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Connecting Charities with Creatives: Bridging the Gap Between Local Nonprofit Organizations and University of Mississippi Students

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CONNECTING CHARITIES WITH CREATIVES: BRIDGING THE GAP

BETWEEN LOCAL NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS AND

UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI STUDENTS

By

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ABSTRACT

Natalie Pruitt: Connecting Charities with Creatives: Bridging the Gap Between Local
Nonprofit Organizations and University of Mississippi Students
(under the direction of Professor Christina Sparks)

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the need for marketing resources among North
Mississippi nonprofit organizations and apply the findings to develop and launch a website based
on primary and secondary research that connects local North Mississippi nonprofit organizations
with University of Mississippi graphic design, marketing, bachelor of fine arts and integrated
marketing communication (IMC) students seeking experience to complete various marketing and
graphic design- related tasks and develop and implement an integrated marketing plan to promote
and raise awareness for the website.

Nonprofits face the challenge of allocating funds from donations to create functional and
creative communications that can include websites, social media presence, and fundraising
messaging/campaigns. Concurrently, UM students majoring in graphic design and content
creation-related majors obtain these necessary skills during their collegiate years. A gap exists
which could be addressed through establishing a resource that matches the needs of a nonprofit to
the skillset of a UM student. A review of secondary publications will examine nonprofit
organizations and the communication challenges they face in today's digital world. Additionally,
primary research was conducted through interviews with multiple nonprofit organizations
operating in Northern Mississippi as well as surveying of groups of students who fall into those
creative disciplines. Seven interviews will be conducted with non-profit organization leaders to
identify communication and creative barriers they face on a local level. 76 skills survey were
conducted with University of Mississippi students to assess attitudes, interest and likelihood of
participation in a creative resource platform to gain real-world experience.

Application of the research was in three parts, 1) To understand and verify the needs of
multiple local nonprofit organizations from a marketing perspective, 2) To measure and gauge
University of Mississippi student interest in participating with a platform that allows them to
complete marketing and graphic design- related tasks for North Mississippi nonprofits, and 3) To
develop and launch the website and then implement an awareness campaign based on industry
principles. This investigation will address the overarching research question: what is the current
need for marketing materials for Northern Mississippi nonprofit organizations, and would
University of Mississippi students participate in a resource that allows them to donate their time
and talents towards developing marketing and graphic-design related materials for these
organizations?

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IMC	Integrated Marketing Communications
NPO	Nonprofit Organization
ROI	Return on Investment
IRB	Internal Review Board

INTRODUCTION

The nonprofit sector as a whole is growing rapidly. It experienced 16.7% growth

between 2007 and 2016 (Lester M. Salamon and Chelsea L. Newhouse, 2019) as overall

giving grew 7.5% in the nonprofit sector for the first half of 2020 (Candid, 2020). The

state of Mississippi itself provides a vast amount of opportunities for these organizations

to thrive and support Mississippi residents in need of these services. Despite being the

state with the lowest per capita income in the country, Mississippi ranked 2nd in

charitable giving as recently as 2014, (Polymar, 2014) with residents donating over 5% of

their overall income (Independent Sector, 2020). With a state-wide increasing interest in

giving to others, an opportunity exists for Mississippi nonprofit organizations (NPOs) to

make a difference like never before. That being said, a crucial element that can lead to the

success or failure of these NPOs is the generosity of community volunteers, as well as

community perception. Reaching these intangible assets poses a great strategic challenge

for these nonprofit organizations, whether they be large-scale or formal, such as charities

or foundations, or informal, such as associations and volunteering groups (Bahmani S.,

Galindo M. Á, Méndez M. T., 2012). Nonprofit management and employees also face the

challenges of fulfilling a constantly growing number of social needs, providing services,

and protecting environmental and cultural contexts, and spreading their organization's

mission and impact. "In other words, NPOs are now called to fulfill basic community

needs, while receiving fewer public funds and competing between each other to have more donors" (Bahmani S., Galindo M. Á, Méndez M. T., 2012). Lack of marketing materials contributes to lack of awareness among potential donors and community members. Creative messaging and digital marketing is more important than ever for NPOs for getting their name out there to possible donors and developing a sense of awareness among community members and volunteers. Especially in light of the Covid-19 pandemic making in-person gatherings more difficult, marketing should be at the forefront of these organizations' efforts to ensure their success.

Despite the importance of marketing with regards to the success of these nonprofit organizations, it can be argued that digital marketing, social media strategy, print material creation, and even general website upkeep tends to be deprioritized in the minds of the individuals running these organizations. In fact, only 3% of charities rate their board and executive leadership as being digitally savvy and 66% of charities are worried that they will miss out on opportunities for digital fundraising (The Nonprofit Source, 2019). This is neither entirely groundbreaking nor shocking, seeing as how nonprofits exist to make a change or better a community or group of people and not to create multichannel and complex marketing campaigns. This general lack of importance placed on marketing strategy is no fault of the nonprofits themselves. The issue arises because of the overall framework of smaller-scale NPOs, meaning, they tend to have much more limited communication budgets (Miller, 2021). than those of for-profit businesses as well as a lower number of employees on payroll (Cause IQ, 2020). Out of the 2,544 Mississippi nonprofits surveyed, 904 of them had a total number of employees less than 10 people (CauseIQ, 2020). These factors combine to create an environment where marketing

efforts tend to be deprioritized compared to more managerial or funding-related initiatives.

Although unfortunate, this lack of resources and emphasis placed on marketing efforts for NPOs leaves a door open for vast amounts of opportunity, especially for students. This project is dual-faceted: the second portion will focus entirely on the creation and execution of a website that serves the needs of local North Mississippi nonprofits and offers them the chance to outsource marketing-related projects, jobs, internships to UM students.

Because there exists a need for the creation of marketing materials for NPOs in North Mississippi along with a desire for industry experience for University of Mississippi students, an opportunity arises for action to be taken connecting these two groups in a way that will benefit both and close this gap

Statement of the Problem

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever that nonprofit organizations focus on their digital marketing footprint, since in-person events and fundraising opportunities can no longer safely take place. A NPO's brand image is crucial because it can make or break the relationship potential donors and community members have with that particular organization. By forming positive relationships with these populations, ideal donors are inspired to become not only active citizens but also contribute to the success of the nonprofit itself with monetary support.

On the student end, there lies the issue of students wanting work and experience but being unable to find those opportunities themselves. Service-based learning is also

being recognized as an incredibly vital element to a student's experience both academically and professionally (Saltikoff, 2017). Research must continue and grow to solve this disconnect between these two parties in hopes of verifying the need for a space that will allow both students and NPOs to best use their talents and resources. Additional research will be conducted on the most effective methods in which to market the website itself to both NPOs and UM students through a digital campaign.

Further investigation will be performed in order to ensure that nonprofit organizations in North Mississippi are given the proper tools to utilize the intellectual resources that University of Mississippi students can offer them and to better utilize the organization's intangible assets and spark engagements, donations, and loyalty among the desired populations —all while giving students the opportunity to learn from real-world client based projects.

