



# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

## SESSION 137 WHAT WORKED IN 2016

Hello, this is Beth Brodovsky, and welcome to Driving Participation. For everyone who is listening live, this is our last show of 2016. I love this time of year. It feels like a fresh start with a clean slate. I always feel like anything is possible at New Year's. Last year I did a show asking our past guests what their marketing resolutions were for the year ahead. It was one of our most popular episodes, so we are continuing the tradition this year with a new question. This year, Bill Skowronski from [Session 134](#) suggested the question:

### **What's one thing you did this year that really worked?**

Over the last few weeks I've been collecting answers from our past guests to see what they have been up to since we last spoke. They have some great insights and suggestions for you that I think you'll really enjoy.

Let's start at the beginning with some thoughts on branding from my friend Gail Bower, who joined me way back on [Session 8](#).

"I paused to reflect on my value, my brand and messaging. This change is long-term and not for the faint of heart. We all operate in a rapidly changing business environment and in 2017 even more change lies ahead. The external world around your organization is not static. There are constantly new ways for your organization to expand it's value, move in new directions, collaborate and partner, innovate, seek new markets for services, explore new revenue sources and generally engage new participants. Pausing to explore, reflect, create new value and update your value can have long lasting impact. As for my new brand, I feel refreshed, more relevant and excited about executing."

**Gail Bower**, *President, Bower & Co. Consulting LLC*  
[Session 8](#)





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I truly believe that adaptability is the most valuable skill a person can have and I think that applies to organizations, too. It's important to be focused in what you do and where you are headed but you need to lift your head and check in regularly to make sure you don't swim into the rocks.

Last April we did a series on volunteer engagement, and Sarah Hemminger of Thread came on to talk about creating a community built on relationships in Session 103. Allison Buchalter, Thread's senior director of communications & community engagement, shared what they have been working on since our conversation. Following the riots on April 27, 2015, in Baltimore, Thread wanted to help the community move forward. She told me:

“One thing that really worked for us this year was Conversation Thread. This arc of events gave our community the opportunity to come together to build strong relationships, talk about serious issues, and take action to improve our city. It was also a great way for Thread to introduce our mission, as well as our long-range vision for the future of Baltimore, to the greater community. Finally, it presented us with the opportunity to routinely communicate with more than 3,000 people for a year and attract a significant amount of national attention.”

**Allison Buchalter**, *Senior Director of Communications & Community Engagement, Thread*

[Session 103](#)

I think this speaks directly to what Gail said. By staying aware of what's happening around you, opportunities will present themselves to expand your value. The challenge for many organizations is to be nimble enough to take action. Action creates momentum, and you can see it in Thread's outcomes. Their events started by asking people to perform an action that would nurture a current relationship or spark a new one. Then they built on that momentum by hosting 100 dinners across Baltimore where strangers sat down for a meal





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together. And the uniqueness of that got them a story in the Baltimore Sun. The arc closed out on #GivingTuesday with a campaign for acts of kindness with nearly 2,000 people participating. And none of this could have happened if they kept their heads down and stuck to their plan.

Another story of trying something new comes from Rachel Hutchisson from Session 65. It shows that sometimes getting to the next level means pushing through fears and breaking out of your comfort. She told me:

“In 2016, I did something I’ve never done before. I gave a TEDx talk. The topic was something near and dear to my heart — the role of people in the world of corporate social responsibility. Giving a talk like this is a bit nerve-wracking. You’re on stage, on camera and want to get it right. So what did I do that was different? I kept it simple, true and completely core to what I believe. I gave a talk that was of me, not just something I “memorized.” The lesson? Be authentic, especially when the challenge in front of you seems big.”

**Rachel Hutchisson**, *Vice President of Corporate Citizenship  
& Philanthropy, Blackbaud*

[Session 65](#)

Keeping it simple is one of the most overlooked ideas in marketing. Steven Screen from Session 58 feels the same way. He says:

“I can name 10 clients off the top of my head that we helped raise far more money this year by keeping their fundraising radically simple. Instead of focusing on their entire mission, we focused on one compelling part of their mission that donors understood – and raise undesignated funds at the same time. Works like a charm!”

