

Engaging the Christian Community

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Three Digital Pivots to Bolster Your Fundraising  
Improve Visual Storytelling to Engage Your Audience**

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# IMPROVE Visual STORYTELLING TO ENGAGE YOUR AUDIENCE

By Christine Johns

**Y**ou can reach your audience through a myriad of ways, but most importantly, you want to engage their hearts and their minds. The best way to achieve this is through *visual storytelling*, because it operates on a deep, emotional plane.

Recall your most recent experience with something creative that moved you to tears or to action. Now, imagine what your organization would look like telling its own story. What are those moments of courage, compassion, kindness, or decency that made you feel more alive? Remember the ones you shared with a family member, a coworker, or a close friend. Which of those

stories might awaken tears or action in others?

How can visual storytelling help you create a memorable connection with your audience?

## Heard and Seen

In my spare time, I am part of a team of stalwarts who, approximately seven years ago, founded a bagpiping and drumming school.

As a nonprofit, we know that our marketing needs to reach several audiences. Our primary audience consists of piping and drumming students, both current and



prospective. Our secondary audience enjoys listening to pipes and drums and passionately supports the art.

We discovered through research that our audiences are mostly active on social media/video platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, as well as on email.

We create content that highlights the sheer passion and beauty of the art form, particularly through world-class instructors. We showcase students' hard work, acknowledge their successes, and connect these artists with their local community. And we do this primarily through our images.

During the height of the COVID pandemic, we launched a social media campaign called “Bagpipes for the Brave” that invited volunteer bagpipers from all over the world to perform outside of hospitals, care homes, firehouses, etc., in honor of those who sacrificed to work on the front lines. We shared these videos and images via all our marketing channels to illustrate the power of music to champion the human spirit.

### **Images and Video**

One of the most effective ways for nonprofits to enhance their visual storytelling and, laterally, their overall marketing strategy, is to invest in quality photography and video.



I have worked with dozens of nonprofits and ministries with compelling stories to share.

Yet many lack usable visual assets to tell those stories—to create a response that resonates and compels their audience to advocate for their cause.

Understandably, some organizations may not possess the budget to hire quality creative. However, as the saying goes,

If you must use stock photography, search for visually interesting and emotionally driven images that most closely relate to your story. Look at Unsplash and Pixabay for free, high-quality stock images. Consider Lightstock as an affordable premium alternative.

### **Inspire the Eyes, Reach the Heart**

In your quest to shape your story, always pair a strong narrative with your imagery.

**In a culture where so many forms of media vie for attention, you want to create a clear journey through the narrative.**

you must speculate to accumulate. Your investment in a cache of quality, evergreen images will be worth it.

Sites like Upwork.com can pair you with affordable photographers in your area. Your staff can benefit from courses on Udemy.com or Coursera.org. You will find a course in iPhone photography through the appropriately named [iphonephotographyschool.com](http://iphonephotographyschool.com).

Look for what Aristotle called pathos: passion, emotion, feeling. Such an emotional appeal will engage an audience and spur them to action.

Prominent nonprofits such as the ASPCA and St. Jude's Hospital offer powerful examples of pathos in both digital ads and TV commercials. And while their narrative approaches differ, they still create a positive connection with their donors.

In a culture where so many forms of media vie for attention, you want to create a clear journey through the narrative. First, define your story's purpose and audience so you can more strategically align your emotive appeal to that target audience.

Then, identify a protagonist—a hero—on which you can build your narrative. This might be a person, an idea, or a common experience. St. Jude's Hospital ads employ testimonials from the perspective of patients and parents, establishing an authentic heart connection with their audience. At the end, they then flip the script, so that donors become part of the story and are celebrated as heroes.

### Seeing the Point

Potent, powerful imagery can cement your message in the hearts and minds of your audience and lead them down the pathway toward commitment to your cause.

