



7 STRATEGIES FOR MARKETING SUCCESS IN 2021



BRAND INSPIRATION

WAKE UP YOUR MARKETING

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Let's face reality. 2020 was horrible on way too many levels. Unfortunately, real life has no magical reset button that we can hit on January 1, 2021, and many of the same circumstances that we faced in 2020 are rolling into the New Year. That means that unless your organization takes proactive steps NOW, you may find yourself repeating the same actions - with the same results.

There are ways to turn the fundraising obstacles we are all facing into opportunities through intelligent marketing that truly connects with the donors you need to reach. Here's how to do just that.

"Building a brand today demands a new way of thinking."

– Michael Desroches

1 NAMING THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM.



In virtually every non-profit leadership textbook we have ever had the misfortune of wading through, one maxim is repeated over and over again: When times are tough, don't stop marketing. Yet in many boardrooms or executive director's offices, non-profit leaders face an agonizing decision when staring at falling donations: Eliminate staff, reduce expenses dramatically, or cut overhead by slashing marketing.

When faced with that decision, they generally slash marketing.

Unfortunately, that could be self-defeating.

The reality is that establishing a brand requires marketing. That's even more true in today's cluttered and hyper-connected media environment. If you stop marketing, two things happen. **1. Your organization falls off your clients' radar completely. 2. You will spend far more money and time trying to reestablish your brand after the crisis has passed than if you had maintained some strategic marketing throughout the crisis.**

While the ways in which you market during and post-COVID will certainly change, and the amount that you allocate for marketing might have to flex, ceasing marketing is a sure-fire way to ensure that your donors forget you exist. So it's time to get strategic.

"Marketing is the lifeblood of your business. If you cut it off, everything else will wither."

– Michael Desroches





2 HOW DO YOU EAT AN ELEPHANT?

While we know that you can't stop marketing, the pandemic and its very real economic aftermath mean that your organization has to market in new ways. The most effective methods are laser-focused on generating the results you need – even if they are not the results you think you want.

Think about it. In the not-too-distant past, an education non-profit could invest in a heartfelt local magazine ad and, if its messaging was right, predictably attract new donors. Today, that magazine would be sitting in the garage in a quarantine basket for 2 weeks before it even enters your potential donor's house.

Instead of marketing to the masses, successful non-profits are marketing what they do to micro audiences who have a passion for their mission at that exact moment, or getting on the radar of those who soon will. How? That education non-profit now invests a fraction of its previous media spend on targeted social media and Google ads that reach potential donors as they are shopping for school supplies for their own children or grandchildren. The volume of people reached will be fewer, but the quality of each lead will be higher. What decision-makers need to understand is that the metrics they should be using to gauge the success of their marketing have evolved.

This isn't new – this is the marketing reality that the business world has faced for years. However, the pandemic has exacerbated it and pushed it even more into the non-profit sector. Organizations who were "getting by" with old-fashioned tactics are waking up to the reality that they have to evolve – one innovative micro-marketing bite at a time.

"A little progress every day adds up to big results."

– Satya

3 ONE SIZE STILL DOES NOT FIT ALL.



“I’m not offended by all the dumb blonde jokes because I know I’m not dumb - and I’m not blonde either.”

— Dolly Parton

What works in New York City probably won’t play well in Mississippi. While most organizations understand that messaging has to change to meet diverse markets, many don’t grasp how quickly – and how widely – segments are diverging. Let’s tackle geography first.

If you are a local organization whose donor base primarily comes from within 25 miles, count yourself fortunate. That’s because if you are connected to your community, you should be able to take the pulse of how your donors think, what they are feeling, and their willingness to give during the current stage of the pandemic.

Depending on where you are in the country, you could be enduring another lockdown and have donors who are already digging deep amid economic uncertainties, or you could be functioning almost as usual with donors who are happy to give and likely to toss a laptop out the window at the very mention of yet another teleconference instead of an in-person event.

Understanding exactly where the majority of your donors fall on that spectrum is critical to everything from whether you grab a coffee to talk about a major gift or whether the event you are planning for the third quarter goes virtual to if the smiling model in your summer giving campaign is wearing a face mask.

If your audience is regional or national, you must be aware of where the majority of your potential donors are so that your messaging is appropriate.

Finally, don’t forget to layer personal preferences into the mix and offer alternatives for those whose comfort levels are outside the norm. And yes, subtly mentioning them in your marketing – think a line in a social media post – is critical to your non-profit being perceived as being in touch.



4 TO CAUSE MARKET – OR NOT.




Speaking of being in touch, the harsh reality is that our nation – and your donors – are split along many very divisive and highly combustible lines right now. Understanding both your potential audience’s biases and what your organization’s tolerance for controversy is will be crucial to navigating these uncharted waters.

Some organizations may have a very distinct, monolithic donor base and opt to appeal to it with pointed messaging that resonates. In some cases, this approach can build connectivity that lasts long after the pandemic, this election, or social unrest. Other, more diverse non-profits may choose to steer far clear of anything that could be perceived as the least bit controversial.

In either case, you will offend someone.

