

Developing a Marketing Strategy for Nonprofit Events

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Abstract

The research for this project primarily focuses on marketing the various types of nonprofit events. The study looks at the most popular types of fundraising events, as well as thank you events that are held for donors, and attempt to better understand how they differ from other events. Additionally, this study examines several popular fundraising events to see how they were promoted by analyzing their social media and websites in particular. The results of the study indicate that nonprofit events are very unique to other events in their purpose, as well as how they are marketed to potential attendees. Nonprofit event marketing must be much deeper than the marketing of other events. Promotion must motivate attendance by creating an emotional appeal that deeply connects potential attendees to an organization and its cause. Only when this connection is formed can a support-raising event be successful in raising long-term support to make a positive impact.

Keywords: Non-profit Event; Fundraising Event; Event Marketing; Emotional Appeal

Introduction

Nonprofit organizations exist to alleviate an issue, support a common goal, and improve society. Their missions vary greatly, but what they all have in common is their strive to create a better world. Nonprofit organizations also share the commonality of needing to raise support through fundraising, as these entities generally do not receive financial assistance from the government, but rather rely on private donations. How do these organizations raise enough support to fund their efforts? There are many ways that fundraising takes place in today's world, but one very important and popular aspect of raising support comes from events.

Planning and executing events such as fundraising dinners, races, dance marathons, tournaments, and challenges are all ways that nonprofits can seek to gain the attention of potential donors. These events are interesting ways for attendees to enjoy a unique experience. Through these events, nonprofits are able to show attendees the positive things they are able to do with sufficient support. Without a clear understanding of what an organization stands for and how it has succeeded in making a difference, potential givers will not be motivated to generously support a cause. This is why hosting these events is vital to the consistent success of nonprofit organizations.

Nonprofit event marketing, although its primary goal is to support the organization, many times has a major impact on tourism in an area. For instance, many nonprofit events are so renowned that individuals will travel across the country just to attend them. Even local travelers need accommodations for housing, food, and beverage during their time attending an event, or will even take the opportunity to check out local tourism attractions during their visit. Especially for bigger fundraising events like the Wheeler Mission Drumstick Dash, recognition and support of tourism is something that comes along with the event itself, supporting the hospitality industry as an additional benefit.

Nonprofit event marketing is vital to society as a whole because nonprofits do what the government and individuals on their own cannot necessarily do. Because of nonprofit organizations, one person can contribute along with tens, hundreds, or even thousands of other individuals to make

a bigger difference. Without nonprofits, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to ensure that funding goes to what individuals seek to improve, which is why it is so vital to have organized entities with the freedom to achieve their missions (without government interference, which can be positive or negative). Nonprofit organizations make the world a better place and are made up of individuals who truly seek to put others' needs above their own to achieve a better world.

Speaking from personal experience, the marketing that goes into a nonprofit event is quite different than marketing a concert or sporting event, for example. It is not just about selling an experience; it is, more importantly, about giving others the opportunity to contribute to the well-being of their community and make a real difference, something that is extremely satisfying and meaningful to so many individuals. Making these individuals feel like their support has made a real impact by showing them how their dollars are being used is vital to encourage repeat giving and continual support.

Purpose of the Study

The research for this project will primarily focus on marketing the various types of nonprofit events. The study will be looking at the most popular types of fundraising events, as well as thank you events that are held for donors, and attempt to better understand how they differ from other events. One aspect that sets nonprofit events apart is how their promotion and execution must integrate attendees' emotions to support a cause, something that this study will look at in more detail. Additionally, this study examines several popular fundraising events to see how they were promoted by analyzing their social media and websites in particular. All of the findings of this research paper will be very relevant in today's tourism industry, as nonprofit organizations are ever-growing and, as explained earlier, have direct impacts on tourism and hospitality.

Research Questions

In regards to research questions, this study aims to answer three research questions. The first research question is as follows: What are the different types of nonprofit events? Answering this question will give insight into how different nonprofit organizations utilize a variety of events to engage potential donors and raise vital funding for a cause. It will also give understanding as to what types of events are most successful when it comes to fundraising. The second research question is: How are nonprofit events usually promoted? In order to answer this question, the research will take a deeper dive into a few popular fundraising events and seek to find what communication mediums they use and how they communicate through those. Then the third research question is: how unique is the promotion for nonprofit events in that it must engage viewers' emotions if they are to support a specific cause? This study assumes that nonprofit event marketing promotion needs to appeal to viewers' emotions in a much more meaningful way than other event marketing to encourage action that makes a difference.

