



Marketing Your Nonprofit

Marketing and Its Relationship to Other Functions

- Marketing for nonprofits -- sometimes called mission-based marketing -- is an organization's overall approach to connecting with stakeholders to gain their involvement and support. It's most effective when it brings together elements from strategic planning, public relations, fundraising, community relations, advertising, and promotion.
- Marketing and public relations work together -- both stressing communications with stakeholders. Marketing emphasizes strategies to reach targeted constituents, while public relations emphasizes communicating key messages to broader publics. Many nonprofits organize both functions under communications. The executive director/CEO should be involved with both functions, and many boards have marketing committees. All staff and volunteers who do fundraising, public relations, publications and online communications, media relations, and community relations are a part of your marketing team.
- Marketing requires understanding and responding to your "customers" or stakeholders. These vary with each organization but usually include those you serve (clients, members, audience members, volunteers, and others who benefit from your programs), funders (individuals and organizations), and community partners (other nonprofits and branches of government with whom you collaborate).
- Marketing is a two-way process. It requires concerted efforts to figure out what your stakeholders want and need. Build feedback mechanisms into your regular operations to learn from those who use and support your services. These can be informal or formal, short or long, but be sure your key decision-makers monitor them regularly and use them for planning. You can use surveys, focus groups, or informal meetings with stakeholders where they talk and you listen and regular feedback features on websites (guest books, web logs, mini-surveys, online chat rooms, etc.).

Marketing Planning

- Marketing planning should be a key component of your nonprofit's strategic plan. As you create strategies for carrying out your mission, include strategies to *understand*, *communicate*, and *influence* your stakeholders, as well as ways to *change* your programs and communications based on what they tell you.
- A marketing plan should address these questions: Whom are you trying to reach to use and support your services? What do the different stakeholders tell you they want from you? What strategies will you use to tell them what you're doing and how it's working and to convince them to support you financially or otherwise? What communications vehicles are most effective? What are your pricing decisions? What is your timeline? How will you measure your success? To whom and how will you communicate your progress?

Branding and Image Development

- Branding helps express your nonprofit's mission and image so that they make sense to your audiences and they differentiate you from other organizations for support, participation, or attention. It is not merely a logo or catch phrase, although those elements support it.

- Your brand needs to capture why your nonprofit exists and what it does well; convey what you're about in a way people can easily understand; and differentiate your nonprofit from other groups.
- If you go through a marketing planning process, your brand identity will emerge as a part of those explorations and creative thinking. All the key message bearers of your organization -- staff, board members, and volunteers -- should have a firm grasp of your brand identity.

Marketing Your Products

- Marketing professionals compare their organization's products (programs/services) to those of their competition. For example, an organization serving seniors might have competitors in the county health department and with private providers. Ask: *How are your services different from your competitors'? How well do you know what your clients want from you? How successfully do you communicate your brand versus how well do your competitors communicate theirs?*
- Your products can be different things to different stakeholders. For example, your clients may want affordable consumer credit counseling services, while your donors may want to know that you served a certain number of people from bankruptcy. Ask: *Who are the key groups that care about our success, and what do they want and need so they'll continue using/buying our services or supporting us?*
- Vehicles to carry out your marketing plan include surveys and other feedback mechanisms; publications (fundraising materials, newsletters, brochures, annual reports); online communications (websites, e-newsletters, e-blasts, web logs); personal connections and ambassadors (community speaking engagements, working with collaborators, fundraising and "friend-raising" activities); media relations (news releases, opinion articles, providing expert sources for the media); and board marketing committees and/or marketing advisory committees with experts from marketing, public relations, the media, advertising, and members of your stakeholder groups.

Resources

- *All About Marketing*, Free Management Library (www.managementhelp.org/mrktng/mrktng.htm).
- Board and Staff Helpline, a confidential service for organizations that are Members of the N.C. Center for Nonprofits. Members can also access hundreds of Frequently Asked Questions on the website. Visit www.ncnonprofits.org/infocenter.asp.
- Center for Communications and Community Toolbox, UCLA (<http://uclacc.ucla.edu/toolbox>).
- *Communications Toolkit: A Guide to Navigating Communications for the Nonprofit World*, Cause Communications (www.hersheycause.com/clients-cause.php).
- *Marketing the Initiative to Secure Financial Support*, The Community Toolbox (http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/section_1333.htm).
- N.C. Center for Nonprofits (www.ncnonprofits.org). To join, visit www.ncnonprofits.org/joindonateaffiliate.asp, or call 919/790-1555, ext. 100.
- N.C. newspapers, online list (www.ncpress.com/ncpa/newspapersbycity.html).
- *The Nonprofit Times* (www.nptimes.com/enews/tips/marketing.html).
- *Spin Works! A Media Guidebook for Communicating Values and Shaping Opinion*, Robert Bray, The SPIN Project and Independent Media Institute. Available from the N.C. Center for Nonprofits (www.ncnonprofits.org/pdf/publications.pdf).

HandsOn Northwest North Carolina and the N.C. Center for Nonprofits have created a close partnership to provide a seamless continuum of support services to Winston-Salem/Forsyth County nonprofits. These partners work closely together to ensure that services to local nonprofits tap all existing statewide and local resources and avoid duplication and the waste of resources. Visit HandsOn Northwest North Carolina at www.nonprofit-connections.org (or call 336/703-3029) and the N.C. Center for Nonprofits at www.ncnonprofits.org (or call 919/790-1555, ext. 100) to learn more.