Need for a solution

This paper will discuss the nonprofit sector as a whole as well as within the state of Mississippi as well as the implications and strategies that lead to successful marketing materials and how important these marketing materials are for smaller-scale nonprofit organizational success as well as the increased student need for real-world client work and experience in three parts: 1) Understanding and verifying the needs of multiple local, smaller-scale nonprofit organizations from a marketing perspective; 2) Measuring and gauging University of Mississippi students' interest in participating with a platform that allows them to complete marketing and graphic design- related tasks for local North Mississippi nonprofits; and 3) Developing a website and an awareness campaign based on industry principles and conducted research. This investigation will address the

overarching research question: what is the current need for marketing materials for Northern Mississippi nonprofit organizations, and would University of Mississippi students participate in a resource that allows them to donate their time and talents towards developing marketing and graphic-design related materials for these organizations?

Through the process of collecting primary data and the analysis of secondary data, a website will be created that will best suit the needs of both parties (NPOs and UM students), ensuring a mutually beneficial relationship between the two so that not only will these NPOs effectively expand their outreach, they will be offering these students the opportunities for relevant work experience. After the website is developed, additional recommendations and future implication will be identified by the creator in order to better establish the site's credibility and effectiveness. The recommendations will also allow for the site to continue to grow and serve many organizations and students for years to come.

CHAPTER ONE: NONPRFOIT SECTOR OVERVIEW ON A NATIONAL SCALE

This chapter explains the importance of nonprofits from both a national and a statewide (Mississippi in this case) perspective in terms of economic growth and sustainability while also outlining the current state of the nonprofit sector.

Nonprofit Organization Situation Overview

To understand the importance of marketing and the creation of effective marketing materials in the nonprofit sector, it is crucial to first understand the current situation for both national and Mississippi nonprofit organizations on an economic and social level. According to the National Council of Nonprofits, a nonprofit is often interchanged or associated with the term "tax exempt" (National Council of Nonprofits, 2021). Nonprofit organizations are aimed at creating social value and maximizing communal impact alongside fundraising opportunities, while not considering financial profit as their main objective (Bahmani S., Galindo M. Á, Méndez M. T., 2012). These organizations, however, are a major economic force to be reckoned with. According to *Forbes* reporter Sarah Hamilton, "It is important to keep in mind that a nonprofit corporation is a corporation just like a for-profit is a corporation. Nonprofit corporations

help create healthy communities, and corporations need healthy communities in order to do business" (Hamilton, 2019). No matter the size, annual revenue, or number of employees, nonprofit organizations provide a way for people to band together for the common good, "transforming shared beliefs and hopes into action" (National Council of Nonprofits, 2021). "America's 1.3 million charitable nonprofits feed, heal, shelter, educate, inspire, enlighten, and nurture people of every age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status, from coast to coast, border to border, and beyond." (National Council of Nonprofits, 2021). Every day, thousands of employees and volunteers generously give their times and talents to the betterment of their communities through these organizations, resulting in an environment in which corporations, and the communities in which they reside, can flourish.

Despite popular belief, NPOs not only boost the state of the nation through acts of service, but the industry plays a major role in shaping the U.S. economy as well and has driven massive amounts of growth over the past decade. It is crucial that these organizations continue to become influential members of the corporate world and within their communities for both the population utilizing the NPs service, as well as those who inhabit the surrounding areas. According to *Forbes*, NPOs maintain strong influence through three contributing growth factors: continuous employment, job satisfaction, and salary (Hamilton, 2019).

The NP sector makes up one of the largest workforces in America, creating dynamic jobs rapidly, especially during times of economic struggle. One reason for that is, times of economic hardship continue to inspire heavy influxes of giving from donors, an example being that 51% of donors say they have not changed their donation amount

during the pandemic, according to a survey conducted by Data Axle. In fact, over the

decade following the 2008 economic recession, nonprofits added jobs at a rate that was

nearly 4 times greater than for-profit businesses (Hamilton, 2019). While for-profit

businesses experienced a loss of more than 4 million jobs between 2007 and 2012,

nonprofits experienced a growth rate of jobs of 8.5%. Because charitable giving tends to

go up during times of economic stress (Lester M. Salamon and Chelsea L. Newhouse,

2019). NPOs are constantly provided with opportunities to capitalize on these

circumstances and use their resources and increased donations to serve others. Nationally

speaking, the nonprofit sector grew by 16.7% with regards to total employment between

the years 2007 and 2016, nearly 12% more than for-profit businesses (Nonprofit

economic report, 2019). **See Figure 1.1** for a visualization of these statistics.

Figure 9. Employment growth rate, nonprofit vs. for-profit, 2007-2012, 2012-16, 2007-16

Figure 1.1: Employment growth rate, nonprofit vs. for-profit, 2007-2012, 2012-16
(Lester M. Salamon and Chelsea L. Newhouse, 2019).

Although for-profit and nonprofit corporations appear to have different goals objectively speaking, both share the ultimate challenge of creating a healthy community where the inhabitants can participate and mobilize. The voice of nonprofits is becoming more valued in the corporate world as it becomes more apparent that NPOs are catalysts for economic growth and opportunity.

With regards to employment in comparison to other industries, the nonprofit sector is currently the third largest category of employment for the private workforce with 12.3 million employees, falling only behind the retail and food service industries. The nonprofit sector accounts for 10.2% of the U.S. total workforce (Nonprofit Economic Report, 2019). **See Figure 1.2.**

Figure 3. Employment in nonprofits vs. key industries, 2016

Industry	Millions of employees
Retail trade	15.73
Accommodation & food services	13.28
NONPROFIT SECTOR	12.29
Manufacturing	12.29
Administrative & waste services	8.86
Professional services	8.57
Construction	6.68
Wholesale trade	5.86
Finance & insurance	5.78
Transportation & warehousing	4.75
Information	2.73
Real estate, rental, & leasing	2.09
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, & hunting	1.26

Figure 1.2: Employment in nonprofits vs. key industries, 2016 (Lester M. Salamon and Chelsea L. Newhouse, 2019).

Leading one of the nation's largest workforces allows these organizations to maintain strong economic influence and create an abundance of new job opportunities.

Despite leading the third largest workforce in the nation, it is important to note that the highest percentage of NPOs have less than 5 full-time employees running the operation (US Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2017), which proves to be a major challenge facing this sector. **See Figure 1.3.**

Nonprofit size class data, 2017 U.S. totals

Size Class	Firms [1][2]	Employment	Total Wages (in thousands)
Fewer than 5 employees	64,806	117,417	$4,386,660
5 - 9 employees	28,999	192,430	$6,909,693
10 - 19 employees	23,506	321,085	$11,271,648
20 - 49 employees	21,565	668,255	$24,510,622
50 - 99 employees	10,297	724,193	$28,083,102
100 - 249 employees	9,231	1,454,506	$59,421,381
250 - 499 employees	3,763	1,305,096	$56,073,013
500 - 999 employees	1,973	1,358,247	$64,887,669
1,000+ employees	1,906	6,347,333	$414,674,265
Totals	166,046	12,488,562	$670,218,053

Footnotes:
(1) Excludes PR and VI; wages in 2017 dollars.
(2) A firm is an economic unit that may consist of multiple establishments.