Method

The methods of research for this paper include a literature review and case studies of popular events' promotional strategies. Literature review of this study discovers helpful insights revealed by previous research regarding nonprofit event marketing. Case studies offered more specific examples of how these nonprofit events achieve success through particular promotional tactics.

Review of Literature

In reviewing various credible sources of literature, many findings are relevant in answering the research questions.

What Makes Nonprofit Events Unique

“Understanding Charity Fundraising Events” (2003) written by Daniel Webber explains how nonprofit events differ from other events, which is vital to fully understanding these events, as their purpose is very unique. The development of donors through these special events is one thing that sets nonprofit events apart from other events. Creating a meaningful event that encourages giving is a vital part in this development of donors. Another possible purpose for a nonprofit event is to express gratitude to donors to encourage them in their current efforts and inspire them to keep giving. Acquisition of new supporters, as well as retaining and caring for current donors, is something that is unique to nonprofit events as well. Sometimes, nonprofit events may even be held for networking or maintaining a brand name, both of which are held in hopes of achieving support (Webber, D., 2003).

Attendee Motivations

As important as these differences are, something of even greater importance is what motivates individuals to attend these types of events. Knowing this information is what helps the organizations market effectively to generate excitement and support for the event. Webber gives multiple reasons for why individuals take part in nonprofit events, the first being that the donor believes in the cause of the event and wants to make a difference. If a nonprofit event has something very unique to participate in, individuals may decide to attend simply for the experience itself. Prestige can also be a motivation, as individuals see attendance to an event as giving them a strong reputation. Other attendees may be motivated by the opportunity they will have to lead and inspire others to make a difference. A direct relationship with the cause may also encourage attendance (for example, losing a family member or friend to suicide may inspire generous support to an organization that helps alleviate that issue). The rewarding feeling that donors have when giving or encouraging others to give may also be a determining factor. Additionally, Webber states that peer pressure can be a final reason for attending, with the individual not wanting to miss out when their family or friends encourage them to go (Webber, D., 2003).

Emotional Appeals

Among reasons that motivate nonprofit event attendance, appealing to the emotions of individuals is vital. If individuals have a heart for making a difference related to a specific cause, promoting to them by making use of emotional value will inspire them to attend the event and contribute to the organization. The motivation generated from a desire to lead and inspire others is also something that event organizers should promote in their marketing strategy. Therefore, appealing to attendees’ emotions is critical for creating the drive in people. For those who have a personal connection to the cause, making those individuals feel united to the organization and supported emotionally can be a driving factor in encouraging involvement. Finally, the event’s promotional tactics can effectively make use of individuals’ emotions by pointing out how they will be able to see and understand the impact they make first-hand at the event, which leads to a rewarding feeling of accomplishment (Webber, D., 2003).

Types of Nonprofit Fundraising Events

When it comes to types of fundraising events held for nonprofit organizations, the options

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are endless. Sporting events, including runs and walks, are very popular in today's world and are a great way to unite a diverse group of individuals in one activity for one cause. Runs and walks create a sense of teamwork by having individuals collaborate together to create a bigger impact than what just one person could make on their own. Competitions can be another way to fundraise and get a large group of individuals with similar interests together. These individuals love engaging in competitions in their interest, and many times will be quick to jump at an opportunity to compete against others, especially for a good cause. These competitions can be sports or non-sports, making for many unique opportunities to effectively gain support. Concerts are used quite regularly to gain support for a cause. These can be large concerts with well-known celebrities donating some (or all) of their profits to a charity, or even smaller scale concerts held in communities that generate support for a cause. Sometimes, event sporting events are utilized to give back to the community and donate to a cause. Galas are a popular nonprofit fundraising event that offer a fun night of dinner, networking, or some sort of entertainment with all of the money raised going to a nonprofit. Auctions are another popular form of nonprofit fundraising that can get many people involved, offering them something they may desire while creating an environment in order to make a difference. These are some of the most popular types of nonprofit events, each of which offer a unique experience to attendees as well as an outlet to support a cause and inspire some sort of positive change.

