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Nonprofit Marketing the Joyful Way- Transcript

[Speaker 1]

Welcome to Charity Therapy, a podcast from Birken Law about building better nonprofits. I'm your host, Jess Birken. Hello and welcome to this episode of Charity Therapy.

Today I am joined by Ephraim Gopin. Ephraim is my friend and an amazing nonprofit fundraising and marketing expert. He is behind the agency 1832 Communications.

Ephraim works with nonprofits to grow their user base, fundraise more effectively, and build brand awareness both offline and online. In his words, they can help you take your organization from survival to thrival. Thanks for being here, Ephraim.

[Speaker 2]

Hey, thank you very much, Jess, for having me. I really appreciate it.

[Speaker 1]

Anytime, my friend. I wanted to have you on today because, well, first of all, you are a self-proclaimed 1980s pop mix master, and so I need to know immediately from you what is the greatest Yacht Rock song of all time?

[Speaker 2]

Yacht Rock? Now, there's a term I have never heard. Really?

Enlighten me, Jess. Enlighten me.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, dang. Okay, Yacht Rock is like Steely Dan and Christopher Cross and stuff like that.

[Speaker 2]

All the 80s songs of the thousands of 80s songs that I know, Steely Dan was not on that playlist. Imagine that.

[Speaker 1]

I'm, like, jumping up and down right now because I've stumped the 80s pop mix master.

[Speaker 2]

Yes, you have.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, amazing. Well, what is your favorite 80s pop group?

[Speaker 2]

Oh, boy. Glass Tiger.

[Speaker 1]

Amazing. I don't even know who that is.

[Speaker 2]

From Canada, and because I spent my high school years in Canada, I spent my years listening to Glass Tiger. They are my favorites.

[Speaker 1]

Okay. All right. That's awesome.

But for real now, okay, you're here because you are my marketing whiz obvi. So, a lot of my clients are always talking about fundraising. And I've noticed that sometimes, especially smaller nonprofits, can get really confused when we start talking in terms of marketing.

And too many nonprofit folks seem to think that marketing is just like bad Facebook ads. So, I'm wondering, could you just give listeners a 30-second overview of, like, what is marketing specifically?

[Speaker 2]

So, it is 2021, and the first thing I did when I, you know, have a question is I looked to see what Rabbi Google says. And Rabbi Google says the following, what is marketing? The action or business of promoting and selling products or services, including market research and advertising.

And I'm like, no. Here's what marketing actually is. It's work that you do to pique someone's curiosity, to connect with them, to build and strengthen a relationship with them, so that at the end of the day, you mobilize them to take action.

That's what marketing is.

[Speaker 1]

All right. Awesome. Knowing that, let's get into the first question.

I was just hired as the new development director at a museum. Staff-wise, we have 15 full-timers in the back office and 20 part-timers running the museum frontlines day-to-day. The person who was in this role before me clearly put a ton of emphasis on their employee giving program, and honestly, I just don't get it.

Based on the financials, employee giving generates less than 1% of our annual revenue. Plus, I just feel bad asking our box office and floor staff to donate part of their already too low wages. I've been thinking about ending the program and putting my time and effort into other strategies.

Have you seen successful employee giving programs, or is it just time to drop it?

[Speaker 2]

Okay, so first of all, let's start right at the beginning, and I want to wish congratulations on getting a new job as development director.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, right! Yes! Yay!

[Speaker 2]

A development director! Now run! No, no, I'm joking.

Okay, so here's the deal. If I look at the question, there are a number of things going on here. Number one, 1% of the annual budget comes in from employee giving.

So, my question is, what's the annual budget? Is the museum's annual budget, I don't know, like the Met, \$100 million? In which case, staff's giving \$1 million a year.

That's 1%. I would say, well, that's pretty damn good. You want to keep that up.

Or if you're one of these really small local museums where the total budget is \$100,000 and the staff is giving \$1K altogether, which is not a small amount at all. But in the grand scheme of things, \$1,000 might not be the biggest number.

[Speaker 1]

Seems like it's somewhere in the middle. They got like 40 employees.

