Communicating on the Countryside: Challenges and Lessons Learned From Rural Nonprofit Marketing

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Introduction

- This project is aimed at understanding how rural nonprofits communicate to different stakeholders.
- I look at their unique challenges they face and how they apply that to their marketing and how nonprofits overall can learn from rural nonprofits.
OBJECTIVES

What are the challenges facing rural nonprofits when they market themselves?

How do rural nonprofits have effective marketing given their circumstances?

I want to....

1. To shed light on a region of the country that has been looked over
2. To show the power of what good marketing and communications can do to an organization
METHODS AND APPROACHES

1. Literature Review
2. 4 Expert Interviews
3. 24 Survey Respondents from 16 different states

Northside Neighborhood House

a hand up through education and assistance
Literature Review - Challenges in Rural America

- 15 active definitions of the word “Rural” in the federal government
- Rural America accounts for 18% of the nation’s population and 21% of those who live in poverty
- 23.7% of rural residents had underlying health conditions compared to only 3% of urban residents
- 34 million Americans lack an affordable and reliable broadband connection and of these, 23.4 million live in rural areas
- Rural Brain Drain
  - Educated individuals leave their small town for the urban areas, thus leaving their town with one less-educated worker
Literature Review - Rural Nonprofits and Rural Marketing

- Rural philanthropy only accounts for **6.8%** of giving by the nation’s top 1000 foundations
  - Only **0.23%** of philanthropic dollars are awarded to Native-led nonprofit organizations
- National foundations tend not to consult local rural nonprofits to understand the priorities or circumstances before investing in those communities
- Rural markets tend to be more wary of outsiders.
  - “They put ideas in there head” - Excerpt from *Worlds Apart*
- **75%** of rural residents prefer to get news and other recommendations from friends and families
- Rural residents respond to regional activities and branding the best
Social Marketing consists of focusing on the consumer’s needs as a member of the public, rather than selling them on the idea of what they need to generate profit for a private company.

If you prioritize Fundraising, you are likely to place a bit more emphasis on events, direct mail, PR/media relations, and email and a bit less on websites/blogs and social media.

If you prioritize Volunteering levels, you will likely place a bit more emphasis on email, events, and your website/blog, but less on direct mail.

If you prioritize Public Awareness of your mission, you are less likely to use direct mail.

If you prioritize the Growth of your nonprofit, you will likely put more emphasis on your website/blog, email, and social media and less on events, direct mail, and PR/media relations.
The two most important tenets of nonprofit branding are **focus** and a subset of that is focus on **why it matters what you do**, and focus on the audiences that are most important to you.

Sarah Moore
Mission Minded

The landlords in the community are **donors and supporters** of the NNH, but at the same time, the landlords are the ones who are **evicting individuals in the community**.

Megan Creecy
Northside Neighborhood House
I think one of the really cool things about rural nonprofits is that they have limited resources. And they somehow find a way to do the work. They somehow find a way to make do with what they have. I think in terms of marketing, what you're seeing is that they don't have a lot of time, and they don't have a lot of money. But somehow they're able to get people to give to them to donate their time. So they're doing something right. Certainly there's many that are struggling, but there are many who are not. And they're finding a way to, to muddle through without that expertise.”

Dr. Jayme Walters
Survey Results

Rural Nonprofit Marketing Medium Usage

- Social Media: 70.8%
- Press Releases: 70.8%
- Flyers: 66.7%
- Digital Newsletter: 62.5%
- Events/Galas: 58.3%
- Video: 58.3%
- Email Blasts: 58.3%
- Print Newsletter: 45.8%
- TV Ads/TV Interviews: 33.3%
- Paid Social Media Ads: 29.1%
- Podcasts/Radio: 20.8%
- Billboards/Outdoor Ads: 20.8%

What marketing medium do you think your nonprofit does best?

- Social Media: 20.8%
- Print Newsletter: 16.7%
- Events/Galas: 16.7%
- Digital Newsletter: 12.5%
- Flyers: 8.3%
- Press Release: 8.3%
- Email Blasts: 4.1%
- Paid Social Media Ads: 4.1%
- Videos: 4.1%
- Podcasts/Radio: 4.1%

How Important is Relationship Building for your Nonprofit's Marketing?

- Very Important: 70.8%
- Somewhat Important: 20.8%
- Low Importance: 4.2%
- Not Important: 4.2%
Survey Results

On average, how far do you believe your donors are from your nonprofit?

- Over 25 miles: 34.8%
- 16-20 Miles: 17.4%
- 21-25 Miles: 17.4%
- 6-10 Miles: 17.4%
- 0-5 Miles: 8.7%
- 11-15 Miles: 4.3%

On average, how far do you believe your clients travel to receive the services of your nonprofit?

- 0-5 Miles: 29.2%
- 6-10 Miles: 20.8%
- 11-15 Miles: 16.7%
- Over 25 Miles: 12.5%
- 16-20 Miles: 12.5%
- 21-25 Miles: 8.3%
Survey Results

How important to your nonprofit is it to localize the language your nonprofit uses while marketing itself?

- Very Important: 41.7%
- Not Important: 25.0%
- Somewhat Important: 20.8%
- Neutral: 12.5%

Has the digital divide been a factor when communicating to stakeholders?

- Frequently: 29.2%
- Sometimes: 41.7%
- Rarely: 16.7%
- Occasionally: 12.5%
IMPLICATIONS

- Localize Your Language
- Duality of Identity
- Social Marketing
- The Digital Divide is Closing
- Build Meaningful Relationships
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. “Relationships matter almost more than marketing and branding” - Sarah Moore

2. Recognize your important stakeholders and be cognizant of their relationship to your nonprofit
   – Duality of Identity

3. Create local marketing materials that appeal to your stakeholders and use language and imagery that appeals to them

4. Incorporate more digital marketing
REFERENCES


COMMUNICATING ON THE COUNTRYSIDE CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM RURAL NONPROFIT MARKETING
Brandon Shepard MNA - Master of Nonprofit Administration - Capstone Project
Master of Nonprofit Administration Capstone

SUMMARY
- Rural areas tend to be more persistently impoverished
- Rural nonprofits are underfunded
- Marketing of nonprofits can increase visibility in rural areas
- Nonprofits’ awareness of the importance of marketing is increasing

PURPOSE
To shed light on a region of the country that has been looked over, and to show the power of what good marketing and communications can do to an organization

RESEARCH
What are the challenges facing rural nonprofits when they market themselves and how do they have effective marketing?

REFERENCES


DATA AND ANALYSIS
- How Important is Relationship Building for your Nonprofit’s Marketing?
  - Not Important: 4.2%
  - Low Importance: 4.2%
  - Somewhat Important: 20.9%
  - Very Important: 70.8%

- Has the digital divide been a factor when communicating to stakeholders?
  - Rarely: 41.3%
  - Occasionally: 13.5%
  - Frequently: 25.2%
  - Sometime: 15.6%
- Rural Nonprofit Marketing Medium Usage

RESULTS
- LOCALIZE YOUR LANGUAGE
- DUALITY OF IDENTITY
- BUILD MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS
- SOCIAL MARKETING
- The Digital Divide is Closing

RECOMMENDATIONS
1. “Relationships matter almost more than marketing and branding”
2. Recognize your important stakeholders and be cognizant of their relationship to your nonprofit
3. Create local marketing materials that appeal to your stakeholders
4. Incorporate more digital marketing

METHODS
- Literature Review.
- Survey with 24 respondents
- 4 Expert Interviews