When you tell the best story possible in the most passionate, authentic, and logical way—with images that create a heart connection—you can inspire your audience to act. And that is a win-win for your organization and your donor base! **1**

### About the Author

#### Christine Johns

Creative Communications  
Specialist



*As well as being a gifted designer, Christine also excels at creating social media content and marketing copy. Sharing the voice of a wide range of international organizations, ministries and nonprofits, Christine effectively delivers powerful messaging through her writing and design.*

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# *How* *Seasonality Affects* **Facebook** **Fundraising**

By George Konetes

**F**undraising depends on reaching people with the right message at the right time. Seasonality has long been understood to impact giving, because people have different demands on their attention and resources at different times of the year. But not all conventional fundraising counsel directly corresponds to fundraising on Facebook.

Fundraising via broadcasting, paper mail, or email shares this fundamental factor: a message is sent to a fixed audience whether they are engaged at that moment or not. If the timing is poor, then few people will see or respond to the message.

Facebook fundraising is different. The platform only delivers messages to people who are active at the moment of delivery. That essentially means no waste. Day or night, peak season or off-season, only active users see your message.

Users' inclination to give will fluctuate, true, but they come from so many walks of life, so many schedules, and so many backgrounds that these fluctuations can be minimized. And there is a great equalizer: supply and demand.

Advertising demand diminishes in off-seasons, and when this occurs, the cost per impression also decreases. So, while it may be more difficult to obtain donations during those off-seasons, the cost to advertise may decrease, too, which can improve overall fundraising outcomes.

Many organizations view summer as a poor time to fundraise because people take vacations and travel. But if other organizations step back during the summer, then the cost to advertise tends to decrease in response. This can make fundraising campaigns just as effective as at other times. Likewise, Q4 is often seen as the best time to fundraise. But due to increased competition, the cost to advertise increases, which can offset an increase in performance.

cost per click, click rate, and video views metrics. If a campaign is getting tired, then engagement and conversion rates will decline. If other factors are at play, then the cost to show your ads will increase but the rates of response should not be overly impacted.

Other factors also affect supply and demand. For example, the larger your target audience, the less your platform needs to work to find quality available impressions to reach

*Seasonality seems to be a greater factor for organizations that focus on small or local audiences than those that target larger and national audiences.*

Seasonality seems to be a greater factor for organizations that focus on small or local audiences than those that target larger and national audiences.

Keep in mind: Lesser-known seasons and cycles can also cause fluctuations in ad performance. For example, the travel industry focuses its advertising at specific times of the year, as does the auto industry. Even if these organizations are often not in your market, they can cause the cost of advertising to shift for periods of time as they can make big demands on available ad inventory.

Advertising on Facebook is dynamic—occurring in a constant state of ebb and flow. Rarely is a whole month, much less a quarter, consistently affected by any particular factor. So, the best approach is often to manage that ebb and flow in real time. Campaigns can be evaluated on a weekly basis to look at trends and make small adjustments with bigger shifts being possible once several weeks of data are aggregated.

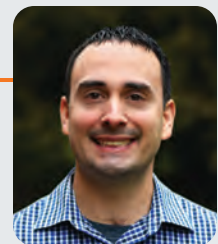
It can be easy to just focus on one or two metrics, however the better approach is to look holistically at many factors to see if there is a seasonal or other unseen impact. In addition to looking at your KPIs, also look at cost per impression, cost per person reached,

those users. But if you have to compete against other advertisers—especially larger advertisers—for a smaller audience segment, the costs can rise significantly (and seemingly unexplainably) for periods of time.

The good news remains good: by advertising on Facebook, you engage with one of the world's largest ad marketplaces. Take time to understand the many factors at work, including seasonality. Take time to test in all seasons and months—then scale up when performance is good and test more when performance is down. **i**

## About the Author

**George Konetes, PhD**  
Director of Client Success



*With a Ph.D. in communications media and instructional technology, George intuitively grasps how to use media to impact audience behavior. Guided by data-driven insights, he specializes in implementing strategic plans that produce desired outcomes, with a focus on both efficiency and efficacy. He also oversees the Client Success department to ensure strategic implementation and successful results for all clients.*



FAITH-BASED MEDIA MIX:

# True Blue

## AND A LITTLE BIT NEW

By Darrell Law

Where do Christians turn for information, entertainment, and biblical instruction? When we conducted research into evangelical media habits, we were surprised at how even younger believers still adhere to many of the tried-and-true channels for learning and inspiration.

