

# Marketing Nonprofits

By Kathryn Roy

Marketing in nonprofits often has a stealth role. Some nonprofit organizations don't have any staff explicitly assigned to marketing. Instead, marketing can fly under the cover of fund-raising, member services, or outreach. As a result, many nonprofit employees are involved with marketing even when they don't realize it. Because their nominal roles don't require training in marketing, it is not unusual to find that staff in an organization lacking a common vocabulary and framework to discuss and resolve marketing issues.

This article outlines the basics of marketing for nonprofits and highlights how nonprofits should approach marketing with their special circumstances in mind. Because larger nonprofits have access to sophisticated marketing resources, this article is slanted towards smaller nonprofits.

In some nonprofits, the funding sources and the service recipients are distinct groups. This article assumes it is far easier to find service recipients than funding sources and therefore the emphasis of marketing is on the funding sources. In nonprofits where the beneficiaries and the donors are one and the same, this is not an issue.

Some nonprofits secure a significant fraction of their funding from government organizations. While government grants are not a focus of this article, the parts about explaining what you do and why your organization is superior at delivering those services is relevant.

This article starts by defining key terms, moves into explaining the basic processes needed to develop effective marketing, and concludes with pointers around the advanced topics of messaging and branding.

## Key terms

Successful marketing is about visibility and differentiation. If you do an effective job with marketing, then you benefit by standing out from the crowd in a way that is meaningful to your target audience. As a nonprofit, that can translate into successful fundraising either through members, donors, or both.

Some use the terms marketing, positioning, and branding interchangeably. When someone says "we rebranded our organization" they often mean that they rethought their positioning – and maybe even their strategy – then changed their marketing messages, graphic look, and programs accordingly.

**Marketing** is the set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to members and donors and for managing relationships with these individuals in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders. Positioning, segmenting, delivering marketing programs, and branding are all components of marketing.

**Positioning** is the foundation for marketing: it describes the raw material you have to build marketing messages and programs with. Positioning lays out what services your organization provides, who you provide them to, and how your organization is different from related organizations.

How does positioning differ from organization mission or strategy? An organization mission statement identifies the lofty goals of the organization, such as eliminate homelessness or reduce hunger or protect wildlife. Unlike positioning, a mission statement doesn't describe the specific initiatives the organization will undertake to tackle the mission or how it will be more effective than other organizations with the same mission. Strategy sits between the organization mission

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statement and positioning. It outlines how the nonprofit organization will organize itself to raise funds and deliver services. As part of the strategic marketing exercise, choices are made regarding which initiatives the organization will and won't undertake based on its ability to attract funding and its resultant scale and capabilities.<sup>1</sup>

**Segmentation** is how you narrow your focus and make the most of your limited marketing budget. Segmentation is complicated for nonprofits because it often needs to be done at two levels:

- For the service recipients

Nonprofits can rarely serve the entire population in need, so they have to concentrate on a specific population. How they delimit that population affects almost every element of their operations and budget.

- For the donors

There is a distinct exercise needed to segment those you approach for funding. Even if you have just one segment, the exercise of segmentation differentiates between who you will approach (and invest money reaching) and who you won't bother approaching. When you have multiple segments, you may craft different messages for the different segments and use different vehicles to reach them. For many nonprofits, their funding populations are divided into members and donors, although finer segmentation can also improve results.

**Branding** is a marketing tool that leverages your key difference and visibility to give you an additional boost. Not every organization has a brand and not every organization with a brand benefits from it. A nonprofit brand is an organization name that comes to mind when someone thinks, "I want to donate to an organization that does X."

Think of a brand being like a speed-dial number on your target prospect's cell phone. People will only assign a limited number of speed dial numbers and they will prioritize who they assign these scarce speed dial numbers to. For a potential member or donor to allocate a "speed dial number" to your organization (assign your organization brand status) they need to know about you, care about what you do, and believe you are more effective than other alternatives.

## Where to begin?

While positioning is the foundation for all marketing initiatives, positioning must be based on the nonprofit organizational strategy. In terms of sequence then, first make sure your organization is secure in its strategy. When you are confident that you know where your organization is headed, it is time to nail your positioning and segmentation. When your positioning and segmentation are clear, you can then think about marketing programs, messages, and branding.

