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From Start to Marketing: An Overview of Creating a Cohesive Marketing Program

Who am I?

Owner or managing partner of a marketing and branding firm for 25 years. Although I work with a broad cross section of client, mostly they are in two areas, biotechnology and philanthropy. Examples include Bayer, Agilent, Chiron among biotech companies and Edgewood Center for Children and Families, Goodwill, Give2Asia, and The Asia Foundation among non-profits. My value to my clients has been to help develop positioning and marketing strategy, and tactics, then implement the program.

Overview

Use of the media is addressing a broader question of how to execute a cohesive marketing program. A marketing program can only be effective if there is first a strong identity and a clear goal that is agreed upon within the organization and the strategy of the marketing program is focused on pushing that identity in the pursuit of well defined goals.

Failure points

- **Lack of an identity**
Different self-descriptions, different foci, random marketing materials. If you can't or don't elucidate who you are, your audience will be confused and your marketing will be relatively ineffective.
- **non-professional presentation – in words and images**
While it's common in non-profits to believe that a polished or professional image puts off the audience, that couldn't be further from the truth. Everyone sees direct mail come to them well designed and well presented selling items for less than ten dollars. That's normal. Poorly designed and less well executed materials stand out as be substandard and that established the quality of your appeal and organization instantly in the mind of your audience.
- **Lack of a marketing strategy**
No definition of goal, and/or multiple goals. A marketing program should have a clear single purpose with perhaps a single secondary intent. Marketing is iterative, it relies upon repetition. A clear and simple message means that your audience gets your point quicker, you seem more focused, your goal more clear, and your organization more effective.
- **Market to your own people.**
Your own board and staff need a clear understanding of the program. This means their causal marketing to their friends stays on point, their clear understanding of the goals of the organization keeps them more involved, and it's easier for them to support the marketing program.
- **Sum**
An effective program of promoting your organization and generating interest and support of your organization requires a clear statement of your organization expressed consistently and professionally in all of your communications materials and presentations.



Beginning

Step 1: Identification

Even though FP is part of a national program, each entity should go through the process of discussion to succinctly describe themselves – the “elevator speech. Value: everyone understands who you are, everyone describes the organization in the same way, not trying to reinvent yourselves and therefore undermining any marketing program. Helps internally and externally.

Step 2: Branding

Step 1 is determining who you are, Step 2 is creating your brand. We have the FP logo, but you make the image your own. This is critical: A branding program is immutable. It is professional and constant. Nothing is done to subvert the identity program; it's never ok to do something else, “just for this one.” Value. professionalism, competency, reliability is the perception of the audience. It establishes an easily recognized presentation. Important to any effective organization; critically important in fundraising.

Donors expect that you will use their donation professionally and reliably. A poor presentation doesn't mean you are judicious with donations, it means you are unprofessional. The larger the donors you are addressing the more important this is. Everyone needs the large donor audience.

You know who you are, and have a strong identity program. Now you can begin marketing.

Step 3: Marketing

First, a question, how many of you look at selling as a model for promotion and fundraising? OK. You need to look deep into this, for everyone involved with any non-profit is deeply involved in selling. For non-profits, the distinction is that you are selling to the buyer an intangible that will be consumed by a third party, in our case, our guests. We sell a service to someone other than the recipient. We are marketing to sell to our clients (donors) social justice for our guests and our competency to deliver this value. What the buyer receives occurs only in the form of information: your marketing of your successes.

The vast majority of non-profits fail or do not thrive because of the failure to grasp the fact that they are selling. You have only to look at the process models of successful non-profits (not an oxymoron) to see this.

All marketing activities for non-profits have the ultimate goal of raising funds. Enlistment of donors relies in part upon success and in part upon the acceptance by known and reliable third parties. These two things are critically intertwined. In all marketing materials, your successes are what show competency and performance. Involvement by government agencies and other NGOs in support of and use of FP show third party acceptance. Quotes and testimonials by local thought leaders and guests are excellent third party validation.

A basic brochure about your organization with out time-dependent information should be the foundation of your marketing program. It should contain your summation of who you are, it should assiduously avoid the phrase "mission statement," it must explain the overview of how the program works (avoid the detail), the benefits that accrue, and the accountability of the guest to the organization. This piece is your general explanation, your value proposition, and your general appeal for donation of dollars and time. You will later develop other pieces that delve more deeply into some of the components as you find the need. Your brochure will be the first main thing that brings up the "spend no money" method of poor response fund raising. You can photocopy the brochure on white paper and you will get some donations. Great. You'll get very good at grant writing. Get the brochure designed professionally and printed in full color professionally, and you are at the beginning of successful fund raising.