Figure 1.3: Nonprofit seize class data, 2017 U.S. totals (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017).

According to collected data, 39% of the nonprofits accounted for in 2017 employ fewer than five people and 56.4% employed less than nine (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). "Small" nonprofit organizations made up the majority of public charities in 2017 (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2019) Although this figure fails to take into account the number of volunteers these organizations rely on for yearly support, it is remarkable nonetheless how few employees a majority of these organizations are able to succeed with. Still, the lack of paid staff with formal training poses a major challenge within the industry and can hinder the organization's effectiveness and efficiency.

Limited numbers of full-time employees is just one of the many operational challenges facing the nonprofit sector employees, board members, and stakeholders. Others include: the implementation of strategic messaging and digital content creation while under the constraints of a small or, at times completely nonexistent communications budget, providing value to donors and stakeholders while not being able to offer them a tangible resource, fundraising itself, and generating awareness of the organization's mission or goal to the public on a state-wide or even national scale. These are extremely complex organizational challenges that nonprofit organizations face and will be further analyzed from a marketing perspective in Chapter 3.

A factor that supports the increasing rate of employment when compared to that of other key industries is the fact that NPOs also act as a major income generator in terms of salaries. "Employment is an extraordinarily useful indicator of the economic activity of nonprofit organizations since these organizations are known to be highly "labor-intensive," (Lester M. Salamon and Chelsea L. Newhouse, 2019).

Although many believe that NPOs pay their full-time employees less than private, for-profit businesses, data proves that is not the case. **See Figure 1.4**

Figure 1.4 Nonprofit vs. for-profit average weekly wages, selected fields, 2016.
(Lester M. Salamon and Chelsea L. Newhouse, 2019).

In the study conducted by John Hopkins University, in only three of the selected fields in

which NPOs operate do for-profit corporations pay higher average weekly wages than

nonprofits, that field being the Arts, Recreation and Human-Service industries. In every

other selected field where both sectors operate, nonprofit wages actually exceed for-profit

wage (Lester M. Salamon and Chelsea L. Newhouse, 2019). Because of the generally higher weekly wages and job satisfaction, NPOs are able to create positive, stable work environments for their employees and volunteers, further establishing their credibility as not only service providers but also employers.

With all these components combined, nonprofits should be seen as not only major players in shaping the U.S. economy but also catalysts for sparking social change for those who need it most. These organizations are at the forefront of serving the vital needs of the cities they inhabit, while also providing ample opportunities to serve strategically and build healthy, stable communities.

CHAPTER TWO: THE NONPROFIT SECTOR OVERVIEW WITHIN THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

Since the purpose of this project is to serve the nonprofit community of Northern Mississippi and students attending the University of Mississippi, it is crucial to analyze the state economy itself and the current needs of the nonprofits within it.

The state of Mississippi provides organizations founded upon the principle of serving others many opportunities for growth, paving the way for nonprofits to make a greater impact. Since 2012, Mississippi has been identified as the poorest state in the country, with a poverty rate of 19.2% (The Freeman Online, 2020). The state's rate is far above the national average poverty rate of 10.5% (Safety Team, 2020). Mississippi also ranks as the hungriest state in the nation with 20% of the population considered to have some sort of food shortage (The Freeman Online, 2020). One factor prolonging this serious issue, especially in rural areas, is the lack of access to grocery stores, also known as a "food desert", which is when more than 33% of county residents live over a mile from the nearest grocery store. Additionally, the state ranks last in quality of healthcare and 43rd in quality of education (U.S. News & World Report, 2020).

Although these are just a few characteristics that only begin to scratch the surface of the complex socioeconomic difficulties that the state of Mississippi faces, it is impossible to deny the incredible amount of need the state's inhabitants require-- allowing local nonprofits to develop and serve in an area that is in desperate need of their services. According to Independent Sector, the state of Mississippi has 12,080 nonprofit

organizations, including civic leagues, chamber of commerce, and veterans'

organizations. Mississippians donate over 5% of household income yearly, equating to

over $1.5 billion dollars total (Independent Sector, 2020). This is an incredible amount of

charitable giving considering the current poor economic status of the state and its

inhabitants. In fact, in 2014, Mississippi ranked #2 in charitable giving as a percentage of

income nationally (The Associated Press, 2014). Mississippians gave 7.6% of their

income to charitable organizations that year (Polymath, 2014). Despite the state's ranking

in charitable giving having dropped slightly in recent years, Mississippians still prove

themselves to be extremely supportive towards philanthropic endeavors.

As stated in Chapter 1, nationally speaking, NPOs employ a tremendous

workforce, making the sector increasingly more relevant amongst other leading

industries. That being said however, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics,

over half of these organizations are considered "small", meaning they have less than 10

total paid full-time employees (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). In Mississippi, this

remains the case as well. Many of these NPOs are getting by with fewer employees,

resulting in these individual employees taking on a larger volume of work and increasing

responsibilities. According to CauseIQ, of the 2,544 NPOs surveyed, 35.5% have

between 1–10 employees, while 38.5% rely solely on volunteers. **See Figure 2.1.**

Employees per organization	Number of organizations
0	981
1-10	904
11-25	253
26-100	242
101 to 1,000	149
1,000+	15
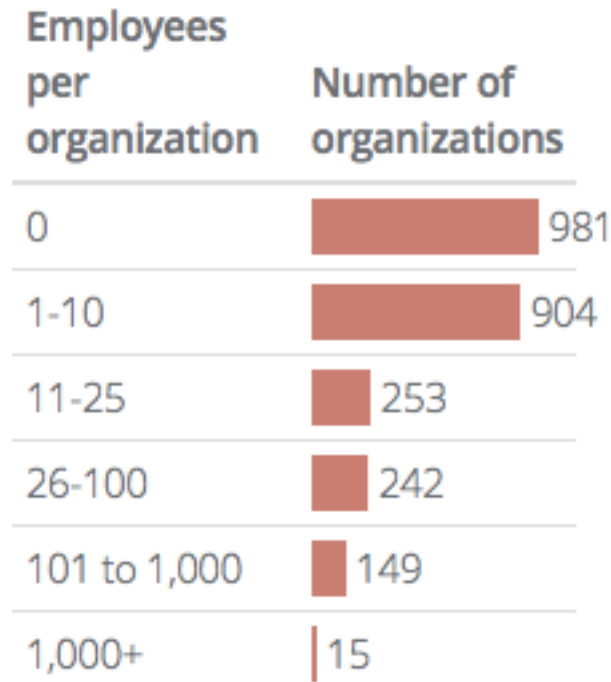
Figure 2.1: Job Trends for Mississippi Nonprofits (Cause IQ, 2020)

It is also worthwhile to note that the largest employers in the Mississippi nonprofit sector tend to be general hospitals, colleges, public utilities, elementary schools, and multiservice human service organizations (CauseIQ, 2020). Although this source was unable to survey every single NPO in the state of Mississippi, it demonstrates that an overwhelming majority of the organizations are considered small and employ less than 10 workers full-time. Findings such as this are important to consider when the operational needs of Mississippi nonprofits are further identified later on in this paper: these organizations have big demands to meet within their prospective communities and few employees to meet them.

