

Interview with CNM Marketing Management Instructor, Martin Berg

By Sarah Rothschild

Great Cities Institute at the University Of Illinois at Chicago

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Director of Marketing and Communications for [Community Investment Corporation](#) and CNM instructor in the upcoming Marketing Management course (October 26, 2006), Martin Berg has over 25 years experience in nonprofit marketing. Martin has worked for various small and large nonprofit organizations, and belongs to a number of trade associations which keep him abreast of the latest trends in marketing. He has been a CNM instructor since 2003.

According to Martin, many nonprofits erroneously think that since they know their services are needed in the community that they don't have to do any marketing for their programs and services. "Nothing could be further from the truth", he stated. "Marketing has implications for funding, the quality and quantity of client services, and membership recruitment and retention (in nonprofits which are membership-based)."

The Nonprofit FAQ webpage of Idealist.org reiterates Martin's stance that nonprofits need to take marketing more seriously, emphasizing that good marketing helps nonprofits raise funds and that fundraising needs to be approached from a marketing standpoint. As with for-profits, first impressions are important for nonprofits: the exterior and interior of their offices, as well as every conversation that each staff person has with clients, are all part of marketing

Similarly, Freida Curry, Director of the [Small Business Development Center](#) at UIC's Center for Urban Business teaches businesses and nonprofit organizations to remember that marketing begins the moment a new idea or program is conceptualized. Freida asserts: "You are always marketing yourself, your organization, your products and services, and the impact your programs have on the stakeholders."

Martin believes that nonprofit and for-profit marketing utilize the same approaches.

Understanding the target market is the key to successful marketing efforts, "including the content of the work they do; their geographic and cultural context; the 'understandability' of the content and the value of their work", he told me. Thus, as nonprofit organizations prepare any marketing initiative – whether it's program recruitment, fundraising, developing a website, on-line advertising, press releases, etc. -- a thorough analysis of who the intended audience is and how they will interpret the marketing message is paramount to the success of the initiative.

To learn the "tricks of the trade" in marketing, such as branding, imaging, positioning, strategies appropriate for specific marketing goals, using the media and web marketing – register now for CNM's Marketing Management course! Registration deadline is October 16. To read more about Marty, please go to the [instructor page](#) of the CNM website.

Below are the questions I asked Martin during our interview. I have included them here in their entirety because I felt that the information he provided is very useful and will be beneficial to everyone.

1. What is a pressing marketing issue facing nonprofits?

The most consistent marketing issue for nonprofits is the failure to see the *need* to market what they do. It is typical for many nonprofits to assume that, because they do good work, the world will somehow find out about it and beat a path to their door. Nothing could be further from the truth. Marketing has implications for funding, the quality and quantity of client services, and membership recruitment and retention (in nonprofits which are membership-based).

2. Are there fundamental differences in marketing for a hospital, an industrial redevelopment area, and an affordable housing lender? If there are, what are they? If there aren't, does this mean that the principles of marketing can be applied to all NPO sectors?

The target markets of any endeavor, nonprofit or otherwise, depend upon several things, including the content of the work they do; their geographic and cultural context; the “understandability” of the content and the value of their work (e.g., everyone understands that feeding starving babies is a good thing; they may not grasp as easily the importance of promoting art, or working for an abstract social justice goal such as payday loan regulation).

3. What are the major differences in marketing pre-internet and now?

The differences are fewer than one might think. Certainly the internet and email are used as tools where they didn't exist before, and this means that the information travels more quickly than before. But beyond that, you still have to define your goals and determine who your targeted markets are, just like always.

4. How important is it for an NPO to have a website?

The importance of a website depends on several things. One is the size and content of what the nonprofit does: if it's on a small scale and doing very local, direct-service kind of things, it may not need a website at all--or may borrow a corner of another nonprofit's website for a small fee. There are advantages for mid- to large-sized nonprofits having a website, because it can attract funders, educate and attract clients, and make the case for how important its work is by giving people information about the organization. Design is not to be overlooked in this process; simplicity in navigation and economy of expression are important for the website of a nonprofit business to be effective—exactly as it is for a for-profit business.

5. How have press releases benefited the NPO's you've worked for?

Press releases are a tool which all nonprofits need to use from time to time, but how often varies considerably with how newsworthy the NPO's activities inherently are. For example, the activities of, say, the American Red Cross during a disaster will require press releases to be sent out on a daily or even more frequent basis; but a nonprofit multifamily rehab lender such as I work for may go a month or two without sending out a release because our work is incremental, routine, and difficult to explain to the public in a newsworthy fashion.

6. In affordable housing, who is the marketing geared toward? Funders and investors, or the people who need affordable housing?

In affordable housing the marketing is primarily geared toward investors [the people who actually develop and manage the properties], first of all, because the efforts of the funders and the hopes of the future tenants will not be fulfilled unless we can get the housing “on the street” and make it available to new tenants.

7. How can haphazard marketing hurt the marketing effort?

The cliché “you only get one chance to make a first impression” is true. If an NPO’s marketing materials look shoddy (or, conversely, too slick), potential investors or funders will not have confidence in the organization or doubt their judgment, respectively, before they even begin to read their verbal message. Less harmful but not helpful in terms of misdirected energies is the failure to strategize sufficiently who is in the target market and what the goals of the organization should be when they reach them.

8. What are some good sources (journal, website, etc.) to keep abreast of NPO marketing trends?

NPO marketing trends aren’t much different from for-profit marketing trends; we just have even smaller budgets than they do. I’m fond of the American Marketing Association website, www.marketingpower.com ; and the website of the local nonprofit Community Media Workshop, www.newstips.org, which is especially good for “how-to” materials for the less experienced nonprofit marketer.

9. Each time you started marketing at a new job, what were some of the first things you did?

I always make a “Marketing and PR Audit” to determine what communications needs of the organization are being well taken care of, and which need attention. Typically, the second list is longer. Part of this process is finding out who the organization feels is its target market, after which I ask, “Where do they go for their information on what we do?” to give clues about which types of media, and which specific outlets, might be appropriate to use to deliver our message.

10. What are some of the best benefits of belonging to trade associations?

Networking and sharing of latest trends are probably the two biggest benefits--plus, learning the secret handshake.

11. What marketing publications do you read regularly?

I don’t read a lot of marketing publications directly. I’d rather observe what other people are doing in the regular media (newspapers, radio, tv, internet) to get their message across, particularly if they’re competitors or similar to us but serving different markets. I simply read/watch/hear with a different “screen” than the casual consumer. Having said that, I do like the monthly newspaper put out by the Public Relations Society of America, called *Public Relations Tactics*; you can get useful, pithy articles from it at <http://www.prsa.org/Publications/main/> .