

The Nonprofit Marketing *Manifesto*

Redefining the future of nonprofit
marketing and communications



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FOR FAR TOO LONG, THE NONPROFIT SECTOR HAS THOUGHT **FAR TOO SMALL** WHEN IT COMES TO MARKETING.

Marketing is for businesses that want to sell products and increase shareholder profits, many argue.

It's crass to even discuss using marketing to drive goals as nuanced and complex as those commonly held by social sector organizations - goals like ending hunger, expanding education opportunities and combating the environmental impacts of climate change.

And it's hard to blame them.

After all, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines marketing as "the act or process of selling or purchasing in a market."

Definitions like these lead the uninitiated to declare that marketing is an irrelevant practice for nonprofit organizations where the focus is on social change, not sales.



Those who *are* open to the idea that marketing has a place in the sector often view it as nothing more than a tool for building awareness and raising funds, despite all the fact that money and awareness alone will never be enough to make their missions a reality.

This limited thinking is the norm.

It's been perpetuated by nearly every book ever written on the topic of nonprofit marketing, and by every consultant who tries to force for-profit marketing models to work for nonprofit organizations without modification or adaptation. Funders and donors don't help either. Their insistence on categorizing marketing and communications as "overhead" and evaluating nonprofit performance based solely on ratios of overhead vs. direct service expenses drives disinvestment in marketing and encourages small thinking.

It's even been perpetuated by every definition of marketing in every major dictionary.

BUT YOU SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY.

You know it's time to redefine what marketing means in the nonprofit sector, and you're ready to try this new definition on for size:



Definition: Nonprofit marketing [noun]

Nonprofit marketing comprises the activities, touchpoints and messages that motivate stakeholders to take actions that advance a nonprofit's mission and create sustainable social change.

You know that marketing is so much more than a tool for fundraising and awareness building. You believe that marketing can support every goal your nonprofit sets, from recruiting volunteers, to building partnerships, to diversifying revenue streams, and that when this happens, marketing becomes a tool for advancing your mission and driving social change.

You know an expanded approach to marketing isn't just a nice-to-have.

It is an essential for any nonprofit that wants to fulfill its true potential. And finding new ways to fulfill your true potential for impact as a nonprofit has never been more critical than it is now. Today's social sector organizations are constantly being called upon to do more with less. The social, economic, and political factors that have caused this growing stress on the nonprofit sector are numerous.

For example:

- Cuts to federal and state-run social services are leaving more people hungry, homeless and otherwise unable to meet their basic needs. **This means more people are turning to the nonprofit sector for help.**
- Cuts to government grants have decreased the total pool of money available to nonprofit organizations, while at the same time, new nonprofits are launching at a record pace (nearly 40% growth since the 1990s). **This means more organizations are competing for less money.**
- New tax laws and additional regulations are discouraging charitable giving. **This means the steady stream of private donations many nonprofits have long relied on is likely to begin shrinking.**
- The first wave of digital native Millennial donors are entering the scene with unpredictable giving habits and nearly unlimited options for social investment, from crowdfunding campaigns that support a friend's medical expenses to venture philanthropy funds that support the explosive social enterprise space. **This means an already highly competitive fundraising landscape is becoming even more cutthroat for most nonprofits.**

These challenges are making it harder than ever to sustain a nonprofit organization and continue to advance its mission over the long-term.

Focusing marketing to the domains of raising awareness and raising funds might have been enough to get by in the past, but it's not enough today.

If your nonprofit wants to advance its mission and drive meaningful, measurable change, marketing simply must be integrated into everything you do. **SMALL THINKING MUST BE SQUASHED.**

SO WHERE SHOULD YOU START?

Begin by making these 10 commitments, and ask others at your organization to make them with you.

COMMITMENT #1:

WE WILL RECOGNIZE MARKETING AS A TOOL FOR DRIVING SOCIAL CHANGE.

We will acknowledge that
when leveraged properly by
nonprofits like ours, marketing
is capable of changing the world.



To treat it as anything less would be a disservice to our organizations and to the very causes they serve, from finding a cure for cancer, to eradicating poverty, to improving access for individuals with disabilities. These are visions that cannot be fully realized until marketing contributes to the cause.

When marketing is at its best, and when it is fully integrated into our strategic plans, it makes it possible for our organizations to serve those in need and advocate for policy changes that improve their wellbeing. It makes it possible for us to build valuable networks and make markets work in our favor. It makes it possible for us to inspire evangelists today, sustain our impact tomorrow, and continue to adapt into the future.

We will therefore treat marketing as a core mission support function, not as overhead. We'll stop confining marketing to the realms of raising awareness and raising funds, and integrate it into every single goal we set.

