

Marketing & the Myth of “We Need a New Idea”

For better results, drill down to the true need behind the “new idea” myth.

By Andy Slipher

One of the biggest challenges in marketing is the constant search for the next idea – the one that’s going to hook and reel in new supporters. It’s the idea that constantly eludes organizations yet, if they find it, will lead to more revenues, long-term relationships, and evergreen income.

Unfortunately, this way of thinking is largely mythology. There’s almost always no missing other. And, if you haven’t figured out the big idea – what’s intrinsically compelling about your organization – you have bigger problems than coming up with the latest gimmick.

Searching for a single elusive idea is like looking through the wrong end of a pair of binoculars. It depends on what’s not familiar or within reach. It calls on disconnected tactics rather than a focused and cohesive strategy. In the end, it manifests itself in the form of one-off and lackluster attempts that yield underwhelming results.

Want to address the true need behind the “new idea” myth? Here are three steps to help you move away from this myopic approach and toward a more holistic way of finding better tactics, more creative pathways, and greater results from your marketing.

Focus First on the Bigger Challenge

Take your attention off the symptoms of the moment – poor donor retention, for example. Instead, ask yourself these questions:

What is the nature of the problem we face?

Is there a larger issue we’re not facing that’s causing our current predicament?

A short-term bump in donor retention, for example, is going to be hard to bring about without a larger understanding of what is causing the symptom of a temporary retention slump. Is it due to seasonality? Is it due to an increase in competition? Or is there a downturn in the market or economy that’s causing people to donate fewer dollars?

Know what you’re up against before you assume that your current predicament can be solved through a single tactical idea. Understand the causal factors contributing to the dynamic that has brought about your present challenge. By understanding the true nature of the problem at hand, you’ll prepare yourself to devise a better and more accurate approach. This new approach can be used to mitigate or overcome the forces that are causing a symptom, such as a short-term dip in donor retention.

Develop a Strategic Plan

Yes, use strategic thinking to develop a plan instead of seeking a single new idea. Will it take longer and require more effort? Most likely, yes. Will it also solve your issue more effectively than a short-term tactic? Definitely.

Strategy is a form of problem-solving. Good strategy clearly identifies the problem and then formulates a larger and binding approach to addressing, head on, the issues you’re facing. In marketing, as in other areas, good strategy demands choice – choosing a path to the exclusion of others so that you can coordinate all your plans to overcome a problem (not just eliminate a symptom). Symptoms can sometimes be relieved through temporary tactics, but rarely will they go away for any length of time or with any great effectiveness without a strategy to deal with their source.

A good strategic plan integrates:

- **your goal** or goals
- **strategy – the binding approach** that will inform all other plans and tactics
- **plans – individual recipes**, each with coordinated activities in accordance with your strategy, that will serve your goals
- **objectives – observable, measurable, time-bound declarations** of how you’ll know you’re fulfilling your plans, sometimes called key performance indicators (KPIs)
- **tactics – the details and activities you’ll undertake** to fulfill your plans and reach your goals.

One of the best things about a strategic plan is that it relates to the challenge at hand. It’s designed to address a problem directly. It serves as a thoughtful, coherent, logical pathway for solving any complex challenge.

“Develop a plan instead of seeking a single new idea.”

“You’ll be shocked at how easily the tactics present themselves.”

Rely on Integrated Tactics

Once you have a strategic marketing plan in place, you’ll be shocked at how much more easily the tactics present themselves. Why? Because a thoughtful strategy serves to focus everyone around a centralized, agreed-upon approach. And because strategy forces choice, it eliminates the need to consider disparate (and sometimes desperate) ideas.

In fact, what you once thought of as wildly innovative ideas will become almost foregone conclusions when a strategy is present. New possibilities present themselves more readily when you and your team have a pathway on which to engage creative energy. Best of all, because such ideas must fall within a strategic pathway, they become, by default, integrated tactics.

Put It All Together

If you use this three-step process of thinking bigger to tackle larger problems, planning your approach, and then integrating ideas around a strategy, you’ll move away from

Move from Strategy to Action

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Key Performance Indicators: Nonprofits Need Them, Too (Vol. 31, No. 2)


How Can Your Board Participate in Strategic Planning? (Vol. 30, No. 2)

A New View of Marketing (Vol. 19, No. 5)

Do You Know Where Your Goals Are? (Vol. 26, No. 5)

Before You Plan Where to Go, Find Out Where You Are (Vol. 29, No. 3)

Strategic Planning on a Budget (Vol. 23, No. 4)

the myth of “We need a new idea.” Instead you’ll find yourself in the wonderful reality of, “We have a strategic approach to overcoming our marketing challenges.” 

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