CHAPTER THREE: SITUATION ANALYSIS: IDENTIFYING THE NEEDS OF LOCAL AND NATIONAL NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS FROM A MARKETING PERSPECTIVE

This chapter provides deeper insight and understanding of the role strategic marketing and brand identity play in leading to the success of nonprofit organizations as well as identifying current industry trends that signal the rising need for digital content amongst nonprofit constituents. Additionally, primary and secondary research will demonstrate the general lack of resources nonprofits face specifically when it comes to the knowledge, creation, and distribution of marketing materials– verifying the existence of a need for a resource providing NPOs assistance with the development of marketing materials among other related tasks. The primary research was conducted through interviews with multiple industry professionals, nonprofit executives, and employees.

The Overall Importance of Marketing and Branding in the Nonprofit Sector and Service-Oriented Industries

It is not groundbreaking knowledge that strategic marketing and overall brand presence is important for businesses to generate consumer awareness and loyalty; this has been the case for decades as new products and services have entered the market hoping to drive brand loyalty with their prospective target audiences through the appropriate marketing channels. According to the American Marketing Association, marketing is defined as: "the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and

society at large" (The American Marketing Association, 2017). By creating targeted, multichannel campaigns, businesses are able to connect on a deeper level with their consumers and generate long-lasting relationships, ensuring economic stability and certainty for that business. Interestingly, the term "marketing" is rarely used in the nonprofit sector. In the eyes of nonprofit organizations, the term is associated heavily with for-profit businesses and at times can portray these organizations in a negative light. After all, nonprofits exist "to improve quality of life for others at a community, local, state, national, or even global level. These organizations are not dedicated to private or financial gain but to the advancement of public interest" (UpCounsel, 2018).The importance of proper marketing, however, is not limited to only for-profit businesses and is crucial to the survival and overall external image of NPOs. This section will discuss the importance of the development and distribution of marketing materials, as well as overall brand development in the nonprofit sector in order to gain engagement, involvement, and loyalty from donors and community members.

Although many nonprofit organizations rely heavily on government funding and grants as a major source of revenue throughout the year, (Hrywna, 2019) the survival and growth of these organizations also directly results from the generosity and engagement of donors, volunteers, and active community members. The Nonprofit Times identified that nearly 80% of a nonprofit's revenue is provided by government funding or grant programs, but this does not take away from the importance of brand perception among these populations. Interestingly enough, the majority of the nonprofit sector is comprised of small organizations in terms of revenue as well, with almost 9 out of 10 spending less than $500,000 annually (Hrywna, 2019). Even though donors only roughly cover about

10% of an organization's yearly revenue, they, in addition to volunteers, are key components of an NPOs success and sustainability as a whole. Volunteers are described by author Karmin Bulman as a nonprofit's "greatest asset", making them a key target audience that NPOs must reach. Because of the increased importance of active volunteers and donor giving, NPOs must work to increase awareness for their cause in order to gain connections, support, and visibility within their communities. Every nonprofit is on a mission to champion a specific cause. Properly raising public awareness is a powerful tool in helping accomplish their goals and serve communities more effectively.

When working to raise overall awareness as well as drive donor and volunteer action, nonprofits must focus on their brand's image and strategic marketing efforts in order to connect with these target audiences in a way that sparks active engagement and participation.

Relationship and Service Marketing in Terms of the Nonprofit Sector and Service-Oriented Organizations

When it comes to building a brand image in the minds of consumers, whether it be for-profit or not-for-profit, product-oriented or service-oriented, it is crucial for these organizations and their prospective marketers to fully understand the framework that accommodates the context that the brand encompasses, whether it be social or commercial. The nonprofit sector as a whole faces the challenge of belonging both in social and commercial settings, which research proves to be an extremely complex economic challenge (Andreasen, A. R. 2012). These organizations are constantly juggling tasks such as reaching ideal donors and increasing fundraising while also spreading the organization's word or mission with the goal of creating community awareness and value-

all while not offering a physical product to the population of donors which they rely on. Service marketing, the realm in which nonprofits exist, is defined as "the application of a different set of tactics or strategies to anticipate the consumer's need for an intangible product" (Prachi, 2020). Service marketing falls under social and nonprofit marketing and is crucial to the foundation of understanding how nonprofits can better position themselves in order to create value in the minds of their donors and volunteers and utilize elements of service and relationship marketing to better serve the organization and the populations they serve, which will be discussed later in this section. See **Figure 3.1** below for a more in-depth analysis of the structural differences between commercial and social/nonprofit marketing and how each sector is able to create value with their desired audiences.

Table 1.   Three Zones of the Value Chain: Commercial and Social/Nonprofit Marketing

Level	Commercial Marketing	Social/Nonprofit Marketing
Internal		
1. Inputs	Organizational budgets Staffing Internal support	Organizational budgets Volunteers Donations Corporate support
2. Activities	Strategy creation and execution	Strategy creation and execution
3. Internal outputs	Sales campaigns	Behavior change campaigns Fundraising campaigns Volunteering events Corporate development
External		
4. Results management	Sales	Behavior changes Volunteer retention Donation levels/loyalty Corporate collaboration
5. Impacts	Profits/return on investment	Social change Nonprofit/social program growth

Table 2.   Other Differences Between Commercial and Social/Nonprofit Marketing

Feature	Commercial Marketing	Social/Nonprofit Marketing
Primary target audiences	Customers	Downstream people with problem behaviors
Secondary target audiences	Supply chain members Media	Upstream enablers Media Volunteers Donors Corporate partners
Expectations	Modest	Substantial
Budgets	Substantial	Minimal
Tactical freedom	Few limits	Close public scrutiny
Characteristics of key behaviors	Often low involvement Audience indifferent or positive	Often high involvement Audience indifferent or opposed
Limits on offerings	Few	Often considerable
Target audience benefits	Obvious Immediate or near term	Not obvious Far in the future

Figure 3.1: Three Zones of Value Chain: Commercial and Social/Nonprofit Marketing (Andreasen, A. R. 2012).