And we'll even go a step further. We'll recognize that marketing can do more than just advance our own organizations' goals - it can change the very behaviors, social norms and societal ills that make our work necessary and relevant in the first place.

COMMITMENT #2:

WE WILL DEVELOP A STRONG BRAND IMAGE AND IDENTITY IN ALIGNMENT WITH OUR MISSION AND VALUES.

We will recognize that our brands are the keys that unlocks our mission and values for our stakeholders, and we will treat them accordingly.



We will stop making our nonprofit status an excuse for our weak, unrecognizable and unremarkable brands. In fact, we'll start believing, and acting on the belief, that our brands should be among the most revered brands in the world, mentioned in the same breath as Amazon, Tesla, Google and Apple. Their budgets may be greater than ours, but our aims are far higher, and our value to society is far greater.

We will start from within. We will develop an internal sense of brand identity rooted in our mission and values.

Then, we will evolve our internal brand identity into a powerful external brand image. The visuals, words and feelings we use to represent our organizations will be the most concise, compelling and readily understood encapsulation of our mission and values available to us, and we will commit our every action and interaction to strengthening that brand image.

COMMITMENT #3:

**WE WILL ALIGN INTERNALLY
AROUND OUR BRAND IMAGE
AND IDENTITY.**

We will recognize that to advance our mission we must build trust, and that to build trust, there must be consistency between how we see ourselves internally, how we act and how we represent ourselves externally.



As we build our brands, our unending goal will be to align internally (leadership, staff, board, and volunteers) around our image and identity and to carry that alignment into every action we take.

We recognize that our organizations cannot achieve their full potential for mission impact if our internal stakeholders present an inconsistent image of who we are and what we stand for. But this does not mean we will force our brand identity and image on our staff or other stakeholders. We will not turn them into robots, parroting the same key messages in the same way over and over again. Instead, we will make the development of our brands a participatory process, giving our internal stakeholders a role in shaping our brands and the license to personalize the way they represent our organizations within a set of guideposts that ensure consistency and cohesion.

We also recognize that our organizations cannot achieve their full potential for mission impact if the way we act is misaligned with who and what we say we are. We therefore build our values into our both our brands and our approaches to talent management, ensuring that our internal teams become the living embodiment of our brands.

COMMITMENT #4:**WE WILL TREAT ALL OF OUR
STAKEHOLDERS AS BRAND
AMBASSADORS.**

We will recognize that every person our organizations interact with has the potential to amplify our brands, our missions and our impact.



We will squash the limiting belief that our organizations should have only one spokesperson. We will empower each of our team members to represent our organizations in a way that is both consistent with our brands and personal to them.

But we will not stop there. We will recognize that every stakeholder our organizations come in contact with, from a first-time donor, to a beneficiary of our services, to a long-standing board member, has the potential to be an ambassador for our brands and our missions. We will recognize that especially in today's 24/7 social media world, people will talk about, and on behalf of, our organizations whether we give them the permission to do so or not. We will provide our diverse range of stakeholders with the tools, training, support and encouragement to become our most powerful brand ambassadors.

COMMITMENT #5:

WE WILL DEVELOP A MARKETING PLAN THAT ALIGNS WITH OUR STRATEGIC PLAN AND RECOGNIZE THAT MARKETING CAN IMPACT EVERY SINGLE ONE OF OUR STRATEGIC GOALS.

We will stop developing our marketing and communications plans in a vacuum, and instead make marketing planning an integral part of strategic planning.



Every time our organizations develop a strategic plan, we will evaluate each goal within the plan to understand how marketing and communications can be used to advance it. We will denounce the idea that marketing can serve only one or two of our nonprofits' strategic goals, and instead, explore innovative ways to integrate the power of marketing into everything we do.

Our marketing plans will be inextricably connected to our strategic plans, with each organization-wide goal and objective linked to a marketing and communications goal and objective. In fact, there will be nothing in our marketing plan that does not address a specific need or aim identified in our strategic plan.

COMMITMENT #6:

WE WILL INVEST PROPERLY IN MARKETING AND VIEW IT AS CORE MISSION SUPPORT, NOT OVERHEAD.

We will stop short-changing marketing in favor of other “more important” functions at our organizations.



After all, we now recognize that marketing is nothing less than an essential tool for driving the social change our organizations seek. To underinvest in marketing is to underinvest in the missions we wake up every day motivated to go to work for. We will therefore invest in developing well-resourced marketing teams, including experienced leadership, effective support staff, and innovative agency and consultant partners capable of realizing the full potential of marketing at our organizations.

We will also allocate a healthy budget to marketing that is capable of supporting the marketing plans we've built in order to address the goals laid out in our strategic plans. We will stop shooting ourselves in the foot by referring to marketing spend as “overhead” and instead, reposition it as a core mission support investment that is vital to advancing our missions and driving the change we seek.

