



PROVE IT! PODCAST

HOSTED BY DEBBIE ALBERT

Episode 115: Marketing Resources for Non-Profits

Guest: Matt Hugg

This is Prove It. A podcast for impatient business owners, overwhelmed marketers, and PR practitioners with no time for podcasts. In just 10 minutes they answer 3 questions and offer proof of what's working in marketing communications today. Here's Debbie Albert, President of Albert Communications.

Debbie Albert: Welcome! On this episode of Prove It, we're going to look at marketing challenges faced primarily by nonprofit organizations. My guest is Matt Hugg, the president and founder of "Nonprofit.Courses," an on-demand, online educational resource for nonprofit leaders, their staff, their board members, and their volunteers. You'll find his URL on our website on his podcast episode page, and it's definitely a site worth visiting, because it's chock-full of materials that any nonprofit, or I would argue, even a for-profit business might benefit from. Matt's the author of *The Guide to Nonprofit Consulting*, and hosts a website, Nonprofit Consultant Zone. And here's a mouthful: he calls himself "the nonprofit consultant's consultant," so you heard that right.

He honed his skills as a consultant for nonprofits, and now he consults for *those* consultants, and my favorite part of the whole episode is that we were in the same high school class in Upper Dublin. So, Matt, welcome to Prove It!

Matt Hugg: Well, thank you, Debbie. Yes, that's right, we won't say what class year that was, but [laughing]-

Debbie: It was in the last century, that's for sure.



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Matt: Yeah, there you go. [laughing]

Debbie: So, I've explained the format to you, I'm going to ask you three or more questions, and then I'm going to ask you for a Prove It! point at the end, so that our listeners know that this really does work.

So, my first question is very basic. **How is marketing for a nonprofit organization different than marketing for a for-profit business or organization?**

Matt: Well, in a lot of ways, when we're talking about tools, it's a lot the same. I mean, you have to get the visibility you want to do target marketing, come up with an avatar, all that kind of work, which honestly, whether you're a small business or a nonprofit, or even a big nonprofit, folks do and don't, right? So, there are a lot of similarities. The issue really is the *audience*, and I might argue that it's harder to do marketing in a nonprofit environment, because you have a wide divergence of audiences. You have the people who are your clients, and the folks who take advantage of whatever your mission is, right?

Debbie: Right.

Matt: Because nonprofits are all about the mission, and then you have the folks who support the nonprofits, who might be the donors, or the grant funders, or whoever those are, and sometimes they're the same, a lot of times they're different. So, if you're in a social service environment, they're typically very different. If you're, say, in an environmental organization, they might be the same, they might cross over.



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Debbie: I never really thought of that, that's very interesting.

Matt: Yeah, it's hard to get your head around that until you think about, a nonprofit relationship is three ways, right? Where it's the nonprofit to the donor, and then to the mission recipient, whereas the business, you sell to the same person or organization that is benefiting from your mission, whatever that mission is.

Debbie: Right, exactly. So you lead me right into the second question which was, they often have different audiences. I know that I've had to design websites that speak to two different audiences for a nonprofit, so how do they handle this? Give us a sense in marketing, beyond a website, **how does a nonprofit speak to two often different audiences?**

Matt: Well, actually, the good news is that the closer you can bring some of these audiences together, particularly from the donor point of view, the better off you are. So, if you can bring the donor into the mind of the mission recipient of whoever it is that you're serving, that's a good thing. So you have a lot of crossover there, but of course, you don't want to talk to, say, somebody in a homeless shelter about making a major gift, right? That's just not appropriate, it doesn't work.

How you work this, it's really in the base materials. The base materials will often be the same, you need to come up with stories. I mean, we know stories sell, right? People buy emotionally, and then they justify logically. So you want to come up with a cadre of stories that will appeal to both audiences, and I say that because the mission recipient audience might need that same story to identify with somebody who's just like them, so that they feel good about taking advantage of that mission, whereas the donor audience needs to have that same story, so that they understand what they are, what that mission is about.



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The other part of this, too, is about dignity, and you have to really keep in mind about the dignity of honestly both audiences, right? You don't want to talk down to either audience, but you want to make sure that your mission recipients are in a light that doesn't demean them, and you want to make sure that your donors see these people, and I'm kind of thinking of social service, but in other areas too, as folks who are deserving of that, whatever that mission is that you're providing.

Debbie: That is a beautiful, important, and sensitive thing to say, and from my limited knowledge in that space, it is those stories that get to you. I mean, when you think about when you see on TV, a puppy in a cage, and you look at the TV and go, "oooooh!"

Matt: I know, really?

Debbie: But you're right, to not demean them, but to tell the story of the potential recipients is a really nice thing to say. So, I guess my third question is, **how do nonprofits balance these important marketing goals, and how do they tell these stories with limited budgets?**

Matt: Yeah, boy, and that's, limited budget is the thing, and so let's kind of clarify things there. Nonprofits go from your community Little League sports organization to major employers in whatever city. In Philadelphia, where we are, the University of Pennsylvania, I believe is the biggest employer in the city, and that's a nonprofit, but both of them will say, well, we only have so much money. That's because they really have an ethic of putting the money into the mission, into the service of the people, and not so much into the promotion of it. So, number one, you have to step back, and say, "are we doing enough in terms of marketing? Are we striking the right balance there? Can we show that marketing is going to, in effect, pay so that it supports fundraising, so that it supports client acquisition?" I think now, sometimes client acquisition is actually a revenue producer, like you think of universities, right?