**Steven Screen**, *Creative Director, Better Fundraising Company*

[Session 58](#)





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Anyone who knows me knows that I am obsessed with technologies that make us more efficient and automate marketing processes. There are so many cool tools out there that sometimes I forget about ones I have tried and liked. I was excited when Meredith Low from Session 84 reminded me of a great one. Here's her tool tip:

“The one thing I did this year that really worked – I’m going to suggest a small thing. It’s something I’m using now called DropVox, which is not the same thing as Dropbox, which is a file sharing and file storage solution. DropVox is “V” as in voice. It’s an app that lives on my phone and the way it works is that I just hit a button, it opens and just starts recording my voice. When I finish it automatically uploads the audio into my DropBox folder that I set up for that purpose. The great thing about this app is that I find when I have an idea, sometimes it comes to me all in a flash. I just see how things are going to hang together and I just know what I want to say. All it really needs is to polish it, but if I wait until I sit down at a keyboard I’ve lost a lot of the spark, the driving force behind the idea. What I like is that I can open it up and say a bunch of things and then I have it captured for later. Sometimes I feel like structuring reports, presentations, training programs or blog posts, I find I have it all there and all I’ve got to do is listen to the audio file, type it up, polish it up a little bit and it’s all there. So I recommend DropVox as a way to capture those bolts of brilliance when you are walking the dog.”

**Meredith Low**, *Founder, Meredith Low Consulting*

[Session 84](#)

And while we are on the subject of maximizing your marketing impact and reducing your work, Carol Meerschaert from Session 51 used a new feature on an old platform. She says:





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“Posting website content as articles on LinkedIn really worked. I use the COPE strategy—create once, publish everywhere. Your members and those who know you will see your news articles on your website and also get there via your newsletters. But to reach those who do not yet know you, LinkedIn is the best. The viral reach of your contacts and their contacts allows you to reach the market you seek.”

**Carol Meerschaert**, @CarolMeersch

[Session 51](#)

I can also vouch for Carol’s suggestion. I’ve published excerpts from this podcast on LinkedIn and it worked great. Doing it weekly had everyone in my network commenting on how they saw me all the time. Awareness was high, and I even got a new client out of it. It’s really hard to sustain that commitment but I think that is something I need to put back on my list for 2017. We are really focusing on the COPE concept which can also be called repurposing or “modular” content. Last week’s podcast was actually a version of an email article that also became a blog post on our website. When you are paying in time or money to create something, think through all the ways and different media you could use it in before you even start. The little extra planning time will pay off many times over.

One of our regular guests, Vanessa Chase Lockshin, had some great wins this year with planning. Listen to what she shared:

“One thing I did this year that worked really well with clients is contingency planning. And we did this especially during year-end campaigns when a lot of organizations are feeling the crunch to meet those year-end deadlines. One of the things we tried to do was actually bake-in plans for “What if this didn’t go the way we hope it did?” So that meant really considering the emails that went out and really considering what we would do in the 24-48 hours after an email when you’re to adjust. Planning ahead lowered our stress. It felt like we had plans in place in case things went wrong or if we wanted to





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try to test some other things. Plus I think it also allowed us to plan time in our schedule to make those things happen so we weren't even more stressed out when things were going awry. I think that this was a really smart strategy and something that was really helpful with time management and for project planning for year-end campaigns and definitely something I am planning on doing throughout the year with clients."

**Vanessa Chase Lockshin**, *Founder, The Storytelling Non-Profit*

[Session 2](#)

[Session 80](#)

[Session 122](#)

I was really excited in Session 126 when Adrian Segar helped define the difference between participation and engagement. We both agree that participation is engagement in action. Adrian's work focuses on participation in meetings and he wrote in to share what he's been working on this year. He says:

"During 2016, I invented and refined a session process for maximizing participation and engagement during large group exploration of a topic or issue. I call it the "fishbowl sandwich." Whenever I've used the fishbowl sandwich in 2016, it's been hard to get participants to leave the room afterwards as they're so deep in post-session conversations!"

**Adrian Segar**, *Author/Founder, Conferences That Work*

[Session 126](#)

If you are interested in learning more about Adrian's process, his books are listed on the [show notes page](#).

