

CHAPTER 14

User-Oriented Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations

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This chapter proposes a user-oriented marketing approach for private nonprofit organizations as they compete and cooperate with private for-profit organizations in an increasingly market-economy-oriented society. The first section of the chapter defines the nonprofit sector; the second section suggests why it is becoming less ideology-driven and more market-driven. The third section discusses the basic dilemma that nonprofit organizations are likely to face in trying to increase their market orientation and, at the same time, preserve the public interest. The success or failure of a private nonprofit organization in the future will depend on how it manages this dilemma. I suggest that the best way to do this is to adopt a user-oriented marketing

Note: I am grateful to Atul Parvatiyar for his comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this chapter. My thanks also to the editors and conference discussants Arthur Blum and Mohan Reddy for their constructive comments.

philosophy and practice. The fourth section of the chapter proposes a ten-point user-oriented approach, the first five points designed to improve the market orientation of nonprofit organizations and the next five to preserve and enhance the public interest.

Definition of the Nonprofit Organization

Textbooks and scholarly papers have provided numerous definitions of a nonprofit organization (Oleck, 1972; Wyszomirski, 1990; Kotler, 1982; Rados, 1981; Rao and Tagat, 1989). From an analysis of these sources, it is obvious that governmental policy, rules, and regulations play a major role in defining a nonprofit organization. For example, areas of the economy where the public interest is presumed to be paramount are defined as exclusively public, in which the private sector is not allowed to participate. Similarly, certain tax exemptions are granted only to organizations that the government defines as nonprofit (Oleck, 1988; Webster, 1992). Where private nonprofit organizations are permitted to engage in activities ordinarily assigned to the public sector, there is a strong symmetrical interdependent relationship and sharing of responsibilities between nonprofit and state agencies (Saidel, 1991; Rainey, 1991). On the other hand, in economic activities where the self-interest of suppliers is likely to enhance market efficiency, for-profit organizations are allowed to own and operate businesses. Furthermore, if there are no barriers to entry and there is potential for full competition, governments generally impose very few market rules and regulations, especially avoiding the area of setting prices.

Figure 14.1 provides a matrix of different types of nonprofit and for-profit organizations. While this chapter focuses primarily on private nonprofit organizations, the underlying dilemma of preserving the public interest while embracing market-efficient practices extends to all entities in boxes A, B, and C in Figure 14.1. Box A includes private nonprofit organizations that pursue a public mission but are independent of governmental support and administrative control. Public orga-

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organizations (those in boxes B and C), managed and supported by the government, are considered nonprofit organizations because, in addition to their having a public mission, none of the surplus that they may generate is passed on to individuals (Clarkson, 1973; Hunter, 1980; Kotler, 1982). Bryce (1987) describes nonprofits as all organizations that have a mission to improve public or community welfare.

Forces Shaping the Market Orientation of Nonprofit Organizations

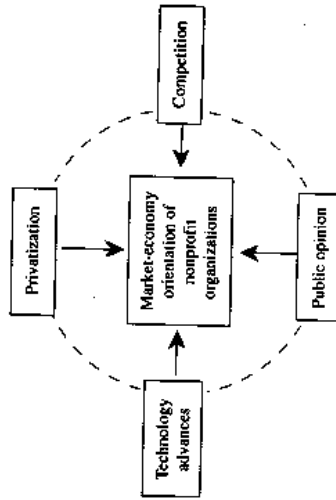
The current trend in nonprofit organizations, or the "third sector" (Drucker, 1988), is to become more market-economy-

Figure 14.1. Organizational Matrix.

	Private	Public
Nonprofit	A Private museums Charities Universities Schools Hospitals Associations	B Government agencies Public schools Public hospitals Railroads
For-profit	D Private corporations Partnerships Owner-managed businesses	C State-owned airlines Telephone companies Utilities Postal services

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Figure 14.2. External Forces Encouraging a Market Orientation.



oriented by adopting a businesslike approach and bottom-line orientation (Giunipero, Crittendon, and Crittendon, 1990). Several academic and industry observers have also recommended that nonprofit organizations adopt a marketing approach to successfully meet the challenges of maintaining and increasing their base of clients, members, funds, and other resources (Kotler, 1982; Rados, 1981; Shapiro, 1973; Conlan, 1988).