To use another analogy, branding is also like a fly-wheel: it takes considerable investment of effort to see any result, but once in motion, much less effort is required to maintain momentum. The drawback is that it is hard to change the momentum. Organizations can change strategy and positioning but be hamstrung with a brand that no longer reflects their new direction. After school programs may be a hot area for funding, but if you are known for sheltering the homeless, it may take considerable time, effort, and expense to have people perceive you as an after school program provider. Clearly, it is important to nail your positioning before investing in branding to avoid conflict and wasted investment.

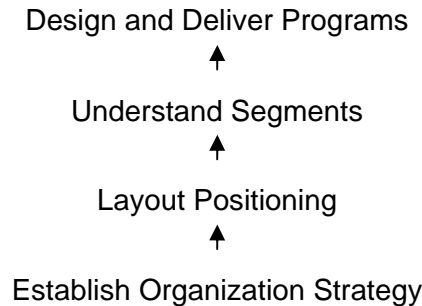
Traditionally, marketing professionals recommended STP (Segment, Target, and Position) as the ideal sequence of tasks. Determine how your target audience divides into segments with common

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<sup>1</sup> A March 2004 HBR article by V. Kasturi Rangan, "Lofty Missions, Down-to-Earth-Plans" has a helpful framework for thinking through and implementing your organization's strategy.

concerns, target the optimal segments, and then structure the appropriate positioning for each. More recently, some marketing professionals have rethought this approach. In some cases, it is best to focus on positioning by determining which opportunities are available given related offerings from other organizations, and then determine which segments are ideal for this positioning. It is likely that whichever approach you choose, you will cycle through positioning and segmentation a few times.

It is misleading to suggest that the process of marketing is neat and linear. As you learn more about your competition and prospects, invariably you will revise the work of previous steps. However, the following sequence is representative of the order in which you need to tackle marketing processes.



You'll notice the absence of branding in this picture. Branding is something to work on after you have the basics in hand. For that reason, we return to branding after discussing the basic steps of marketing.

## Positioning

### HOW DO YOU DECIDE ON POSITIONING?

By answering five questions you can establish the positioning of your nonprofit organization. This is where a key difference between for- and not-for-profit organizations arises. Let's look at the difference between positioning questions for a commercial organization and for a nonprofit organization.

Commercial Organization	Nonprofit Organization
What service or services do you provide to <b>customers</b> ?	What service or services do you provide to <b>recipients</b> ?
Whom do you provide it to?	Whom do you provide it to?
What is needed by the population you serve?	What is needed by the population you serve?
What alternatives do <b>customers</b> have?	What alternatives do <b>members and donors</b> have?
How are you different from the alternatives for <b>customers</b> ? (What unique benefit is derived from your services?)	How are you different from the alternatives for <b>donors and members</b> ? (What unique benefit is derived from your services?)

For a commercial organization, the user and buyer are one and the same. For many nonprofit organizations, the people providing the funding and the people using the service may be completely separate groups.

These are fairly straightforward questions, so it's interesting that when executive staff or board members at a nonprofit answer them, unanimous responses are a rarity. People trip up on the difference between their mission and their programs. Those who frequently pitch to donors may have drilled themselves into believing that there are no comparable competitors. People working with nonprofits will say: "competition is for commercial concerns, not nonprofits!" But if your potential donors have alternative charities to spend their funds on, you have competition.

When you go through this exercise, go through it dispassionately and honestly. Pretend you are an outsider who just spent a day talking to members, donors, and the people you serve about the programs you provide. What would they say? Be as specific as possible. When you answer the last question, answer it from the donor's perspective: why should they fund you rather than competing organizations.

**A POSITIONING EXAMPLE**

Let's take Mass Audubon as an example to understand better positioning. You can probably answer the first three positioning questions just from this excerpt from their web site:

"The Massachusetts Audubon Society is the largest conservation organization in New England, concentrating its efforts on protecting the nature of Massachusetts for people and wildlife. Mass Audubon protects more than 30,000 acres of conservation land, conducts educational programs for 250,000 children and adults annually, and advocates for sound environmental policies at the local, state, and federal levels. Established in 1896 and supported by 65,000 member households, Mass Audubon maintains 43 wildlife sanctuaries that are open to the public and serve as the base for its conservation, education, and advocacy work across the state."