At the core of service marketing (1) service is the fundamental basis of exchange, (2) service is exchanged for service, and (3) the customer is always the co-creator of value (Andreasen, A. R. 2012). Service marketing centers around three essential elements: consumers, organizational employees, and the company itself. **Figure 3.2** provides a visual of the "service marketing triangle" model developed by Christian Gronroos 2000 which depicts the division of marketing tasks for each group and how the tasks unite to generate one overall brand image (Prachi, 2020).
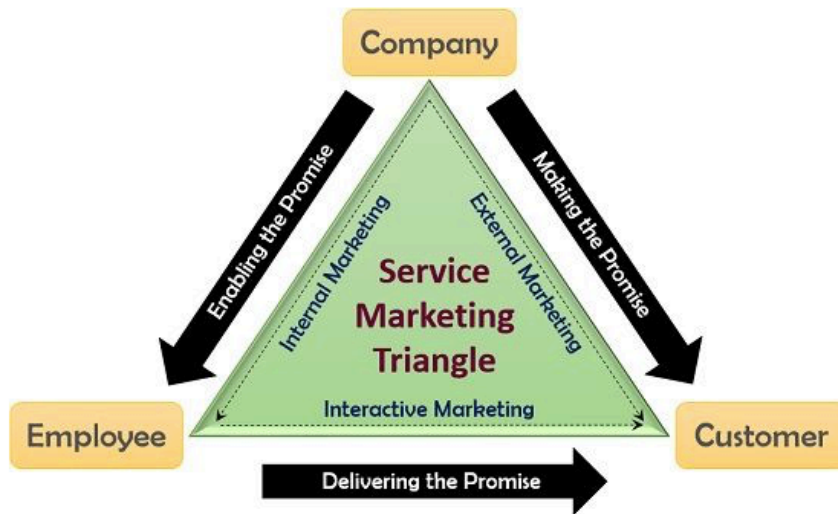
Figure 3.2: Service Marketing Triangle (Prachi, 2020).

Figure 3.2 also conceptualizes the different channels of marketing associated with each group: internal, external, and interactive. Internal refers to strictly in-organization tasks that connect the company's mission with its employees; external refers to direct marketing to target audiences through the proper channels; and finally, interactive marketing is the crucial element that, if executed properly, can drive long-term customer (or in the case of nonprofits: donor and volunteer) loyalty and retention (Prachi). In service-oriented organizations specifically, internal branding is crucial because a brand's identity must be consistent with the employees' values, behaviors, and actions. "Sustainable competitive advantage can better be achieved through unique emotional elements rather than functional characteristics," (Prachi, 2020). Employees, information technology, operations, and company culture overall have an influence in service branding and is an important internal approach that can be amplified outwardly to make a measurable difference for NPOs. "These emotional values are not just communicated by advertising but also through employees' interactions with different stakeholders"

(Chapleo, C., 2015). To be a successful company outwardly, the organization must begin brand development and mission implementation inwardly first, especially in service-oriented industries. Based on these findings, it is clear how important it is for these organizations to have a creative staff internally.

Because NPOs are unable to offer donors a tangible product in return for a monetary or time-based donation, they must overcome that barrier and provide the desired target audience with noneconomic benefits, which supports the finding that nonprofit-donor relationships involve primarily social exchanges. Research suggests that the exchange cycle is a field dominated by product-centered marketing due to the fact that those businesses or corporations are able to offer consumers economic, tangible benefits. Noneconomic benefits nonprofit donors can feel include a stronger sense of pride and humility, as human beings often experience when they perform generous acts and are able to see the impact of their actions (Prachi, 2020)

This concept brings in the element of "relationship marketing", which is closely associated with social marketing, but centers more around forming connections with the desired audience and stakeholders and further establishes the importance of brand perception in the nonprofit sector. The concept of brand perception is derived directly from relationship marketing, which suggests that these organizations should view (1) stakeholders and donors as partners, (2) the process of dealing with these groups as a means of creating value, deriving increased brand loyalty, and (3) the resulting partnerships as tools for increasing the firm's (or nonprofit in this case) ability to compete (Arnett, D. B., German, S. D., & Hunt, S. D., 2003). Relationship marketing is also based upon the fundamental idea that not every consumer or target market is searching for a

"transactional relationship" or gain with every economic exchange but instead are searching for a stronger relationship with brands and organizations. "We posit that organizations will be more successful in their relationship marketing strategies when individual consumers involved in the exchange have salient identities relation to the exchange relationship," said (Arnett, D. B., German, S. D., & Hunt, S. D., 2003). Nonprofits are able to tap into this mindset and create these connections with their prospective audiences, increasing brand loyalty and driving donations (Prachi, 2020).

This paper will further identify the elements and marketing strategies that allow nonprofit organizations to cultivate these relationships with potential donors by applying relationship marketing tactics as well as analyzing current industry trends aimed at generating engagement and creating value in the minds of those audiences in Chapter 3. This analysis also allows the researcher to provide recommendations on the most effective methods of reaching donors and ensuring their loyalty to the organization and brand.

Industry Trends and Audience Reach- The Shift to Digital Marketing for Nonprofits

Donor Trends

Although potential and current donors make up just one of the many audiences that NPOs are tasked with the challenge of marketing towards, donors pose their own unique set of problems that separate them from other groups such as board members and volunteers. If someone is strictly a donor, whether it be a one-time transaction or they act as a consistent source of monetary support, this group is not able to physically see the difference their funds are making, which can lead to a significant decrease in donor

retention. According to FEP Reports, the overall donor retention rate in 2018 was 45%, meaning only 45 out of 100 donors continued to give to that organization the next year. This number is steadily on the decline, excluding years of natural disasters or economic stress, which is discussed in Chapter 1. For new donors, this statistic is even lower, with only 30 out of 100 donors returning to donate the next year, or a 30% donor retention rate (Bloomerang, 2020). **Figure 3.3** shows the relatively steady drop in both donor retention rates and gift-giving rates from 2005 to 2018, which did experience a minor jump in 2018.

Year	Overall Gift Retention Rate	Overall Donor Retention Rate
2005	46.4%	49.7%
2006	44.5%	46.2%
2007	48.1%	46.7%
2008	43.3%	45.2%
2009	43.0%	40.5%
2010	45.1%	42.7%
2011	45.0%	41.5%
2012	43.4%	43.2%
2013	47.4%	42.8%
2014	47.2%	45.7%
2015	48.0%	45.9%
2016	47.8%	45.5%
2017	48.0%	45.5%
2018	47.0%	43.4%
Average	46.0%	44.6%

Figure 3.3: The average rate of donor retention for nonprofits (Bloomerang, 2020).

Because donor retention is dropping and this group receives no tangible economic benefit from their transaction, this poses a huge obstacle nonprofit marketers must overcome with strategic messaging tactics. The biggest advantage that nonprofits possess is that they all represent noble and worthy causes that are people-oriented. These organizations are the champions for issues that donors and communities can attach themselves to and

get behind to solve, all while prioritizing people over organizational profit. "Donors identify with people. There is power in donors hearing from real people, about real people. Hearing the impact a donation is creating goes a long way when in the context of human stories" (Campaign Monitor, 2020).

When it comes to directly appealing to donors, nonprofits must first understand the motivations behind their desired target audience and meet them where they are. Not every donor is created equal. Every person has a different motivation driving them to donate, whether that be personal experience with the organization or cause, proximity, community influence, or just random selection and timing. Research indicates that people have a strong desire to belong to social groups and organizations that affirm their identities. "This drive to connect with and receive approval from others within their social group has a great influence on behavior" (Braxton, D., and Lau-Gesk, L., 2020). NPO marketers must take this information and utilize it to their advantage by always honing in on the individuals that are already interested in the cause. This strategy saves immeasurable amounts of time and effort and proves to be more effective time and time again. "Organizations will be more successful in their relationship marketing strategies when industrial consumers involved in the exchange have salient identities related to the exchange relationship" Arnett, D. B., German, S. D., & Hunt, S. D., 2003). For example: an individual who has had an immediate family member or close friend be treated at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital is more likely to donate to that particular charity or other childhood cancer initiatives because this individual has a personal connection with that charity and has been able to see tangible benefits or results. Marketing to donors that already heavily associate themselves with a certain organization allows the nonprofit to

provide this donor with non-economic benefits such as a sense of pride or humility while also allowing them to feel as if they have been able to witness tangible impacts as well– those derived from their previously established feelings for that nonprofit or any personal experiences they might have had.