Four major external forces have encouraged the "third sector" to become increasingly more market-economy-oriented: privatization, competition, public opinion, and technological advances. These forces are depicted in Figure 14.2. These external forces are interdependent and therefore correlated. It is not, however, possible to hypothesize or model the directional causality of these four forces. In other words, I will not focus on which force triggers the change or creates the domino effect and how it affects other forces to shape the market-economy orientation of nonprofit organizations. Instead, I will try to assess why these forces are leading nonprofit organizations to become more market-economy-oriented and what changes they must make in their philosophy and practice to be successful.

Privatization

The force of privatization is indicated by three trends in the nonprofit sector. First, many public organizations are being privatized all over the world, including the developed as well as developing countries. Second, there has been an emergence of joint ventures linking a for-profit organization with a nonprofit organization for their mutual benefit (Barnes, 1991a, 1991b; Cary, 1991; Ensmann, 1991). Third, private nonprofit businesses are growing in numbers and strength (Oleck, 1988; Olson, 1989; Zatzman, 1979).

The antecedents of these trends are easily traceable to the inability of governments to generate funds to support programs of the third sector. Most governments of the world, including those of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany, are finding themselves in financial difficulties. Recently, for example, the city of Los Angeles announced that Los Angeles International Airport will be privatized in a manner similar to what the United Kingdom did with Heathrow Airport, and the government of Australia announced that its national airline, Qantas, will be sold to private investors.

Governments these days are unable to generate revenues by direct tax increases because of citizen revolt or by indirect taxes (sales tax, property tax, and so on) because of slow economic growth. At the same time, costs have continued to rise, at least at the rate of inflation, resulting in wider gaps. Mortgage the future through bonds does not seem feasible as the investment community's confidence about the government's ability to repay the principal or even the accrued interest is shaken. While exports may help out in the short run, they are highly unpredictable given currency exchange fluctuations and the vagaries of international trade. Often, the only way for a government to raise capital is to sell its assets to private investors. It is less important to debate whether privatization is good or bad for nonprofit organizations than to recognize that it is here to stay (Moe, 1987; Wolch, 1990; Mosher, 1980; Kettl, 1987; Seidman and Gilmour, 1986; Weidenbaum, 1983). With privatization comes the necessity to reorganize the public sector, eliminate

cross-subsidies, and improve productivity. As governments privatize the public sector, it is likely to set new benchmarks for the existing private nonprofit organizations. For example, several state universities and colleges have become innovative in their programs and processes as a consequence of significant reductions in their state-supported budgets and have become a major threat to private universities and colleges.

Competition

In some industries, government is unable or unwilling to sell public assets and at the same time is under pressure to improve productivity and cost efficiency. One approach is to liberalize the markets, abandon the concept of a natural monopoly, and encourage competition from private for-profit organizations (Barnetkov and Raffel, 1990). This happened to the U.S. Postal Service with successful entries from many firms, such as UPS and Federal Express; it happened in the airline, railroad, trucking, and other infrastructure industries through deregulation. It is a major global movement and is likely to happen in such nonprofit private sectors as hospitals and schools.

The hope and the expectations are that when a private for-profit organization starts to compete with a nonprofit organization, the latter will be forced to adopt a market-economy orientation in which prices will be set by the external marketplace, rather than by inefficient internal cost structures. Hence, improvements in productivity, modernization, reorganization, and streamlining will occur.

Federal cutbacks have also forced private nonprofit organizations to compete for funding by acquiring a share of the private contributor's dollar (Cotton, 1981). This competition has led to a dramatic increase in mailbox clutter and has seriously affected the resource attraction and allocation efforts of nonprofit organizations (Smith, 1990). They realize that charitable donations are relatively elastic and that there is positive elasticity of demand to fundraising efforts (Posnett and Sandler, 1989). Therefore, in order to differentiate themselves from their competitors, private nonprofit organizations are embracing a

marketing approach so that they can harness the power of intimate relationships with current and prospective donors and clients.