<b>Positioning for Mass Audubon</b>	
<b>Question</b>	<b>Response</b>
What service or services do you provide to recipients?	Conserve land Provide environmental education Advocate for government policy
Whom do you provide it to?	People living in Massachusetts who enjoy viewing wildlife
What is needed by the population you serve?	Local places to observe and appreciate wildlife Advice on how to protect wildlife in their area
What alternatives do members and donors have?	Dozens of groups in Massachusetts for land conservation The New England Aquarium for environmental education The Appalachian Mountain Club for government advocacy.
How are you different from the alternatives? (What unique benefit is derived from your services?)	Focus on birds and Massachusetts Larger (more efficient) than many local preservation groups (Members can save considerably when visiting properties.)

## Segmentation

### WHAT'S IN IT FOR OUR ORGANIZATION?

Segmentation is the answer to how you manage a limited budget and limited staff resources. If you can't afford to reach out to all possible donors and members, you need to determine which groups you should focus on and how best to move each group to action. Even if you have one target audience – donors – which people do you chase first? Is it best to focus on a specific geography or a specific profession? How do you circumscribe the people you approach to get the highest return on your investment? How do you identify the people who will not respond no matter what you do? Eliminating expense related to these people frees up funds to pursue more fertile groups. Careful thinking about segmentation is the key to maximizing the return of your marketing budget.

Remember that you are ranking segments by Income – Expense. That is, you want to measure how much you can attract in funding minus the expense of convincing these folks to donate.

### WHAT IS THE RIGHT NUMBER OF SEGMENTS?

Whenever you have distinct groups that value different characteristics of your organization you probably need to separate them into segments. The key questions to ask are:

- Do we have groups that value different characteristics of our organization?
- Do we have means to reach and interact separately with these different segments?

If you don't have the means to target messages by segments, even when you know that they care about different aspects of your organization, there is no need to further subdivide the target audience at present; in this case, target your message for the more promising segment even if the message is distributed to a mix of the two segments.. However, don't lose track of the difference; it is possible that in the future you will find the means to interact separately with the different groups.

Nonprofits with both members and donors instantly have two segments. Members pay the standard membership fee and they typically, but not always, use the organization's services. Donors are people who contribute above the membership fee level; they may use the organization's services, but may be less likely than members to do so. Nonprofits that rely on volunteers may need to treat them as a special segment: people with time, but perhaps not funds to donate.

Mass Audubon is largely funded by members. People join mainly to get free access to properties. Others join but never visit the properties because they want to protect terrain for birds and other wildlife that they can appreciate, whether in their own neighborhood or around Massachusetts. People may continue to be a member after they stop visiting properties because of the developed attachment. Mass Audubon converts some members into significant donors over time. Their primary audience is people in Massachusetts who have some interest in protecting wildlife or enjoying local properties.

Some nonprofits, however, do not have a member-based fundraising strategy. Many social service nonprofits raise funds from wealthy donors and expend the funds providing services to people with more limited means. In these cases, the audience is the donors. What about the service recipients? Our assumption is that it is easier to find people who want your services than it is to find people to pay for them. Once again, there are exceptions to the rule. Battered women, for example, may need to be convinced to come in for assistance.

Identifying your most promising segments is great. So is identifying the least promising segments, for two reasons. First, you want to make sure you avoid wasting money on them. Second, you periodically need to test assumptions. Have you too broadly categorized people in that category? Is there a subgroup that is more promising?

While positioning is an exercise that hopefully you do once and leverage the results for years, segmentation is something you constantly revisit as you learn new things about your donor and member base. Did a pattern emerge from interactions with donors this year that suggests a new segment that requires a new approach? How can you collect more data to verify this hypothesis? Organizations should regularly ask what more they could learn about target donors and members that would help them better reach and motivate them. Discussing alternative segmentation schemes is a great exercise for accomplishing this.