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Debbie: Right, but to really make the marketing part of giving back to the mission, it should be that marketing budget should be part of, you're helping the mission by funding the marketing.

Matt: Totally, yes, exactly. But, from the nonprofit point of view, they may not see it that way. They often will see it as just an extra expense, or something we have to do. The other part of that is comfort, that the people in any business, I would argue, but in nonprofit work in particular are all about the mission, but however they work with a mission, but they aren't comfortable with marketing. It's just not where they are.

Debbie: Right, that I totally understand. [laughing]

Matt: Yeah, so that's an issue that they come down to saying, "Well, do have to do this? Do we have to go out and do that?" I mean, you might have the best hospital physician, or nurse, or whatever, but they want to do their thing, and they didn't go to school for marketing because they wanted to be a marketer, they wanted to be a doctor or nurse, an environmentalist, whatever it is. So, when you get down to what we're really talking about is marketing the marketing, right?

Debbie: You're exactly right, and that's our job, are people who own a marketing firm, if you're trying to do marketing for a nonprofit, to explain the importance of the integration of marketing with the mission.

Matt: Right, and to do it in a way that doesn't look self-serving, because there's a big radar going on in the nonprofit sector about, well, that's their interest, and they just want to take money from us, right? So, you have to be really sensitive to that, and put in all those good marketing



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tools you would use for them to work for you as a company or an organization to help them. In other words, to convince, I don't want to say convince, but to have them see that yes, marketing should be core.

Debbie: So, before I ask you about a specific nonprofit that did that, and you don't have to mention names, let me just ask you one more question about, **what resources are out there that can help nonprofits stay on top of this ever-changing world of marketing?**

Matt: Yeah, well, okay. So, it would be terrible if I didn't mention Nonprofit.Courses, right? And I really do have a number of, and I say, growing list of resources for any aspect of nonprofits, but marketing is something I'm sensitive to, because I think it's essential for any nonprofit, you'll find things there. There actually is a pretty good nonprofit marketing Facebook group out there, which I feel very positive about putting out, because that's not something you'll see a lot of.

Marketing resources tailored to nonprofits are really tough to find, good ones, because I teach in an academic program for nonprofit management, and probably the hardest instructor, the most difficult instructor to find was the marketing person, because getting people who have experience in nonprofit marketing was tough. So yeah, there's some good text resources out there. I will tell you, though, that the number one thing to keep in mind is starting with the basics. A lot of nonprofit organizations, except for the very most sophisticated ones, really just need to start with, make your case for whatever you're going to do, right, why somebody needs to engage with you. Come up with the avatar, the target market, and then work them through, what are the tools that need to occur to meet their goal that they stated in the case.

Debbie: Absolutely.



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Matt: For 80%, 75% of the nonprofits you're working with, that's going to be a revelation.

Debbie: Okay.

Matt: And then take them into more sophisticated techniques. It isn't that much different than standard marketing things.

Debbie: I agree, I mean, you have to build the foundation before you build the house.

Matt: Well, right, and you're just going to find that if you come in with a little bit of sensitivity that they are all about mission, now you're really going to make a difference.

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Debbie: Right, tell the story from that angle, okay. We're up to the Prove It! part.

Matt: Ah, yes.

Debbie: Why don't you tell us about a nonprofit, and as I said, you don't have to mention a name if you don't want, and how they worked marketing magic with the resources you provide, their limited budget, understanding their audience, et cetera?



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Matt: I come from a fundraising background, and so one of the things that always strikes me is how well organizations will use multi-channel marketing, and how they'll use that for their work, and it bothers me a lot when I get approached by some nonprofit someplace, saying, "well, we took everything, or we want to take everything online."

And I have a nice example of a school I worked with that tried to do that, backed off of it, and then decided, you know what? They took a three-pronged approach. They did telephone calls, they did direct paper mail, and there's some really good tracking stuff on that, and I love this that you're able to take, there's some computer programs that connect into the US Postal Service that are able to track direct mail, and then follow up with emails. So telephone, direct mail, email, and the emails are much more effective when they have these, when you're putting those three things together, it really makes a difference. They boosted their revenue from that campaign over what they had before, which they had tried just direct mail, actually, they had tried, they were kind of a direct mail-only shop with some phone-a-thon, and they said, well, we're getting rid of that, we're just doing email. They just weren't happy with it, but when they put all these things together, it made a huge difference.

Debbie: Oh, I love that story. That's great, and so I'm going to thank you for that, because we're out of time, but I would be remiss if I didn't say, again, if you are a nonprofit, or not, and you just want some more marketing resources online, go to Nonprofit.Courses. I was amazed, Matt, when I went there, and saw the number of things you have, and broken down by category, and I mean, there's so much to read, there's so much to share with people. I happen to be on the board of a large nonprofit, and I learned a lot from looking at the materials on your site, so I thank you for that.

Matt: Well, thank you very much, and if anybody wants to be a content provider, I'm certainly open to that, too.



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Debbie: Oh, that's a good point, too. So, let me wrap it up by saying, thanks everyone for listening. If you have thoughts about this episode, please mark it, write them down on our website. We hope we're adding some clarity for you and what's happening to marketing communications today and stay tuned for another episode of Prove It! Take care.

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