

# Engaging Your Audience for Success and Sustainability

By Shelli Bischoff

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**This article outlines a proven, step-by-step process that helps organizations reach new audiences or more deeply engage existing audiences.**

A one-of-a-kind prairie preserve and nature center that is best known for its popular environmental education programs for school children welcomes over 18,000 visitors each year. But it only has 250 members and 180 donors.

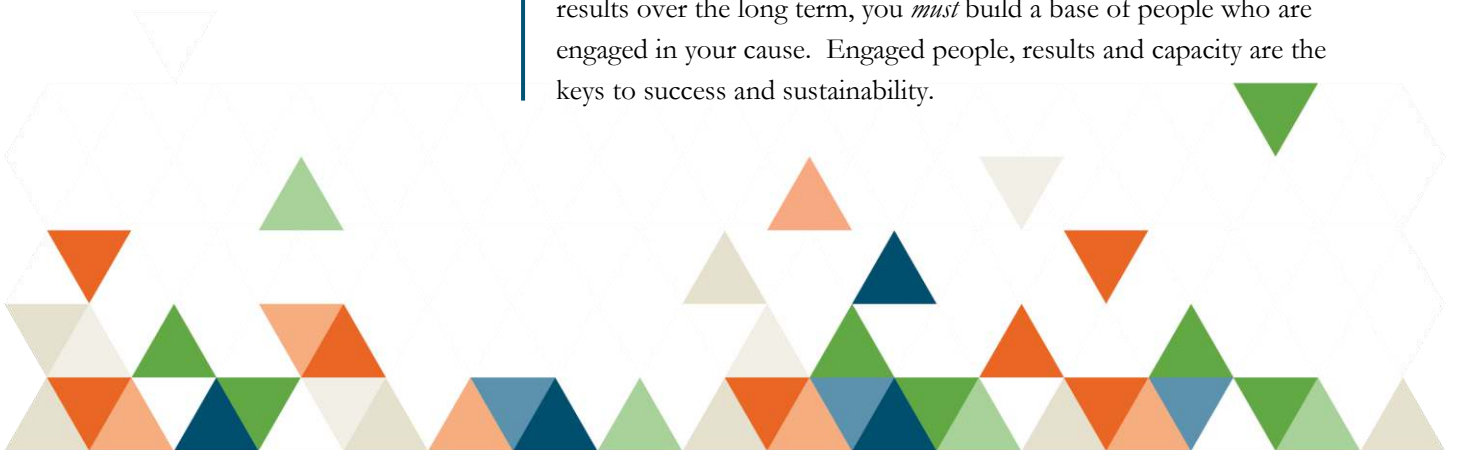
A successful land trust serves a growing, idyllic community that is surrounded by mountains, rivers, and ranches and attracts lots of new residents – active retirees, young families, and urban escapees – all of whom relocate to enjoy the area’s natural beauty and outdoor lifestyle. But the trust isn’t able to convert even 1% of these new residents into supporting members.

What’s going on? Why do organizations that do good work struggle with turning their participants into loyal, engaged constituents? Why do organizations struggle with reaching new audiences?

**“If you build it, they will come,” is not a marketing strategy.**

Yes, this is an article on marketing. Marketing is the process of understanding, reaching and engaging your audience.

The purpose of this article is to outline a proven, step-by-step process that helps organizations reach new audiences or more deeply engage existing audiences. If you want your organization to reach its full potential, to be strong and sustainable and achieve mission-related results over the long term, you *must* build a base of people who are engaged in your cause. Engaged people, results and capacity are the keys to success and sustainability.



**Market:** The set of actual and potential consumers (audience) for the organization's products or services.

**Market Segmentation:** A way to organize subsets of the market by like values, behaviors, demographics, or psychographics.

**Target Market:** That subset of the market that is most likely to take action, or most simply, those that are likely to afford the organization the highest return on investment.

**Audience = Target Market:** Your donors, supporters, members, participants, customers, or clients who are critical and necessary for your success.

### **Marketing is not about selling, persuading, or convincing.**

It is about taking all of the good stuff you do to achieve your mission, and connecting with those people who care and are most likely to take action on your behalf. Good marketing is more about listening than it is about telling.

First and foremost, marketing is understanding your audience. A deep understanding of your audience's demographics and psychographics (values, attitudes, lifestyles and behaviors), and clear insight regarding how they relate to your mission, program, or service provide the basis to create outreach strategies that resonate and connect.