[Speaker 2]

Okay. So, let's do like this. The first thing is that I'm a big fan of not looking at other people's wallets, and that's something that my dad taught me.

You don't know what goes on behind closed doors. You don't know who has what money. Yes, we know that Jeff Bezos has a lot of money, and Bill Gates, and fine.

But your CEO or your workers on the floor, you don't know how much they have. So for you to make assumptions that because of their low wages, they don't have anything to give is a bad assumption to make. We all see the stories every now and then of somebody, some librarian who never married and made a really low wage for 75 years, and then suddenly leaves \$5 million to the library in their estate.

So, you never really don't look in other people's wallets. That would be the first thing. The second thing is, I understand that it's only 1% of the budget, but ask.

Because everybody deserves to have the joy of giving to be part of the joy of philanthropy. And I know that's something that in the nonprofit world, a lot of people don't think of because we're in this, we're knee deep in trying to get people to give. And so, we feel like we're pulling teeth all the time and dealing with donors, what a pain.

But the fact is, for the donors themselves, there's a joy in giving. And if you just take yourself out from the organization, think about when you're a volunteer or when you donate to a different organization that's not the one you work for. There's a joy.

It's a wonderful thing. People want to solve problems in their community. People want to help other people.

People want to make the world a better place. Why can't your employees do that as well? If you're forcing them to give, no, you're not doing it right.

That's not what we want. We want it to come from a place of joy, of wanting to give. So I don't see the problem in asking them.

Now, you'll ask me, it's a question of resources versus other places where you could potentially be putting your efforts and your time and strategies. Here, I'm going to share with everybody two of my favorite hashtags. One is always be learning.

And the second one is always be testing. The one percent or not, whatever employees are giving should never stop you as development director from trying new, finding new avenues to talk to people, connect with them and try and get dollars from them. That shouldn't stop you.

So just because, you know, you could say, well, we're putting all our eggs in this basket. Don't do that. Putting all your eggs in one basket is just a bad strategy.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, just overall in any situation.

[Speaker 2]

Correct. Correct. A hundred percent.

And in this case, I would not tell them to stop asking employees. There's I don't think there's a reason to do so. But I think you better be trying other things and not concentrating on, well, it's only one percent.

If it is only one percent, then you then concentrate your time and effort elsewhere. But that's not a reason to abandon it because and here I want you to think like an employee. You're new to this place.

OK, you're the new development director. You may have staff there that's been there for 15, 20 years at this museum and they've given every single year, even if all they've given is ten dollars. What do you think they're going to feel if you don't ask them?

They're not going to feel great anymore. They're going to feel like, oh, our dollars don't matter. They don't want to hear from us lowly employees.

So why make them feel that way? So, I kind of want to turn it around and say it's only one percent, but it could be a very one important one percent specifically to your fellow staff members, to your colleagues. And that's a big deal.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. And we don't have any details about the nature of the program. So, what I'm hearing is like this person should be encouraged to maybe review how the employee giving program is communicated, because if it is a high pressure, you know, if it's only one percent because it's this like toxic culture, high pressure thing, then maybe there's an opportunity to actually make it joyful.

And there, you know, there is an opportunity to improve the program and not just scrap it. Correct. And they might see a higher return.

Even you never know.

[Speaker 2]

Totally correct. And that's why at the end of the day, it's how you ask, which makes it listen. The same goes for regular donors.

And that's why with an employee giving program, you have to treat your employees as regular donors, which means you have a proper campaign and a proper ask and afterwards proper gratitude, the same as you would show a regular donor just because they're your colleagues. So, you could just go over to the next desk and say, hey, could you give us 10 bucks? That's not the way to do it.

You have to treat them like you would treat every other donor. And you will see, yes, like you said, potentially higher returns if you're doing it in the right manner and making them feel good for their giving.

[Speaker 1]

I love that. I love that. OK, let's move to question two.

I'm the marketing manager for a local chamber of commerce, and I am so frustrated. My executive director and board are all much older than me and more old fashioned. I'm having trouble convincing them that it'll be worth the time and money to invest in some new digital marketing strategies.

