



Telling a Powerful Story

With a successful track record spanning more than two decades, Golden Apple knows how to improve teaching and learning. The not-for-profit organization provides an innovative and integrated set of programs that enhance the quality, resiliency, and creativity of classroom teachers in Illinois. Unfortunately, as Golden Apple began its 23rd year, too few people understood the organization's scope and value. Those who knew of Golden Apple often knew only of its most publicized program, the Awards for Excellence in Teaching.



Like many not-for-profits, Golden Apple needed to expand its sources of funding. In less than one year, The Harbinger Group helped Golden Apple articulate and begin to share its powerful story, gaining the attention of prospective donors, raising its voice on issues of national scope, and connecting constituencies through new media.

Creating a consistent messaging platform

The Harbinger Group began by reviewing Golden Apple's existing development and marketing materials. Created at different times and featuring different programs, the materials lacked consistency. No single piece captured all of Golden Apple. To gather the content for a consistent and compelling story, we interviewed senior Golden Apple staff, members of the Golden Apple Board of Directors, and executives serving on the board's Communications Committee. We created:

- A one-page Message Map capturing Golden Apple's central value proposition and key differentiators, to drive all future communications.
- A presentation delivering those messages and supporting them with clear evidence, for use with prospective donors by the Golden Apple staff and board.
- A primary brochure, with program-specific inserts, telling the full Golden Apple story.

Each of these essential communications underwent a thorough review process with Golden Apple stakeholders, ensuring validity, acceptance, and use.

We also incorporated the new messaging and highlights of Golden Apple's past year into the annual fundraising letter for past and prospective donors. This refreshed annual appeal generated tangible financial results for Golden Apple in a particularly challenging economic climate.

Establishing a voice of leadership

Golden Apple's past media exposure had been limited to annual announcements of Award-winning teachers, and future teachers selected as Golden Apple Scholars. To expand awareness of the Golden Apple story, The Harbinger Group identified media opportunities connected to the organization's expertise and established new methods for honing and sharing a point of view.

- Capitalizing on "back to school" coverage, we surveyed more than 200 Golden Apple Fellows (Award-winning teachers), tapping into their collective experience and consolidating their back-to-school advice. Golden Apple President Dominic Belmonte shared these insights on *Chicago Tonight*, a nightly public television program featuring in-depth news coverage and interviews.
- Following President Obama's announcement of his choice for Education Secretary, former Golden Apple board member and Chicago Public Schools CEO Arne Duncan, we convened a roundtable of 12 Golden Apple Fellows and Scholars to outline recommendations for tackling the biggest challenges in education. A subsequent roundtable seized the opportunity to weigh in on how Illinois should spend education stimulus dollars.
- With Golden Apple's president, we developed op-eds in response to Obama's speeches on education, leading to coverage in *Catalyst Chicago*, an online education-reform magazine.

Concurrently, The Harbinger Group collaborated with one of Golden Apple's newest fellows, a technology enthusiast, to elevate Golden Apple's online presence. A YouTube channel and Facebook and Twitter accounts now connect Golden Apple Fellows, Scholars, board, staff, supporters, and others and provide them with instant updates.

As Golden Apple completes its first quarter-century and begins its second, this vibrant new communication platform will continue to strengthen the organization's voice and donor base.