#### **THE MESSAGE YOU EMPHASIZE MAY BE SPECIFIC TO EACH SEGMENT.**

Members may be attracted by discounts, while donors are often more excited about the organization mission. There may be value in further subdividing these segments. Maybe your members with dogs value different things than members without dogs. If you can leverage media like the Internet to deliver distinct messages it makes sense to separate the two segments. Maybe families attending religious services or with children are more prone to donate to food kitchens. Can you recruit donors from local religious organizations or schools?

How do you find out what your target audiences care about? Ask at every possible opportunity. Ask new donors how they heard about you and why they contributed. Ask lapsing members why they dropped off of your roll. Use the anecdotes to formulate hypotheses and then survey your base to find how consistent the patterns are. Beware of wishful segmenting. Nonprofits attract idealistic people. Segmentation requires healthy skepticism. A creative staff member might suggest that you target a new segment: perhaps chefs at high end restaurants for a food bank or homeless shelter? Is there any data to support this? Is there a way to test the idea inexpensively?

### **Marketing programs**

Marketing programs help reach and interact with the target audience. These should be tailored for your different segments. In the commercial world, marketing selects from a broad mix of programs:

Public relations	Email marketing	Partner programs
Direct mail	Collateral	Advertising
Telemarketing	Web sites	Events

#### **WHICH MARKETING PROGRAMS ARE RIGHT FOR OUR ORGANIZATION?**

In any case, your approach should be tied to the characteristics of your target audience. Is it dozens of local philanthropists or thousands of local property owners? Beware being too ambitious. If you say, "We want to ask everyone possible for funding" it is very likely that you will squander your marketing budget. A better approach is to segment your target audience according to how much you can get for effort and time expended. Think carefully about which group is most receptive to your message and focus first on that group.

Many nonprofits underutilize **Public Relations** (PR). In part, this is often due to lack of experience or budget for a PR agency. If you can find a PR agency to help you on a pro bono basis, terrific. Even if you can't afford an agency, however, you can still get a boost through PR. A common fallacy is that PR equates to Press Releases. You can get exposure in the press without writing and issuing a press release. What you will need is a document that describes your organization, ideally succinctly covering the points in your positioning exercise. You don't need to name competitors (to avoid giving them free press), but emphasizing what sets you apart is important. You will also need a news story. It can be about a member of your board, a volunteer, or a successful program you ran. Nonprofits that conduct events at their properties should not overlook listing the events in local newspapers' calendar of events. There are many good texts to help you with PR. Another source of help might be an intern or volunteer from a local university.

**Direct mail, telemarketing, and email marketing** are used by nonprofits with appeals to broad target audiences. Hospitals as well as national or international charities use direct and email marketing. Universities rely heavily on direct mail and telemarketing to increase donations from alumni. Even small nonprofit organizations use direct mail campaigns as part of their annual appeal. There are also many books written on optimizing results from these programs.

Nonprofits should be investigating how to replace paper collateral with on-line materials. The percentage of people using email continues to grow each year. Newsletters can be delivered by email for much less and with more color. Special events can be communicated by email. Members may lose your calendar of events, but they should be able to rely on going to your web site to find out what's going on.

Delivering information via email gives you a reason to ask for email addresses. Armed with email addresses, you can periodically poll your members to learn more about them to hone your communications to them. This is a key point: donors and members who perceive they are being listened to become more loyal. Don't miss this opportunity to engage your donors and members

Don't rely on an old poll from years ago that showed low numbers of people using email to determine whether you utilize the Internet. Check the current status of people you want to reach. It may take time to accumulate email contact information for your audience, but the payback will be enormous.

**Collateral** can include a brochure, an annual report, a capital campaign leave-behind, newsletters, or other handouts. Given the expense that can be eaten up producing collateral, a key challenge for nonprofits is designing collateral for their different audiences. Wealthy donors may respond well to polished materials, but members writing a \$40 check each year may wonder how much of their funds are being used in these expensive mailings.

Nowadays, almost all nonprofits have **web sites**. These provide contact information for visitors and donors. They communicate positioning. They can provide an alternative delivery vehicle to more expensive paper communications and announcements. Make a point of reviewing your competitors' web sites on a regular schedule. Discuss what they do differently and why. This type of cross-fertilization is one of the best ways to improve web sites. Watch someone new navigate your web site and watch what they notice and what they look for. Have you made it easy for them to find things?