Research shows that the most effective way to appeal to donors and promote activism and loyalty is through the use of human stories. By sharing personal stories of the people the nonprofit organization has impacted in some way, it provides almost a tangible element to the donor's experience. Even though they were not actively out volunteering and seeing the change themselves, they can see the end result that their donations are contributing to. "When you tell a story—whether the story of your organization or the needs you're meeting in a community—you connect with your donors on a human level and make an even greater impact, which leads to more donations, volunteers, and action" (Campaign Monitor, 2020). In alignment with this finding, results are valued by 59.9% of donors, and 59.1% want to see how nonprofits use the money they've given. According to a study conducted by Campaign Monitor in which 1,000 donors and 500 nonprofit organizations were surveyed on their giving and social media habits, 61.1% of donors want to hear stories about organizations' impact and how their services are helping. This is the content donors value most, and 91.8% of nonprofits believe this is the most important type of content for donors (Campaign Monitor, 2020). In addition to personal stories of those impacted, on the same survey 52.0% said they would donate after receiving an urgent campaign that presents a specific need or goal. This was by far the most common response and further justifies the importance of strategic messaging, targeted marketing, and campaign utilization as a method of

appealing to donors. As the next most selected answer, 36.6% of respondents said they would give after seeing pictures and stories from someone the organization has helped. See **Figure 3.4** below for a visual representation of the survey results asking what would cause a potential donor to make a donation.
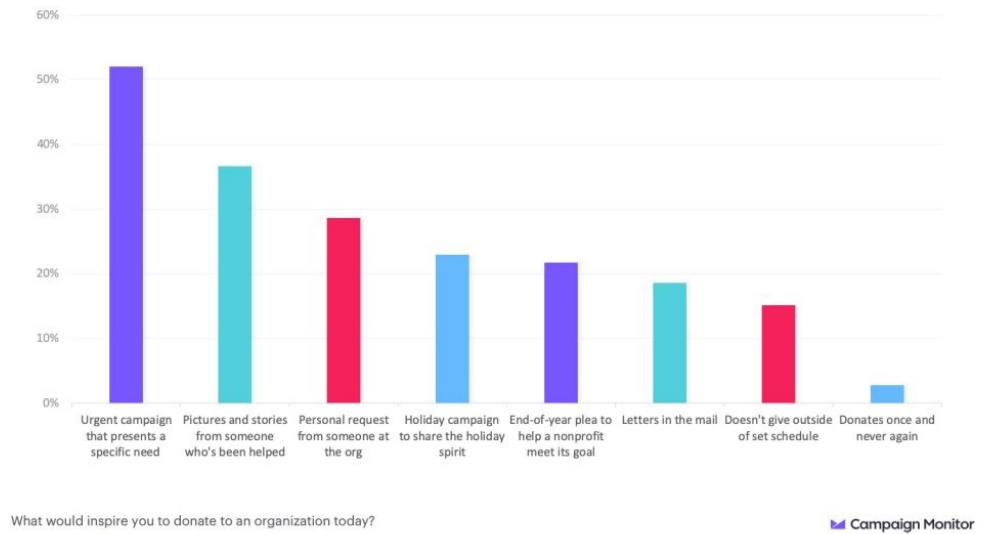
Figure 3.4: "What would inspire you to donate to an organization today?"
(Campaign Monitor, 2020)

In terms of methodologies to reach donors, studies show that many of these nonprofits are placing too much emphasis on hosting events. Studies have shown a decrease in the popularity of in-person events long before the Covid-19 pandemic even began, which has only hastened the process even more. Only 18% of donors discover a nonprofit through events, differing from the 58.9% expected by nonprofits (Campaign Monitor, 2020). This is an extremely drastic difference in perception versus reality, and demonstrates how nonprofits can fail to understand the motivations and behaviors behind their desired donors and other target audiences. This concept will be further analyzed through the lenses of digital marketing and social media in the next section.

The Role Digital Marketing and Social Media Play in Inspiring Online Giving

To understand the invaluable roles brand perception and marketing play for nonprofit organizations, it is crucial to first analyze the ever-changing social media climate the sector is facing as many of these organizations begin prioritizing digital content over in-person events. Research shows that marketing strategists as a whole are choosing to focus their efforts towards digital messaging to reach their desired audiences now more than ever, and the nonprofit sector is no exception. Over the past year, online giving grew by 21% as recurring donation options become increasingly popular and more widely available to online donors (Candid, 2020). Recurring donors are those who give to a certain organization or charity periodically, whether it be monthly or annually. When discussing which digital marketing methods prove most effective in reaching donors and driving fundraising, studies show that a multichannel marketing approach is most effective. According to a study from Dallas-based business intelligence firm, Data Axle, 29 % of donors contributing to a nonprofit through the organization's website did so after being contacted by another channel (The NonProfit Times, 2021). It can take up to 18-20 touchpoints to reach a customer, or, in the case of nonprofits, donors, for the first time (The Nonprofit Source, 2019). In fact, marketing campaigns that utilize both digital and physical methods, such as direct mail and one or more digital elements, experience a 118% lift in response rate compared to using direct mail only, and direct mail paired with digital ads yield a 28% higher conversion rate (The Nonprofit Source, 2019). For decades, direct mail has been at the epicenter of nonprofit marketing and continues to show high rates of return on investment (ROI) today, especially among older audiences.

In fact, 51% of nonprofits say they receive the highest ROI from direct mail marketing initiatives (Campaign Monitor, 2020). See Figure 3.5 below.
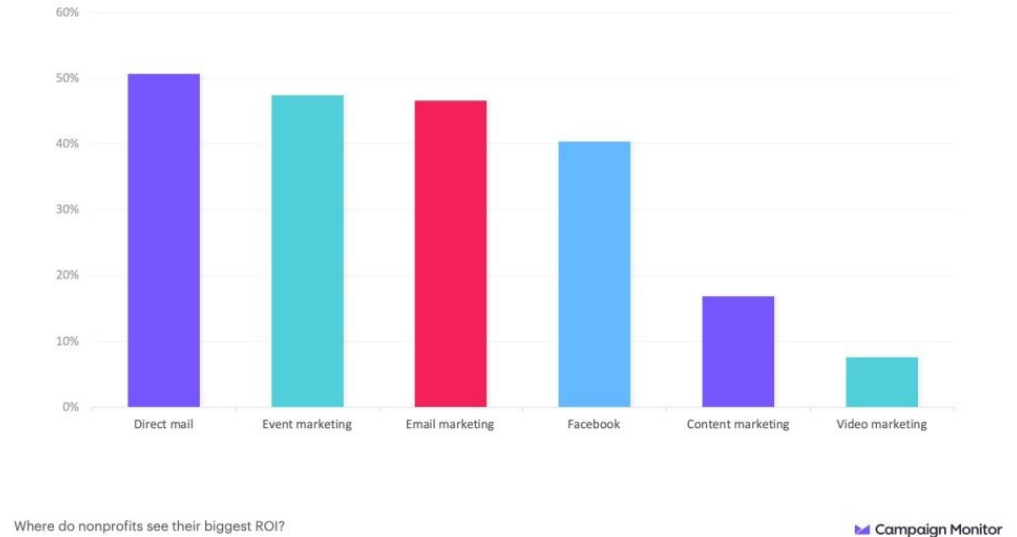

