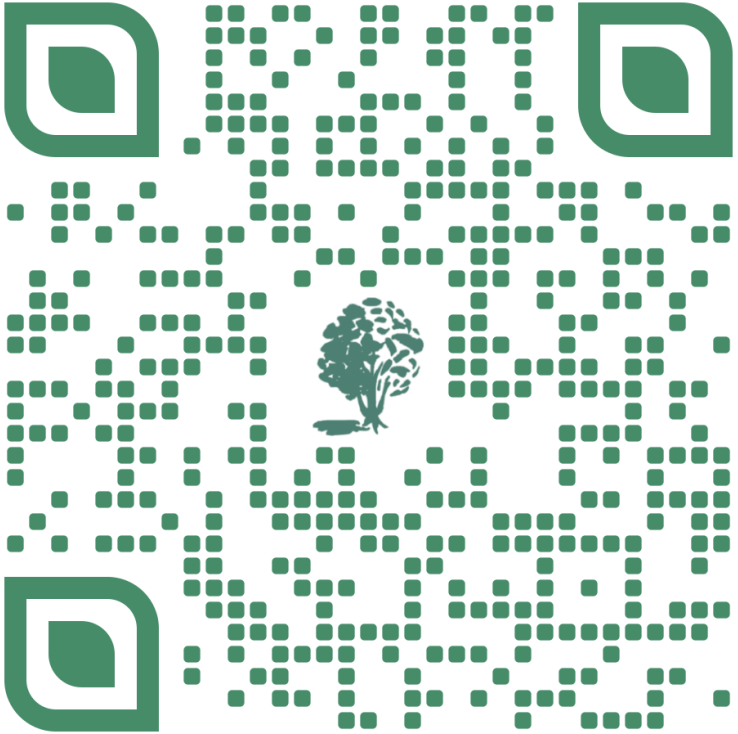
Nonprofit Insights Conference 2026

Marketing Truths: What You Need to Know But May Not Want to Hear

Agenda & Presentation Links



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Marketing Truth: What You Need to Know, but May Not Want to Hear

ACF Nonprofit Conference

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March 12, 2026

ABOUT ME

- President and founder, Dot Org Solutions since 2009
- 30+ years of experience in nonprofit marketing, fundraising and operations
- B.S. in Journalism, Bowling Green State University
- Graduate, Goldman Sachs 10KSB Program
- Data and tech nerd
- I love to cook, read + travel!

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TAKING IN TODAY'S SESSION

The goal is to think

This session is meant to encourage thoughtfulness when it comes to your marketing and communications

Don't get offended

I may say things that you don't want to hear. I'll be kind, but I'm going to be blunt.

Tips are based on experience

All stories and tips are things we see all the time. Names will be withheld to protect the offenders.

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TIP

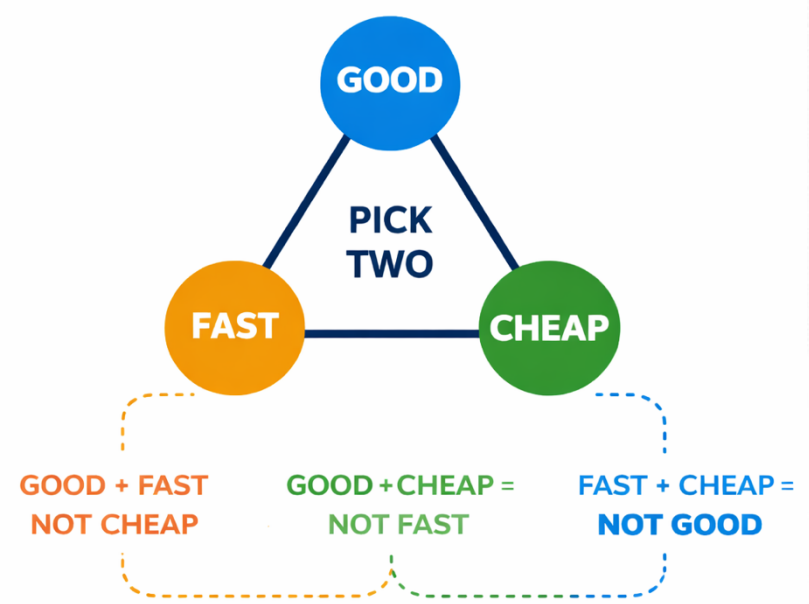
GOOD, FAST, CHEAP

(Pick two)

YOU CAN'T HAVE IT ALL

Applies to: outsourced services (design, websites, campaigns, content, planning, etc.)