Nonprofits should not overlook **partner opportunities**. Homeless shelter organizations have worked with real estate professionals to raise funds and awareness. Food banks have worked with grocery stores to collect donated groceries or cash donations. Providing a gift during a public radio on-air fundraising campaign can secure some free advertising. One shelter recruited local businesses to help collect clothing and hygienic supplies for clients. Employees of the local businesses sign up as volunteer food servers on specific nights.

**Advertising** is a double-edged sword for many nonprofits. Some potential donors will think: if you have enough money for advertising, why do you need my money? The clear exception is nonprofits that depend on visitors. These include arts organizations, museums, aquariums, universities, and hospitals.

**Events** for nonprofits are not the trade shows, seminars, and webinars of for profit organizations, with the exception of universities attending college selection events. Nonprofit events are more likely to be a gala dinner or other fundraising event. Events are a great opportunity to secure more press coverage. One nonprofit training the homeless to operate push carts held a chili cook-off to get donors and press coverage at the same time.

## AN EXAMPLE OF MARKETING PROGRAMS FOR A ONE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION

<b>Marketing Programs for a Local Homeless Shelter</b>	
<b>Public Relations</b>	Place stories about donors, fund raising success, homeless people making transition to a permanent home
<b>Direct mail</b>	Annual appeal to past donors
<b>Telemarketing</b>	Possibly, but expensive compared to annual direct mail appeal
<b>Email marketing</b>	Use to communicate successes during the year. Test fundraising through email vs. postal mail.
<b>Collateral</b>	Used to support direct appeals to large donors by board or exec staff. Clearly communicates positioning and provides evidence of success. Includes pictures of population served to tug on heart strings
<b>Web sites</b>	Implemented to provide visitors and potential donors with relevant information. Also clearly communicates positioning and provides evidence of success.
<b>Partner programs</b>	None
<b>Advertising</b>	None
<b>Events</b>	Possibly a gala lunch or dinner with well-known sponsors to help raise funds.

You may be thinking: “There you go, sneaking fundraising into the realm of marketing,” when you see the gala dinner under events. We take the liberty to include it here because it is a prime opportunity to communicate key messages to your target audience, both in the invites and at the event. Use your positioning exercise as a guide for key points to get across.

## Messaging

### AVOIDING THE MESSAGING TRAP

The increased sophistication and power of tools at our fingertips has created a dangerous trap. A novice can now create a fairly sophisticated web site or email campaign. A glossy, professional look is necessary, but not sufficient in moving a target audience to the desired actions. Similarly, clear, concise, and grammatically correct text is not enough. Messaging is how we use words to move people to take action. An excellent and inexpensive guide to how to craft and tune your message is *Writing Copy for Dummies*.

Key points on how you communicate who your organization is include:

- Emphasize the benefits! (should relate to your mission)
- Highlight your key difference
- Be consistent (about who you are)
- Be credible
- Keep it simple

#### **EMPHASIZE THE BENEFITS**

People are lazy readers. Always connect the dots between what you do and what it does for them. If you run a soup kitchen in a suburban area, you could say that you feed the hungry but that may not resonate as well as saying that your support helps their neighbors through crises like loss of jobs until they get back on their feet. Think about how what you do is most relevant to those you are reaching out to.

In the nonprofit world, organizations get in trouble with messaging when their mission is really a program description. If your mission is to educate teenagers about the legal system, you may need to reach beyond your mission. Why are you teaching kids this? Is it to encourage more to be lawyers or to reduce a sense of alienation from the justice system? Your potential donors are not nearly as interested in the means as the ends. Touch upon what will matter to them.

#### **HIGHLIGHT YOUR KEY DIFFERENCE**

Remember back to positioning where you had to specify how you were different? Your communications will include a description of who you are that should reflect your positioning, including what's different about your organization. Don't say simply that you feed the hungry. Why should someone give to your organization rather than another that feeds the hungry? Maybe it's your geographic focus. Maybe you teach them cheaper, more nutritious ways of preparing food. Whatever your key difference, flaunt it.

#### **BE CONSISTENT**

This means: be consistent in how you portray your organization. If you are experienced at email marketing, the reference to consistency may seem counter to what you learned about splitting a campaign into two or more variations to test different approaches. Testing tweaks in the call to action is not the same, however, as changing how you describe who you are.