And we were confirmed in our belief that Christian media should be part of the mix for anyone who desires to reach this important American demographic.

Infinity Concepts and Grey Matter Research conducted research with more than 1000 American evangelical Protestants to produce our report, *Media Matters: Evangelicals and the Media*.

## Media Snapshots

Here are a few snapshots from the report: The most popular media for specifically spiritual purposes include printed books, television, and websites.

Evangelicals still rely on two traditional forms of media for Christian content of all types: broadcast radio (60%) and books (58%). Their third favorite: podcasts (57%).

Between 63 and 80 percent of evangelical Protestants engage with a mix of Christian and mainstream media, including TV, streaming video, web, broadcast radio, podcasts, books, and magazines.

**This reveals that a communications strategy aimed at this audience must resist assumptions and employ careful research of media usage category by category.**

For example, significant age differences exist: Those under 40 list websites as their number one source (44%) for specifically spiritual purposes, with streaming video second (40%) and mobile apps third (36%), tied with printed books.

Printed books come in first for the next three age groups: 40–54 (42%), 55–69 (49%), and 70 and older (48%). Television is still a strong contender for specifically spiritual content across all age groups: under 40 (34%),

**Evangelicals still rely on two traditional forms of media for Christian content of all types: broadcast radio (60%) and books (58%).**

Christian media use is particularly high among lower-income evangelicals, among all Pentecostal/charismatic believers, and among those more engaged with their faith—evidenced by at least monthly church attendance, reading the Bible, etc.

For learning and pleasure reading, evangelicals across all age categories prefer printed materials over digital.

## Traditional Standbys

I could have predicted certain conclusions from this study, such as how younger evangelicals are more likely to adopt and regularly use emerging new media than are those 40 and older. But I was surprised that certain traditional standbys, such as broadcast radio and good old ink-on-paper, still ranked among the top ways that evangelicals receive Christian content.

40–54 (38%), 55–69 (40%), and 70 and older (38%).

That said, it is not safe to assume that everyone in a subcategory consumes media in exactly the same way.

## New Items on a Familiar Menu

Whenever a new communication platform rises to prominence, prognosticators like to announce the end of whatever traditional media it might replace. Certainly, television would kill film (2022's *Top Gun: Maverick*, anyone?); e-readers would spell the end of books (I think I read that in a book somewhere); and podcasts would put the nail in the coffin for radio. (What did you say? I couldn't hear you over my favorite AM/FM station.)

Unless a new media form fulfills all the functions of the older media and does a

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better job (CDs over cassettes; Spotify over CDs), **most people simply adopt the new form as part of the smorgasbord of options available.** Evangelical Christians' consumption behavior parallels that of the rest of American society in that regard.

## The Power of Christian Media


This study conducted with Grey Matter Research reaffirmed my conviction that Christian media is a powerful way to engage the evangelical audience.

Three of four evangelical Protestant TV viewers watch at least some Christian shows. Among those who stream videos, 80 percent view some Christian content. And for those who listen to radio, nine out of 10 tune into stations that offer Christian teaching, preaching, inspiration, or information.

This should encourage and inspire those who wish to communicate with evangelical Protestants, who comprise 23 percent of American adults, or about 59 million people, according to our findings.

While Christian media still represents a smaller slice of all media sources that evangelical Protestants consume, it is part of the mix.

Content producers with vision, creativity, and resources will be able to capture an even greater percentage of this audience with material that inspires, challenges, and changes lives.

To receive a free copy of the full research report, visit [www.infinityconcepts.com/research-reports](http://www.infinityconcepts.com/research-reports). 

## About the Author

### Darrell Law

VP | Chief Growth Officer



*Darrell is a 20-year veteran leader of a multi-campus megachurch and international television and radio broadcast ministry. Whether developing fundraising strategies, creating donor retention programs, launching humanitarian outreaches on the other side of the world, or implementing marketing and assimilation strategies to grow a local church, Darrell's passion is to help clients achieve their goals and fulfill their mission.*

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# SECURE YOUR ANCHOR

— *Overcome Brand Drift*

By Mark Dreistadt





**A**n anchor is a device used to secure a sailing vessel in place and keep it from drifting due to wind or sea currents.