We had great conversations this year with some wonderful nonprofit marketers. I met Candi Summers at the Donor Inspiration Conference in Nashville hosted by Sandy Rees. Candi said this is what she focused on this year:





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Getting as much face time with our donors as possible and building those relationships was a big deal for me this year. Understanding that the relationship is primary. When you truly care about your donors as people, good things follow.

**Candi Summers**, *Board Member, Bestwa*

[Session 131](#)

In our first year we had the CEO of Zoo Miami, Bill Moore, on talking about leadership. This year I had the chance to go to Miami and Bill introduced me to Greg Koch, the Zoo's education director, who joined me in Session 112. Greg made a change in programming that really made a difference. He says:

"I am proud to say that this year we had the courage to take one of our education programs offline so that we could completely re-envision and rebuild it from the ground up. Our "Wild Night" tours have just launched to the public and are consistently selling out. The new version is more aligned to our mission and offers a much better customer experience. Sometimes it pays to take one step backwards so you can take several steps forwards!"

**Greg Koch**, *Education Director, Zoo Miami*

[Session 112](#)

Claire Axelrod from Session 87 had some great advice as you close out your year. She says:

"I continue to encourage everyone I work with to call their donors, right away if possible, and thank them. The feedback is 100% positive, from both the recipients of the calls and the callers themselves. There's really no downside. We know from Penelope Burk's research that folks who are called within 48 hours of having made a gift renew at higher rates and give larger gifts than those who aren't called. Why not test this for yourself? At the end of the year, tally up the responses of those who were called and thanked and





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see if they exceed those who were not. If they do, then do MORE of this the following year. Even if you can't call everyone, figure out a subset that makes sense and give it a go!"

**Claire Axelrod**, *Founder, Clairification*

[Session 87](#)

Sandy Rees from Session 120 has had great success this year helping her clients change the way they approach their newsletters. She says:

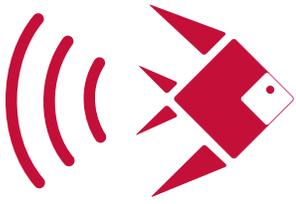
"My clients saw a terrific response from donors when they made their newsletter more personable and conversational. Many of them had let their newsletter fall to the bottom of the priority list, then threw it together in a hurry just to get it out the door and mark it off their To Do list. I had them pause and think about the newsletter from the donor's point of view - what would THEY love to know? What would warm their heart and make them feel good about supporting the nonprofit? Then write that, leaving out the jargon, the acronyms and the insider language. I had them write the same way they would verbally share the information with their donor. The result was a warmer, more interesting newsletter for the donor, with higher open rates and click-throughs. For most nonprofits, the newsletter is the main tool for communicating with donors. When it's done well, it can really boost retention rates and deepen connections."

**Sandy Rees**, *Founder, Get Fully Funded*

[Session 120](#)

I believe that in 2017 marketing is going to be all about personalization. That applies to technologies you can use to segment and deliver communications as well as good old fashioned attention. John Lepp from Session 41 suggests using the Pareto Principle for your next mailing. John says:





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“The Pareto Principle (also known as the 80/20 rule) states that, in the context of fundraising, 80 percent of your revenue comes from 20 percent of the donors. For your next mailing, remove the top 20 percent of your donors (by gift level, loyalty, monthly, etc.) out of your automated mail piece and commit to creating and assembling in house.

First, it must be mailed in a larger envelope, 9” x 6” or 9” x 12” with a first class stamp and hand-addressed.

Second, print off your amazingly crafted #donorlove letter on your printer. Make it personalized, hand sign every single one and even add a personal handwritten note at the end.

Third, design a full size (8.5 x 11) reply form that is also personalized with my name and address reading: Reply Form for “Jane Donor” at the top.

Fourth, paperclip a photograph or written testimonial or something from a grateful beneficiary of your cause or shows your donor’s gift in action.

Fifth, if you can, enclose a reply envelope with a first class stamp on it or a postage paid business reply envelope.

Mailing this, and John suggests even following up with a phone call, will greatly increase your gifts from this selection of donors.”

