

Guest Blog by Natalie Henry Bennon — springtalestrategies@gmail.com

Marketing gets a bad rap. And sometimes it's deserved. I don't like being told I need a new thing when really I don't.

And yet, marketing is key to successful for-profit businesses. Non-profits have finally taken notice. Some are hiring marketing staff. Some have shifted budgets from media relations to marketing and social media. Others are hiring marketing firms under contract.

Whatever your non-profit growth challenge, here are five questions to ask in determining how marketing can help your non-profit grow:

1) What are your measurable **goals**?

This could be: We want to attract 1,000 new members in 2014. Your marketing goals could also be recruiting new volunteers or board members; retaining members, volunteers, or board members; or raising awareness and attention to your issue.

2) Who is your **target audience**?

Let's assume you are trying to recruit more members, and you know you want younger and more diverse members. Your target audience might be women and men between the ages of 20 and 35 making \$30,000 to \$55,000 per year. It may help to give this person a real name and picture and persona. Think about what s/he does for a living and for fun.

For example, let's say you are creating a marketing plan for The Sierra Club. They want to recruit more members. This might be a useful target audience persona:

Meet Chris. He is 28, works at a company that manufactures solar panels, buys mostly organic food, and has in the past volunteered at his local beach cleanup. He likes to ski, hike and cook.

3) What is your **value proposition**?

For this, it's helpful to actually define the difference between marketing, branding, advertising and sales. For non-profits, [Arizona State University's Lodestar Center for Philanthropy](#) defines "marketing" as a process that brings about the voluntary exchange of values (as opposed to goods) between a non-profit organization and its target market. For example, it could be a transfer of a donation in exchange for addressing a social need.

What value is your audience getting? A value proposition helps you articulate this. It names your target audience, what you want them to do, what benefits they will receive, and why.

Keeping with the Sierra Club example, here is a specific example: When you donate to the Sierra Club, you get peace of mind that your money is going toward proven, effective environmental advocacy that will help provide clean air and water, improve human health, and protect wildlife and wild places.

4) What is your **position** in the marketplace?

Now it's time to consider your competition. Non-profits don't always like to call it competition, because we don't actually want other groups doing important work to fail. But you are competing for members and volunteers. So what is your **position** in the marketplace? How are you different than other non-profits? A [positioning map](#) can help with

this.

For example, the Sierra Club engages in advocacy, lobbying, and litigation. The club works nationally, but also has local chapters, and even some international programs. Compared to other international environmental non-profits, it positions itself as more reasonable than Greenpeace, which is very confrontational, but more aggressive than The Nature Conservancy, which is less confrontational in its tactics.

A non-profit's position in the marketplace will help establish trust from different audiences. Moreover, a non-profit's positioning, combined with its value proposition and its target audience, help non-profit managers make a cascade of other strategic decisions including messaging, partnerships and how to get the message to the audience.

5) How will you reach your audience?

Where do they spend time? What do they like to do?

If you are aiming for the 20-35 year olds in my example, I think the things they are doing are trying to build a career, and find a mate. So perhaps the Sierra Club would offer professional networking events, or young and social volunteering and hiking events. The club might also create a community online where young people engage with Sierra Club actions. The club could also become a news and action resource for all the things this age group cares about regarding the environment (this is a kind of [content marketing](#)).

My number one advice: don't just answer these questions in your head. If your non-profit has plans to grow, try drafting a marketing plan that identifies at least one quantifiable growth goal.

Start today. What is one goal for your non-profit's growth? Leave a comment below.

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