entire state. In the past few years SCNHC has made a deliberate effort to define and communicate to employees its corporate core values: justice, compassion, quality, stewardship, and collaboration.

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other departments involved to join communications in the new venture. In spring of 1991 the hospital's art director developed a comprehensive four-color layout and presented the prototype to the other department heads. The publication would be an 11 X 16 magazine with headlines identifying the department related to particular articles. Each department would be represented in each issue, and the magazine would be published six times a year.

Even though the departments would lose the autonomy and ownership they previously had, the department heads were all enthusiastic about the new project. And although turf issues arose, all departments were eventually willing to compromise. The hiring of a consulting editor from outside the hospital—a completely neutral party—helped assure all involved that they would be fairly represented in the new publication.

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PUBLICATION REVIEW

In 1991 a Communications Department review suggested that St. Vincent could make more efficient use of resources and provide a higher-quality product if it consolidated several of the hospital's newsletters. At the time, the hospital was producing 10 publications ranging from technical medical updates to newsletters for employees and donors. Although each department wrote its own newsletter, all 10 eventually came through the Communications Department for layout, mechanical production, and printing. The process created log-jams, inefficiency, and frustration.

To determine how it could streamline, the

department audited its work. During a two-month evaluation, communications staff assessed every hospital newsletter for purpose, target audience, and potential for collaboration. Evaluators determined that 6 of the 10—including an epidemiology department newsletter, a physician newsletter, and a nursing newsletter—were too specialized for collaboration. However, 4 were deemed good candidates for a single, combined publication. These were the newsletter for the general public (produced by the Communications Department), as well as those for volunteers, donors, and cancer center patients and friends.

DEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION

The next step was to convince the three

PLANNING

Heads of each participating department—

along with an editorial board composed of the consulting editor, an editor from the Communications Department, and the art director—came together to plan the first issue. The group finalized story ideas, set production schedules, and made story and photo assignments. Planners decided that each hospital department should be responsible for editorial content, with help in writing and editing from communications staff. The consulting editor would meet bimonthly with representatives of each department to critique the previous edition and plan the next publication.

The first issue of *Vision* was published in August 1991. Each issue features hospital news, reports of departmental events, lists of donors, and an article describing a medical specialty. An early issue contained a follow-up on a previous article describing "miracle babies" who had clung to life in the hospital's intensive care nursery. It also included stories on a volunteer project to provide patients with free samples of personal hygiene products and on a benefit held for the cancer center. In another feature, an internist practicing at St. Vincent profiled her specialty.

In September 1992 St. Vincent published

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the first 12-page issue of *Vision*. The issue introduced the hospital's new president and chief executive officer. It also included a full-page feature describing the consolidation of St. Vincent's cancer center services. Other articles showcased various volunteer opportunities available throughout the hospital and listed 15 pieces of equipment and special projects funded by the St. Vincent Development Foundation.

Editorial staff and department heads meet every other month to plan the next issue. With the plan set, editorial staff arrange to have photos taken, illustrations completed, and stories submitted. When all materials are in, they design, produce, and mail the magazine.

COMMUNITY RESPONSE

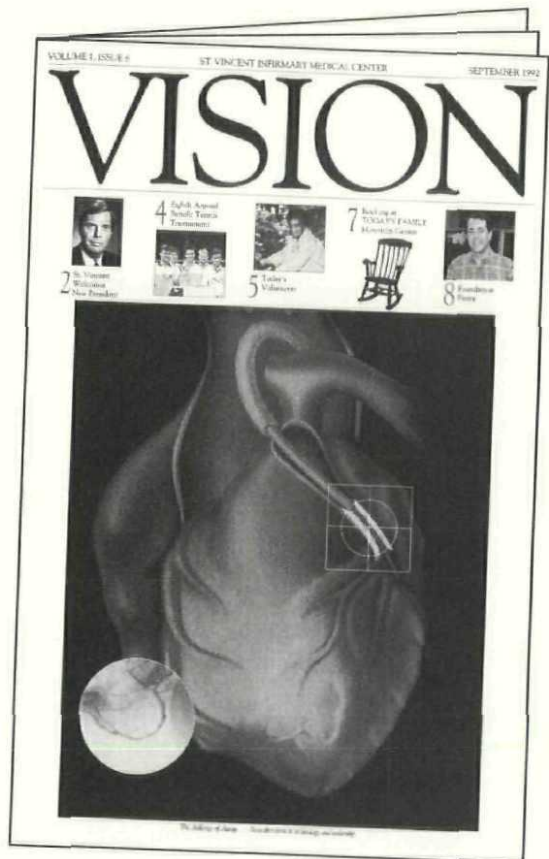
Community response to the magazine indicates that *Vision* has been a success. The Communications Department sends the magazine to about 14,000 people, using a mailing list compiled

by merging and purging lists previously used by the individual departments. The audience includes the general public (e.g., media, other hospitals, schools, businesses), physicians, employees, volunteers, and donors.

St. Vincent has received numerous letters and phone calls complimenting the magazine's look and readability. A small advertisement offering *Vision* readers discounts at the hospital gift shop has brought in hundreds of customers, and one woman recently called for information on donating to the St. Vincent Development Foundation, which she had read about in the magazine. *Vision* was designed to communicate to a diverse audience, and such responses suggest it is succeeding.

Vision has also allowed the hospital to be a better steward of its time and resources. Producing one magazine in the place of four newsletters has saved communications staff dozens of hours. And the reduction in staff and production

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time saved the hospital an estimated \$4,000 in the magazine's first year. Plans to do color separations on a new desktop publishing system promise thousands of dollars in extra savings in the future.

The purpose of *Vision* is to communicate and enhance the St. Vincent mission and thus extend the healing ministry of Jesus Christ into the community and state. Although the process of combining four

newsletters into a single publication has been difficult at times, the collaborative effort has benefited all involved. Each department now has an expanded audience for its message, and the message itself is delivered in a more appealing format than would have been financially possible before. The November 1992 issue included a readership survey that will provide information for future planning and direction.

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