Public Opinion

Interestingly, negative public opinion and public image have become a significant impetus for at least some private nonprofit organizations to become more market-economy-oriented. This is evident in health care, education, and religious and charitable institutions. Public opinion, especially as expressed through broadcast media or debated in Congress (Zimmerman, 1991), seems to be a powerful motivator for nonprofit organizations to concede that operations and expertise-driven policies and procedures need to be supplemented by an orientation toward users, donors, watchdogs, and social critics. The recent forced resignation of the head of the national United Way is a good example of this. In search of answers to criticism and improved facility utilization, managers and policy makers are interested in learning from private for-profit organizations how to become more market-economy-oriented.

Technological Advances

Perhaps a less understood force in shaping the future expectations of nonprofit organizations is advances in information technologies, such as computers, telecommunications, and task automation. Nonprofit organizations have generally been reluctant to deploy information technology for a variety of reasons, including limited operating budgets, labor unions' resistance, and reliance on a volunteer work force. Indeed, if there is one area where for-profit and nonprofit organizations tend to differ significantly, it is in the deployment of office, factory, and work automation. But information technologies do offer significant advantages (Birnbaum, 1990; Cohen and Perreault, 1991; Lant, 1991; Keefe, 1991; Craver, 1991). Probably the most important is quality assurance. For example, both Federal Express and UPS gained significant competitive advantage over the U.S. Postal

Service by deploying information technologies and promising more reliable delivery of overnight packages. Second, information technology enables the nonprofit organization to move from one-time transaction-oriented marketing to relationship-oriented marketing. Obviously, the possibility of generating lifetime revenues from the same stakeholders allows greater cost efficiency and productivity in selling and service. Third, information technologies break down time and place barriers between the providers and the users of products and services. Indeed, they make it possible for a nonprofit organization to increase its market scope from local to national to global (Nelson, 1991). For example, the use of the 800 number service, voice mail, and fax mail has amply demonstrated that the global village is a reality for most charities. The most significant impact of information technology advances is visible in the broadcast of religious services through cable television. Finally, information technologies increase productivity and cost efficiency by reducing cycle time, consolidating overlapping functions, and enabling frontline workers to do their jobs faster, better, and more reliably.

The Marketing Dilemma of Nonprofit Organizations

As nonprofit organizations become market-economy-oriented, they are likely to experience the classic dilemma of fulfilling their public interest mandate while enhancing their market orientation (Holmes and Grieco, 1991; Wood, 1991; Gallagher and Weinberg, 1991). Each dimension offers certain benefits but also requires some fundamental trade-offs.

A market orientation improves productivity and cost efficiency by eliminating or at least minimizing some social and other nonbusiness missions of the nonprofit organization, such as providing employment, subsidizing costs for those who cannot afford to pay full price, and contracting with minority suppliers. It creates a positive public image that minimizes the problems of customers who have little choice among suppliers. It also generates innovation and change, since markets offer more dynamism than reliance on supplier expertise. Finally,

market orientation tends to create greater user satisfaction and, indeed, stakeholder satisfaction in general (Friedman, 1962).

On the other hand, a market orientation has a number of aspects that often conflict with the public interest. For example, it tends to ignore disadvantaged users who cannot afford to buy market-priced products and services. Similarly, given the diversity of users, the greater the market orientation, the greater the segmentation of the market, resulting in open discrimination and inequity in provision of services (Levin, 1968). Third, a market orientation has the tendency to offer what the users want, as opposed to what they need. Indeed, in many nonprofit sectors of the economy (for example, health care, higher education), enhancing the provision of services by providing for users' wants as well as their needs may be desirable, but substituting one for the other is often socially unacceptable. Finally, a market orientation tends to place a strong emphasis on the opinions of users and donors. Unfortunately, we are all familiar with numerous situations in which users or donors do not really know what they need or want.

