

Awareness Isn't Action

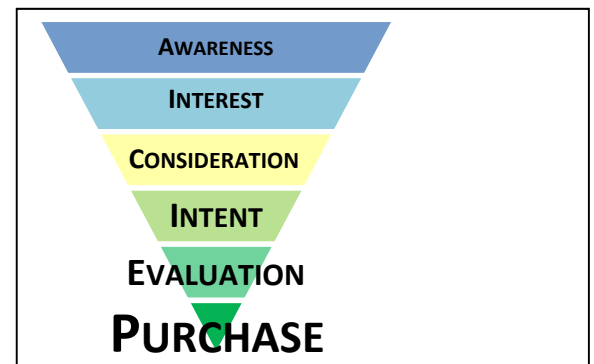
Funnel Marketing Approach Attracts Time, Talent and Treasure

The Funnel

There is a urban legend in the nonprofit world that says if you build it, they will come... if you could only make people aware of your noble cause they would surely volunteer, donate, and advocate for your organization. The truth, as folks working in the communications and marketing world can attest, is that awareness does not equate to action; and since giving time, talent, treasure and voice to your organization are actions, it follows that simply knowing about your existence isn't enough to motivate movement. And movement is exactly what professionals in the communications and marketing fields aim for.

Think of marketing and communications as a funnel, with the mouth being 'awareness' and the spout being 'action.' Have you ever transferred something other than liquid through a funnel? If you have, you know that sometimes the material gets bound up and needs to be helped along to move from mouth to spout. Your audience is a lot like that; and moving them effectively through your information-to-action funnel takes intentionality.

As demonstrated by the commercial marketing funnel to the right, there are quite a few steps between 'awareness' and 'purchase,' that is, buying-in to and supporting your organization and, more importantly, its core cause or causes. Each step is an opportunity to sell your organization and move an audience closer toward action. This article is meant to explain each part of the funnel metaphor and help you begin to plan your communications and marketing strategy.



Awareness: The existence of your organization is

acknowledged, typically through a brochure or flyer, a PSA or advertisement. These pieces of "collateral" (marketing materials) can reach a wide range of audiences and give a snap shot of your organization without delving too deeply. On the downside, design costs, printing costs, and distribution costs (to mail or buy an advertisement), can eat up a budget. Even printing in-house can be costly in the long run.

This collateral isn't bad. In fact, each is standard. What is unusual, though, is to have set distribution points and target audiences, and to track the return on investment. Going to a resource fair where there will 100 other organizations that are also giving out materials? It may make more sense to distribute your one-page flyer and save your slick brochure for a smaller, more captive audience. When people contact your organization, ask how they knew about you. Keep track of what they say. If most of your audience is finding you through online searches, you may be able to cut down some of your basic print materials budget.

Interest: Your organization and its efforts are known well enough to pique curiosity and compel audiences to know more. This is most likely where your website and social media are coming into play. Websites, blogs, and social media can be really effective, cost-saving, and innovative ways to tell your story and create momentum for your organization.

Unfortunately, most of us aren't maximizing and leveraging these tools to their fullest. For example, we use Facebook as if it were a website, a place to just plop information about what's happening for us. Our websites are static and stodgy.

Social media is about creating communities and, by extension, relationships (believe it or not). Instead of using social media to push out staid information and general call-outs for money or volunteers, use social media with the intent of generating *conversation* about your organization and a specific effort. Ask a provocative question and conduct an online poll. Use hashtags for events and encourage your volunteers and donors and beneficiaries to use them. On your website, use interactive quizzes and streamed video of people who've benefitted from your organization.

Consideration: This is your big moment to shine! This is where your organization and like-organizations are being examined, and the decision about who to research further is being swayed. So, what do we usually do here as a nonprofit community? Not much. We keep relying on our brochures, 2 a.m. PSAs, and flat technological outreach to "tell our story." It's a psychological phenomenon: when given the choice between two places to eat, we will usually pick the place with the line. Why? Because, we determine, there must be demand, and that demand must be generated by the quality of the food. In other words, a line = food so good it's worth waiting for. Your organization needs that same kind of "buzz" being generated by people outside your organization!

