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Avoiding Pitfalls: Top 20 Marketing Mistakes in NGOs



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CONTENTS

1

Intro

2

Why Marketing
is Critical for
NGOs

3

Key Challenges
for NGOs in
Marketing

4

The 20 Common
Marketing
Mistakes

5

Solutions and
Best Practices

6

Key Takeaways

7

Q&A



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WHY MARKETING IS CRITICAL FOR NGOS

Purpose: To amplify your mission, grow support, and drive measurable impact.

Challenges:

- Limited budgets and resources.
- Trust barriers with potential donors and stakeholders.
- High competition for attention in a crowded space.

Goal Today: Learn to identify and address the most common marketing mistakes, saving resources and maximizing results.

Key Challenges for NGOs in Marketing

Limited Budgets: Every euro/krona must be maximized for impact

Audience Trust Issues: NGOs need to prove their effectiveness to attract and retain donors

Overwhelming Choices: Deciding where to focus efforts among numerous marketing channels (social media, email, events, etc.)

The 20 Common Marketing Mistakes



1. No Clear Marketing Plan

Danger

Leads to scattered efforts, inconsistent messaging, and wasted resources.

Solution

Develop a one-page marketing plan outlining your audience, objectives, key activities, and metrics for success. Start by defining your mission and aligning your marketing goals with it.

2. Not Understanding Target Audience

Danger

Messages fail to resonate, leading to low engagement and wasted resources on ineffective campaigns.

Solution

Conduct surveys, interviews, or focus groups to gather insights. Find out how they take decisions, what they want to achieve and why, what are their problems, doubts and fears – and use this info in comms and for improving your product.

3. Ineffective Social Media Presence

Danger

An unstructured or unclear social media presence can waste targeting budgets and lose potential followers.

Solution

Audit your social media accounts to ensure consistency in branding and messaging. Clearly define why people should follow your account and what value they'll get.

4. Ignoring Data and Metrics

Danger

Without tracking results, it's impossible to know what's working and what's not.

Solution

Use tools like Google Analytics or SM insights to measure performance. Focus on KPIs relevant to your goals, such as engagement rates or conversion rates. Don't focus on likes instead of meaningful metrics like donations or volunteer sign-ups.

5. Lack of Storytelling

Danger

Failing to connect emotionally with your audience reduces donor trust and engagement.

Solution

Develop a narrative around your cause. Use real-life stories and testimonials to create emotional connections and inspire action.

6. Overloading with Information

Danger

Overwhelming your audience with excessive details dilutes your message and discourages engagement.

Solution

Focus on clear, concise communication. Use visuals and infographics to simplify complex information.

7. Unoptimized Website

Danger

A slow, unclear, or hard-to-navigate website can lose potential supporters.

Solution

Ensure your website is mobile-friendly, loads quickly, and clearly communicates your mission. Highlight key actions like 'Donate Now' or 'Get Involved.'

8. Neglecting Email Marketing

Danger

Email remains one of the most cost-effective tools for engagement. Ignoring it wastes potential connections.

Solution

Build and segment your email list. Personalize content to maintain donor relationships and drive actions like donations or event participation.

9. Lack of Collaboration

Danger

Not partnering with other organizations or leveraging existing networks reduces your reach and effectiveness.

Solution

Identify like-minded NGOs or local businesses for joint campaigns, shared resources, or mutual promotion.

10. Not Adjusting Strategies

Danger

Failing to adapt to changing trends or audience needs leads to stagnation.

Solution

Regularly review your strategy and adjust based on feedback, results, and trends.

11. Unclear Branding

Danger

Inconsistent messaging confuses your audience and weakens your credibility.

Solution

Develop a brand style guide and ensure all materials align with your visual identity and tone of voice.

12. Overdependence on One Channel

Danger

Relying too heavily on a single platform (e.g., Facebook) risks losing your audience if that platform changes policies.

Solution

Diversify your marketing efforts across channels, such as email, social media, and offline events.

13. Inconsistent Communication

Danger

Irregular posting or messaging leads to disengagement and loss of interest.

Solution

Create a content calendar to maintain regular and relevant communication.

14. Underestimating Donor Appreciation

Danger

Failing to thank donors or show impact reduces retention rates.

Solution

Implement a donor acknowledgment program, including personalized thank-you messages and impact reports.

15. Ignoring Volunteer Engagement

Danger

Volunteers are ambassadors for your cause. Neglecting them loses valuable advocacy and support.

Solution

Host volunteer appreciation events and provide regular updates on how their efforts contribute to your mission.

16. Overlooking Visual Content

Danger

Text-heavy communication misses opportunities for engagement.

Solution

Invest in high-quality visuals and videos to convey your message more effectively.

17. Not Leveraging Testimonials

Danger

Testimonials from beneficiaries or donors build trust and credibility. Ignoring them misses a powerful tool.

Solution

Collect and share stories from those impacted by your work. Feature them on your website and social media.

18. Failing to Build Partnerships

Danger

Operating in isolation reduces your potential impact and growth.

Solution

Develop partnerships with local businesses, government agencies, or other NGOs for collaborative initiatives.

19. Overlooking Internal Communication

Danger

Poor communication within your team causes misunderstandings and inefficiencies.

Solution

Set up regular team meetings, shared platforms for updates, and clear role definitions.

20. Neglecting Crisis Management

Danger

Being unprepared for crises damages your reputation and donor trust.

Solution

Develop a crisis communication plan with predefined roles, key messages, and protocols.



SOLUTIONS AND BEST PRACTICES

Set Priorities: Focus on 2-3 key areas to improve first to avoid feeling overwhelmed.

Train Your Team: Invest in ongoing education and training to keep your team updated on marketing best practices.

Key Takeaways

1

Develop a clear marketing plan

2

Understand and segment your target audience

3

Implement consistent and engaging storytelling

4

Measure your efforts with relevant KPIs

Key Takeaways

Actionable Tip:

Choose one mistake to address this week
and start implementing a solution.



Q&A Session

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Reach out for advice, resources, or
templates to support your marketing
efforts



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