Nonprofit events have an ability to generate excitement through promotion and marketing in potential attendees, bring them in to experience something fun as well as rewarding in the sense of giving back. For fundraising events that are bigger sizes, their promotion, marketing, and implementation could literally make or break a nonprofit organization. Without this vital funding from larger scale events, nonprofits are not able to do their work effectively. This is why it is so vital to effectively market these events, appealing to viewers' emotions and giving them clear answers as to what they will be supporting and how their generosity can make a tangible difference in others' lives. Sometimes, nonprofit events are held not to raise money directly from that event, but more so to express gratitude to current donors, which can encourage future giving by those same donors. These events commonly take place in the form of dinners or special entertainment experiences that current donors can enjoy. During these events, it is common for donors to be reminded of how appreciated they are. Specific statistics and stories may be shared in order to show donors how much their generosity matters, and what it can do in the lives of those enduring hardship. This can help donors feel excited about their giving, and experience how rewarding it is to give back. An article by Coghlan and Filo (2013) explains how engaging in sports charity events in particular is underscored by a sense of connectedness and well-being. When individuals make a positive impact as a part of a unified group, they experience an incredible sense of unity, in addition to mental well-being. Physical well-being is also a by-product of engaging in sports charity events, as it motivates individuals to train in order to be in the best condition to engage or even compete in the sport (Coghlan, A. & Filo, K., 2013). This further indicates the importance of emotional appeal in event marketing, because appealing to the emotions of participants includes promoting how connected they will feel at the event, and how rewarding that feeling will be if they attend.

Additional Attendee Motivations for Charity Sporting Events

A study conducted by Filo, Fechner, and Inoue (2020) gives additional motivations for attendance of nonprofit events, specifically charity sporting events. First, attendees can challenge themselves physically, something attractive to many individuals seeking healthy lifestyles. Not only the event itself, but the preparation leading up to the event, can provide inspiration for attendees to

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challenge themselves and achieve physical well-being. Socializing with other participants is another motivation for attending, especially as these sporting events for a cause can unite individuals in their love for a sport as well as a cause. Helping individuals in need is something that encourages attendance of events, as well as advancing a charity's mission. Being a part of the mission and purpose of a nonprofit can be very rewarding for attendees, whose generosity can collectively make a huge impact in the lives of those in need. Furthermore, motivation can arise from the positive and rewarding feelings that come from supporting a cause. The feeling of making a difference when attending nonprofit events is a very unique sentiment that brings people together in unity and brings out the best in people (Filo, K., Fechner, D., & Inoue, Y., 2020).

Constraints to Nonprofit Fundraising

According to Filo and his colleagues (2020), there are some constraints to nonprofit fundraising that must be considered in order to achieve success. The first is a lack of money from potential donors. Some individuals may not have the resources available to offer support financially, but this should not dissuade these individuals from attending the events anyways and finding other ways to make a difference. Promotion for the event should emphasize that every little bit of support helps, and that there are more ways than one to make a difference. Volunteering and spreading awareness about an issue is just as important to so many nonprofit organizations as the monetary support some are able to give. Another constraint that may arise is a discomfort on the part of the organization's employees in asking for donations. Some of those working for the organization may be uncomfortable doing this, but they should be encouraged to realize that those who give to organizations get a lot out of it – a feeling of connectedness with a cause, a rewarding feeling in making a difference, and a way to accomplish what they cannot on their own in regards to improving society. Looking at giving from this standpoint can alleviate some of the stress that comes with asking for donations and support. Employees may also have a lack of time to engage in fundraising, as many nonprofit organizations have a limited number of staff accomplishing a lot of tasks. Making time to fundraise in these organizations is vital, and offering prizes and incentives to giving can make the process much easier (Filo, K., Fechner, D., & Inoue, Y., 2020).

Advantages of Fundraising Events for the Organization

An article by Chen, Singh, Ozturk, and Makki (2014) first describes how fundraising events can strengthen the corporate image of nonprofit organizations and enhance social bonds with communities. These events raise awareness for a specific cause, encourage community engagement, build sponsor and donor relationships, and generate publicity for the nonprofit. In order to make fundraising events successful, it is vital to make all events, fundraising events in particular, unique and fun experiences for attendees. A positive experience was found through study to be the most significant positive predictor of event quality for attendees. Providing an unforgettable experience can lead to additional support in regards to fundraising, and also gives an outlet to better explain the organization's mission and purpose and how it positively impacts society. Small aspects of the event such as the quality of food and beverage, décor, layout, atmosphere, and activities can all play a role in creating a unique event for attendees, which will lead to increased support for the nonprofit and its cause (Chen, P., Singh, D., Ozturk, A., & Makki, A., 2014).

