



CHECK YOUR MINDSET TO MARKET YOUR WAY OUT OF THE RECESSION

(Feb. 23, 2009) If you don't believe your own message, who is going to believe you? Here are some tips for successful, "I think I can" marketing.

By Elaine Fogel

There's doom and gloom in the air. Most nonprofits are feeling the pinch. Gifts and support are only limbering along, and anxiety reigns supreme. If the current recession has you biting your nails and snapping like a turtle, it's time to change your mindset. Survival comes to those organizations that are proactive and fit.

An economic downturn isn't the most ideal time to *begin* to market your mission. So, if your marketing to date has been reliant on fundraising events and word-of-mouth—with no additional components to your mix—then you may find yourself at a disadvantage. But, if you've been complementing your activities with other marketing strategies and tactics, now is a good time to sit down and do some planning.

Do Some Primary Research

First, talk to your current and prospective donors and stakeholders. How are they hurting? What can you do to help? What are their challenges? Listen and they'll give you some valuable information.

Make Use of Secondary Research

Next, read whatever you can about marketing in this economy. Look for studies and survey results that shed light on recession-based messaging that works. See what can translate well to the nonprofit sector.

Plan, Plan and Plan

Sit down with staff and evaluate what your organization has been doing, what it can continue to do and what needs adaptation or adjustment. Develop an abbreviated strategy that identifies who its target market segments are and the most cost-effective ways of reaching them. Who are its ideal donors? Where can you find them? Which publications do they read and which websites do they visit? This information will uncover appropriate communication channels. There's no point in casting too wide a net and spending money ineffectively.

Do You Have the Right Mindset?

Then, as a decision maker, do some soul searching. Ask yourself some hard questions and be as honest as you can with your responses.

1. Do you value marketing and what it can do for your nonprofit? Have you been marketing all along? If, yes, you're in a good position to re-focus and do what it takes to ride out the recession.
2. Do you have *chutzpah* and an entrepreneurial spirit? There's some element of risk involved in a proactive, recession-based marketing approach. Calculate these risks, make the best decisions you can based on the knowledge you have, and take action.
3. Do you have fortitude and a stick-to-it mentality? Can you follow through with a marketing strategy to completion? Can you recognize when you need to make adjustments along the way?
4. Are you creative? Can you (or your team) come up with new ideas that can grab your prospects' attention?

5. Are you positive? Yes, we all suffer from doubt and concern in times like these, but can you maintain an optimistic attitude? People are attracted to success and a positive approach. Would *you* want to get involved with an organization that may not make it?

Look at cost-effective marketing tactics

Social Media

- Read about and understand social media.
- Find blogs where you can post comments at www.blogcatalog.com.
- Be authentic.
- Share your organization's stories and build relationships.

Word-of-mouth marketing

- Get and use testimonials from donors, volunteers, and those who benefit from your work. Place them (one at a time) on your website, in newsletters and in direct mail.
- Do a great job and your stakeholders will become your brand ambassadors.

Develop professional marketing/fundraising materials

Professionally designed and written marketing/fundraising materials invoke credibility.

Cause marketing

- Look for potential business partners that tie into your mission.
- Research everything about them.
- Evaluate what your organization can bring to the table.
- Make proposals win-win.
- Believe and beget for both sides.

Other ideas to explore:

- Explore co-branding opportunities with other organizations.
- Distribute online news releases to increase SEO (search engine optimization).
- Submit articles to publications.
- Provide amazing customer service internally AND externally.

If you can turn your mindset around and develop marketing strategies and tactics that are sound and cost-effective, you may not only survive—your organization may actually thrive.

"Recessions offer what may be unprecedented opportunities to market in an environment of relatively less noise, as others cut back." (*Advertising Age*)

Cutting your marketing efforts now will certainly cut your costs, but do nothing for building brand awareness for your mission and capturing donors' attention. Use this time to turn adversity into advantage. Learn, listen, and market smartly.

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