

# “So, you write jingles for nuns?”:

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How do you meet the challenge of engaging the Sisters in a dialogue about strategic marketing that focuses on mission, ministry and sustainability? Being a communications professional for the Sisters doesn't mean that you "write jingles for the Sisters" to "convince women to be nuns" or anything else that is potentially offensive.

"Marketing", a term which makes many Sisters uncomfortable, is worth exploring. There is value in understanding that good marketing ensures sustainability. Good marketing is the successful exchange relationship that "attracts perfect customers." Good marketing asks the questions "Who are our customers? What are their needs?" and designs "products and services" to meet those needs.

Who are the customers of the Sisters? What do those customers need?

People aren't all that different than those living fifty, a hundred, or a thousand years ago. This is especially true when it comes to the "product" that the Sisters offer. Humans today still yearn to be connected to each other and to God. Such efforts include exploring spirituality, understanding God's call, engagement in ministry, and commitment to service.

Years ago, Sisters had "captive audiences" of millions of students because they taught in schools, worked in hospitals and were active in churches. Young women who were inspired by their spirituality and way of life were attracted to do the same.



They "lived" the "4Ps" of the "marketing mix" without any awareness that they were doing it. They had a product (compelling career choice to follow God's calling into ministry), at a "price" they could afford, offered in the "place(s)" they already were, through direct interactions and communications with the Sisters (promotion). The Sisters were able to "speak Christ, and use words when necessary," thus offering the ability to strengthen relationship God and the congregation/community through experiential learning and relationship.

The challenge today is that in order to touch people's hearts and minds enough to be

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attracted to our mission and ministries, and, more importantly, to help women develop their relationship with God to the point that they are willing to be open to the journey to vowed sisterhood, we must adapt and be creative in how we engage and attract people.

Here are some strategies that will help you to successfully allow your congregation to create the appropriate “marketing mix” in a way that attracts and engages others:

1. Distill the essence of your charism to the few compelling words that can describe it in a meaningful way to people who don't know you.
2. Identify your various audiences. Don't be afraid to call them customers. Truth is, you have various audiences for potentially different products that are very relevant today (spiritual development, vocations, ministry and fundraising). Different groups have different communication needs. Consider the needs of each group. Prioritize them based on where you believe God is calling your congregation. Be intentional and define the characteristics of a “perfect” customer. Recognize that your perfect customers are actually out there seeking you.
3. Measure the outcomes and impacts of the mission and ministries individually and collectively. Our humility as Sisters doesn't mean that we or our work should be invisible. Focus on the outcomes and impacts of the charism, mission and ministries and not on the Sisters. Learn how to measure outcomes and impacts to make a compelling “case for support.”
4. “Tell the story” in a way that strategically reaches each of your target customers and engage them in the calling related to the charism. Expect a measurable “return on investment” from each effort. Adjust your approach if it does not achieve the desired results.

Good marketing adapts to the needs of the current environment to ensure that those relationships continue when things change. When we adapt to the needs of the changing environment, we continue to meet needs, we continue to be relevant and we ensure sustainability. True marketing is biblical. We are called to “shine our light for all to see.”



## About Strategy Solutions

Strategy Solutions, Inc., a professional consulting firm...helps clients access new funding opportunities by building a “business case” that there is a return on investment for funding their innovative programs.

Recent success stories from The Children's Institute and South Hills Interfaith Ministries can be viewed at:

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## About Debra Thompson

Debra Thompson is President of Strategy Solutions, Inc. She provides strategic planning, training, facilitation, research and project management services to organizations and communities who want to grow and thrive. A graduate of Villa Maria College with a B.S. in Marketing, she received her Master of Business Administration from Gannon University and is an adjunct professor in the Masters of Organizational Development Program at Duquesne University. She has advanced training in Strategic Planning, Quantitative as well as Qualitative Market Research, Total Quality Management, Leadership Development, and Systems Thinking. She is an associate of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Northwestern PA. Contact Debbie at: [Debbie@getstrategy.com](mailto:Debbie@getstrategy.com) or by calling 814-480-8000.