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Non-Profit Analysis:
What's your
organization's score?

WHY MARKETING IS NOT A BAD WORD

By Gail S. Bower

Growing an organization, whether it is for-profit or non-profit, is the primary function of marketing. Your organization can create top programs, offer services undeniably necessary among your constituents, preserve, entertain, educate, counsel, or effect change in the most significant ways, but if no one knows about, who cares?

How will constituents know about your programs and services? Why should donors contribute? How will you create new services and new opportunities to grow, to better meet your mission, to better serve your communities?

Sometimes non-profit managers see marketing as an expense, an unnecessary activity. However, they may fail to realize that without marketing, their organization is incapable of making the sort of impact in the world that their mission statements proclaim.

Marketing does come with a cost, but rather than see it as an expense and a luxury, non-profit organizations would be wiser to see it as an investment. And this investment will make the difference in your relevancy in the future, your ability to survive and sustain your operations, and your ability to carry out the mission your founders envisioned when the organization came to being.

The marketing area of an organization typically helps give shape to products or services that meet the needs of customers and that fulfill an organization's mission. Then, the marketing function communicates specific messages about the products/services to customers through vehicles, such as public relations, advertising, promotions, marketing communications, and events. These communications methods help organizations build visibility and awareness, encourage some action, educate, and otherwise create some interaction between the organization and its many audiences.

Marketing is also the innovative side of the organization, the place where new ideas come from. As we all know, change and impermanence are part of life, some say the only reliable aspects of life. What is important for your consumers today may not be next year. Similarly, a need in society developing over the next ten years might indicate an opportunity for an organization. For example, demographers anticipate a surge in the older segment of the population, ages 50+, in the next decade as Baby Boomers age. What services or programs might your organization develop to meet the needs of this group? How might you reach out to them more effectively?

Always begin with your customers, who may be your constituency, donors, audience members, potential board members, volunteers, and other influencers, such as government representatives.

- *What do they need?* Their needs most likely will not be the same. For example, homeless men and women served by a social services agency have very different needs than the donors and funders of that same agency.
- *In what ways would these various audiences best be served through your organizations' services and programs?* How might they each participate? And why?
- *What are the best ways to communicate with these customers?* For example, if your organization serves individuals who battle low literacy levels, written correspondence would not be the best way to reach this group. But public service announcements on the radio or television might work.

You might consider marketing the function of your organization that helps you build a community: cultivating friends and supporters, sharing the news about your programs, achievements, and goals, and actively engaging the hearts and souls of other people who care about the same issues your organization champions, through their own personal needs or because of passions and commitments they have.

Therefore, what purpose does it serve to *not* engage in marketing?

(633 words)

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