

Title:

Nonprofits Looking for Ideas - Not Plans

Word Count:

400

Summary:

Search terms indicate that fundraisers are looking for ideas, not plans. On the other hand, business searches for plans far exceeded searches for ideas.

Keywords:

fundraising, nonprofit organizations, business, plans, strategic planning, search, Overture

Article Body:

Most nonprofit organizations that I know run in a very efficient and business like manner, so I hesitate to criticize the hardworking folks in this sector. But there is a tendency in many non-profit organizations to look for quick, short-term results rather than develop and stick to a strategic plan. Some search results I ran across support this observation.

According to Overture, there were about 25,000 searches last month for the term "fundraising idea" and another 5000 or so searches for related terms like "school fundraising idea" or "sports fundraising idea". On the other hand, the term "fundraising plan" was searched only about 350 times, with another 100 or so searches for related terms.

Compare this to searches made by business or people interested in business. The term "business plan" was searched 66,000 times and the term "business idea" was only searched 11,000 times. Based on these numbers it would appear that far more people in business are interested in a plan more than just an idea. People in nonprofit organizations or charities seem to be more interested in ideas than plans.

One can't draw too many conclusions from a single observation and to be fair, there are lots of small nonprofit organizations that just need an idea for an event or something to make a few bucks. But I think this observation should also make managers of nonprofit organizations ask themselves how much time their staff, volunteers and board members spend trying to come up with or imitate the latest great idea, and how much time they spend in strategic planning.

Strategic planning for a nonprofit organization can be complicated. There may be

historical reasons, traditions and values of the founders to consider when making fundraising decisions that may preclude some options. The reaction of the community and relationships with government and major funding organizations like the United Way may need to be taken into consideration. A few strong willed volunteers may exert undo influence on the organization. The priorities of the C.E.O. may not include fund development.

In spite of these complexities, a nonprofit organization should still be able to determine a long-term vision for what it wants to accomplish as an organization, the resources it has at hand to start it down that road, and a fair assessment of its strengths and weaknesses. Too many organizations try to be all things to all people and should focus on achievable, quantifiable goals.