

By Sean King

## Five Marketing Questions to Review 2015 & Plan for 2016

For most of us, our events are in the rear view mirror for the year 2015. Tents are down, signage is packed, sponsors are thanked, yet there is still some work to be done.

As we prepare for 2016 and the successes to come, this is a great time to take a look back on the basics of your marketing plan to evaluate its effectiveness in achieving the mission of your event and your organization.

With the advent of big data and analytics, every facet of the mechanics of an organization's marketing can be parsed to the narrowest parameter. While detailed analytics are possible, for most organizations the limited resources of time, budget and personnel make it nearly impossible to take on analysis in a meaningful way.

But in this time of reflection and planning for the New Year, we ask ourselves to set aside the daily dashboard to ask what are the important questions. We need to take some time to investigate the deep insights that connect our data to our mission.

Where is the heart? Where is the soul in what we do? We find ourselves ensconced in ROI and conversion rates, which all agree are necessary to keep our doors open and to make payroll. But in the end, what are we achieving, and what role does marketing play in forming relationships between those who support us and every aspect of our event and our organization?

There are FIVE basic questions and themes to reflect upon and address in an upcoming staff meeting or planning session with your volunteers. These are fairly universal topics that can be asked by any large Fortune 500 company or small community church, but they are intrinsic

expectations of what your marketing plan should seek to address and deliver.

### **Question #1 Does Your Marketing Reflect Your Mission?**

A long time ago, in some extended off-site retreat, leaders of your organization went on a deep dive of what they wanted to accomplish through your event or organization. Years passed by and the mission has pretty much remained intact but is it still relevant to supporters and attendees?

No matter if its been months or decades since your mission was last addressed, it is critically important that the organization pays attention to its most basic elements and incorporates them in some way into the marketing plan on an ongoing basis.

The question you and your staff must answer is this: "Do we know why we are hosting this event, selling these tickets, and promoting this event?" If you can't answer that question, it might be a good time to start delving into why everyone is not singing from the same songbook.

Unless there is a connection between the mission, the marketing and the members of the team – from paid staff to newest volunteers and from all levels of seniority and responsibility - true success might be difficult to attain.

### **Question #2 Does Your Marketing Tell Your Story?**

Storytelling in marketing has become a catch-all for consultants to promote in this instantaneous world of social media. But what does it really mean?

Time is at a premium for most everyone. There are only so many hours in the day for people to digest all of the inbound sources of news. While newspapers, radio and traditional media have seen drastic drop-offs in followers, the mainstream social media of Facebook, Instagram and YouTube have more than taken up their space.

### Why?

Because social has provided a great job of building platforms for storytelling, people have become more connected to one another and to those things that are important to them. And what is more important than one's own news feed, hearing stories from those we know and love and care about?

No matter how small the niche, social media has been able to align those who are passionate and engaged and connect them to others resulting in solid growth when the most effective channels are being leveraged for the right audiences.

Tapping into this passion is what it means to tell your story. Remember, it's not necessarily about you generating all of the content on your own. It's about having members of your tribe do that for you. From selfies at your event to minimally-produced videos to heartfelt love notes written to you in celebration of your successes, we're talking about the sum total of the work surrounding your event helping to build the audience for the future.

### Question #3 Are You Measuring the Right Things?

There's so much chatter about big data these days.

It's wonderful to be served with ads of things I care about... I think?

It's great to know about the five or seven items that an algorithm believes would make my life more complete since I purchased a related product on Amazon. Maybe? These tactics are efficient. But are they necessary? You decide.

We can and should harness all this data for good. Marketers love this ability because we can eliminate wasting resources such as time or budget to concentrate on messaging to people who find us relevant.

However, with so many of us programming events for the general public, mass appeal is still important in building of a larger community than parsing data to exclude rather than include all.

One can argue that with limited resources we must do our best to maximize our investment in marketing. But with all of the opportunities presented, it may be in the best interest of us to look at all of the data to understand the qualitative as much as the quantitative.

It's the age-old question of measuring outputs vs. outcomes. Is it more important that we drive the analytics to know that we had 73% of our readers open our emails and 42% click thru and 5% complete the goal we wanted them to accomplish.

Or is it just as important, or even more so, to measure what the outcome of that goal was? And if so, how do we go about creating the new metrics.

These questions are the real grist for the 21st century mill of marketers. Caring about our followers and measuring the why's and what happened's beyond just the trackable data is where intelligent marketers are headed. Are you in that space?

### Question #4 What is the Status of Your Current Marketing and Communication Channels?

When was the last time you completed a full marketing and communications audit?

If it hasn't occurred in the past two to three years, you and your team have some work to do.

There are too many changes to count that have affected everything from your website to your email channels, not to mention the explosion of social media opportunities including SEO, paid ads and more. Add in the traditional in-person touch points and the power of word of mouth and it's probably a great time to analyze what you are doing, where you've been and where you are headed.

Where do you stand? Are you happy? Are your stakeholders receiving the information they need? Are you developing new audiences and attendees through the right channels?

What needs help? Are you wasting precious resources on elements of social media without a strategy? Are there other areas of opportunity that your team would like to test, but you do not know where to begin?

If there's one thing to put on your to-do list for 2016, it's to conduct an audit of your marketing and communications channels to affect an even more successful year ahead.

### Question #5 Is Your Marketing (Ir)Relevant?

Relevance is a scary word and an even scarier topic when it comes to your marketing. Creativity and content development are difficult issues to address with your team. Some marketing professionals have spent countless hours of trying to craft the perfect message only to find it provides only a negligible improvement in engagement.

At some point, we realize a portion of marketing is art and highly subjective to

the audience, and we cannot waste much time on trying to address personal taste.

The phrase "getting the word out" ties into not only where and when we are delivering our message, but what our message is. Most campaigns are relatively benign but lack more for the inability of the message to be sent with enough frequency and land directly with an audience that is impassioned to make an impact on whatever your measurable is.

The great thing about festivals and events is that the content essentially generates itself and with proper planning, you should have more than enough content to entertain and delight your audience for a long time to come.

For those events run by organizations who have a busy annual schedule, even better. There's more opportunity to create content that is relevant to your followers and to keep them engaged in the next step of their journey through your organization.

### SUMMARY

Are these five questions the only ones you need to ask? Of course not, but they are certainly important ones to get the conversation started.

Our hope is that by taking on some of these questions at the 20,000 foot level it will get you and your team's focus out of the weeds long enough to avoid discussing the actual tactics you employ to deliver your marketing messages.

We encourage you to take the time to block out an hour or two to begin this conversation across all members of your team in a constructive and creative atmosphere.

The goal is not to point fingers or cast blame, nor is it to celebrate successes and slap backs. The real goal is to address the higher level of your marketing plan so the event and your organization move in lockstep towards your mission.

Best of luck on your journey!

*If you find yourself in need of assistance in facilitating the conversation or conducting your 2016 Marketing Audit, please contact me at your convenience. I'd be happy to assist with your plans for event marketing in 2016 and beyond.*

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