When planning projects, ask: "What matters most now? Speed, cost or quality."



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TIP

MARKETING IS A SKILL.

(Not everyone has it.)

EVERYONE THINKS THEY ARE AN EXPERT

- Highly visible: everyone has an opinion
- Opinions aren't strategy
- Requires: Clear goals, defined audiences, consistent messaging + patience

MARKETING CANNOT FIX PROBLEMS

- Unclear mission
- Poor culture
- Bad programs

IT REQUIRES CONSISTENCY + KNOLWEDGE

- If your strategy changes every month, you'll never see results
- Simpler is better.
- Recognize that marketing has many layers
  - Strategy, content, creative, technology, analysis, research

TIP

"EVERYONE" IS NOT YOUR CUSTOMER.

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YOU CANNOT REACH "EVERYONE"

- When you do:
  - Your message becomes vague.
  - Your campaigns become expensive.
  - Your results become weak.
  - You fail to connect with those who matter to your mission.

INSTEAD… DEFINE YOUR ICPs

- Who are they?
- How do they communicate?
- What motivates them?
- How do they like to receive information?

TIP

GENERAL AWARENESS MARKETING IS A WASTE OF $.

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"WE JUST NEED MORE AWARENESS"

- Awareness w/o purpose = waste.
- Marketing should support specific goals
- Strategic marketing is targeted and measurable.
- General awareness campaigns are usually:
  - Expensive, difficult to measure, not tied to results.

THE ENGAGEMENT FUNNEL

TIP

YOUR EMAIL LIST IS GOLD.

(Use it.)

E-MAIL HAS HIGHEST ROI IN MARKETING

- You own the audience.
- You're not fighting the algorithm. (Social platforms can change overnight.)
- You can directly communicate with constituents.
- You control the assets

YET MANY NPOs DON'T USE IT ENOUGH

Problems:

- Overwhelm leads to infrequent sends
- Lists aren't segmented
- We're afraid we're going to "bother" people

Solutions:

- Protect your list
- Keep it clean
- Build segments
- Grow intentionally
- Send more often

TIP

YOUR NEWSLETTER IS TOO LONG.

(And kinda boring.)

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EMAIL NEWSLETTERS CAN BE GREAT!

- People skim emails in seconds.
- Too text heavy? People stop reading.
- Focus on 1-3 key stories
- Have clear headlines + consistent sections
- Make sections short. Send people to your website!
- Add calls to action. What do you want readers to do?

MAKE IT SKIMMABLE

BEFORE

Too Much Text

TL;DR

vs.

AFTER

Short & Focused

READ & CLICK!

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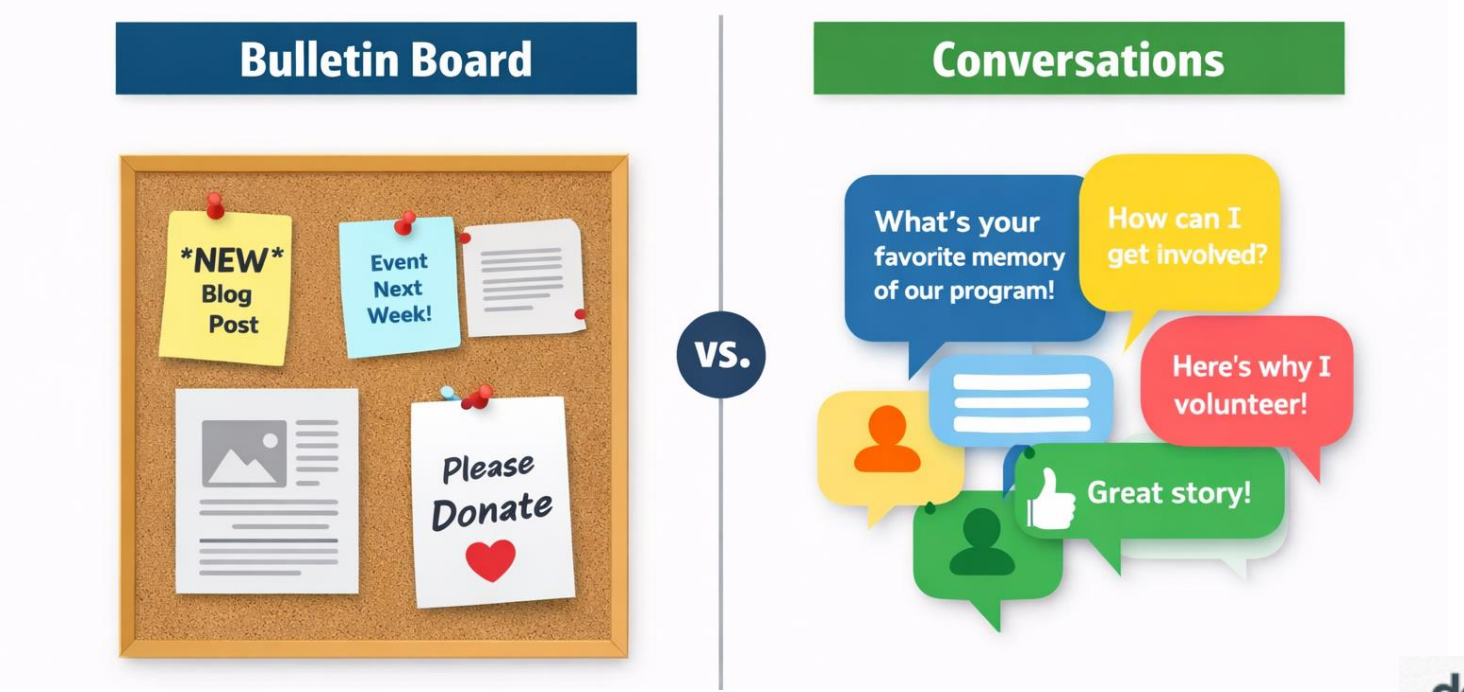
TIP