COMMITMENT #7:

WE WILL ENSURE MARKETING IS OVERSEEN AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF OUR ORGANIZATIONS AND CONTRIBUTED TO BY EVERYONE ON OUR TEAMS.

We will give marketing and communications a seat at the leadership table and a spot on the board meeting agenda.

Marketing and communications will be overseen by an experienced leader who reports to our CEO, if not by our CEO herself. We will recognize that marketing is not more or less important than the other executive functions of our organizations, but rather a critical part of every effective leadership team.

But this does not mean that marketing will be siloed into the realm of the executive team or into the marketing and communications department. We will recognize that every single person on our staff contributes to the success or failure of our marketing efforts, and we will give our staff at every level the tools and support they need to make a positive contribution.

COMMITMENT #8:

WE WILL EMPOWER THE COMMUNITIES WE SERVE THROUGH OUR MARKETING, NEVER SACRIFICING THEIR DIGNITY FOR THE SAKE OF OUR GOALS.

We recognize that our marketing efforts are not a success if they marginalize, stereotype or otherwise disempower the people we serve, no matter how well they perform by other metrics.



We will say no to poverty-porn, famine-porn and all of their close cousins, which exploit the conditions of the people we serve in order to generate sympathy and increase support for our causes. We will recognize that this type of marketing does more harm than good, from causing compassion fatigue to perpetuating a sense that the people our organizations serve are helpless and somehow lesser.

Instead, we will say yes to marketing that tells a more complete story about the people and communities we work with, or better yet, allows them to tell their stories themselves. We are smart and strategic enough to develop marketing campaigns that both inspire support and uplift the people we aim to help.

COMMITMENT #9:

**WE WILL USE OUR BRANDS
AND MARKETING TO BUILD
PARTNERSHIPS AND ADVANCE
THE BROADER CAUSES WE'RE
FOCUSED ON.**

We realize we're not an island,
and we behave accordingly.



We know that our own organizations, as innovative as they might be, exist among many others focused on similar goals. We will aim to differentiate ourselves for the purpose of advancing our own aims, but we will never aim to be “the best” or “the only” organizations in our focus areas. Instead, we will build partnerships with other organizations, acknowledging that we’re stronger together than we are alone.

We will recognize that our brands and marketing communications are key assets that make our organizations appealing to potential partners, and we’ll aim to strengthen them accordingly. We’ll also aim to develop brands that work in concert with our partners, neither overshadowing them nor getting lost beneath them.

COMMITMENT #10:

WE WILL MEASURE THE IMPACT OF MARKETING ON OUR MISSIONS AND CONTINUALLY OPTIMIZE OUR EFFORTS TO DRIVE MORE SOCIAL CHANGE.

We are unwilling to accept the notion that it's impossible to measure the impact marketing makes on our missions.



We will do everything we can to develop approaches and tools that help us understand how our marketing efforts are impacting our missions today, and how that impact shifts in the future as our marketing evolves.

We will measure continuously, to the very best of our ability, and make real-time adjustments to our marketing based on what we observe as having the greatest impact on our missions.

DRIVING REAL, MEANINGFUL CHANGE ISN'T GOING TO GET ANY EASIER.

The need for the services nonprofits provide is going to continue to grow. Competition for money and resources from both inside and outside of the sector is going to keep heating up. Shifting demographics and dynamics will call everything we know about what it takes to succeed as a nonprofit into question.

■ In this new world, organizations that prefer to stick to the status quo will struggle just to stay afloat.

The longer they limit the role of marketing and communications in their operations, the more their growth will stagnate. With their focus on sustaining their operations, making a meaningful impact on their mission will sound like a pipe dream.



But the status quo has never been your style. You're ready to start thinking bigger.

You're ready to realize the full potential of marketing so that your organization can realize its full potential to change the world. **Right here, right now, you're committing to do just that.**

Will it be daunting?

Yes.

Will you face confusion, contention and roadblocks from those who want to do things the way they've always been done?

Most likely.

Will you have to constantly communicate and reiterate your vision for what's possible?

You bet.

But when you start to see the benefits of an expanded approach to marketing and communications at your nonprofit, the hard work will be worth it.

More people will know your organization than ever before, and your fundraising revenues will soar, sure, but that will be just the beginning.

You'll become a leading advocate for the causes you champion. You'll develop partnerships you didn't even allow yourself to dream of. You'll introduce new products and services to diversify your revenue streams, and this time, they'll actually take off. You'll start to attract the best talent the market has to offer and build a team so innovative and effective, even Google will be jealous.

Most important of all, you'll be making an even bigger impact on your mission than you ever thought possible.

AND
THAT'S
HOW
YOU'LL
KNOW...

the marketing revolution
was real, and it all started
with you committing to
thinking bigger.

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