Non-Profit Marketing on a Shoestring Budget

The Shoestring

The budget is tight. The budget is always tight. And advertising and marketing are an afterthought. Don't fret. If this describes your organization, you are a typical non-profit. But there are ways to grow your influence on a shoestring budget.

How? Spend TIME.

Time equals money. If you don't have one, you have to spend the other.

Of course, right now you're saying, "I don't have time, either." That's okay, too.

The four methods here – Word-of-Mouth, Social Media, Networking and Cause Marketing require either just a little time each day or are something you're already doing, but here's a better way to do them.

The Heartstring

To attract people to your cause, you have to go after the heart. Emotions will always be stronger at getting people to act than logic or information.

This is the essence of all persuasion (and branding).

The strongest emotions are Love and Hate. (The true opposite of Love is Indifference)

But since you don't want to turn people off or upset them, always look for the positive emotions in what you do. Focus on the way your organization makes people feel, both the people you help, and the people that help you. Guilt, while powerful, is a real turnoff for most people. Avoid using it, unless you want to associate your cause with guilty feelings.

Create an "elevator message" that tugs positively at the heartstrings and conveys those positive feelings to everyone you meet. That's the first step to building a loyal following.

The Elevator Message

An elevator message is simply who you are and what you do condensed down into fifteen seconds, the amount of time you might have to describe your business while making small talk in an elevator.

The message has to be simple, understandable, and in plain, conversational language.

And it has to be memorable, heartfelt and obvious.

You don't collect food for the needy, you keep our youth from going hungry.

You don't give out scholarships for college, you give young adults a future.

You don't shelter abused women, you give hope and comfort to those who need it.

You don't lend toys for kids with special needs, you expand minds and opportunities for the challenged.

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Word-of-Mouth

To get someone to talk about you, you have to give them something remarkable to talk about.

Every non-profit thinks they have a worthy cause that everyone should be talking about. Unfortunately, there are as many causes as there are people. What will make people talk about your cause?

To garner WOM you have to do one of 4 things:

- Create **Stark Raving Fans** out of your regular supporters by making them *feel special*
- Have an **Over-the-Top Design** element to your cause that everyone *has to see*
- Have **Over-the-Top Interactions** so spectacular they write books about it.
- Have **Over-the-Top Generosity** that brings them back, but this time with their friends.

Make Them Feel Special

You need to cultivate the relationship you have with your supporters the same way you would with your BFF's.

How? By making them feel **Important** and **Special**.

Think about your circle of friends. What makes them your friends? How do you treat them differently than other people you know?

You probably know more about them, you know their likes and dislikes, you share your inner most secrets with them, you know how to make them feel good.

Have you tried to get to know your supporters this way?

Insider Information

One way to make your supporters feel special is to share your secrets with them. Draw them into the inner circle of your organization by telling them a little bit more than you would tell a complete stranger. Give them news or info that no one else has such as behind-the-scenes moves you've made in the political arena, or fund-raising ideas you're preparing to launch, or public information *before* it goes public.

Secrets make us feel special. When someone shares something with us we feel a closer bond with them. Best of all, most of us are lousy at keeping secrets. We want to share them because it feeds our ego and helps us draw people into our own inner circles.

This is especially powerful way to empower your supporters to both feel closer to you, and be more likely to talk about you to others.

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Over-the-Top Customer Service

Pikes Place Fish Market in Seattle has such an incredible level of customer service that it actually becomes a show. Not only do people stop by to shop for seafood, they come for the excitement of the lively interactions between employees and customers, employees and employees, and employees & the fish.

No one leaves unhappy (and few leave empty handed).

In fact, their service is so legendary, a best-selling book and training program was launched about it. If you haven't read the book "FISH!", you should.

How can you change your policies, procedures or attitudes to create a new, fresh experience no other non-profit would dare to do?

Over-the-Top Generosity

Free Dessert: You're out to eat at a fancy restaurant. All night you see beautiful desserts roll by. The dessert menu is on the table, but the prices are high. Your dinner guests suggest maybe splitting one among the table.

Just then the waiter approaches and says, "You guys have been a great table tonight. I'd like to buy all of you your own dessert. What would you like?"

Not only will it be one of the best desserts you ever had, you'll be talking about it for years.

Months later when your friends say, "Where do you wanna go to eat?" You'll say, "How about so-and-so's? The last three times I got a free dessert!"

For the price of sugar and flour, the restaurant is buying some incredible loyalty and creating stark raving fans.

Is there something you could do that would be over-the-top generosity for those who have been so generous to you?

Using Social Media

Facebook is FREE. Twitter is FREE. LinkedIn is FREE. Most Social Media platforms are free for you to use – at least in terms of *money*.

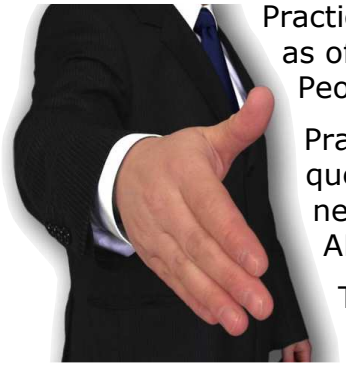
The truth is that everything in life costs either time or money. Social Media costs you time.

It takes time to gather a huge following of people interested in your cause. It takes time to build a relationship with your fan base. It takes time to learn how to post, where to post, what to post. It takes time because you have to post daily if not more often.

But if you don't have the money, spend the time and you will get results. Not right away – that takes time, too. But to paraphrase a Chinese Proverb… The best time to start using Social Media is five years ago. The next best time is today.

Networking Your Way to Increased Traffic

Attend Chamber of Commerce functions, Service Group luncheons, open board meetings, any place that has movers and shakers in the business world.



Practice people's names by using them as often as possible in conversation. People love being known.

Practice ***listening skills*** by asking questions about other people's businesses MORE THAN YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR OWN.

The goal is not to sell yourself – that turns people off – but to make contacts with people who will remember you positively for your attentiveness and friendliness.

But don't spread yourself too thin. At each networking event make it a goal to meet and really get to know only one or two people. Any more than that and you won't have time to make a lasting impression or get to know anyone well.

Cause Marketing

Your organization needs money, but getting people & businesses to give directly to you is tough work.

Why not do a partnership? Contact a business and offer them a win-win-win scenario.

You'll promote their business and encourage your supporters to shop with them on a specific day if they'll donate a portion of the proceeds (5%) to you. They win because they attract new customers that you send them. You win because you get money and publicity for your group. Your supporters win because they get to donate to you just by shopping for what they already need.

Note: if you get a gig like this, pull out all the stops in getting the word out. The more traffic you drive, the more money you make, and the more likely they will want to do it again. Along with earning money, you'll get increased exposure to the community.

we're better together

Action Steps

- Create a positive elevator message—short, concise and to the emotional point.
- Focus all of your mailings and media around this message.
- Network, network, network—make a plan to attend at least one networking event per week, and meet one new person per event.
- Budget a few minutes every day to social media.
- Start planting the seeds for a Cause Marketing event with one of your favorite stores.

With a little time and effort, you'll be attracting people to your organization as if you had a six-figure ad budget. And your board of directors will be singing your praises for being so frugal.