

Get your board on board with marketing

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Summary

How to sell your marketing budget to your board.

Develop the budget in consultation with stakeholders, include KPIs, educate the board on the importance of marketing in achieving organisational goals and only give them strategic information.

About the Author

Stuart Ayling runs Marketing Nous, a specialist consultancy that focuses on effective sales and marketing tactics. Stuart was a speaker at INCE 2004 and 2006. He is available for consultation to assist your organisation with sales and marketing processes. You may contact Stuart on (07) 3806 2238 or visit his website at www.marketingnous.com.au for more marketing resources and his free monthly newsletter.

More Info

Chat with other nonprofit practitioners - visit www.nfpn.com.au and CONNECT.

Let's face it. When it comes to getting your marketing budget approved, sometimes you feel as though you're pushing mud uphill.

You've done your best to get some ideas together. You've pored over your written proposal, trying to dot all the i's and make it look impressive. You have probably run some numbers to estimate what you want to spend.

But at the end of it, you feel as though your Board members have missed the point. As usual, they seem to prefer the status quo to taking on your new ideas.

What has gone wrong?

To consider this situation, we need to start at the beginning. But before we do that, let's be upfront about why your Board might trash your marketing plan or budget.

- You are proposing unproven tactics or ideas.
- They became lost in the detail.
- You don't seem focused on members/supporters.
- Measurement of results is not clear.
- No previous communication with stakeholders or the Board.
- No visible connection with organisational objectives.

Whilst this list of reasons may seem daunting, let's look closer at what we can do.

The Role of the Board

We need to understand our customers. And in this situation your Board is your customer. They have to buy your marketing plan and see value in the expenditure.

The Board is responsible for compliance and strategy of your organisation. Board members need to focus on 'big picture' strategic issues, not day-to-day operational details. Even if you have Board members who like to be involved on an operational level, you must take it upon yourself to work with them from a higher strategic viewpoint. That is your responsibility.

The information you provide to the board should assist their strategic thinking. It should not encourage scrutiny of daily details.

executive ••• update

For nonprofit CEOs, Executive Update is an opportunity to discuss those issues that keep you awake at night with your peers, and to share solutions. Staff recruitment and retention? Organisational sustainability? Intellectual property? Bring it on! For nonprofit staff, it is an opportunity to share in ideas and information around marketing, fundraising, membership, sponsorship, lobbying, corporate partnerships, and more!

Feedback on this event:

The Executive Update provided an exceptional opportunity to step out of my own very busy space and learn and share with other executives. I found the fact that the Update was not industry focused fascinating... We are so used to attending our own industry conferences - mine being health and ageing, that we discount how much all not-for-profits have in common.



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What is Your Overall Aim

When you begin to develop your marketing budget, first consider what it is you are really trying to do. Do you want to gain approval for a new strategy? Do you want to increase the marketing budget? Are you trying to introduce 'new' ideas?

It is easy to get engrossed by our own initiatives. We see all the good upside of our proposals. We get excited by the outcomes.

But we need to be careful that our marketing plans truly reflect the mission of the organisation, and that they are in alignment with the organisational strategy.

How can you do that? By talking to people. By getting out from behind your desk and talking with members, stakeholders, management, and even Board members. It is a good idea to interview your CEO or Chairperson to obtain their perspectives.

Specific questions you should ask your CEO include:

- What do you think our biggest challenges are in raising revenue?
- Who do you think are our greatest competitors? Why?
- What do you think we have done right – and wrong – in our previous marketing efforts?
- What is the most important message you think we should convey in our marketing materials?

Remember, this is an interview. You are gathering their opinion, and accessing their expertise. You are not committing to directly follow what the CEO says.

Know Your Targets and KPIs

Every successful organisation has revenue and expense targets or KPIs. Do you know your organisation's KPIs?

Does your marketing plan include KPIs? If it doesn't, your Board will probably assume either:

- A) You are not confident of what you are proposing and don't want to be measured against a bench mark (and therefore it may be a gamble), or
- B) You have not done your homework and your proposal is not to be trusted.

The Board should be looking at KPIs for each part of the organisation. Make sure you help them see the impact of the marketing department by measuring results, and being able to explain outcomes (positive or negative).

Examples of KPIs you may be able to monitor include:

- New members/donors/customers; renewals
- Performance/delivery results
- Sales of products/services
- Attendance at events
- Revenue raised
- Enquiry volume via website
- Conversion rate from enquiry to commitment

Educate Rather Than Dictate

It is important for marketers to build an understanding within their organisation of what marketing is really about. This is a constant challenge, as most non-marketers have a very shallow view of what marketing does.

To help get your message across to your internal customers it is a good idea to prepare case studies or real-life examples of how marketing has helped. Look at previous marketing activities. Monitor the results, and create a case study along the lines of:

- 1) The situation before the marketing activity.
- 2) What activity was undertaken?
- 3) What happened as a result? Compare that to the beginning situation.

Remember, a major objective with developing this type of 'proof' is to demonstrate that marketing has helped to achieve organisational goals. So be as specific as possible about that.

Your Budget Presentation

When it comes time to present your marketing budget and associated plans, follow these simple steps.

1. Know your facts. Do your homework about costs, frequency, previous results.
2. Understand your Board and their priorities. Know the various 'personality types' and have information to help them understand your message.
3. Plan ahead for questions you can expect. Some of this may come from your CEO interview, as well as discussions with other stakeholders.
4. Keep it clear and simple. Do not present 'hazy ideas'. Skip the marketing jargon. Your objective is to get their approval, not to impress (or confuse) them with your use of acronyms, industry terminology, or pie-in-the-sky concepts.

Top Tips for Success

Many marketers try and cram in too much operational detail. They think the Board will approve their plan "if only they knew every little step". Don't do it. Give the Board higher-level strategic information they can work with.

Show that you understand your market. Include results of your interviews or other research findings. Prove you are in touch with stakeholders and that your recommendations can be trusted.

Make sure you clearly address how your marketing activities will assist the organisation achieve its goals. Don't ever assume people will automatically understand. Include KPIs to show you are accountable.

Keep it simple enough so your Board can readily understand what you are asking for, and can see it as easy to approve.