YOUR SOCIAL ISN'T SOCIAL.

IT'S CALLED SOCIAL MEDIA FOR A REASON

- Social is meant to be social.
- It should engage, create community, inform
- Not just a bulletin board: Post. Announce. Ask. Repeat.
- Not going to solve your fundraising challenges.
- Ask questions, share stories
- Highlight/tag people + partners
- Keep graphics simple

IT'S ABOUT COMMUNITY, NOT A BROADCAST



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TIP

YOUR WEBSITE CONTENT NEEDS WORK.

(Design is not enough.)

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YOUR WEBSITE IS YOUR BILLBOARD

- Focus on content as much as design/UX (if not more)
- It's about the user and what you can do for them.
- Solve for THEIR problem.
- Make it easy for the next action to happen (conversion)
- Keep it short + write for the common user.
- Use clear calls to action (CTAs)
- Answer three questions immediately. What do you do? Why does it matter? What should users do next?

COMMON PITFALLS

- No dedicated landing pages for events
  - Great place for sponsor information
  - Links to register
  - Recaps of events
- No dedicated giving pages. Just links to a donate portal.
  - No ways to give
  - No impact stories
- Limited CTAs on home page

ORG-FOCUSED VS. USER-FOCUSED

TIP

OWN YOUR STUFF.

HAVE CONTROL OF YOUR ACCOUNTS

- Your organization should own and control all its digital assets.
- Don’t rely on vendors, interns or volunteers who set things up and never transfer access.
- Your internal team should always have admin access and oversight.
- Key systems should be documented and monitored internally

RISKS OF NOT HAVING OWNERSHIP

- When a person leaves, the password/access leaves
- Admin won't transfer ownership
- Account is difficult to access (maybe impossible)
- Having to recreate pages, accounts
- Loss of analytics, historical data
- Rogue admins hijacking your digital assets.

WHAT YOU SHOULD OWN/HAVE HIGHEST ACCESS LEVELS

- Core marketing systems
  - Website hosting, CMS, Domain registration
  - Meta Business Manager
  - Social media accounts
- Data & Analytics tools
  - Google Analytics, Google Tag Manager, Google Search Console
- Fundraising & Marketing Assets
  - Email platform + list, Google Ad Grant account, CRM or donor database

RULES + BEST PRACTICES

- If you hire a vendor or agency: Your organization should own the account. Not the vendor. The vendor should have access, not ownership.
- Your organization should maintain:
  - Admin-level access
  - A password manager
  - Documentation of all platforms
  - At least two internal administrators

RECAP

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Recap

- Marketing requires strategy, not just activity.
- You can’t have good, fast AND cheap.
- “Everyone” is not your audience.
- General awareness is rarely a goal.
- Invest in your owned channels.
- Own and control your digital platforms.

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AND FINALLY…


STRONG MARKETING
isn't about doing more.
— IT'S ABOUT —
DOING THE RIGHT
THINGS INTENTIONALLY.
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QUESTIONS

CONTACT & CONNECT

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