If you are experienced in segmentation, you might wonder, "Aren't I supposed to highlight different things based on the segment?" Absolutely, but you can't pretend to be a completely different animal to each segment. Nor can you change who you say you are in each communication to one segment. A conservation organization should have one key message to highlight for potential members – perhaps, enjoy our properties as much as you'd like without paying admission fees, and another for large donors – perhaps, we're the most efficient organization in Massachusetts for conserving land and educating the public. Highlight the aspect most relevant to the audience, but include a consistent blurb about your organization in each communication. If you are revising the description of your organization repeatedly, you probably have not agreed on your positioning yet.

#### **BE CREDIBLE**

Being credible means providing evidence. Numbers make great evidence. Let's say that you have found that donors are interested in funding the most efficient provider of shelter for the homeless. You could highlight the number of homeless people you helped or how your overhead decreased as a percentage of costs last year. Your readers probably won't remember the evidence you cite, but if it is credible, it will help glue your positioning into their memories.

## **KEEP IT SIMPLE**

Lastly, keep it simple. A test for mental acuity gives people several words to remember and then checks after some period – say 10 minutes – how many they can remember. Regardless of how acute our mental facilities are, though, we know that the more items we are given to remember, the lower the probability of remembering any. The less you ask donors and members to remember about you, the better they will remember it. Conservation organizations may occasionally do things outside of conserving land for species protection. They might conduct a native plant sale annually, for example. However, they don't need to list every activity they undertake when they are explaining who they are on their web site or in their brochure.

## **Branding**

### **WHAT IS A BRAND?**

Branding is a special case of image. Depending on the definition, either everything has a brand or few things have brands. The discriminating definition is more useful. Remember at the start when we compared brand to speed-dial numbers? Everyone has a telephone number, but only a select few are lucky enough to be programmed on your cell phone. Similarly, all organizations have an image, but only a few are lucky (or smart) enough to come to mind as representative of a type of nonprofit organization. A name becomes a brand when it becomes widely known and carries a very specific connotation about the associated organization among those who care. Coke, P&G, Toyota, and IBM are well known for-profit organizations. Their names have become brands that have specific connotations about their products. On the nonprofit side, The Nature Conservancy, YMCA, The Red Cross, and Oxfam are equally well known and carry specific connotations about their purposes.

Companies are not limited to one brand. Larger companies with significant differences across their product lines often develop specific brands for each product line. IBM has five brands corresponding to its divisions. P&G has dozens of brands, sometimes with multiple brands for the same category, like shampoo. Nonprofits more commonly only brand the organization, not the separate programs primarily because you need to put a lot of resources behind the effort to be successful.<sup>2</sup>

### **WHEN DOES A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION OR SERVICE NAME BECOME A BRAND?**

A nonprofit brand is an organization name that comes to mind when someone thinks, "I want to donate to an organization that does X" and a specific organization comes to mind. Nonprofit brands become very visible during events like the Tsunami relief effort when people around the world rushed to donate. A few organizations received more funds than ever before in their history. Doctors without Borders publicly asked people to stop donating to them; they had received more money than they had capacity to use. Why did Doctors without Borders find itself in this situation? It provides medical care to victims of disasters under difficult situations around the globe, but there are dozens of nonprofit organizations that provide these services. Doctors without Borders rose above the crowd. That's what being a brand means.

Small nonprofit organizations will notice that these examples are all of large nonprofit organizations. If this article were specific to Boston nonprofits, I could use an example of a smaller nonprofit. When nonprofit organizations are geographically based, the extent of their brand power is circumscribed to that local area.

### **HOW DO YOU BUILD A BRAND?**

Clearly you need visibility. You could say that Doctors without Borders built their brand by being in the news, but how did they get in the news so much? They were the first organization to

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<sup>2</sup> An exception would be a university branding separate programs like the Woodrow Wilson School of Foreign Policy at Princeton.

marshal volunteer doctors and medical personnel to respond to world crises. They repeatedly go early to crises areas around the world. They also have a reputation for using donations efficiently. Here are the levers to achieving brand visibility:

➤ Be first

This doesn't mean be the first to tackle world hunger, or homelessness, or child abuse. But whether you are addressing spouse abuse among immigrant population or preserving land in your community, presumably you are addressing a need not currently being met.

