

When Two Plus Two Equals More than Four

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Someone once suggested that “*Everything is marketing and marketing is everything.*” While this may ultimately prove true in the organisational scheme of things, what is also decidedly true is that too few non-profits realize that marketing must be seen inside their organisations as more than a functional departmental assignment.

In fact, marketing is more than either a department or an individual assignment. It goes beyond departmental structures and individuals to the very heart of the experience an organisation wants to provide for its constituency.

As such, the goals marketing has for a non-profit’s stakeholders need to be integrated into the entire organisation so that combined, all parts of a non-profit work together to create for a stakeholder an experience that is meaningful, memorable, and as relevant as possible. Unfortunately, memorable experiences from the stakeholder’s point of view do not just happen on their own. They come from a set of contacts, exposures, and touchpoints the stakeholder has with any organisation during the course of their mutual relationship.

Over time, integration’s goal in this environment is to communicate a single incorporated experience from the point of view of the stakeholders associated with your organisation.

How does all of this come about?

The procedure of integration starts with the organisation’s original desire to undertake such an activity and then first resides within its strategic marketing plan. For example: virtually every non-profit has a problem with retaining donors over time. Developing an explicit retention strategy by audience segment for dealing with this problem could become a necessary outgrowth and initial early step in developing marketing integration into your strategy plan. However, the process doesn’t simply stop with an organisation’s desire to integrate all of its operations that interact with various segments of the public into a cohesive sounding message.

The next step has to do with asking “*How do your stakeholders experience your causal product?*” Sticking with the tactical urgency of retaining stakeholders longer, what parts of their experience with your organisation must change in order for them to want to support your cause in the long term?

The tactics that define your strategy must provide the answer to this question. It is necessary to understand as completely as possible where your stakeholders stand in regard to your institution in order for your marketing efforts to appear relevant and meaningful to them. Having knowledge of their values and emotional stance allows you to tactically design touchpoints they can have with your cause in a way that reinforce messages that are important to helping retain them over time (“Your gifts are making a difference – here’s how” etc.).

What are these touchpoints?

Beyond the emotional feelings a stakeholder may have for your institution, there are ordinarily other contact points that occur along a continuum that reflect an agency’s communication across the different transactions he or she may have with the organisation.

These contacts may range from having an encounter with a non-profit’s regional volunteer representative on one end of the spectrum to normative communication, advertising, and solicitation opportunities designed to extend the stakeholder’s experience. Should an organisation implement extensive audience segmentation approaches, the integrated marketing process also speaks to those special relevant contacts that may be made in order to establish customized relationships in which the experience is tailored for the stakeholder.

Obviously in our little example, there are a variety of strategic options available to a non-profit interested in extending the life of its stakeholders. A membership based organisation could concentrate on giving signals to some members that they are about to lapse in their giving. Another strategy might be to concentrate on key donors to ensure that they would stay in the fold. Or, a non-profit could expend its effort towards new donors, trying to create for them a compelling reason to stick around and give again.

Integrated marketing requires that your non-profit defines a concept, regardless of the audience segment it is talking to, that will enrich that segment’s experience with your organisation. By doing this, the organisational concept of branding then flows from the effort to make the stakeholder’s experience more meaningful and relevant. *The popular notion of “brand” becomes a litmus test in the non-profit’s desire to deliver a wonderful experience for the stakeholder.*

Conclusion

An obvious strength of integrated marketing is that the experience a stakeholder has with your non-profit does not necessarily have to be tied explicitly to the action of donating, purchasing a product, or volunteering.

Experiences can be created outside of direct actions with your cause. Your website can be a touchpoint for a stakeholder by telling stories of how individuals are involved with your organisation. Advertising of all forms can likewise communicate the same concept to stakeholders. Presentations the stakeholder may hear, or events they may attend can have the same effect. Likewise, viral marketing can reinforce broad sentiments that are central to your system of values.

The challenge to your marketing programme today is the need to integrate and coordinate literally hundreds of points of contact you have with your stakeholders, those points of contacts you control and those you don't, in order to give them a sense that the values they hold, the issues they would like to see resolved, are being well handled by your organisation.

Marketing integration must be seen as:

1. A philosophy your organisation holds to.
2. As something more than one department or function – it must be seen as cross-functional and vital to the comprehensive communication efforts of the organisation.

To learn more about marketplace dynamics and their effect on your marketing and fundraising strategies, read Barry's new book *Successful Marketing Strategies for Nonprofit Organisations*.

For assistance with developing an integrated marketing strategy contact us at: info@mconkey-johnston.co.uk

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