



Five Steps to Changing Your Marketing Paradigm

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With the proliferation of not-for-profit (NFP) organizations today, (almost 1.3 million registered charities in North America) all competing for support, it is more important than ever for NFP professionals to address their marketing needs. Many of the techniques and approaches used to build awareness and exposure for organizations have been conducted in a reactive manner.

Many organizations have witnessed declines in fundraising results, and experienced higher costs to raise a dollar (fundraising ROI). Donors have become more discerning, seeking greater accountability for their gifts. Many NFPs have adopted *social entrepreneurialship*, and are selling products and/or services to diversify revenues. Membership-driven associations may be experiencing reductions in membership renewals.

The roadmap to success requires a paradigm shift to embrace marketing strategically and proactively. Whether you have limited resources, or a more substantial budget, taking a committed approach to marketing your not-for-profit can help gain increased support and revenue.

1. Obtain buy-in

Before your organization can take any baby steps, you must get buy-in from the top. That means getting your board of directors on side with marketing and its role in the organization's ultimate success. This is imperative. Without it, you'll risk spinning your wheels and falling behind.

Plan an educational component before a board meeting and hire a marketing consultant to address the role and value of marketing in the NFP sector. Check out fundraising or marketing associations for the names of marketing companies with expertise in the not-for-profit world. An outside expert will bring credibility to your case for support.

Ensure that your senior management is part of this session, as they are needed as *enablers* in this paradigm shift. Without their support, it can mean internal power struggles that may stymie your organization's efforts.

The initial presentation may require follow-up training sessions to help your group understand the difference between marketing and communications. Producing the annual report, news releases and newsletters may have been the organization's sole "marketing" function since its inception.

2. Appoint a marketer

Whether you are a large or small organization, appoint someone to "own" and drive your marketing strategy and tactics. If you can afford it, hire a marketing professional, preferably one with NFP experience. If this is not feasible, the role may fall on the executive director, fund development director, or communication coordinator's shoulders.

Empower this individual and make him/her part of the strategic team. It's difficult to prepare an effective strategic plan, or develop any strategies without the marketer at the table. Marketing efforts will have an impact on human resources, finance, and operations. It's important that the decision-making team value the role of the marketer.

Professionally develop your marketer. Encourage and pay for him/her to attend local marketing seminars and conferences. Join a marketing association; subscribe to marketing e-publications and check the bookstores or libraries for valuable resources. The more tools and knowledge gained, the better the results.

3. Develop a strategy

Knee-jerk reactive marketing is inefficient. It may help bring momentary gains, but you need a long-term approach to build momentum and gain market share. If your NFP has a strategic plan, it's an excellent foundation to develop an organizational marketing plan. This needn't be a dissertation at first. Preparing a basic SWOT analysis, competitive analysis and segmentation chart will help your key players understand your current situation.

This exercise should not represent one individual's perspective. Seek input from your stakeholders. What does the organization represent to them? Why do donors give to the charity? What are the benefits of membership? What do they see as the organization's key attributes? How does the organization differ from others in the same category? How does your organization currently generate revenue? What tactics are you using to help facilitate that?

Seek marketing expertise to assist in the development of the marketing plan. If you have the funds, hire - if not, check local universities for MBA programs. Students will often participate in hands-on, group projects as part of their education.

4. Live your mission and stay the course

Your mission and vision should guide you. Living your mission should be at the core of everything you do. It will keep you on track. Develop a metric to analyze your marketing strategies and your eventual tactics. Do they reflect your mission?

Don't get sidetracked by last-minute, seemingly beneficial opportunities, unless they are determined to be **highly** advantageous. Being reactive will take you away from your plan. A former colleague often said, "If you don't know where you're going, any path will take you there." Don't get distracted by flavour-of-the-month, sporadic ideas.

5. Toot your horn

Frequently report your progress results to the board and senior staff. Internal marketing is as important as external is. It's easy to get engulfed in day-to-day tactics that you forget to build your reputation and value internally.

Typically, your achievements are not gained by one individual alone. Give your team credit whenever you realize positive results. This gives your staff reinforcement, and indicates to the decision-makers that you're on the right course.

Then, send releases to the trade publications about your latest achievements or case studies. Show off any new marketing or communications materials at trade shows and conferences. Use your distribution channels to build your reputation and profile.

The steps you take will not happen overnight. Expect to make mistakes and learn from them. In due time, your efforts can help improve market share in your NFP category.

Whether you operate a local, regional or national not-for-profit organization, effective marketing is the key to generating revenue and building support.

About The Author:

Elaine Fogel is the Director of Communications, Sales & Marketing at Ontario March of Dimes, one of the largest charitable rehabilitation organizations in Ontario (Canada) providing a wide range of services to enhance the independence and community participation of people with physical disabilities. You may contact the author at: efogel@dimes.on.ca