

## **Marketing New Years Resolutions:**

*Why Things "Are The Way They Are"  
And What To Do About It*

By Kathleen M. Hosfeld

Nonprofits with more than 100 employees spent \$7.9 billion on marketing-related costs in 2005 according to a study by Changing Our World, Inc. a consulting firm that works with nonprofits, corporate grantmakers and foundations.

While large non-profits embrace the principles of branding and marketing to compete for philanthropic dollars and attract "earned income," many smaller non-profits struggle with creating a "marketing culture."

As Gerald Weinberg wrote in his wonderful 1985 book "The Secrets of Consulting," (a quote he attributes to economist Kenneth Boulding): "Things are the way they are because they got that way."

In other words, there is actual intention behind the choices that bring organizations to their current situation. Many don't really want to change. They just want a different outcome from the same steps they've taken in the past.

Many non-profits find themselves in an approach/avoidance dance with marketing -- they know they need it, but underlying values and beliefs keep them from changing their behavior enough to change their outcomes. It can look and sound like this:

- **Diverse 'Focus'** – "We need a strategy, but if we focus and specialize, we'll miss opportunities. What if we pick the wrong strategy?"
- **Cream Rises** – "We need better publicity, but we're the best at what we do. We shouldn't have to promote ourselves."
- **The "M" Word** – "We want to grow, but to be a marketer, you have to lie to people."
- **Selling Out** – "We'd like to build a stronger base, but if we do what clients want, we'll lose our sense of mission. We'll just be pandering."

The truth is there are "good" reasons for their ambivalence. Stepping out of ambivalence means finding out what we are afraid of, and taking steps to overcome what we fear.

Another consultant I admire, Robert Kegan, has articulated a reason that people don't make the changes they want, as desirable as the outcome might be. In his book with Lisa Laskow Lahey "How The Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work" he explains the "competing commitments" that lie on either side of a change. On the one hand, we want a marketing strategy that will help us grow. But the competing commitment might be that it means saying no to some of the things we do today. That may mean saying goodbye to clients, or certain people we work with.



In other situations, it might mean discovering something about ourselves we don't like. It might mean admitting to ourselves that we don't know something, that we have a weakness or that we've made mistakes in the past.

“New Years Resolutions” are the kind of for-good-and-against-evil promises we make to ourselves (“This year I'll lose 20 pounds. This year we will write our first marketing plan.”). We make them and break because we haven't come to grips with the reason why we haven't made the change already. But remember, “Things are the way they are because they got that way.” What is the “good” reason that things are the way they are today? Some might be:

- If a marketing program is successful, we may get too big and lose the “family” feel we have here.
- If we look too “slick”, our colleagues and clients will think we've lost our integrity.
- If we invest too much in the wrong strategy, we could bankrupt the organization.”
- If we spend too much time on marketing, we'll neglect the work for our clients.”

Kegan says one of the tricks to breaking out of stasis is to figure out what you're afraid of if you make the change, and then try small “recoverable” experiments in the direction of the change you want to make. An experiment allows you to test the assumption/fear that something bad will happen if you make a change.

Almost any fear that might arise can be addressed if it is brought out in the open. As one of my therapist friends says “Anger is for changing things, but fear is for exploring.” If it remains hidden, a fear becomes an unseen power that keeps you from making positive change. If it comes out in the open, it can be explored and addressed.

As you consider your New Year's Resolutions for your personal life or your workplace and marketing, consider the possible reasons things “are the way they are.” And think about the “recoverable” experiments that might help you step into the changes you want to make.



Kathleen Hosfeld is the President of Hosfeld & Associates, Inc. Since 1989, Hosfeld & Associates' marketing expertise and services have launched, grown and inspired visionary for-profit and non-profit organizations and projects. We help clients think more clearly and boldly about their goals. We provide the skills and resources clients need to implement breakthrough strategies for profitability, service, and contribution. For more information, please visit <http://www.hosfeld.com>