Figure 3.5: "Where do nonprofits see their biggest ROI?" (Campaign Monitor, 2020)

This being said, due to the ever-changing digital climate and need to attract younger donors, since 48% of donors between the ages of 18 and 29 make monthly contributions to at least one charity (The NonProfit Times, 2021). Nonprofits should not be prioritizing direct mail marketing only. According to The Nonprofit Times, when surveyed, direct mail moves donations among 45% of donors older than 60, and the number drops significantly as the recipients' ages drop as well. The results of this survey showed that direct mail was not cited as the preferred outreach channel by a majority of the respondents. The question becomes the following: which channel lies at the forefront of nonprofit digital marketing and should be prioritized by nonprofits looking to expand from direct mail– email. Research points to email marketing driving the most charitable giving. According to the survey conducted by The Nonprofit Times, 48% of respondents

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indicated that email was their channel of choice, followed by direct marketing, then

social media. In a separate donor survey, email remained the top response by donors with

20.5% saying an email from an organization would inspire them to donate again. Email

was the top response followed by Facebook at 17% and Instagram with 11% (Campaign

Monitor, 2020). See **Figure 3.6** below.
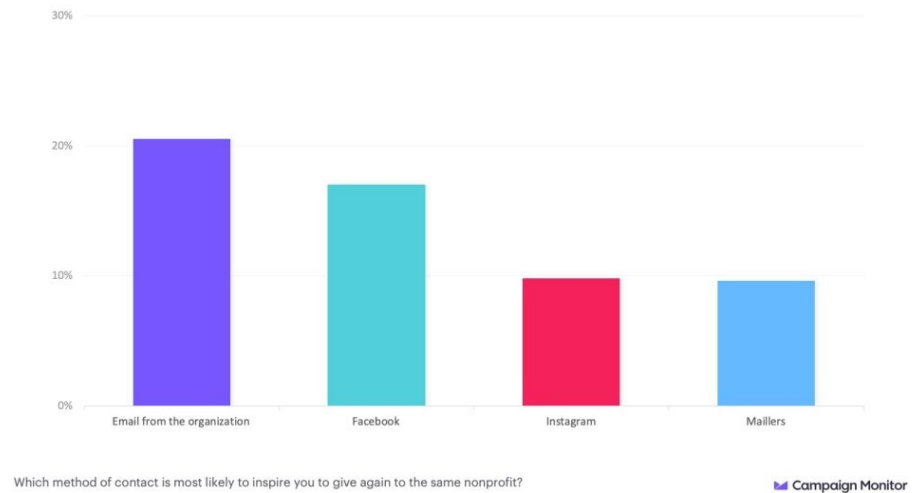
Figure 3.6: "What methods would inspire you to donate again?" (Campaign Monitor, 2020)

 According to the 2021 Nonprofit Communication Trend Report, email, websites, and

social media are the three most important communication channels for nonprofits (The

2021 Nonprofit Communications Trends Report, 2021). "Across the board, donors prefer

email. Nearly 42% said they prefer to hear from a nonprofit via email from the

organization" (Campaign Monitor, 2020). On the nonprofit end, 46.8% see a major ROI

from email marketing initiatives. Email marketing is especially crucial to nonprofit

organizations due to the fact it combines the elements discussed earlier in Chapter 3:

storytelling and people. Emails can be a balance of fundraising, images, and narrative

success stories. Emails are owned media and are curated by the nonprofit itself, allowing

them to control the message and communicate it specifically to channels that will respond with a donation or engagement.

Although email appears to be the preferred digital delivery marketing method for donors, it and direct marketing cannot stand alone. Emails with social sharing options increase click-through rates by 158% (Campaign Monitor, 2020). Social media influence is growing at unprecedented rates and should be prioritized by every nonprofit looking to attract donors, volunteers, or overall community awareness. According to the Empower Agency, 29% of people consider social media to be the tool that inspires the most giving. In fact, 55% of people who engage with charities on social media end up taking some sort of action, and 21% of online donations are done directly through social media (The Nonprofit Source, 2019). When asked their preferred method of discovering a nonprofit through a survey conducted by Campaign Monitor, the winning method was word of mouth and personal connections, which supports data discussed earlier, with 41.5%, and the second was Facebook with 39.5%. See **Figure 3. 7** below.
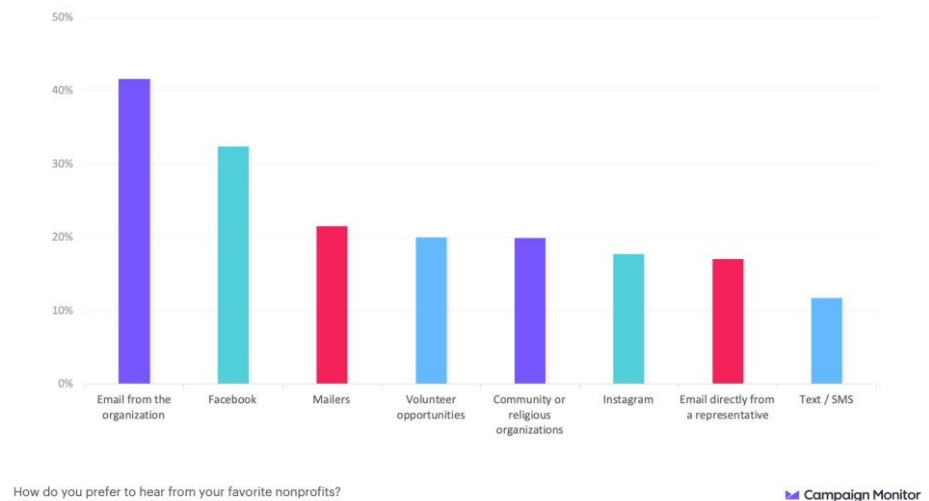

Figure 3.7: "How do you prefer to hear from your favorite nonprofits?" (Campaign Monitor, 2020)

Facebook continues to assert itself as the top social media platform for nonprofit organizations, which is supported by the 2021 Nonprofit Trend Report, which stated the leading social media platforms are Facebook and Instagram. In fact, 93% of social marketers use Facebook to advertise their organizations regularly, an overwhelming amount. As for Instagram, only 30% of nonprofits use the platform with the intention of raising money and awareness, even though 75% of Instagram users take action after looking at an Instagram advertising post (Campaign Monitor, 2020): Actions can range from viewing a website or profile to the actual donation itself. With over one billion active users (Tankovska H., 2021). Instagram is a platform that should not be ignored by these organizations. Similar to email, Instagram allows these organizations to create their own content, brand image, and overall online presence that will resonate with their potential target audience.