Right now, all of our marketing is events and ads in the local newspaper. We have an ancient Web site that is effectively useless and an old Facebook account that an intern made us back in 2016. It's hardly updated.

Can you help me make my case to this group that it's worth using some funds to modernize?

[Speaker 2]

OK, I'm going to go back 3000 years to a very wise man by the name of King Solomon. And 3000 years ago, in a book called Ecclesiastes, I totally butchered the pronunciation of that. I can't do it.

[Speaker 1]

I don't know that one either. Ecclesiastes?

[Speaker 2]

I think you got it.

[Speaker 1]

Ecclesiastes?

[Speaker 2]

Yes.

[Speaker 1]

So, somebody write in and tell us.

[Speaker 2]

Somebody, if you're listening and you heard us both butcher it, please tell us the proper pronunciation. But here's what King Solomon wrote. There is nothing new under the sun, and I do in some way subscribe to that.

I think that there's this tendency to always look for the new, the new, the new. The problem is best practices in marketing and in fundraising have been around for a very, very, very long time. If you go follow Mark Phillips, for example, on LinkedIn or Twitter, he has written in the past about stuff that was being done by the Catholic Church in the 1200s.

[Speaker 1]

Dang.

[Speaker 2]

That you could sit and read. And it's literally it's literally the best practices that you could be using today. So, when I say there's nothing new under the sun, I would love to hope that your organization is following best practices.

At least we'll start with that. OK, now I did mention in my last answer, always be testing and always be learning. So, I can't say there's nothing new.

You do have to find what works for your specific audience. And in this case, I have come up against and Jess, I'm sure you have also nonprofits. We've been doing it this way for 30 years.

Why would it be any different in year 31? Yes, that's yeah. And that's where both of us, A, just our eyes roll out the back of our heads when we hear it for starters.

But then B, OK, how do we crack this very, very tough wall of we're not moving and we're not changing. So in this specific case, if I'm looking at this chamber of commerce, I'm wondering if you as a marketing person, you go, you sit in at the next board meeting with the executive director and the C-suite people, C-level people and the board, and you simply look at them and go, what do you want your legacy to be? Because if you keep doing the same thing you've been doing for the last 20 years, this dies when you die.

Now, I know I'm being very blunt and that's not the way you should say it, but that's how you want to present it. Put it on them to understand they want to have a legacy. They want to have a future for this chamber of commerce.

That's the first thing you want to do. The second piece of advice I would have is once you've gotten a little bit of a crack in that wall, you say to them, look, the chamber of commerce has to deal with a quite a large, varied audience of people. You got your boomers, your Gen X, your millennials, and you want to talk to all them and you want to help all of them and you want them to network with each other and you want to provide services and value added for them.

Some of those groups still will look for ads in the newspaper. Keep doing that. Don't stop.

But others of those groups, unfortunately, they don't read newspapers and they're not listening to the radio. So, you got to be where they are. So, if your target audience is online, you say to the board and you say to the C-level execs around the table, here's a plan for how we can bring more people into the chamber of commerce.

More people will benefit from what we have. And sitting around this table right now, all of you and I'm just going to say the ages around the table are Gen X and up. Let's just say there is a couple hundred years of experience around this table.

Let's get that experience and pass it down to the younger generations who need it, who need what you have in your heads. I love that. If you present it like that as a way for them to understand their legacy and be for them to want to help.

So, you turn the discussion around onto them and say, well, what are you going to do to make sure this stays a permanent fixture in our community for decades to come? Or as my friend Sherian says, you have a 40-year plan. And I know to some of you, we don't even have a four-minute plan, let alone a 40 year plan.

But you know what? You really can plan 40 years in advance. By starting these strategic discussions now, so I would certainly say that you can go in the marketing manager at this local chamber of commerce, go in there, present it in this way, in this manner.

And I think you'll see that suddenly their demeanor and the way they think about the chamber of commerce will change because now it's not a here today, it's I may be gone tomorrow, but I still want this to be around. How do I make that happen?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, I love that because I see that work with clients where maybe a group comes in and they've been around for 25, 30, 40 years. And now it's like somebody on the board has the vision to say, we're dying by attrition, or we need to plan for the next 40 years. And there's usually that one person that is already thinking legacy.

