

Ethical Marketing: Nonprofits' Trust-Building Tool

January 30, 2025 Kristy Morris



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As we know, in the knowledge era, nonprofits have an enormous opportunity to amplify their message. Today's tech and social tools allow organizations to extend their reach in a few clicks to support innovative marketing campaigns, and it's truly amazing. Still, these artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which now exist in virtually every software or app platform, bring many ethical responsibilities.

The fact is that AI is a tool that provides great conveniences and capacity, but in some cases, [engineers don't understand how it works](#) or why it does things. As a result, nonprofit leaders should consider that society is in a bit of a predicament. When powerful tools such as large language models exist, but we don't fully understand how or why they do what they do, we have to ensure that we protect the human element with ethical responsibility.

Bias and Inaccuracies in a World Where You Have to Always Verify First

As we know, nonprofit donors, volunteers and supporters want to trust the organizations they support. What if a nonprofit were raising funds but wasn't vetting its tools, and there was bias in the shared content? Unfortunately, bias is often baked into AI tools because the content we share on the internet, which are the data sets used for AI training, has bias created by human creators.

In 2024, Google faced criticism for its AI image generator, Gemini, and its depiction of a "beautiful woman." To no one's surprise, [AI believed that a beautiful woman was only limited to a young and curvy Barbie knockoff](#). The company also faced heat for inaccurate depictions of historical figures and even [created images of people of color as Nazi soldiers](#). Unfortunately, we live in a time when you can't believe what you see. First, you should verify and then trust.

Imagine a social media nonprofit marketer who isn't verifying what they're sharing. For instance, what if a supposed donor in the image didn't run the miles for the cause as the photo suggests? Or, what happens if the environmental nonprofit claims erroneously that its donors are lowering their carbon footprint by a certain amount when one of its global programs isn't providing vetted or accurate data or information? Is sharing the content ethical? Short answer: no.

Ethical Marketing Challenges in Nonprofits

Believe it or not, there was a time when you could trust what you saw, but that's no longer our world. Donors, volunteers and followers know that they can't necessarily trust the content or image they see from any organization, including a social good nonprofit. As a result, nonprofit leaders need to be mindful that this sentiment permeates and they should mitigate risk around all aspects of their organization, including marketing.

1. Content Creation and Messaging

First and foremost, in ethical marketing, it's essential that any nonprofit team shares content with responsibility and integrity. That means that all content has to be accurate and should always have a human who ensures accuracy and the elimination of bias. Stories and images shouldn't be exaggerated, biased or untrue.

2. Cause-Related Marketing Partners

Nonprofit marketers love a good cause-related marketing partner. What marketer doesn't? These partners allow organizations to propel amplification to the next level, especially if they're influencers. However, to minimize risks, it's essential — no matter how exciting the opportunity — to do due diligence to ensure value alignment.

3. AI Bias and Human Oversight

The truth of marketing is that nonprofits must use AI and technology. If they don't, they'll be left behind. However, due to the rapid evolution of technology, human oversight is an essential aspect of marketing. Moreover, it's vital for nonprofits to also audit tech annually to ensure ethical marketing (e.g., anti-bias).

Best Practice Tips for Ethical Marketing

Here are some tips to ensure ethical marketing for any nonprofit.

1. Create an Ethical Marketing Framework for Marketing

Creating an ethical marketing framework is an excellent activity for any marketing team. Fortunately, there are many places to look for resources, including the [National Council of Nonprofits](#) or platforms such as [MasterClass](#). Creating a framework provides a consistent ethical standard across the board.

2. Regularly Auditing Marketing Strategies Amid Technological Advancements

It's hard not to emphasize this enough. Because of the significant changes in technology, which can happen in as little as a few months, and the continuous upgrading of marketing tools, marketing teams need to audit tools. Review not only the tools and output but also the company itself.

3. Ensuring Ethics on the Marketing Team

We all love our marketing teams. They're on the leading edge of change. However, while they're whizzes on marketing tools, amplification and going viral, it's not every day that teams chat about ethics. So, reminding people through training workshops and open discussions about it ensures that ethical marketing is a top value and priority.

Nonprofits play a vital part in our society, and they fill the gap in addressing the social challenges that governments or corporations may not fully prioritize. As a result, they're in a great position to lead on ensuring that ethics, integrity and human oversight remain front and center at a time when no one really knows how AI and tech will develop. In short, nonprofits have an opportunity to ensure trust, set the standard and remind communities that it's first and always about people and not shiny and cool AI and tech.

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