Press Releases

Another key area of third party acceptance are notices in publications. Press releases are of indescribable value because they cost nothing and because they establish validation by a relatively objective third party. Any accomplishment or event is cause for a press release. One aside, those not in the general business of marketing often think of PR as being the main vehicle for promotion. PR is a small subset of marketing, a single indispensable tool in the bag.

Format of Press Releases

One significant failure is sending press releases to newspapers or other periodicals in non- or sub-standard format. There is a standard format of press releases. Google it and use that. A key point not made is this: your first paragraph is what will most likely be your press release. Make it clear, concise, and objective. Make it linear: Beginning— middle—end.

The second and third paragraphs give background and color – quotes-- . The last paragraph is fairly static boilerplate "about your organization." ALWAYS use this format. The person to whom you send it will appreciate it. The easier you make it for them to place your PR, the more likely it will get printed; the less they have to edit it, the more likely it will be that what you want to be printed gets printed.

Alternative means of accomplishing the same thing include letters to the editor and guest editorials.

Speak with your newspaper and suggest articles on homelessness in general and how FP is addressing it in particular.

Serendipitous Opportunities?

Be careful with unplanned opportunities. All publicity is NOT good publicity. When opportunities suddenly occur, demand the time to consider how it fits into your program. But this is where a good marketing program shines. If you've been running your program right, you should be able to identify very quickly what portions of your program are appropriate for the sudden opportunity and tune the message for that vehicle. If you can't quickly make the match with your existing

plans, you absolutely shouldn't use the opportunity. If you are sufficiently disconnected from what you are trying to say or the opportunity sufficiently obtuse to the program you are running, you are in too great a risk of getting off point and perhaps creating problems where none would have existed. Also, do not proceed with a serendipitous opportunity unless you can also identify why this vehicle was not already a part of your program and what value the opportunity has to the person or group offering it.

Websites

There is a tremendous amount of misconception and misinformation about the use of websites. Even in the corporate sector with marketing departments and IT departments, there are significant problems.

Some misconceptions

A website will reduce the need for print marketing. Exactly the opposite. You must drive your audience to your website with print. Printers everywhere breathed a sigh of relief once this was realized. Postcards are great for this.

Emblazoning a magnificent mission statement on the home page of your website. Sub problem. Forever. Your home page should change as often as you have news. For those of you who've been around the SF Bay Area for a while may remember, Scoop Nisker said it best, "if you don't like the news, go out and make some of your own." There is always something that can be said to freshen your news page. Get everything you can up there as fast as you can, and get it off after a reasonable length of time, measured in weeks, not months. Have a policy and a process for aging off content to archives that remain available, but are not front page.

Not using a professional to design your website. Three-quarters of the professionals are bad. Amateurs are worse. Someone's aunt's middle-schooler's friend isn't someone upon which to base a key component of your organization's marketing program. When designing your website, do not think about the website before you have all of the content for the website gathered and organized. No one here doesn't know the value of an outline. Outline the content of your website. Edit it to death. The content will design your website, except for the trivial aspect of what it looks like. The vast majority of websites care first about looks and sixthly about content. Totally nuts, but totally true.

Don't Make Me Think

For websites, before you begin one, or before you start to revamp it to make it work for you, buy this small, informative, and funny book: *Don't Make Me Think*. When I first ran across this book, I thought I had written a book without knowing about it. The author, Steve Krug, has gathered the most cogent points about websites and put them in a great little read. You'll have the pleasure of knowing more than most website designers if you read this book. Website by the same name as the book.

So what do I leave you with?

- To be effective, you must get your program organized and stick with it, adjusting, like we do steering our cars down our lane on the road, but staying in the lane. Don't be changing lanes every 50 feet.
- Get and keep the most professional presentation possible, and always try to improve it, in thought, word, and deed. Defend your presentation assiduously.
- Get a marketing professional on your board, get them clear on the purpose, and then let them do their job without interference. Most such people would love the opportunity to be able to design and execute a well-planned program without a client's ill-considered and unfounded input, just so they know what it feels like. Once.

This program, Family Promise, deserves the best of all of us, because it is doing such good work, so successfully helping the homeless while bringing our communities together in the process. How can it get any better than to build on that?

Thank you all for your work and for listening to me.

Jerry Meek
Vice President, Board of Directors

RESOURCES:

Online Donations

groundspring.org
justgive.org

Printing

savoirprint.com
partnerprinting.com