And that's that I always hook into that as a way to get the rest of the board on board. Right. It's like you have built something amazing.

It has withstood the test of time. We want to make sure it's still standing for the next 25 years. And you wouldn't believe how far you can get with that.

I mean, because we are organizationally risk intolerant, right? People don't want to try something, especially an overhead item that's expensive and might not work. And oh, my God.

And then our ninety-two cents of the dollar becomes, you know, ninety seven cents of the dollar and oh, whatever. Right. So, like we have that culturally in our organizations.

So, I love that focus on the future as a way to like get past that. And, you know, who doesn't love to think about leaving their legacy, too? Right.

[Speaker 2]

That's also a great donor strategy, which is why I think if you walked into that room as the marketing manager and you ask them a question, how many of you around this table have a will see how many hands and then say how many of you are leaving money to charity in that? Well, you'll see most of those hands go up and then you'll say, well, why? And they'll say, because we the future of our community and these organizations just use that as the intro right there and go, OK, Chamber of Commerce, same exact thing.

And we're not talking leaving money. We're talking leaving a chamber of commerce that serves the entire community, no matter what age, no matter what business they're in, no matter who it is.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, I love that. That's awesome. I mean, there's a lot of good stuff here.

I love the takeaway for employee giving that it's OK to ask. I would say don't pressure, but I love you saying like you should ask and make giving the joy so they can participate in treating your

employee giving program just like any other donor. Pay them the same respect that you pay to your best donors.

I love that as a message for nonprofits out of this. And then the hilarious Catholic Church in the twelve hundreds, right? There really is nothing new under the sun.

I think that is a great concept to take from this, that, you know, when we're afraid of making change and moving forward, that the best practices we've used before are still the best practices that we're going to use in the future, but maybe just in a new format or in a new venue. So, I love the idea that like focusing on leaving a legacy is a way to help your organization move forward when maybe it's hard to get those wheels turning. So great.

So great.

[Speaker 2]

The only thing I would add to that is never be afraid to fail. I have failed a thousand times, and I will fail another ten thousand times. But, you know, it's like riding a bike.

What do they say? Get right back up and get on the bike. You're going to fail in this business, in every business, certainly in the nonprofit world.

You're going to fail. You know what? You learn from your failures, what worked, what didn't work.

Move on to the next thing. Always be testing. Always be learning.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, that's the other one I wrote down was just exactly that, because that's how you develop grit, and you grow. Right. And you can't grow if you're not falling down and skinning your knee a few times.

Every parent knows that one. Correct. Ephraim, thank you so much for joining me today.

Can you let us know where listeners can get your e-book on employee giving?

[Speaker 2]

Absolutely. Thanks, Jess. You can go to my website, 1832communications.com.

Under the publications menu item is the employee giving e-book. If you want the specific URL, [1832communications.com slash employee dash giving dash e-book](https://1832communications.com/employee-giving-e-book).

[Speaker 1]

Awesome. We'll put that in the show notes, too. And for people who are interested in Twitter, you should totally connect with Ephraim on Twitter because he is hilarious, and he makes my day almost every day.

And what is your Twitter handle, my dear?

[Speaker 2]

Jess, flattery will get you everywhere. My Twitter handle is my name Ephraim Gopin, E-P-H-R-A-I-M-G-O-P-I-N, and I'm more than happy to talk to all non-profiteers there.

[Speaker 1]

Awesome. Yes. Connect with us online.

It's nonprofit Twitter is so much fun.

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About the Author



Hi, I'm Jess Birken.

I'm the owner of Birken Law Office, I help nonprofits solve problems so they can quit worrying and get back to what matters most – The Mission. I'm not like most attorneys, I actually have an outgoing personality, and – like you – I like to think outside the box. Most of my clients are passionate and have an entrepreneurial spirit. I'm like that too. My goal is to help you crush it. Getting bogged down in the minutia sucks the joy out of the important stuff. My clients want to do the work – not the paperwork.

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