Strategic marketing is a six step process:

1. **Goal:** Define the goal or desired outcome of a successful marketing effort
2. **Situation Analysis:** Take stock of your internal, external, and competitive operating environment
3. **Market Analysis:** Define and segment the potential market, and select target markets
4. **Target Market Profiles:** Intimately understand the target markets relative to your organization
5. **Outreach Strategies:** Design the most efficient and effective organization offerings and outreach strategies to reach and engage the target market.
6. **Organizational Implications:** Align the organization's resources (staff, volunteers, budget, information management systems) to support marketing efforts

Complete these six steps and you have a strategic marketing plan. Depending upon your needs, the plan might be as simple as a one or two page matrix, or as detailed as a thirty page report. The important thing is that the plan explicitly defines the target market and strategies that align with that market.

### **Step 1: Define the Goal.**

What do you want to achieve as a result of your marketing efforts? Creating awareness, raising visibility, growing name recognition? Too general. If people in your community become aware of your organization. So what?

**Less useful goal:** Create a comprehensive, coordinated approach to marketing that identifies target audiences, increases the organization's visibility, and provides a uniform message

**More useful goal:** Attract 2,000 new members over the next two years, and increase engagement of people who have been members for 2 or more years as evidenced by increases in volunteerism, program participation, and size of financial gifts

Instead, focus on what behaviors you want from the audience. What do you want more people to do for you? Give money, become members, visit a preserve, write an elected official? Create a goal that is so specific that it defines the desired action and the number of people you want to take that action.

A clear, specific marketing goal has many benefits. It is inherently measurable (either that many people take that action in a given timeframe, or they don't). And, it tells you a lot about the scale and scope of your marketing initiative: securing 100 new members is distinctly different than getting 100,000 people to sign your petition.

### **Step 2: Conduct a Situation Analysis.**

You need to put your understanding of the market and your marketing strategies in context by considering the larger environment in which you operate and your organization's own operating capacity.

Define the socio-economic and political trends and issues that influence your work; your industry landscape, the philanthropic environment, your competitive or comparative environment, and your internal assets, competencies, and gaps. More than a list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, an objective analysis clearly defines your operating context, identifies strategic issues or choices relative to marketing decisions, and highlights the implications for your organization.

### **Step 3: Complete a Market Analysis.**

This is where you identify and understand the market. Start by defining your largest potential market, for example, the community in which you operate. Then segment that market: divide up the pie by like characteristics. The typical way to segment is by age or ethnicity, or perhaps by geography. It is more useful to segment by psychographics that is, values, attitudes, lifestyles, and behaviors. A good question to ask here is: "How do people relate to or think about your issue or cause?"

Describe each segment so that you can answer this question: "Which segment(s) are most likely to take action on our behalf?" Choose the one or two segments which make the most sense for you to target in order to reach your marketing goal.

#### Step 4: Develop Target Market Profiles.

You need to intimately understand your target markets. Talk to people who know that market and who fall within that market. Pay attention to the businesses and organizations that cater to the market.

For example, if a conservation group believes that outdoor recreationists are their target market, companies that cater to recreationists (e.g. REI or L.L. Bean) are a good source of information. Even if they won't share their market intelligence with you, you can learn a lot by observing their outreach, messaging, advertising, and promotion strategies.

You want everyone in your organization to have a clear picture of your target market – who they are, where they hang out, what they care about, where they get their information, who influences them, how they make decisions. Once you have this information, “right” answers emerge regarding what outreach strategies will work best.

There is a direct correlation between how well you know your target market the success of your outreach strategies. While working with the land trust mentioned at the beginning of this article, we learned that new residents spoke about the area's quality of life. They never talked about biodiversity, habitat, or ecology – the key words the land trust used in its communications. Understanding this difference and updating its language was key to creating effective outreach strategies.

#### Sample Target Market Profiles

Target Market	Description	Their Needs/Interests
Holistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▲ 45-60 –Baby boomers; semi-retired</li><li>▲ Outdoors-oriented, active, healthy lifestyle and choices</li><li>▲ Seek meaningful, unique experiences</li><li>▲ Philanthropy as investment; engagement</li><li>▲ Understand the larger ecological whole</li><li>▲ Idealistic; value integrity</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▲ Protect natural beauty</li><li>▲ Recreation opportunities that afford the lifestyle of my choice</li></ul>
Quality of Lifers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▲ 30-42 – Gen X; young families with young children</li><li>▲ Moved for more time with family and quality of life (environment and safety)</li><li>▲ Seek balance and simplicity; work to play</li><li>▲ Independent; pragmatic; individualistic</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▲ Keep this a place I want to live</li><li>▲ Maintain quality of life for family</li></ul>

**If you REALLY know your audience, there is a logical, best strategy (and it is usually quite obvious).**

### **Step 5: Create Outreach Strategies that Resonate.**

In marketing terms, your outreach strategies are the “four P’s”: product, place, price, and promotion. For nonprofit organizations, marketing strategies may mean redesigning your programs and services to better serve your target market. For example, an outdoor stewardship organization wanted to attract younger volunteers. The research demonstrated that no amount of promotion would be successful because that market didn’t want the “product” as they had packaged it (a multiple weekend commitment with an extensive up-front training requirement, and registration in early spring for a summer project). To engage the younger 30 year old market, the organization had to redesign their fundamental offering (more episodic, minimal, just-in-time training, with sign up a few days ahead of the event, not several months ahead!).