The Importance of Belief

Previous research also gives insight into the importance of belief and emotional appeal in motivating support of a nonprofit. "The Role of Belief in Making a Difference in Enhancing

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Attachment to a Charity Sport Event” (2012) explains this in further detail. It outlines how many times, individuals are motivated to give to a cause by the belief that they are making a difference. This is why it is vital for nonprofit marketing efforts to clearly explain how those who give are engaged in making a difference. Telling stories of those who have been positively impacted by the nonprofit organization is especially effective. It is also important to explain how making a difference does not only have to be monetary – giving time and effort to an organization by volunteering and raising awareness is also vital and can make a difference. Additionally, a sense of attachment to the event can also motivate engagement. This leads to repeat participation, positive attitudes toward the organization, and positive word-of-mouth that can generate even more support. To capitalize on these motivations, nonprofit marketing must utilize social media to offer compelling content to potential supporters (Filo, K., Groza, M., & Fairley, S., 2012).

Case Studies of Fundraising Events

In order to more fully understand nonprofit event promotional strategies and tactics, this study will take an in-depth look into a few recent nonprofit events. The first event to be analyzed is held by Wheeler Mission. The Drumstick Dash is a very popular run held each year in Broad Ripple, Indiana, and one of the primary ways Wheeler Mission raises enough funding to support the homeless in Indianapolis and Bloomington for the year. Wheeler Mission promotes its event regularly both on its website and also on social media including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to raise awareness of the impact it is making because of the support of generous donations. One way Wheeler Mission markets its event is by always giving the reason for the run – to help those who are struggling and provide them with hope. Throughout November of last year, Wheeler highlighted many of those positively impacted by the organization with why they are thankful for Wheeler. These small stories of how Wheeler, and those who support it, can have such a big impact is inspiring, and appeals to the emotions of potential supporters (Facebook: Wheeler Mission, 2023). Another way Wheeler appeals to emotions is through its videos on YouTube, which give the incredible stories of individuals whose lives have been completely turned around as a result of the nonprofit’s efforts. By showing potential attendees what their small giving can lead to in a homeless person’s life, many are encouraged to participate in the Drumstick Dash and support the cause (YouTube: Wheeler Mission, 2023).

Race for Life, multiple races in UK held to support research of all 200 types of cancer for Cancer Research UK, is one of the most successful fundraising events across the world. By asking participants to race for someone they love who has dealt with cancer, the promotion and execution of this event also appeals to attendees’ emotions in a meaningful way. When individuals can find a personal connection in a cause, it is one of the primary motivations for engagement with a nonprofit organization, as explained by Webber (Webber, D., 2003). Race for Life is also unique in that it offers different events, one of which can be walked or jogged, so that all attendees can participate in something bigger than themselves, regardless of their skill levels. This creates the sense of connectedness and well-being that so many nonprofit sporting events do (Cancer Research UK, 2023).

The Global Citizen Festival, which first began in 2012, utilizes the popularity of musical artists who want to make a difference to fundraise in combatting extreme world poverty and other related issues. Not only does Global Citizen host its annual festival in different locations worldwide, but also promotes itself year-round to gain support. The event, however, is the nonprofit’s primary source of funding. The website promotes the organization by outlining the impact that has been

made from past giving, explaining each of the areas it is able to affect, and telling stories of those suffering from poverty worldwide. Similar to other nonprofit marketing, this type of promotion appeals to human emotion, encouraging giving by providing a sense of connection to a cause (Global Citizen, 2023).

Results & Discussion

Reflecting on the research conducted, there are a few key findings that seem to be universal when it comes to nonprofit event marketing. First, the development of donors through careful marketing planning and execution is vital to the success of a nonprofit organization. Like all event marketing, it is vital to segment the market and find target markets that will most likely support a specific cause and find the best ways to reach them with content that will inspire them to take action. As with all marketing, target markets determine what nonprofit organizations will promote and how they will use different mediums to promote. This is why it is so important for nonprofit organizations to develop communication and marketing strategy, and to clearly provide pertinent information to those whom their marketing reaches. If potential givers do not fully understand what their generosity can do and how the organization will use their dollars for good, those individuals will most likely pass on the opportunity and give somewhere else. Competition for support in nonprofit organizations is real, which is why promotion must have a clear purpose and mission. Another key finding is that many individuals are motivated differently to support a cause, which sometimes requires different promotion to different target markets.

Emotional appeal is a common theme in nonprofit event marketing, setting it apart from other events' promotion. If individuals do not feel connected to a cause, knowing exactly what their support will provide, they will be much less likely to give. Nonprofit events are also unique in that there is a very wide variety of events to choose from to gain support, as discussed earlier. Almost any type of event can be used to generate support for a cause while also creating a sense of connectedness and unity among attendees, further encouraging funding.