➤ Be the biggest (at least in your area)

National or international organizations may not be as effective as a local organization for issues like feeding the hungry or sheltering the homeless or conserving land. Look for a defensible differentiator and then protect it. You protect your differentiation by being successful, by growing, and by being effective. Become the biggest fish in your small pond.

➤ Be different in a meaningful way

There's "meaningful" again. What makes something meaningful? It's something the target audience cares strongly about. There might be a bigger organization helping the homeless or one that has been helping them longer, but you might have a better track record of getting people off of the street permanently. If you do and there are a lot of donors who are looking for an organization for the homeless that does that, you can leverage that as the basis for your brand. If all you can say is that you are the second longest operating shelter for the homeless or the third largest shelter, you don't have a shot.

Here's an important point about brands. Target audiences are made up of busy people. They can only remember so many things. They can easily remember the organization that is first or biggest or best at something. Anything else becomes too difficult for them to remember. When you think about donating blood, whose web site would you go to in order to find a place to donate? The Red Cross, right? Does any other organization come to mind? I once gave blood to another organization by accident, only to find that it was much more convenient than donating to the Red Cross. Since few people knew about this organization, there was no wait to donate blood. But don't ask me what the name was; I can't remember now.

If you are lucky enough to secure space in the brains of your target audience, it will most likely be for one aspect of your organization. If you bring inner city kids to the country to learn how to farm and also sell organic produce in the inner city, chances are people will only remember one of the two. Which one will get you the most mileage? Put your energy behind that one.

Avoid being different through "and". Don't say: "we're better because we feed the hungry and we shelter the homeless" in an attempt to capture donations from people who care about both issues. Most will question whether you can do two very different things well. They are more likely to give money to two organizations: one that does a great job feeding the hungry and another that does a great job assisting the homeless. What if you find that helping people out of homelessness involves more than providing temporary shelter, and you end up with multiple programs to provide food, training, and employment counseling? In this case, you could describe your organization as boosting the transition from homelessness by providing integrated essential services. This underscores what you achieve and explains how you do it differently that contributes to your success.

**ALL THIS TALK ABOUT "BEING DIFFERENT" SOUNDS LIKE WE'RE BACK TO POSITIONING**

Absolutely. The key difference from positioning should be the basis for your brand. Even if you haven't achieved a brand, if you have effective positioning and are communicating that to your target audience, you are on the road to success. Having a key differentiator is the necessary but

not sufficient first step. The next step is to make that difference visible. Nonprofits typically can't afford the millions spent by commercial firms to establish brands. Nonprofits need to rely on PR and word-of-mouth. Get people to write about your model for achieving this accomplishment. If you can get coverage in publications read by your target audience, you have a shot at creating your brand. The key is to get people talking about why you are so special. Hopefully, what is different about you is not easily replicated by a larger organization, because if they copy you before word spreads, you lose your opportunity.

#### **DOES MY ORGANIZATION NEED A FANCY LOGO TO HAVE A BRAND?**

Image is important. Graphics can reinforce the message you want to convey. And a consistent look across your web site and collateral leverages repetition to help glue your organization's positioning in the minds of your target audience. The Internet is commoditizing graphic arts and you can now get a logo and graphic look inexpensively through overseas services. However, a graphic logo is not a requirement, though they are helpful to brighten up your materials. If your nonprofit frequently hosts visitors, a graphic logo might help identify your properties better than just your name on a sign, especially if you have a long name. A graphic logo works as a substitute for a name only after long use. Below are three logos from well-known national or international nonprofits with the name obscured. Which ones can you identify?



Another word about expense. Nonprofits are typically concerned about costs. Note that each of the logos above uses just one color besides black. If you want to convey to your donors and members that you are minimizing overhead, you might want to utilize a one color logo, or at least use a one color version on your business cards.

#### **In conclusion**

Hopefully, this document gives you a framework for thinking about how you can market your nonprofit organization more effectively. If you are struggling to secure funding, first examine your strategy, then work on your positioning and segmentation. If you develop a meaningful position and segmentation for your organization, the other parts of marketing should be much easier to execute.