

## Starting with Odds and Ends, and Creating Strategic Marketing

### “Begin with the End in Mind”

How are you doing in writing an actionable marketing plan?

Many people, and the organizations they work for, find it hard to create a single and unified marketing strategy to build audiences out of the current set of odds and ends – tasks that appear random – that define their approach to PR and advertising.

It is not at all unusual for organizations to have fallen into a pattern of parsing out various tasks—i.e., “do the monthly newsletter, update the calendar, do the annual renewal campaign”—and have that add up to “marketing.” When marketing is looked at like this, it is just a laundry list of non-strategic tasks. It is treading water, and everyone involved knows there is great difficulty accomplishing goals this way.

Beginning with the end in mind helps unify these seemingly disparate elements into a coherent plan. Let’s go through the process:

Here are some of the “end in mind” questions you should have answers to as you sit down to

write your marketing plan:

1. **What size audience do you want?** You can factor this by the year—i.e., “we want 70,000 people through the door.” Or you can decide, “We need to have 300 subscribers in place within two years.” Or, your definition of size may be, “We need to increase our donor base and member base by 2,000.” These numbers determine your prospecting strategies, the size of prospect marketing direct mailings, newsletter and other solicitations.
2. **What do you want that audience to be like?** “We want double the number of general attenders who are members.” Or, “We want a far more diverse audience.” Or, “We want to make sure we have deep affiliation from four clusters that we know are important to our future.” As you can see, you may have more than one set of descriptions on your plate. Your plan will have to show you and your organization how you will accomplish all of the desired “ends in mind.”



3. **What image do you want, and how will you back this with reality?** Do you want an image of “the best in the region?” Do you want your image to evolve from “community playhouse” to “outstanding regional professional theater,” and have that be how you are seen by your target audience in three years? Do you want to be seen as “young, hip, trendy” compared to a current image of “older, staid, traditional?” Do you want to evolve from “amateur” in image to “professional and great” in image? Again, your desired end image needs to be on the table to help you devise the right strategies to get there. Articulating this will guide your investment in marketing and communications materials, follow-through with audience and overall positioning of your organization.
4. **Let’s think about the geography you want to serve at the end of your three- or five-year plan.** Do you want deep market penetration into an exurban or nearby smaller community region? Do you think you have opportunities to expand there? If you can define this, your strategies will be easy to line up, either through communications, prospecting, satellite locations, outreach or any of the other tools you have in hand.
5. **What kind of relationship do you want to have with your audience, be they students, families, general admission attenders, members, volunteers or subscribers?** How do you want them to feel about your organization? Do you want them to be more actively involved as “owners?” Do you want them to feel they are truly getting something special back from your organization? Do you want them to be ready to “sell” your organization for you? Answering these questions will help you determine what kind of benefits you need to provide, the communications and personal touch you need to give, the news you provide in your newsletters, e-mails and other communications, and even how you structure memberships and other affiliate groups.
6. **How can you continuously use market data to strengthen, streamline, and target your audience and donor development?** You have a baseline of data now. How will you systematize what you do to constantly have fresh data? You might answer this by deciding that within three years you want to have the ability to capture the names, addresses and e-mails of all visitors or all ticket buyers. You might answer this by showing how you plan to use exit or visitor surveys to build your database. You might have a strategy to collect all audience or attender e-mails. The “end” here is the ability, within three years, to do very targeted, efficient and less costly communications and marketing.
7. **What kind of marketing infrastructure do you want to have in three years?** What systems, “departmental structure” or linked tasks do you believe should be in place, so that in the following three-year plan you can really zoom? What data systems should be in place? Should you be looking at rearranging staff teams so that customer service, box office, front of house, visitor services, volunteers, group sales or bookings and others are all working as a team? How should marketing and development be better meshed, so it is a seamless, strong and unified approach to institutional development? How should the board be organized, with audience development and donor development



teams that are well linked and share the same overarching institutional goals? Having the answers to these questions on the table before you will make writing your marketing plan—and implementing it day by day, year by year—much easier. You'll be able to set priorities, link all those disparate tasks that currently seem to eat up all your time without getting you anywhere, and develop a

sound marketing budget and staff/personnel plan. You'll be able to give these desired "ends" to your board audience development committee, to help them strategize, monitor, and work with you. And you'll be able to edit what you do, to say "no" when somebody says "let's do X!" and you know it is a diversion that won't get you to the desired "end."

## Words to Live By

Jay Conrad Levinson's wonderful book *Guerrilla Marketing* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998) should be on your bookshelf. It's a classic, and there is no arts or cultural organization in America—well, maybe a couple—that can afford to ignore the basics of guerrilla marketing.

Here's what Levinson says about your marketing plan:

*"When you do develop your marketing plan, don't give it your stamp of approval until you are ready to commit yourself to it. Don't approve it until you are ready to invest in it with a realistic expectation of return. And don't implement it until you are prepared to stick with it consistently. This isn't to say that you can't make changes. Of course you can. But make changes while remaining constant. Your tasks:*

*Make prospects **confident** in you (your organization.)  
Your secret weapon: **commitment** to your plan.  
Your personality: **patience**.  
Your marketing tools: an **assortment** of at least twenty weapons.  
Your format: **consistency**.  
Your finances: some **wisely invested in marketing**.*

*Your energy: evident prior to and **subsequent to** the sale.*

*Your operations (as visible to your audience): the essence of **convenience**.*

*Your creative message: it **always amazes** readers.*

*Your unglamorous but extremely profitable chore: measurement of **who your customers are** and where the heck they heard of you.*

*Your relationship with your audience: **involvement** is the only word for it.*

*Your relationship with other (cultural organizations): you're **dependent on each other** for mutual profitability.*

*Your arsenal for marketing: **brimming with easy to use technology**.*

Let's look at some of these points, particularly the highlighted words:

Your marketing needs to inspire confidence. That means your organization has to deliver what you promise, and the promise—your marketing—has to be as professional and powerful as you can make it. There are endless cases where prospects look at a brochure that your organization might have thought was a money-saver and said "humph, amateur! Why would I GO?" To reach your desired



marketing “end,” you must **invest to inspire confidence**.

Let’s look at patience and consistency. Say you have invested in annuities or blue chip stocks. **Do you expect that you are launching this investment for a one-year pay-back? Or do you expect investment to be for the long term?** Consider your marketing the same way.

Think about amazing your audience and prospects. Too often marketing appears tired, that it is the duty of an organization’s marketing to inform rather than amaze and involve. Marketers all know better than this, but the grind of institutional communications often gets tiring, and the result is anything but amazing. **Strive to always amaze.**

Have easy to use technology, and multiple tools at hand. The smaller and tighter the budget, and related deadlines and needs to reach your “end” the more important it is to have technology at hand that makes it possible. E-mail communications with audience and members is vital as a way to take that old “members newsletter” into a cost effective, rapid turn around. Look at this newsletter. Once, we had to produce and mail these—a costly and labor-intensive mechanism. Now, we produce them in an hour, and broadcast them strategically to you. Your organization can do the same. **Think creatively.**