Through research, answers to the research questions were found. This paper includes multiple examples of the different types of nonprofit events and how they are utilized to generate support. Through the case studies in particular, answers were provided as to how these events are marketed, i.e., nonprofit event marketing promotion needs to appeal to viewers' emotions in a much more meaningful way than other event marketing to encourage action that makes a difference. This conclusion has been substantiated with the review of literature as well as the three case studies, all of which utilized this important component of promotion in marketing their important events.

Conclusion

Statistics show that the nonprofit sector is the third largest workforce in the United States behind retail and manufacturing. This proves how vital these organizations are to not only solving problems and supporting worthy causes, but also contributing to the well-being of the U.S. economy as a whole by providing employment opportunities. In his article, Ariella (2022) states that 5.7% of the United States' GDP comes from the nonprofit sector, further proving its importance. In 2021, overall giving increased by 4.1%, with online giving reaching an increase of 12.1%. The number of nonprofit organizations is increasing, but the revenue created is increasing at an even higher rate (Ariella, S. 2022). More and more individuals are giving to nonprofit organizations, which is why it is so vital for these organizations to effectively promote to potential givers in a highly competitive

and actively growing market. The use of social media and websites for marketing purposes is also vital, as the statistic regarding growth in online giving shows. All of this information supports the vitality of utilizing good research to make strong decisions regarding a nonprofit's marketing and promotional strategies. The points made in this paper are very relevant in today's world, where there has been tremendous growth in the nonprofit industry as more and more individuals are made aware of issues and how they can be alleviated through giving and support.

In terms of managerial implications, nonprofits need to focus some of their promotional tactics on engaging the younger generation. These younger individuals have proven themselves to be concerned with many issues in today's world, and are the next generation that will be able to impact society in either a positive or negative way. Utilizing social media marketing on mediums such as YouTube and TikTok are great ways of generating awareness on how to get involved and make a difference. Encouraging younger individuals who are yet unable to give financially to engage in volunteer experiences with a nonprofit organization is a wonderful way to show them what the nonprofit stands for and how it is making an impact in lives. This can lead to individuals having strong connections with an organization and be inspired to eventually support the nonprofit financially and share solutions with others as well.

As mentioned earlier, utilizing social media effectively is what will give many nonprofit organizations an edge competitively. In a day and age where technology is continually growing and evolving, these organizations must be sure to stay up to date with trends that are here to stay and use technology to the fullest to generate awareness, and, in turn, support. Utilizing a diverse group of social media platforms is also vital. Facebook has been proven to cater to an older group of individuals, who can be encouraged to make an impact through careful messages from nonprofits. Younger individuals can be inspired through platforms more catered to their needs, like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Additionally, wording these social media messages in a way that appeals to each group's demographics and psychographics is something that must be carefully considered and adapted as necessary.

Another implication is for nonprofits to continue to appeal to the emotions of those who engage with their promotion. Understanding target markets' psychographics can help by showing nonprofit organizations what motivates giving in others, and what will be most effective in gaining their support. By creating meaningful human connection, giving individuals strong ways to relate to a cause, giving is much more likely, especially consistent, long-term giving. Encouraging a one-time gift is relatively easy, but retaining donors over long periods of time can be much more difficult. It is worth it, however, to invest in marketing tactics to appeal to the emotions of individuals and create long-term connections, as those types of giving in particular are very rewarding for nonprofits. Those who are passionate about a cause and have found great satisfaction in giving to a nonprofit will undoubtedly spread awareness to their closest friends and family, further contributing to the support of the charitable organization. In order to do this, the marketing team for a nonprofit entity must clearly outline the mission and purpose of the organization, which will reach the right people and encourage them to give support. In order to create an emotional, psychological connection with these individuals, it is important to tell stories and share statistics of how many people have been helped and how supporters helped create that positive change. Through this type of marketing, individuals will be able to see themselves engaging in a mission to create a better world, and the emotional connection they connect to the nonprofit organization will be a long-term reminder of how their support can make a positive impact.

There are many issues that are very apparent in today's world, and nonprofits have a very special part to play in making a positive difference. Many want to be a part of that movement by

planning and executing fun, unifying events that spur individuals to action, specifically, generous giving to a worthy cause. These events and their marketing can literally make or break a nonprofit, as annual events are many times the most vital way to gain support for an entire year. By motivating individuals to find a connection with an organization and its purpose, marketing in a way that generates curiosity and awareness, and holding events that effectively unite individuals together for one cause and one mission, nonprofits can fund their initiatives and continue to do what they do best – make the world a better place.

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