Organizations typically think of marketing as their brochures, websites or social media campaigns. The outreach part of marketing includes direct contact, social media earned media, paid media, advertising, promotions, or events. The right strategy or mix of strategies depends on who the target market is. This is NOT about brainstorming a bunch of ideas. If you REALLY know your audience, there is a logical, right best strategy (and it is usually quite obvious).

### **Step 6: Align the Organization ... and Implement.**

Sometimes organizations are not reaching their audiences because they simply aren’t trying to reach them – they want to, but they aren’t taking action in a consistent manner. If you are serious about engaging markets, then you must allocate staff, volunteer, financial, and technological resources to doing so. Everyone in the organization plays a role in engaging your market to take action on your behalf. Reaching new audiences, even if the goal is to increase membership, is not just the job of the membership coordinator. Remember that prairie preserve and nature center? Research revealed that while its programs were well known, visitors were unaware of the organization that was behind those programs. All of the staff and volunteers who served those 18,000 annual visitors had to participate in implementing strategies to change that – no one person could have created significant awareness on his or her own.

A good marketing plan will contain strategies for each target market, and will define tasks for implementation. Outline the roles everyone will play, and ensure they have the tools they need to be successful.

**Marketing is a Core Function**

To be successful and sustainable, you need people who care about the work you do. You need people who are not just aware of the organization, but will take action on your behalf. A marketing plan is a tool to help you identify and engage those people.

Marketing as a core function, gets designed into everything you do - programming, communications, or outreach. Understanding and engaging an audience is powerful! Give it a try and let us know the difference it makes!

**Marketing Plan Components**

Component	Key Questions
Marketing Goal	What outcome do we want as a result of marketing plan implementation?
Situation Analysis	What are our area’s demographics? What is our operating environment? What are the prevailing trends and issues? Who are community influencers or players? Who is our competition?
Potential Market	What is our area of influence (or what does it need to be?) by geographic boundary or type of audience, and how many households does that encompass?
Market Segmentation	How do people in our potential market relate to land conservation? What do we presume to know about each segment?
Target Markets	Based on what we presume to know, and our goal, who is our likely target market? What are the characteristics of the target market segments?
Offerings (product, place, price, packaging)	How do our programs, services, projects need to be developed or designed to be appropriate for the target market?
Outreach Strategies (media, direct contact, promotions, events)	How do we reach and connect with the target market?
Communication and Public Relations	Which messages do we begin to use that best resonate with our target markets? How do we build a reputation and a positive image with the target market?
Organizational Alignment	Which resources (staff, board, and financial) will be invested in implementation? Which systems need to be developed or redesigned to support our efforts?
Action Plan	Who will do what tasks, and when?

## About the Company

Conservation Impact and Nonprofit Impact are client-centered practices of our mission-driven, B Corp certified company. Our mission is to radically impact how organizations fulfill their missions and demonstrate results.

Founded in 1996, we provide comprehensive planning, marketing, and organizational development consulting and training solely to nonprofits, government agencies, and foundations. Our practices focus on the conservation, environmental health, healthy living and healthy aging, and food systems sectors.

Together, Conservation Impact and Nonprofit Impact have successfully completed more than 1,000 projects with 650 clients in 45 states and 5 countries.



## About the Author

Shelli Bischoff is the founder and president of Conservation Impact and Nonprofit Impact and has 30 years of experience in nonprofit planning, marketing, and organizational development. Shelli developed the Integrated Strategy as a framework for creating more impactful and sustainable organizations.

Shelli is a sought after speaker and trainer known for her content expertise and her dynamic and truth-telling style. She has developed and delivered training for the Land Trust Alliance, River Network, the Association of Nature Center Administrators, the NACDD Chronic Disease Academy, and for the DTTAC Learning Institute as well as for state and local health departments nationwide.

Shelli is currently adjunct faculty at the Colorado School of Public Health, previously served as adjunct faculty in the Regis University Master of Nonprofit Management program, and has been visiting professor on nonprofit management and marketing at College of the Atlantic. She has held several nonprofit management positions, created successful revenue-generating nonprofit ventures, and has served on numerous nonprofit boards. She holds a Master's of Public Administration from University of Colorado



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