

Marketing in the New Economy

The Top 3 Things Every Nonprofit Should Know

1 • Scattershot Marketing Won't Work in This Economy

Survival of the fittest is a term often bandied about during an economic crisis – implying that those businesses that survive these tough economic times will be those who are best equipped, whether it is in terms of financial stability, flexibility, or any number of other factors. When it comes to marketing, I like to call it Survival of the Focused; and if we're talking about nonprofits, it is often a challenge for small to mid-sized nonprofits to have a focus on marketing at all let alone focusing their marketing where it will be the most effective. The results are usually 'scattershot' marketing where you periodically send out marketing materials or conduct marketing activities but no real plan is followed (although you may have one in place) in any consistent way.

In a great economy, you can shoot far and wide (and irregularly) but still happen upon donors who have their "giving radius" also reaching out far and wide. In a not-so-great economy, donors have pulled back their "giving radius" to a tighter inner circle and only items of utmost importance are allowed in that circle. Your scattershot approach will no longer reach those donors; not only that, many nonprofits also pull back their marketing efforts into a smaller radius (or a more sporadic one) – guaranteeing that their marketing efforts will come nowhere near those donor inner circles. So the goal of every nonprofit is not to blame the economy for the reduction in donations, but to understand that they now need to work harder to position their nonprofit and target specific donors in such a way that their nonprofit becomes important enough to be in that donor's inner circle. Those who survive and thrive will be the ones who are focused on retaining and renewing their current donors with a marketing plan that targets specific communications to specific donors and donor groups.



2. Social Media Doesn't Work in a Vacuum

Social media is all about connections and yet most nonprofits are not connecting their social media efforts to their website. Or they are using the social networking sites like Facebook as mini websites, repeating everything from their main site. I like to think of your website as a big planet and everything else just floats around it, forming symbiotic relationships that are different for each satellite. Social media experts also call it the Blog & Outposts model – using the blog as the central planet. The biggest concern I have is that most nonprofits are not effectively utilizing or taking care of their main planet BEFORE they start adding on the satellites. You can't connect with the outer world without having something to say and what you have to say should spring from your website and/or your blog – which means continuously creating news and updates on your site and blog. "Continuously" would be defined as at LEAST monthly, but preferably weekly – if you really want to engage the outside world, start with updating your website, then your blog, and then work your way up to other social media outlets.

3. Credibility is Everything

With the decreasing inner circle or "giving radius" of many donors, nonprofits face more competition than EVER before and need to do everything in their power to stand out from the crowd. One way to do that is to build your credibility through your connections and affiliations, through corporate transparency, and through your brand image. Who you associate with, how much information you provide to the public, and how you present your nonprofit visually can all have a huge impact on your bottom line. All of the credibility-builders identified in the checklist below should be showcased in some way on your website (always) and your other marketing materials (as appropriate).



Credibility Checklist

Associations & Relationships

- Corporate and Foundation Grantors
- United Way affiliation
- Membership organizations for nonprofits
- Membership in professional organizations related to your industry
- BBB Wise Giving Alliance Program
- Charity Navigator Program
- Guidestar Listing
- Authroize.net or other well-known name for your payment gateway

Corporate Transparency (all readily available on your website)

- List of board members and their affiliations
- List of staff members
- Form 990
- IRS Determination letter
- Annual Report
- Full address and contact information
- Program Information including who the program is for, what it costs, and how to sign up

Brand Image

- Professionally designed logo
- Professionally designed website
- Website updated at least once per month
- Cohesive look to all marketing materials