**John Lepp**, *Founder, Agents of Good*

[Session 41](#)

Elizabeth Engel from Session 6 works with member associations. Like me she really believes that getting to know your audience is the most valuable first step toward accomplishing anything. Here’s what she says had an impact this year:





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“One thing that really worked for my clients was talking to their members. I know that sounds obvious, but associations tend to – in my opinion – over-focus on surveying people to the detriment of other methods of learning about our audiences. I’m not saying that surveys aren’t important or a necessary part of our data-gathering efforts. But they aren’t the whole picture.

Surveys can be particularly useful as an early warning system for identifying problem areas in your value proposition, if they’re properly designed and administered, and if you ask the right questions.

They’re not great at “blue ocean” situations, though. If you’re trying to learn about future goals and desired outcomes, new challenges, or emerging trends in the profession or industry your association serves, surveys are not effective. You learn about those sorts of things much more effectively and efficiently through open, honest conversation.

Association professionals can sometimes be nervous about talking directly to members in an unstructured way. What if they’re angry about something, or have complaints, or ask questions we can’t answer, or have requests we can’t meet? Those are all reasonable fears. I would argue, though, that it’s better to invite the momentary discomfort that comes from finding out something negative than it is to ignore it. When you know, you can do something. When you choose not to know, members walk away and you have no idea why.

In 2017, I would encourage listeners to start a formal program of regular audience conversations. There are lots of ways this can be accomplished: regular in-person or virtual focus groups, town hall style meetings or calls, tasking staff members or volunteers with calling one or more members a week, working with your chapters, setting up regular member visits, an emailed or online open-ended question of the week, doing Appreciative Inquiry style peer interviewing, hiring a consultant to conduct interviews,





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a mix of the above, etc. But regularly gathering and widely sharing this sort of information is vital for the long-term health of your organization and your relationships with your constituents.

**Elizabeth Engel**, *CEO, Spark Consulting*

[Session 6](#)

Understanding and connecting to your audience is a challenge for many organizations. Just a few weeks ago on Session 133 I spoke with Jeff Miles from the Keystone Opportunity Center about developing your audience focus. It is something he has really paid attention to this year and the results are revealing opportunities for giving that he never imagined. Here's what he shared:

“One of the main marketing and fundraising ideas I had this year was really digging into what our organization is presently doing but is not connecting with our audience. In really focusing on our audience and who they are, I tried to pick out appeals that resonated with who they are as moms and grandmothers. For years Keystone ran a program that collected food for kids over the summer that were at risk of food insecurity without school lunches. This was not ever really named and never marketed, just promoted to local churches that donated food. So I took the details of this effort and named it the Keystone Student Summer Aid Program and marketed it to our community. We had a goal of raising \$5,600, and we raised nearly \$70,000. I think the key is not always to market the biggest effort you are doing, but what you are doing that most connects with your audience.”

**Jeff Miles**, *Development and Marketing Director, Keystone Opportunity Center*

[Session 133](#)

There is so much value in really knowing the people you are trying to connect with. Understanding what motivates them changes everything from what programs to offer to the words you use. And when you know what your key





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supporters really care about, it makes it infinitely easier to go find more people just like them.

It's hard to do what Jeff has done to clarify the perfect person for him to talk to. I see people struggling all the time trying to reach everyone in the hope that the message hits home with some of them. But hope is a really expensive marketing strategy. I'd prefer you had the skills to be sure what you are doing is moving you forward.

So January's MasterClass is on Finding your Audience. I'll be teaching strategies to show who to focus on based on what's important to you. And we'll use tactics that are free and accessible to you right now. If you are interested in getting on the invitation list, just text the word MASTERCLASS to 33444 and you'll get our emails with registration information.

I want to thank all of our guests for helping me wrap up 2016 and give us all a boost into the new year. I am grateful to all of you for listening and learning along with me. We are planning our topics and guests for 2017 now. I've been getting a lot of questions about digital marketing strategy and tactics so we'll be doing a lot more on those topics next year. If you have something you need to learn about, please let me know. Email me at [beth@iriscreative.com](mailto:beth@iriscreative.com) and if we can help you move forward with your marketing, let's talk.

Thanks for listening!