Perhaps you've been able to cut your print budget back (see "Awareness"). Redirect those funds to giving your volunteers shirts with great messaging. They won't be worn just on the day of your volunteer event. Tie an event press release to a local, state, or national issue that is in the news. For example, let's say your organization is concerned with education, especially the high school-to-college transition, and sponsors tours for low income families to tour colleges and get assistance with admissions applications. Use Small Business Week as an opportunity to highlight the economic conditions of your community: will you have a ready workforce? is entrepreneurialship fading (or why it's important for innovation)? Then, explain what your organization does to help remedy the situation and use quotes not from your staff, but the people benefitting from your organization. But don't stop there! Include a call to action: "We need volunteers who can..." "You can help 60 more families this college season by..." You might even consider joining forces with other organizations to promote a collaborative event that promotes different aspects of the same cause and issue a joint, newsworthy press release.

Intent: People are gravitating toward your organization by inquiring about volunteer opportunities, actually volunteering, or donating for the first time. The great thing about intent is that interest in your organization is high and this is your chance to seal the deal, so to speak. This is an opportunity to begin cultivating future board members, donors, volunteers, advocates for your cause, and brand ambassadors. We often make the fatal mistake, however, of just answering questions rather than inviting the inquirer into our circle. As well, we forget to thank first- or second-time donors individually; instead, we issue a blanket thank you on Facebook and our websites and call it done. Lastly, we ask for volunteers without having first made a place for them. This is the death blow to getting a volunteer to come back. Volunteers are important for us in the nonprofit world because voluntarism and donorship are correlative. If people are reaching out to you to know more or to get involved, seize the opportunity!

Invite them to a board meeting or an event, or even to tour where your work happens. It helps to have a standing list of people, including beneficiaries, who can represent your organization so that your staff

isn't solely responsible for creating connections. If you're asking for volunteers, have real jobs for volunteers that match their time, skills, interests, and talents. This means you may have a volunteer intake form that acts as a time/talent/interest survey. As well, think about how you can use volunteers in non-traditional ways. The person who cannot come into your office or make the event can still stuff bags, arrange entertainment, draft letters, and perform a host of other tasks from home or during off-business hours. Ask how he/she wants to be involved, and make it as easy (and concrete) as possible. Lastly, thank first- and second-time donors individually, either through a letter that addresses him/her by name or even ask your board members to take 15 minutes to call people.

Evaluation: Your “product” is being rated, scrutinized, and compared to similar “products.” The good news here is that the decision to support your organization is very close to being made. The tough part? You have to make a stellar case for why your organization is the best fit.

Too often, though, we think our “product” is how much money we brought in or the number of volunteer hours we arranged. The truth is, this isn't the “product.” You are selling how your organization responds to audiences and the causes are the products. The name of the game here is “engagement.” The evaluation stage is a chance to connect with the hearts and minds of people. Instead of reporting a dollar milestone, report how people's lives are different because of what your organization has done (e.g.: “Thanks to your support, we fed 120 families.”). Have an annual report available on your website. Ask volunteers and beneficiaries to live stream your organization in action. Arrange “impact tours” so that interested audiences (and even the media) can see where and how your organization does its work.

Purchase: Congratulations! You've “sold” your organization and you have a new volunteer, donor, cause advocate, or brand ambassador! You've worked hard to gain the attention of and win over someone. Now, you have to keep that person wanting to come back. You want a “repeat customer” – someone who is loyal to, connected with, and engaged in carrying out your organization's mission. There are many ways to retain your new-found support. Find out what volunteers want to get out of their volunteer experience: do new board members want to boost their professional skills? Make sure you provide them with opportunities to learn something new and to apply those skills. Thank volunteers frequently for what they specifically contribute (e.g.: “providing direction,” “being a calming influence,” “making other feel welcomed.”). If your volunteer is employed, send a letter of praise to that individual's supervisor or family.

Move your donors along in their giving by developing a scale of giving that includes appropriate ways to thank donors. Recognize donors publicly, and make sure that what your organization does connects with a donor's personal passion.

As you can see, moving someone from awareness to action does not happen organically (despite the urban legend). It requires methodic preparation by your staff and board. The Indiana Nonprofit Resource Network at Indiana United Ways can assist you in creating a plan that is congruent with your organization's mission, resources, and target audiences.

Indiana Nonprofit Resource Network provides affordable, accessible, and high quality training and custom consulting services. Visit <http://www.inrn.org> for more information.

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