The anchor hooks into the seabed to secure the location of a ship or boat. The seabed varies from place to place—perhaps composed of hard sand, or loose and shifting shells, or even rocky obstacles. So, the effectiveness of the anchor partly depends on the nature of the seabed.

In the best circumstances, an anchor digs deep into a hard sand bottom. Without such a secure anchor, each mild gust of wind and every gentle rippling wave nudges the vessel ever so slightly one direction or another. Over time, the ship may find itself in a very different place from where it started.

So it is with organizational brands.

After 20 years, over 200 clients, and more than 4,000 client meetings, I can definitively say that most organizations have not anchored their brand with the care and precision of a thoughtful sailor.

Let me first clarify what I mean by *brand*. A brand is not a logo, a look, a slogan, or an image. These are all expressions of something much deeper. Here is my definition:

**A brand is the collection of experiences people have with your organization over time.**

- If you get the brand right, you must then intentionally manage and maintain it.
- If you get the brand wrong, you will have to invest a lot of work, money, and time to correct misperceptions and create a new collection of experiences.

A strong brand is built upon a group of core values, a passionate mission, and a compelling vision. Together, these form an anchor that can ensure the organization will remain on course.

However, a beautiful and effective anchor that remains on the deck of the ship serves no useful purpose. It is only when that carefully crafted anchor finds firm footing in the seabed that its real function is revealed.

Years ago, I read some revealing survey results: eighty percent of organizations that go through a branding process never fully implement the brand. The branding document sits proudly on the CEO's shelf as an accomplishment in thoughtful planning. In other words, in four out of five cases, the anchor remains on the deck of the ship.

Assuming you have a well-developed brand already in use, let's talk next about how to prevent what I call "brand drift."

**Brand drift occurs when the subtle influence of donors, customers, competitors, or changes in the marketplace begin to slowly redefine your brand.** At that point, people's experiences with your organization start to change. Eventually, you can find your organization on a different course than originally planned.

Without diligent attention, brand drift can happen to any organization.

positioning, and the benefits people experience because of the work you do. These key points help you stay on course over the long haul. Your methodology may evolve—but your brand should always remain consistent.

**3. Anchor your brand deeply in the hearts of your staff and your donors or customers.** If your staff does not know, understand, and live your brand every day, there is sure to be a breakdown in your brand consistency. One of our church clients took six months to train leadership, paid staff, and volunteers on all aspects of their new brand before they rolled it out to the congregation. They incorporated their newly defined brand into every aspect of church life. Once they rolled it out, the results were amazing—and the brand remains consistent now, many years later.

**4. Communicate your brand through consistent imagery, words, actions, attitudes, and intentions.** These are the five levels of brand communication. Imagery and words

## BRAND DRIFT OCCURS WHEN THE SUBTLE INFLUENCE OF DONORS, CUSTOMERS, COMPETITORS, OR CHANGES IN THE MARKETPLACE BEGIN TO SLOWLY REDEFINE YOUR BRAND.

Is it time for your organization to reset its anchor to ensure your brand is secure? Consider these five steps to notice and overcome brand drift:

**1. Define your organization's Core Mission, Core Vision, and Core Values.** Unearth the heart of the brand, rather than get caught in the clutter of overly crafted, vague statements that try to say too much. Find a few powerful words that everyone can remember, and you will have created a much more stable brand.

**2. Define your organization's Brand Essence.** This concise statement conveys your organization's personality, unique attributes,

alone are not enough to create a consistent set of brand experiences. Intentions, attitudes, and actions sometimes speak louder than words.

**5. Over-communicate your brand. The rule of thumb is to repeat your message so often that you grow sick of hearing yourself say it.** Only then will people begin to internalize and understand your brand. Set your anchor deep into their hearts.

Brand drift is real—and it is costly—so it should be an area of ongoing care and concern. You likely can identify places where your organization's anchor has come loose,

and brand drift is evident. Do not ignore the shifting course. Be sure your anchor is secure at all the key points.

Occasionally, an organization will make an intentional change of course and abandon one brand for another. Certainly, this can be done, but it must be done carefully.

