



Guest Speaker: Go for the win-win-win by leveraging the value of organizational involvement

Tips to make your firm's organizational involvement easy and effective.

By Anne Scarlett, printed in *The Zweig A/E Marketing Letter*

We often reiterate, "Everyone in the firm is a marketer." As marketing professionals, we must provide "everyone" with the tools and guidance to best support the firm's marketing efforts. Visibility is one essential marketing ingredient, so it's no surprise that active exposure within non-profit organizations—civic, professional, social—is an excellent way for individuals to contribute to the firm's overall marketing activity.

To make this happen, review your firm's existing organizational involvement program, or consider spearheading a new initiative. Based upon your firm's available resources, size, and structure, you may opt to collaborate with another department, such as human resources, in order to ensure the effort remains robust and permanent. Here are some ways to make organizational involvement easy and effective:

MAKE IT EASY

Emphasize the merits. Active involvement in organizations offers life balance, rewards, and satisfactions that are highly personal in nature. Less obvious, but equally valuable, are the professional benefits. Not only is organizational involvement a way for the individual—representing your firm's brand—to be visible, but that person also has great opportunity to grow professionally. They become confident, self-fulfilled, and well-rounded. Interestingly, senior positions in both business and non-profit organizations involve similar tasks: setting policy, long-term strategy, networking, and organizing. So a young professional can step into leadership roles within organizations to develop, practice, and sharpen their skills at rapid speed. Non-profit organizations can actually serve as training and proving ground for those who want to stretch, explore, and experiment beyond what they might experience within their own firms. As well, organizational involvement allows individuals to demonstrate their true character in a non-selling, non-business scenario. Later, that same character may be remembered and sought out by business prospects.

Help with assessments. Provide a tool to promote self-reflection within each individual. Facilitate a group discussion, or meet with them one-on-one to discuss their answers to these questions: Motivation to get involved? Skills to offer or develop? Preferences for civic or community, professional, or social organizations? Available hours per month to dedicate (1-2, 3-7, 8-16, etc.). Level desired: member, volunteer, committee, or board? Interests: political, environmental, foreign relations, health, elderly, children, disabled, women, underprivileged, or religious?

Provide ideas. Create a directory of local organizations, noting: focus or mission; membership costs (if applicable), fundraising responsibilities; requirements; and contact information. Coach staff to conduct informational interviews with an organization to find the best fit. Encourage them to explore—and even propose to—the organization regarding its benefits (board members' company names on letterhead, trading volunteer hours in exchange for sponsorship spot).

Let it be their idea, and their choice. Be mindful that you cannot force anyone to perform really well if they are not interested. In fact, contributions often become lackluster and undervalued when one's heart isn't in it.

Offer an alternative team approach. Some individuals may not have availability to fully commit to an organization, yet they

will participate in occasional one-off events. Find an enthusiastic person in your firm to organize a finite number of firm-wide volunteer activities per year (i.e. Saturday afternoon clean-up of a community park within a low-income neighborhood).

MAKE IT EFFECTIVE

Track it. Monitor who is involved in which organizations. If possible, extend the reach to various organizations for wider visibility. On a micro level, track each individual's involvement during annual reviews, and discuss how the firm could further support their efforts.

Encourage active participation. Becoming a volunteer or member is good; serving on a committee or board is excellent. Like anything, the more energy one puts into it, the more personal and professional benefits one will reap in return.

Support it. Have a modest budget to support the organizational involvement of your staff. Maybe they need a sponsor. Maybe they need to buy a table. Maybe they need T-shirts (with your firm's logo) for a specific community event. Encourage staff to come forth with their pitch on the value behind financial contributions.

Equip them with communication tools. The first priority, truly, is for the individual to grow, and to do something good for others. The residual benefit is the visibility, networking, and even viral marketing for your firm. Give these individuals the tools they need (i.e. Help with articulating your firm's value proposition) to feel comfortable as an "ambassador" when appropriate.

Lead by example. If you expect others to be involved, then you too must be involved. Make sure that the firm's leadership and marketing team are committed to external organizations. Without that example, staff may receive any organizational involvement initiatives with skepticism, even criticism.

Applaud it. Without overdoing it, raise awareness about staff who are actively involved. Perhaps it's a brief article for the web site or newsletter. Show admiration and appreciation, honoring their dedication to an organization(s) for the win-win-win benefit.

And just what makes organizational involvement a triple-win? One, the non-profit organization itself— enthusiastic people are warmly welcomed. Two, the individual— with opportunities like none other to grow personally and professionally. And three, your firm— boasting happier and more talented employees, along with an irreplaceable far-reaching visibility.