Unfortunately, most public policy research and debate has tended to be value-laden: scholars and professionals either take the side of market efficiency and, therefore, strongly believe in Adam Smith's theory of value creation through self-interest (Shapiro, 1973), used the argument of consumer self-interest as the driving force for nonprofit organizations as they become more market-oriented) or advocate the preservation of the public interest through other processes than the market economy, largely because of their belief that self-interest and the public interest are in conflict with each other. In my judgment, this conflict between market efficiency through self-interest and pursuit of the public interest through nonprofit organizations needs to be resolved and managed rather than debated and discussed. In the following section, I propose a user-oriented approach that seems capable of resolving the marketing dilemma.

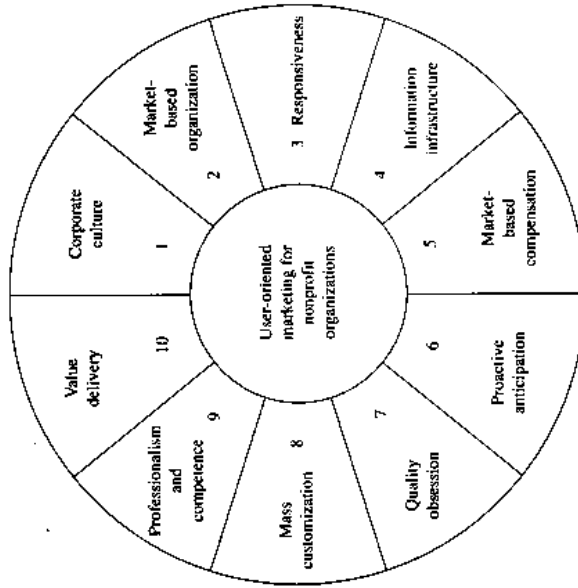
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It would appear that the common denominator in both market efficiency and public interest is end users. This is obvious for the

public interest dimension, except, perhaps, regarding the issue of offering what the public wants as opposed to what it needs. It is not so obvious, however, how the end-user focus can generate market efficiency. There are at least four ways in which an end-user orientation leads to market efficiency. First, it reduces the cost of doing business. For example, one dissatisfied user is often five times as costly as five satisfied users. Indeed, in many areas where nonprofit organizations operate, the users have no choice. A dissatisfied user with no choice often becomes a terrorist (Hirschman, 1970, articulates this as the "voice option" of the customer, as opposed to the "exit option"—a favorite concept of economists convinced of the power of the invisible hand.) Second, an end-user orientation can increase revenues: satisfied users not only use more of a product or service but also use other products and services of the organization. This has been found to be true in private nonprofit higher education and health care services, for example. When a user continues to patronize an organization over his or her lifetime and uses more than one service or product of that organization, significant market efficiency is realized through economies of scale and scope. Third, satisfied users tend to mean satisfied employees, especially in the nonprofit sector, where a significant percentage of employees are volunteers or are driven by nonmonetary rewards. Of course, satisfied employees lead to cost efficiency through reduction in employee turnover and increases in productivity. Finally, and probably most importantly, satisfied users are the best antidote to competition, especially from the private for-profit sector. Most users would prefer to do business with nonprofit organizations because of their distrust of for-profit suppliers, especially in critical services. Indeed, it is only when the nonprofit organization begins to become less user-oriented and more procedurally oriented that users look for alternatives. In short, user orientation generates a win-win situation for balancing public interest and market efficiency.

The ten-point approach described here is an integration and modified application of extensive research in total quality management, customer service excellence, and customer satisfaction (Davidow and Uital, 1989; Lele and Sheth, 1987). Most of

Figure 14.3. Ten-Point Approach for User-Oriented Marketing.



this research has concerned private for-profit service providers, and care needs to be taken with its application to private nonprofit organizations, such as hospitals and educational institutions. Figure 14.3 is an effort to selectively and carefully apply this knowledge, especially to balance the dilemma between public interest and market efficiency. It is, of course, possible that there are some trade-offs that cannot be fully addressed by the ten-point approach.