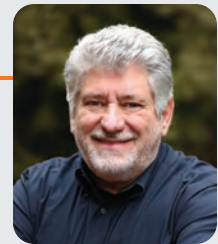
At the risk of overusing the anchor analogy, allow me to say: To change course, you must lift the anchor from one place and put it down in another—a careful and calculated process. Too many organizations attempt to drag a deeply embedded anchor to a new location. This stirs up a lot of mud and puts an undue strain on the ship. Eventually, the anchor may be repositioned, but the move will have caused a lot of damage in the process. If you must change brands, do so strategically and carefully.

## In conclusion ...

Branding happens. Good branding is always intentional. Consistent branding requires careful management and continuous reinforcement. True brands are firmly anchored in deeply held values, a passionate mission, and a compelling vision. The best brands create memorable brand experiences in the hearts and minds of their leadership, staff, donors, and customers. **1**

### About the Author

**Mark Dreistadt**  
Founder | President | CEO



*Mark has a long and distinguished history of transforming organizations through his strategic counsel, innovation, and blended approach to branding, marketing, advertising, fundraising, and media.*

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# THROW “PITCHES” THAT GET HIT *Every Time*

By Clem Boyd



## EVERYONE WANTS TO HEAR YOUR STORY.

At least, that is what we think.

“This story is so powerful and moving, all we have to do is get it in front of hundreds and thousands of media, and we will be known the world over,” we may think to ourselves. “Brand awareness, here we come!”

And then, reality sets in. “We emailed the 4,000 media contacts from the PR software,” someone says at the debriefing. “What did we get? Nothin’ but crickets. What happened?”

Take heart, brave PR practitioner. To write a “home run” story that strikes out is a common experience. So, how can you throw a “hittable”

approach to quickly reach thousands of desired media contacts based on specific demographics related to the story you want to share.

The Inspire Newswire also provides external review, guaranteed placement on searchable online platforms, and a way for you to position your organization’s leaders as expert sources to the media. Talk about a home run for your PR efforts.

### Know Your “Batter”

Each member of the media is more than a name on your targeted media list. They are real people who want to tell stories that matter, and your story fits the bill.

## THE MORE FOCUSED YOUR TARGET, THE BETTER CHANCE YOUR PITCH WILL FIND THE MEDIA WHO WILL SHARE YOUR STORY.

pitch that will raise awareness of your organization and the great work you’re doing?

### Hit the Strike Zone

Do your research and locate media whose audience will find your story most interesting. As you use that powerful software package that grants you access to a searchable database of thousands of media email addresses and phone numbers, employ two or three search terms so you hit the right prospects. Type in “Christian,” but then drill down: Christian and Israel, Christian and Chicago, Christian and health care, etc. The more focused your target, the better chance your pitch will find the media who will share your story.

Another way to find home plate with the media is through a newswire. Infinity Concept’s very own Inspire Newswire provides a fastball

From that massive database of media emails, glean 10 or 20, then send out individual emails to introduce yourself and your organization. Communicate that you want to convey ideas that will help them tell engaging stories and draw in viewers/listeners/readers. Propose chatting over the phone or Zoom to better understand their needs. You might be surprised how many say yes.

### Consider the Angle

As you pitch your story, these six angles will help you send it over the plate:

**Calendar-specific** – Do you have a cancer care expert? October is breast cancer awareness month. Do you have a source whose wheelhouse is U.S. history and America’s Judeo-Christian heritage? Send out a pitch that coincides with the 4th of July.

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**Consequential** – The year 2020 featured COVID-19. Last year: the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Can you offer stories that connect your organization to the Big Story of *this* year?

**Commanding** – Are you promoting an event that will be headlined by a well-known name—someone whose presence will lift your organization's profile to the next level? For a 5K fundraiser in my community, I enlisted the support of twin sisters who had qualified for the upcoming Olympic trials. They agreed to a speaking engagement that drove up registrations and provided a nice media boost.

**Close** – Will your national organization hold an event or make a special push in a certain community? Target local radio, TV, newspapers, and online publications with a press release, and offer your leading sources for interviews.

**Considerable** – Media love to tell stories about scale: “Biggest turnout ever expected for fundraising concert”; “Local charity doubles its services and budget”; “Nonprofit expands programs to five counties.”

