

Delivering low-cost, high impact marketing for nonprofits

Oct 12, 2020 | Craft Marketing

Tuesday, September 29 at 4:00 pm

AM> | Madison

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“Read All About It: Delivering Low-Cost, High-Impact Marketing for Nonprofits with Rowan Childs, Madison Reading Project”

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When **Rowan Childs** discovered a literacy gap for youth in the Madison area, she acted and founded the Madison Reading project. And now, because of her efforts, thousands of children enjoy reading new books at home and in their classrooms

Rowan Childs is the founder and executive director of the **Madison Reading Project** (MRP), a literacy-based nonprofit. She addressed the virtual September Craft Marketing session.

Rowan launched the organization in 2013, Since then, MRP has worked with more than 74,000 children and has provided them with 155,000 books. And Rowan has grown the nonprofit, all while working full time and raising a family.

Rowan’s interest started as a mother helping her first-grade son learn to read. She researched literacy rates and discovered that low-income children and/or black and brown children fall 20 to 40 points behind their counterparts in Dane County and the State of Wisconsin.

As a parent, Rowan could provide reading materials for her son. But she realized that many homes didn't have books and magazines at home, providing more reading opportunities. She found that two-thirds of children in poverty have zero or a few books in their homes.

Book Requests Increase

MRP began an after-school pilot project for 30 students. Rowan said her team realized the need to expand the program and get more control of the most requested book titles.

With help from public interest, marketing and recognition of the need to improve literacy, MRP continues to grow each year in the following ways:

- Volunteers
- Book donations
- Financial donations
- Operation of a bookmobile known as the Big Red Reading Bus
- Donation Center
- Staff increase from one parttime person to two full time and four part-time people
- More than 100 community partnerships

Because of MRP, thousands of children now have larger home libraries. Teachers also can fill their bookshelves with relevant and fun books children want to read.

Rowan reports that the pandemic led to a drop in personal book donations. MRP can't keep up with the requests from children, schools and educators.

"We have 100 teachers on a waiting list for diverse classroom books," she said. "We would like to expand our reach to more children, families and educators."

How a nonprofit can deliver Low-Cost, High-Impact Marketing

When you have a low budget as a nonprofit, it's important to focus on the essentials.

Here are the tips Rowan passed along.

1) Maximize Your Resources

The literacy nonprofit understands the value of photography for connecting with stakeholders. The good news is that it's easy to take and post photos to build the brand.

For example, many supporters take photos highlighting their book donations.

Other resources include social media, the MRP website, key demographics of supporters and their contact information.

2) Find Partners

From the start, Rowan realized that she needed partners to fulfill her mission. She turned to the following:

- Marketing groups, such as Ad2Madison or Design Like Mad
- Volunteers and board members
- Paid employees

Rowan emphasized the need to ask for help.

3) Engage in Low-Cost Events

It doesn't take much money to engage stakeholders. MRP created fun and engaging ways to build its brand. Events have included literacy parties for youth and a Read Like Mad campaign that offered prizes to participants.

This year MRP's *Whiskey and Words* fundraiser will be a virtual Facebook Live event on Oct. 8. 105.5 Triple M radio will be the host. Rowan said MRP also celebrates its stakeholders with a yearly Thankful event conducted around Thanksgiving.

4) Share the Mission

Use newsletters, Rowan said, to build connections. You can inform interested parties about your activities and reach individuals who may not spend much time on social media. It also provides useful analytics and can generate donor and referral leads.

An effective media list also can build interest. Rowan notes that press releases should be geared to the news source and match your nonprofit's demographics. Include tv, radio, newspapers and blogs in your media outreach.

Madison Reading Project relies on staff, board members, partners, the community and volunteers to get the word out. They provide videos, pictures and gather testimonials.

MRP takes pictures of books they receive, which become part of the "new to the book center" series. Book recipients also tag the nonprofit in social posts or send staff photos and thank you notes.

"Capture milestones and share them," Rowan said. "Don't forget to engage with others and share their content as well."

5) Use reoccurring themes

Consistent messaging also is achieved using reoccurring themes. The nonprofit highlights the *Books We Love* each month and features a Virtual Book Drive as part of the "ways to get involved" series. The same message will be promoted on different social media channels to expand its reach.

Design tools include Adobe Spark, Fotor and PicMonkey. Canva provides brand kits and allows users to easily resize designs.

6) Schedule content using digital tools

Investigate platforms that allow you to schedule content. They include the following:

- Buffer
- Facebook
- SocialPilot
- Hootsuite
- TweetDeck

"No matter what scheduling tool you decide to use, always remember you still need to be flexible. Stay ready to edit, reschedule or delete posts as needed," Rowan said.

She offered other best practices to get the word out about your nonprofit:

- Involve everyone you can to help share your story
- Utilize a design tool to create content
- Schedule content when you can

Madison Reading Project has come a long way from its beginnings as a pilot project with 30 students. Rowan said you don't need thousands of people to make a difference, just a small group willing to pursue a goal.

When she needs inspiration, Rowan looks at the Margaret Mead quotation taped to her laptop:

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." – Margaret Mead

See You Online for October's Craft Marketing

Thanks to Rowan Childs of Madison Reading Project, attendees and volunteers. Craft Marketing also appreciates [Winbound](#) and Madison Reading Project, our September sponsors.

Craft Marketing invites you to its next virtual event at 4 p.m. on Oct. 27, 2020. [Jared J. Wiese](#) of [ProfilesThatPOP.com!](#)[™] will present "**How to Build a LinkedIn Profile that Attracts Jobs, Leads & Joy.**"

[Register here](#) for the online event.

Author

Leslie [Blaize](#), the owner of [Blaize Communications](#), is a certified case study specialist. She crafts B2B content with a focus on the Architecture/Engineering/Construction industry.

Upcoming Events

January 2021						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

Level Up Your Website SEO and Digital Marketing - Tools and Tips



Vince Rose
Earthling Interactive

AMA Madison

Level up your website SEO and Digital Marketing - Tools and Tips

January 12, 2021 at 12:00 PM

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Here comes 2021! Join us for our first Signature Speaker Series event of the new year with SEO tips from [@WeAreEarthling.eventbrite.com/e/level-up-you...](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/level-up-your-seo-tips-2021-tickets-121234567890)

Dec 16, 2020



AMA Madison
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Did somebody say Christmas?! We want to wish an early happy holidays to our entire AMA family. Stay safe and stay warm!



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American Marketing Association – Madison

PO Box 259692

Madison 53725-9692