The first five elements of the approach are designed to enhance the market orientation of private nonprofit organizations and therefore draw on the experiences of the private for-profit sector. The second five elements are designed to preserve

and enhance the public interest mission of the nonprofit organization. Below I describe each element and provide some examples to illustrate the concept of user-oriented marketing.

Enhancing Market Orientation

The following five elements of the approach are likely to further a market orientation and, therefore, improve market efficiency in nonprofit organizations. Most of the differences that users perceive between nonprofit and for-profit organizations seem to be related to these five process dimensions.

Corporate Culture. Does the culture of the nonprofit organization put the user's viewpoint first? The more expertise-driven the organization, the less likely it will have a corporate culture that puts the user first. The legendary examples in this area are found mostly among for-profit organizations, such as Nordstrom's and Federal Express, with a few among nonprofit organizations that have changed from a production-driven to a market-driven philosophy as a consequence of competition from private for-profit suppliers.

Market-Based Organization. Nonprofit organizations tend to organize their departmental structure around geographical service areas and functional specializations of work, such as lab services, counseling, fund development, or human resources administration, because it is easy to implement the public interest objective. This functional-territorial organization design also helps to ensure that all users are treated equally. Unfortunately, the greater the diversity of users, the less likely the organization is to satisfy any one of them by some common, standardized way of dealing with them. It becomes increasingly necessary to reorganize the nonprofit entity around its markets, as defined by user groups and the specific products or services that they want to obtain. For example, higher education can switch its organizational focus from the functional (academic) disciplines to its bachelors, masters, and doctoral programs, and hospitals can switch their focus from general practice and

functional specializations to treatment of particular illnesses such as cancer, heart, lung and other diseases.

Responsiveness. Responsiveness concerns the time that elapses between an initial user request and delivery of a product or service and the manner in which it is delivered. It sometimes requires giving frontline people the discretion to bend standard operating procedures (Shelton, 1991; Maier, Thompson, and Thomas, 1991). For example, it should not take months for a client to schedule a routine physical examination at an HMO or for an applicant to find out whether he or she has been admitted to a university.

Information Infrastructure. The level of an organization's capital investment in information technologies (computers, telecommunications, and work automation) and how they are used by its frontline people are key aspects of the information infrastructure. Most nonprofit organizations invest less on a per capita basis than their counterparts in the for-profit sector, and most of the investment is for management systems, rather than for use by the frontline people in their thousands of interactions with users. This is particularly true in universities, hospitals, and civic and fraternal organizations. Users are most concerned that the frontline people have on-line information about who they are, what products and services the organization has in its inventory, and how quickly they can be served (Carr, 1990; Conhaim, 1991).

Market-Based Compensation. Perhaps the factor that most inhibits nonprofit organizations from developing a market orientation is that their reward system is not directly linked to user satisfaction. In at least 70 percent of nonprofit organizations, the reward system is straight salary, with no incentives for trying a little harder. This is further complicated by the fact that compensation is based on the internal hierarchy's ideas of performance excellence, rather than any measures of user satisfaction. Industry observers have suggested a number of approaches to implementing incentive plans in nonprofit organizations

(Rocco, 1991; Hildebrandt, 1991). These approaches need not be limited to the frontline people who have direct contact with users; it is possible to evaluate each job and every function on the basis of satisfaction: if you are not serving the users directly, you are serving someone who does.

Preserving the Public Interest

The remaining five elements of the approach are designed to preserve and enhance the public interest.

Proactive Anticipation. Anticipating users' needs and desires is extremely important in the nonprofit sector, for several reasons (Gwin, 1990). First, users neither know nor can anticipate their own needs and wants in many markets where the public interest is of paramount importance—for example, health care, library services, education, religion, arts, and broadcasting. Second, users are totally dependent on suppliers in many areas of economic activity, because regulation precludes choices. Third, resource commitments are substantial in markets where the public interest is critical. Therefore, the efficient and universal deployment of resources requires that suppliers anticipate not only present needs but future needs and wants. This is best illustrated in art galleries, museums, hospitals, and educational programs. Unfortunately, this requires unique expertise and must involve more than simply asking users their opinions. Indeed, opinion surveys are often not as useful as observation of behavior, because users may not be able to articulate what they need or want. And interpreting the findings from observation requires investigative intelligence—it is similar to putting together a jigsaw puzzle.