**Curious** – “Dog called to testify at civil trial.” I wrote that piece when I worked at a small daily newspaper. It was distributed all over the U.S. and appeared in *USA Today*. Find an out-of-the-ordinary story that brings positive attention to your organization and send it out.

As you target your story ideas more carefully, get to know the editorial needs of the media, and craft story ideas with a compelling hook, you will find that more and more of your pitches will get slammed over the fence and into the headlines. [i](#)

### About the Author

**Clem Boyd**  
Director of Public Relations



*Clem loves sharing stories that lift the profile of organizations and garner more support for their great work. His career in media and public relations helps him connect the dots between a story that should be told and those who long to tell it.*



# Three Digital Pivots to **BOLSTER YOUR** **FUNDRAISING**

**By Andy Walker**

**T**he world of digital advertising and fundraising changes quickly. Over the past three years, those changes accelerated through significant initiatives by major players in the tech industry such as Apple, Google, and Facebook, as well as shifts in user behavior caused by the pandemic.

To continue expanding digital fundraising efforts, organizations must look for opportunities to pivot: leave behind what worked in the past and embrace emerging strategies and tools that will move them beyond current challenges into new territory. This requires an active, adaptable, and agile mindset. More on that in a minute.



### Three key opportunities

While we might recommend plenty of shiny new tools to test, organizations should consider these three opportunities to bolster their fundraising efforts.

#### 1. Utilize new audience targeting solutions

Though still trailing Europe, the U.S. continues to move toward greater privacy regarding digital data. In 2021, Apple rolled out its AppTrackingTransparency framework, which

detailed targeting options related to social or political issues—a move that significantly impacted the ability of ministries and organizations to reach their ideal audiences.

To overcome this drop-off in ROI, organizations must expand their collection and utilization of first-party data—to better target current donors as well as create lookalike profiles on platforms such as Facebook. With lookalike profiles, an organization locates prospects that

**To continue expanding digital fundraising efforts, organizations must look for opportunities to pivot: leave behind what worked in the past and embrace emerging strategies and tools that will move them beyond current challenges into new territory.**

reduced mobile advertising ROI by 38 percent, according to Singular, a marketing analytics and attribution company. Google stated that in 2024 it would phase out the use of cookies, a ubiquitous tracking tool, in its Chrome web browser. Additionally, Meta removed any

look like its active donors and are most likely to make a first-time gift.

Additionally, advertisers should explore consumer and data intelligence tools combined with third-party data. Together,

these can help them regain detailed targeting options that Meta removed. Many of these tools can be integrated into advertising campaigns on Facebook, Google, and other ad platforms.

Organizations must strategically address how they will bridge the current data gap, or they will see their fundraising effectiveness continue to drop.

## 2. Integrate digital wallets as a giving option

Digital wallets such as Apple Pay, Google Wallet, PayPal, and Venmo have become increasingly more integrated into everyday shopping and food ordering apps. According to Qgiv, 28 percent of millennials want to give via a digital payment system. Additionally, 80.6 percent of American consumers use digital wallets for fast transactions and 77.8 percent for the ease of use. Fundraisers should take note of the friction-free experience—anything to make it easier and quicker for people to make a donation.

## 3. Explore native advertising opportunities

The concept of native advertising is not new. For years, television and movies have utilized product placements—a form of embedded advertising and a precursor to today's native advertising. In the digital world, native advertising means that ads fit seamlessly within the platform where they are displayed. So, they don't look like ads. These include recommended content that appears next to articles you are reading, long-form sponsored content, and search ads.

Native ads are viewed as more trustworthy. According to a study by Outbrain and Sevanta, 68 percent of consumers trust native ads seen in an editorial context, compared to 55 percent for social media ads.

Native advertising provides organizations the opportunity to share powerful stories

that display the impact of their work paired with paid amplification. Stories lie at the core of successful native advertising campaigns; there, they connect an organization with its ideal donors and customers.

