



Marketing Your Mission

Do you use these three key strategies? If not, you'll have trouble fulfilling your organization's mission.

BY SIRI N. ESPY

We see the effects of marketing every day. Advertising jingles, telemarketers, and “junk mail” often annoy more than they inform, leading to the perception that marketing is the domain of profit-oriented businesses that try to persuade us to buy—whether we need to or not!

Against this backdrop, many nonprofit organizations have developed a bias against marketing and fail to use marketing strategies that can be highly effective in carrying on the organization's work. This bias results from an incomplete understanding of what marketing is and how it can benefit the organization and those it exists to serve.

To be effective, marketing should never be limited to developing promotional strategies to achieve desired results, such as attracting clients or persuading donors to give. These promotional efforts may be part of the marketing plan but never the entire focus. Instead, you need an overall marketing orientation.

What Is a Marketing Orientation?

To develop a true marketing orientation, you must have three elements in place:

1. a way to identify what people want and need

2. a way to connect people with those who can satisfy their wants and needs
3. a focus on understanding and serving the client, customer, or consumer.

These elements translate into three crucial tasks for your organization:

1. Identify Wants and Needs.

First, you need to identify the wants and needs of your target groups. This step ensures that you are offering programs and services of value to your intended consumers. Promotional strategies, no matter how clever or well intended, will not be effective if you have failed to take this first step.

To identify wants and needs, begin with your mission—the definition of why your organization exists and whom it serves. For example, imagine that your mission is to increase adult literacy. Your clients' *needs* would include: help with reading skills, help with learning disabilities, and referrals to other nonprofits for accompanying physical or social problems. Your clients' *wants* would include: caring tutors, convenient scheduling, and courteous treatment on initial contact.

At times, understanding a target group's *wants* can be the key to filling their *needs*. For example, an indigent pregnant teenager needs prenatal care

for her sake and that of the unborn child. However, if care isn't available in a way that suits her wants—close, convenient, friendly, and affordable—she may not take advantage of these services. Therefore, we must often focus on wants before we can move to fill needs.

2. Reach Out and Fill Needs.

Your second task is to reach out to those who want and need what you provide. Whether your organization is seeking to reach indigent clients or wealthy donors, it is essential to tailor the appeal to the population.

Without consumers, funders, volunteers, and other important constituencies, your organization would fail to fulfill its mission and would be targeted for

Siri N. Espy is director of planning and marketing at Shadyside Hospital (5230 Centre Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15232). She has worked in strategic planning and marketing for 15 years, has served as a consultant to nonprofit organizations, and has taught at several colleges. She is the author of Handbook of Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations and Marketing Strategies for Nonprofit Organizations. (See "Selected References".) She may be reached at 412-623-1256.

Nonprofit World • Volume 14, Number 5 September/October 1996
Published by the Society for Nonprofit Organizations
6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, WI 53719 • (800) 424-7367



**A senior center
located up a
steep hill from
the bus stop
won't attract
many visitors.**

may deter potential clients from seeking help.

Ultimately, success in the marketplace must be earned by offering solid products and services that deliver. A weight-loss clinic that doesn't result in

weight loss will have trouble maintaining its market. A program for juvenile offenders that doesn't diminish repeat offenses will eventually earn a negative reputation.

Clever promotion and sales strategies can bring consumers to your door,

extinction. Marketing, in this second step, becomes the mechanism through which you contact these groups, using marketing tools such as advertising, public service announcements, direct mail, posters, and referral networks.

An organization serving low-income teenage mothers, for example, has several important target groups for marketing. One is the client herself. To be effective, the organization must develop promotional strategies that will appeal to the young woman's needs for emotional support, financial security, and help with the demands of parenting. However, strategies to reach funders are equally important, since the target population cannot pay for services. Other key marketing targets include volunteers, schools, and other nonprofits in the service network.

3. Understand and Serve.

Once you have brought customers into contact with your organization, your third vital task is to focus on understanding and serving them. The end goal must be customer satisfaction.

There are many examples of nonprofits that failed to understand the wants and needs of important constituencies and suffered the consequences. Often a seemingly trivial detail is the difference between success and failure. For instance, a senior center located up a steep hill from the bus stop won't attract many visitors. Likewise, a rude receptionist at a counseling center



but only first-class follow-through will yield long-term rewards. Marketing goes beyond simple promotion and extends to all facets of your operations. Your goal should be to offer such excellent service that people will return for additional service and recommend you to others.

How Do You Develop a Marketing Orientation?

Selling or promoting the organization, which many think of as marketing, becomes a middle step in this three-part marketing process of researching wants and needs, reaching out to individuals and groups, and then providing quality service to achieve your organization's mission.

A marketing orientation focuses on the client or customer in everything your organization does. From your customers' first phone call to their final contact, their interests must come first. Everyone

in your organization—your receptionist, board president, executive director, part-time volunteers—must understand the importance of the customer.

Even in this era of diminished funding, you can implement a marketing orientation. It is cost-efficient to do things right the first time and to build consumer-friendliness into all aspects of your organization's services.

In fact, it is costlier *not* to attend to marketing considerations. If you neglect any of these three steps, the result will be underutilization of services and ineffective promotional efforts. Your organization will be unable to fulfill its mission as clients leave in frustration and negative word of mouth works against promotional strategies. Today's sophisticated consumers and overloaded funders reinforce the need to focus on this three-part approach to delivering quality services. Your organization's survival may depend on it. ■

Selected References

Carter, Meredith, "How to Be a Role Model in the Quest for Quality," *Nonprofit World*, September–October 1993.

DeVos, Karen, "Maintaining Support through Marketing," *Nonprofit World*, March–April 1986.

Espy, Siri, *Marketing Strategies for Nonprofit Organizations*.

Foote, Cameron S., *The Fourth Medium: Using Promotional Literature to Market Your Organization*.

Kennedy, Larry, *Quality Management in the Nonprofit World*.

La Barbera, Priscilla Ann, "How Nonprofits Use Marketing—And Ideas for Improvement," *Nonprofit World*, March–April 1991.

Lauer, Larry D., "How to Use a Total Marketing Approach to Renew Your Organization and Make an Impact," *Nonprofit World*, May–June 1995.

Marketing Workbook for Nonprofit Organizations.

Muehrcke, Jill, *Marketing, Leadership Series*.

Topor, Robert S., *Your Personal Guide to Marketing a Nonprofit Organization*.

Vogt, Jean, "Demystifying the Mission Statement," *Nonprofit World*, January–February 1994.

These publications are available through the Society for Nonprofit Organizations' Resource Center. For ordering information, see the Society's *Resource Center Catalog*, included in this issue, or contact the Society at 6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, Wisconsin 53719 (800-424-7367).