



At the Crossroads of Marketing and Development

Susan Nelson, Principal, TDC

Providing nonprofit organizations and their
supporters with the business and management
skills they need to carry out their missions



INTRODUCTION

Most people firmly believe that marketing and development are two completely different functions within the organization. The logic goes like this: Marketing is about the message, and development is about the money. As a result, nonprofit managers follow the logic through to its natural conclusion by setting separate goals for each, creating separate budgets for each, and—when there is enough money—hiring separate staff for each.

Yet in TDC's experience, the marketing and development functions share very common goals. They both seek to articulate a message to individuals outside the organization, with the hope of raising overall awareness. They also both aim to inspire individuals to take action, whether it is attending a program, changing their behavior, or making a donation.

Given the congruence of goals, one might expect to see more marketing and development functions working hand-in-hand to bring the organization's message out to the public in a coherent, engaging way. For a variety of reasons—including some nonprofits' reluctance to embrace something so "corporate" as marketing—the value of marketing can be downplayed. In this article, we will make the case for a joint approach that aims to break through the walls creating a common understanding of audiences. In doing so, marketing and development will be better able to see the intersection of their work and identify the right messages and strategies that will propel the entire mission forward.

THE BENEFITS OF ALIGNMENT

Given that so many nonprofits create separate marketing and development functions, it may be helpful to ask: What could an organization expect to achieve by aligning the goals and strategies of their marketing and development functions? What would success look like?

TDC would suggest that in an ideal world, well-aligned marketing and development functions would ensure that the organization:

- **Defines a focused set of key audiences that aligns with the mission.** Many nonprofits have underlying egalitarian principals that would push them to be "all things to all people" and spread their messages and programs far and wide. This

has the unfortunate effect of dispersing marketing and development resources. Organizations that know their audiences – whether they be donors, program participants, partners, volunteers or foundations – can coordinate their development and marketing efforts to build a few strong relationships rather than many weak ones.

- **Clearly meets the needs of its core audiences through its work.** Nonprofits, unlike for-profits, have two kinds of "consumers": Participants who use a nonprofit's programs or services, and donors who pay to help subsidize a social good. From a marketing and development standpoint, the implications of this idea are practical: There must be excellent market research in place to make the case to participants and donors that the nonprofit is meeting a true social need.

Such market research allows the nonprofit to know with greater certainty what its participants need, allowing it to design or update its programs in a way that inspires their loyalty. At the same time, this same market research, presented in a slightly different way, allows the nonprofit to present a compelling argument to donors and funders that the nonprofit is effectively meeting a genuine need.

- **Delivers the same coherent "brand" message to all audiences or consumers.** When marketing and development work in tandem, they consistently articulate the same mission, values and goals to the general public. This means that a program participant and a major donor hear the same core message, which in turn helps to build a broader public understanding of the organization's work.
- **Energizes a core audience through a clear articulation of its mission.** When smart organizations target their resources to the audiences and donors who care most about their mission, they create a core audience that is truly passionate. The members of this core group become the organization's ambassadors, mobilizing their energy and commitment because they believe in the organization's impact.

Of course, the ultimate measure of success is that the organization will improve the base of its user group and its ongoing support, thanks in large part to the dynamic interplay between the work of the marketing and development functions.

KNOW THY AUDIENCE

There is one thread that runs through all of these definitions of success: Audience. By audience, we mean the types of stakeholders with whom an organization typically has relationships, including participants, clients, donors, foundations, volunteers, and partners.

In TDC's experience, many nonprofits sometimes feel that it would be difficult—if not impossible—to get their marketing and development to develop a shared vision of audiences. Yet with the right process, the two functions can create a new model of how to speak to and about audiences with each other. As your organization thinks about trying to better integrate marketing and development functions, consider the following key steps to understanding audiences:

- **Prioritize key audiences:** The best place to begin is simply by listing all of your current and potential audiences. From there, try to distill this list by identifying your *most critical* audiences. Who is necessary to reach from a program perspective? From a fundraising perspective? Is there any overlap between these key audiences? Take the time to articulate *why* it is so important to serve each key audience. If you can't articulate how that audience contributes to your mission, it should give you pause.
- **Create a joint research agenda to define audience needs.** Once you have your short list of audiences, set a joint research agenda that will answer key questions about each audience. This agenda should both gather information about participant needs, and provide data to assess the quality of existing services. Then jointly decide how best to answer these questions through a combination of interviews, focus groups, surveys, or other data collection.
- **Define the ideal relationship between your nonprofit and each audience.** With the research results in hand, collectively define how the organization as a whole will relate to each audience. The answers to your research questions should tell you a lot about what each

audience needs or expects from your organization.

As you define the relationship with each audience, be sure to think about it as a two-way street: How will the organization meet the needs of that audience? How can the audience make a meaningful contribution to the work of your organization? Remember that an individual's contribution to mission might be anything from participating in a program to making a contribution.

- **Develop programs and strategies to build this ideal relationship with each audience.** As you define your relationship with each audience, you will likely find that programmatic action steps easily emerge from the process, such as recommendations from participants to create a new program or end an old one.

These conversations should also yield some interesting new ideas for marketing and development tactics. For example, your research might uncover that many of your program participants have email and want to know about upcoming programs, suggesting the value of a monthly email update.

- **Align the organization's message and tailor it to each audience.** Your organization should strive to identify the consistent message that resonates across all audiences, as well as how to vary these themes for each key audience.

For example, an experiential learning organization might anchor its overall message around the notion that experiential learning offers a fun way for children to make transforming leaps in their personal development. While all communications will contain this message, the organization may tailor it slightly for different audiences: For a kid, it's about the fun; for a parent, it's about personal development; and for the donor, it's about supporting a child's transformation.

- **Find the opportunities for marketing and development to work together to reinforce the organization's message.** With a clearer sense of message and product for each audience, the marketing and development functions naturally start to see the world through each other's eyes.

- Marketing might find new ways to ensure that their promotional efforts generate the right “buzz” that will pave the way for a successful development pitch later in the year.
- Development might start to ask marketing to develop a short presentation or flyer that donors could use to educate their friends about the organization's work.

With time and practice, marketing and development will find that it seems obvious to collaborate on their communications to each key audience. Together, these efforts will allow your organization to transform your relationships with your most important audiences.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

So, how do you begin to put these ideas into practice? Here are a couple of tips on ways to bolster your efforts to bridge the gap between marketing and development functions:

- In smaller nonprofits, consider adding new board members who can bring talent and drive to your marketing and development work. We also encourage you not fall into the trap of thinking that limited budgets mean that you have to pick either development or marketing. Use the internet to identify books, trainings and other resources for marketing on a shoestring budget.
- In larger nonprofits, think about creating incentives for these functions to work together, or appointing a “referee” from inside, such as the COO or CFO, who works with marketing and development managers to guide their efforts to achieve greater integration. Some organizations may want to invest in outside training or support to bolster the skills of key staff members as needed.

It is undoubtedly challenging to craft a new relationship between marketing and development by thinking in new ways about audiences. Still, we believe that the hard work is all worth it in the end. We have seen organizations successfully adopt these approaches in ways that clarified their messages and strengthened their relationships with key audiences. We hope that some of these ideas inspire you to find creative ways to leverage your marketing and development resources. The result can be expanded impact and stronger, more engaged support for all of the excellent work that you do every day.



31 Milk St.
Suite 310
Boston, MA 02109

Tel:
617-728-9151

Fax:
617-728-9138

www.tdcorp.org

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