## Triple “A” Approach

For organizations to experience continued success in the ever-changing digital landscape they must adopt a Triple “A” approach in light of these fundraising opportunities:

- **Active.** They must actively engage digital platforms or risk becoming unaware of strategic shifts in digital until they find themselves left far behind.
- **Adaptable.** They must adapt their strategies and toolsets to meet these shifts. Organizations need to be deeply committed to the goal they need to reach, not the tools and platforms that will help them get there.
- **Agile.** Every digital shift brings new opportunities. Organizations that adapt quickly will capitalize on these opportunities and experience greater benefits.

Organizations that remain active, adaptable, and agile will be able to pivot and succeed regardless of how the currents of the digital world—and the real world—may change. **1**

## About the Author

**Andy Walker**  
Director of Integrated  
Communications



*With over a decade of specialized experience in digital and social media marketing as well as fundraising, Andy loves helping people remove the stress and hassle of marketing their organization. Andy oversees our Creative and Media departments.*

# Strategy is NOT Enough

By Jason Dreistadt



**W**hoa! How can I say that? After all Infinity Concepts was built on strategy. Yet from the beginning, we recognized the need to help organizations with not just strategy but also execution.

One of the most significant things organizations can do to be successful is to develop a strong strategic plan. This defines who you are as an organization, develops the correct brand and messaging, and then creates a plan to communicate that message. When they take time to develop and implement a strategic plan, organizations ensure that they remain competitive and successful.

Actually, organizations often do develop a strategic plan. However, industry experts have determined that as many as 80 percent fail to implement that plan. Organizations invest a large amount of money and time, and it all seems to go to waste.

Here are some reasons these plans can get stuck, even with the best of intentions:

- **Discomfort:** Strategic plans often serve as a catalyst for change, which can cause a level of discomfort within an organization (i.e., “we don’t want to rock the boat”). But discomfort is necessary to effect change.
- **Communication:** Sometimes, leadership does not offer enough

the next three to 10 years. Then create a timeline for their implementation as part of the strategic plan.

In addition, determine your short-term goals—which will serve to accomplish the long-term goals. Set short-term goals for the next three months, six months, and 12 months. The first 12 months are key to the execution of a strategic plan as it builds momentum.

Make sure that your goals are both realistic and achievable. While you may want something done within a month, recognize if it might more likely take three months. Set your people up for success.

### Assign Responsibilities

Every action item or goal on your list must have a person responsible—the right

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information to staff to accomplish the goals. In addition, when challenges arise (and they will), people do not communicate enough to find resolution.

- **Focus:** Everyone gets on board with the plan and is excited about the possibilities ... but then they run into the dreaded distractions. Often the “urgent” items supplant the “important” items essential to execute the plan.

person for the task, not just the available person. Just because someone has a TikTok account does not mean they should be in charge of the social media campaign.

Also, be sure you have the necessary resources. Have you allocated the appropriate budget? Do you have adequate personnel? If not, you may need to look outside your organization to hit your goals.

### Develop Accountability

Accountability is one of the major factors in success. Earlier, we talked about measurable goals. Remember, “you manage what you measure.” Be sure to periodically monitor the status of your plan.

## HOW TO EXECUTE YOUR PLAN

### Set Measurable Goals

Determine your long-term strategic goals—typically, what you want to accomplish in



Meet on a regular basis. Review the goals, get a pulse for where everything is, and identify any log jams.

Keep the items in front of you, so you can better stay focused and eliminate distractions.

When executing a strategic plan, also keep in mind: change will happen that is outside your control. There may be shifts in the marketplace or even the world. COVID changed everything, and there was nothing organizations could do but pivot. Sometimes you must reevaluate the plan and adjust. However, be sure you do not make changes simply because of discomfort. Remain true to the vision and purpose of the original plan.

If you have not begun to execute your plan, do not be discouraged. Simply take it one step at a time.

Strategic planning and implementation are essential for organizations that wish to remain competitive and successful. Consider strategic planning to avoid failure and ensure that your strategies are implemented effectively. By taking the time to not only create but also effectively implement a strategic plan, your organization can prepare for future growth. **1**

### About the Author

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*Jason is best known for his passionate commitment to strategic thinking and creative innovation. He brings a broad spectrum of experience in branding, creative design, event planning, marketing, direct mail, and nonprofit management to his work at Infinity Concepts.*

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