

7 Low Cost Marketing Tools

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Effective marketing can help nonprofits build brand recognition, reach new clients, and develop community relationships and resources. Unfortunately, nonprofit marketing dollars are often in short supply. The good news is you don't need a trust fund to market your organization successfully. The trick is using funds strategically to get the greatest return on marketing investments. Consider these low-cost (or no-cost!) tools to get started.

1. Your Contact Database

When it comes to low-cost marketing, almost every organization can begin with its client information database. It's one of your most valuable resources, so it deserves to be developed and maintained. Whether you need to announce a new service, ask for referrals, do market research, or even reach out to supporters about an important legislative issue, you need up-to-date, well-organized contact details. If your database is out-of-date or incomplete, make getting it in shape a priority for 2008.

2. Market Research

Grassroots market research can help you quickly uncover potential marketing messages and channels by asking clients and business partners about their opinions and habits. Even better, the research process may prompt respondents to think of potential partnerships and referrals for your agency. If your nonprofit is small, you can speak to your contacts in person, by phone, or at a hosted lunch or dinner that includes an information-gathering session. Research also can be done very affordably through online survey tools like [Survey Monkey](#).

Ask respondents what they value most about your organization and where they go to learn about the kind of products and services you offer. One word of caution: Make sure the person designing your survey is well versed in how to build effective questions. Not doing so can leave you with a pile of data that can't be sliced and diced into meaningful results.

3. Testimonials/Case Studies

Nothing speaks louder to potential clients and funders than documented success. This is especially true for service-based organizations because they typically demonstrate quality through the results of their work rather than through a product that can be visually and physically assessed. Make an evaluation process a standard part of your business practices, and when appropriate, as for permission to quote feedback in marketing materials. Create case studies from the most compelling client stories.

4. Samples

Think about how you can share a small piece of your product or service with the public. This may involve distributing samples through partner organizations that come into contact regularly with your client base or aligning yourself with an event that your customers will attend. If you're promoting a service, it can be more challenging to provide samples, but not impossible. For example, if you provide educational seminars through schools and events, add a video clip from your presentations to your website.

5. Email Outreach

If your contacts are web users, you can realize big savings by moving print communications to email. For example, moving a traditional newsletter to email can cut costs by more than 50% through savings in time, postage, paper and printing. Some organizations worry that they will lose readers by shifting to email. While it's true that a transition will require an adjustment phase, your opt-in email list may grow much faster than your snail-mail list, assuming your target audiences are online. And while spam filters are a concern, nonprofits typically have an engaged and motivated reader base, and with smart list management practices they can increase the likelihood of getting messages delivered to recipients' inboxes.

6. Your Website

In today's market, your organization's website is an essential low-cost marketing tool. It gives you the opportunity to reach millions of people, all without spending a dime on postage, phone bills, gasoline or any of the other tools that use to be necessary to

connect with potential supporters and clients. It's true that a well-designed site requires an initial investment, but when you spread this cost over the number of years that your site will serve your agency, it's one of the best values around, especially compared to the annual cost of phone directory listings and print collateral.

The secret to building a low-cost site is understanding web strategy. All the pretty graphics and cool technology in the world will mean nothing unless your site is designed with an understanding of how people use the web and their preferences for content and navigation. Make sure your marketing team can talk clearly about its online strategy, which should be markedly different from, but aligned with, your offline outreach efforts.

7. Networking/Partnerships

Working with others to get the word out about your business is one of the best ways to build buzz. You can do this informally or formally. Exchange links on a website, leave flyers in each other's offices, or promote each other's services in email or print, or at live events.

About Springboard Strategies

Springboard Strategies is a strategically-focused, marketing communications firm that helps growing companies and nonprofits to meet business growth goals quickly and affordably. [Visit us online.](#)