Quality Obsession. It is obvious that economic activities that serve the public interest are probably critical to the individual, the community, and the society at large and hence should not be entrusted to the profit (self-interest) motive of the private sector. Quality assurance is particularly important in such activities—in fact, it should be elevated to the level of an obsession. "Zero

defects" and "doing it right the first time" are not just theoretical norms but real necessities in such critical services as health care (Koska, 1991) and education (Wiggins, 1991). Furthermore, this is one area where benchmarking quality assurance to user expectations is not sufficient; it must be benchmarked to perfection.

Mass Customization. Mass customization means tailoring mass-produced products or services to the individual needs and wants of users (Davis, 1987). It requires balancing efficiencies of scale with the effectiveness of personalized delivery. Examples of mass customization are printing of personal checkbooks, self-service breakfast bars, the publishing of custom textbooks, cabbage patch dolls, computer application of software possessing customization capabilities, and cash registers with custom features as in cafeterias and fast-food restaurants. In all these instances, the basic production process is the same, but the assembly of the product is customized for each order. Mass customization is even more important for nonprofit organizations because, while there may be great demographic diversity among their users, especially in such heterogeneous nations as the United States and India, they must serve all users; for example, patients who come to an emergency room or researchers using library services and data bases.

Professionalism and Competence. The professionalism and competence of workers are very important where critical services are involved. Since users may lack the education or technical competence to take care of their own needs and wants, their trust in the nonprofit sector is vital. A single negative incident can easily destroy that trust, resulting in criticism, cynicism, or even outright revolt. In recent years, unfortunately, trust and confidence in the nonprofit sector have been shaken in such vital areas as health care and education. The only way to maintain user confidence in an institution is to ensure that providers are professional and competent in carrying out what they are expected to do (Tobias, 1990; Peatse and Fram, 1991).

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Value Delivery. The nonprofit organization's ability to use its fixed resources to deliver value to all users depends on bridging the gap between user needs and wants and its internal capabilities. It also means removing any barriers to entry for users, such as price and availability. In my assessment, nonprofit organizations tend to be good at value creation but not at value delivery. For example, higher education institutions expend considerable effort in ensuring that academic curriculum and excellence are preserved but make it difficult for students to gain access to their resources, such as the library, computing services, parking, and even professors.

Summary

The ten-point approach for developing user-oriented marketing for nonprofit organizations has several unique properties. First, the strength of the total approach is equal to that of its weakest link. Therefore, the best place to improve first is the area in which the nonprofit organization is weakest. Second, consistency across business units or product or service groups is vital. Therefore, if there is significant variation in the elements of the approach across business units or functional departments, it is critical to reduce the variance. Finally, the ten-point approach is a benchmark. It encourages the organization to establish a continuous-improvement philosophy to narrow the gap between performance and benchmark.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined four forces that are driving nonprofit organizations toward a market-economy orientation: privatization, competition, public opinion, and technological advances. As nonprofit organizations try to emulate the for-profit sector, they are likely to encounter the classic conflict between preserving the public interest and becoming more market-driven. This dilemma can be substantially resolved and the trade-offs between market efficiency and the public interest minimized if nonprofit organizations take a user's perspective.

The chapter has also proposed a ten-point user-oriented marketing approach. The first five elements of the approach – corporate culture, market-based organization, responsiveness, information infrastructure, and market-based compensation – are designed to improve an organization's market orientation. The remaining five processes – proactive anticipation, quality obsession, mass customization, professionalism and competence, and value delivery – are designed to preserve the public interest in a market-economy context. It is my hope that this user-oriented marketing approach will establish a benchmark with which a nonprofit organization can assess itself and improve itself by implementing changes in its business practice.

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