Social media feeds are filled with stories of who offended whom with something they said, something they should have said but didn’t, a cause they embraced or one they failed to promote. **One thing that will carry your organization through anything short of a real misstep is earned goodwill.** If you realize that a post, an ad, a message or anything else was inadvertently offensive, sincerely apologize and then follow it up with a genuinely productive action.



“There is nothing more valuable than a spotless reputation.”
- William Shakespeare



5 CHANGE IS THE ONLY CONSTANT.

In the past, we could design strategic marketing appeals that had three- or even five-year time horizons. Today, we advocate planning for the quarter with a strategic overview that stretches out to 2022.

The reality is that no one really knows what 2021 will bring – in terms of the virus or its economic and political fallout. Experts have educated guesses, but those are as diverse as the pundits who repeat them. A flexible plan that has an eye toward your long-term goals but adjusts in real time to changing circumstances will be critical as this year unfolds. And it just makes fiscal sense. **A short-term plan allows you to strategically shift resources to campaigns and tactics that are working and away from those that are not.**

“The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new.”

- Socrates

6

INNOVATE TO GROW.



We've purposely focused on broad strategies for our first five points without delving into the tactics you need to execute them. That's because you need a map of where you are headed before you determine what type of vehicle will get you there most efficiently. In the world of fundraising today, there are almost as many tools as there are variations of new car models.

You'll hear buzzwords like personalization, social listening, user-generated content and conversational marketing being thrown around like the fake Holy Grails in that iconic scene from Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade. While choosing the incorrect one probably won't result in instant death, much like the movie scene, it could age your organization's appearance prematurely.

Staying up to date on what's resonating with your base is essential – and the only thing we can promise is that it will change. Backlash against social media has launched a plethora of new platforms, and which ones will endure remains to be seen. New technologies launching after the demise of marketing's holy grail – the cookie – should lead to levels of personalization that we haven't even imagined, and how you successfully interact with donors once you have that knowledge will certainly evolve.

The best way to navigate these waters for many small to medium-sized non-profits may be to outsource fundraising and marketing to an agency that fully understands what is and is not important. That will allow your people to focus their energies on that they do best – serving your clients!

“Market like the year you are in!”
- Gary Vaynerchuck



7 GET FOUND.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter how phenomenal your message is and how well it's targeted if no one sees your messaging. Getting found and remaining visible is more critical than ever in today's hyper-connected and ever-evolving world. To do that effectively, your team needs to go back to that elephant we started with and determine how to best attack it.

Today, non-profit fundraising is a "both and" instead of an "either or" proposition. In the past, EDs faced decisions like channeling appeal marketing budgets into either print or broadcast. In 2021, it's more like both SEO and Google AdWords, and traditional and emerging social media, and geofencing, and location-based text messaging, and... you get the idea.

It may sound counterproductive, but less might really be more – at least as you are building your base and if you have limited funds in this stage of the pandemic. Unless, of course, your organization's marketing budget is the size of Samsung's \$2.4 billion annual investment, then by all means, dive into all of them! But for the rest of us, we recommend a more measured approach. Just as your non-profit focuses on a few key areas where you can make a difference and reaches for new opportunities as they arrive, your appeals should do likewise. Go old school. First determine who you need to reach, where they spend their time, and what they need to hear to encourage them to give. Then focus resources on those platforms and strategies that meet potential donors where they are now and develop those where you feel they are likely to be in the future.

Then go all in. Invest in the SEO terms that you need to corner the market on. Be a thought leader on the topics your donors want to understand. Create viral videos that endear your channels to your audience.

You have the map and the keys – the road to 2021 is wide open ahead of you and will be what you make of it.

Need help executing? We'll take this opportunity to make a shameless plug that we are here to understand your organization, determine where you need to go, and help you get there. #marketing – it's what we do, so you don't have to.





Michael Desroches, Marketing & Creative Director



Michael's diverse marketing and consulting background encompasses 20+ years and successfully bridges the disparate worlds of corporate and non-profit communications. But what's really unique is how he uses his decades of varied experience to help his clients uncover their most remarkable traits and translate them into creative marketing that genuinely connects with the audiences they most need to reach. Visit our gallery to see a small sampling of Michael's work with non-profit organizations and corporate brands.

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Brand Inspiration

Brand Inspiration is a dynamic marketing, communications, public relations and design agency specializing in non-profit organizations and small to mid-sized businesses. Based in Woodbridge, CT, and serving organizations across the nation, Brand Inspiration was built on the belief that every entity – every organization, every business, and every individual – has at least one thing they do better than anyone else. From strategy and planning to design and content across online and offline channels, Michael and his team are experts at helping organizations communicate their unique stories and personalities in a way that inspires donors to give, clients to buy, and people to trust. This unique combination of holistic marketing strategy, fiercely innovative creative direction, public relations and non-profit expertise is simply unparalleled. Separately and together, our team members have completed branding and marketing campaigns, cases for support, website design and development, public relations campaigns, social media campaigns, videography, fundraising campaigns and email marketing campaigns for diverse regional and national non-profit clients over the past three decades.