All these factors combine to bring to light just how critical the use and understanding of social media and digital email marketing for these organizations can be and that efforts should be made to better utilize these platforms with the hopes of increasing donors' awareness and overall revenue to help accomplish their organizational mission while expanding its brand presence.

Lack of Creative Resources Facing Smaller Nonprofit Organizations

Even though it is clear through the research presented that social media, digital marketing, and print marketing are crucial to the success and brand growth of these organizations in terms of donors, it also highlights a major flaw that is currently facing the nonprofit sector that is relatively unexplored. Nonprofits, especially on the smaller-

scale, are currently experiencing a creative drought. Many of these organizations do not

possess adequate creative resources to maintain their digital presence. It must be noted

that usually this is at no fault of the organizations themselves, but stems from a structural

vulnerability which the industry is built upon. The missions of these charities are to

spread awareness and aid a cause, not to focus on the revenue intake. These organizations

are not profit-centered. Therefore, whether it be limited human capital in the form of

employees, budget constraints, or general lack of access to creative software or

understanding of the digital or marketing industries, nonprofits face a great challenge

overcoming these obstacles and at times, can let marketing efforts and initiatives become

secondary to other organizational tasks. While some of these nonprofit employees are

well aware of the importance strategic marketing plays in the survival of their

organizations, but there does exist a gap in the actual implementation of these creative

strategies and digital content pieces.

Many smaller-scale nonprofit organizations that take in lower amounts of revenue

annually are not able to create the type of complex promotional material, multichannel

campaigns, or utilize target advertisements effectively due to the fact that they do not

have a sizable communications budget. **Figure 3.8** illustrates the relationship between

overall annual budget, which can be translated to firm size, and communications budget

size. It is important to note that the researcher, Kivi Leroux Miller, Founder and CEO of

The Nonprofit Marketing Guide, stated, "This is the first data of this kind that I am aware

of."

Annual Budget for External Communications Expenses in Nonprofits

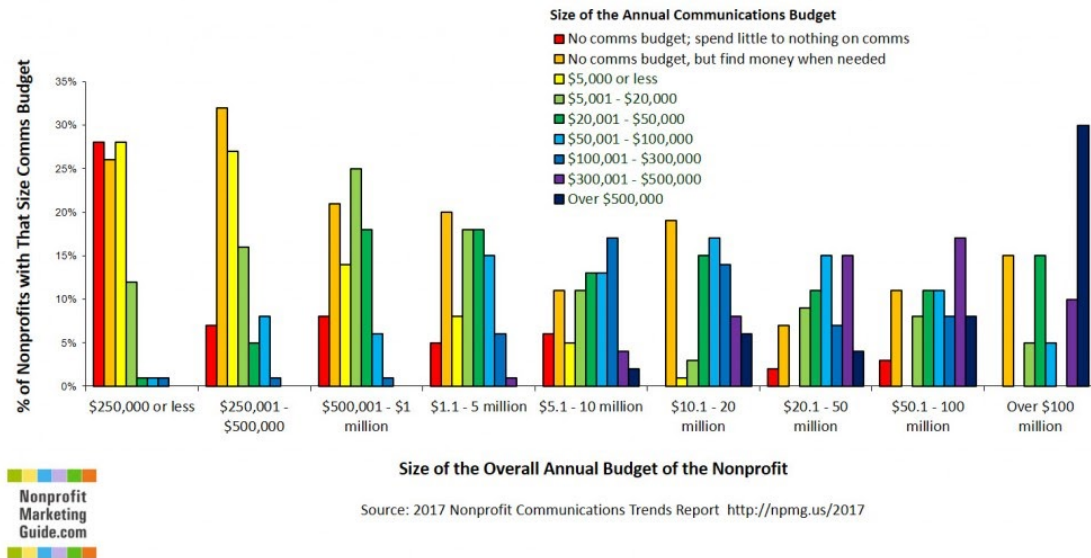*(e.g. printing, email marketing, advertising, freelancers, etc., excluding salaries)*

Figure 3.8: Annual Budget for External Communications Expenses in Nonprofits (Miller, 2021).

This graph provides a visual representation of the overall distribution and allocation of communications and marketing-related funds relative to the size of the nonprofit organization based on total budgets for 547 nonprofit organizations across the United States. The larger the nonprofit, the larger the annual budget will be. Conversely, it appears in the data that a nonprofit organization with a $250,000 budget or less has a much higher likelihood of having no external communication budget whatsoever. 27% of nonprofits that fall into the smallest category shown have no communications budget at all, whereas 26% have no communications budget but will find the funding when needed. 27% of these nonprofits spend less than $5,000 annually on marketing-related expenses, which is a miniscule amount considering the multitude of complex communications efforts these organizations must implement. Based on the findings of this researcher, 80% of small nonprofit organizations spend between $0 and $5,000 annually on

communication expenses. This is a major breakthrough. No matter the industry

knowledge or creative capabilities of the employees within these organizations, budget

constraints are extremely rigid and severely limit the ability for these nonprofits to

effectively communicate their message and connect with their target audiences through

strategic communications campaigns. However, these employees enter this industry fully

aware of the possibility for budget constraints and this obstacle "gives these organizations

a chance to be creative problem solvers," said researcher C. Chapleo. Alibine Bennett,

CREATE Foundation Director of Communications elaborates on this concept in her

interview, stating, "Most nonprofits, especially the small ones, have a limited budget so

nonprofit employees have to become creative in accessing resources that are free or

recruiting volunteers who have knowledge/expertise in certain areas."

Another structural characteristic of the nonprofit sector that directly influences

and hinders the creation of marketing materials and the effectiveness of their

implementation is the overall number of employees within these organizations. As

discussed in Chapter 1, 39% of the nonprofits accounted for in 2017 employ fewer than

five people and 56.4% employed less than nine (US Bureau of Labor and Statistics,

2017). This statistic accounts for every employee within that organization however, and

does not address the specific responsibilities of each. According to *The 2021 Nonprofit*

Trend Report and the 547 nonprofits surveyed, a one-person communications team is the

most common team size, representing about a third of the surveyed charities. Because

such a high percentage of nonprofits have one singular employee handling all of the

marketing and communication efforts for the entire organization, it can be more difficult

for these employees to handle all of these responsibilities than it would in a corporate

setting, which would require a team of dozens of employees. This hindrance is often what leads to a shortage in marketing materials or general lack thereof (Chapleo, C. 2015). "They (referring to nonprofit employees) are tasked with numerous responsibilities which at times makes it difficult to execute additional items that are not in their scope of work or a matter of urgency," said CREATE Foundation Director of Communications, Albine Bennett. "Consistent creative communication needs are very much needed and sought after." The issue for these employees becomes not whether or not they are capable of understanding and developing complex marketing campaigns along with digital and print content, but whether or not they have adequate time to do so on the scale the organization demands when combined with other responsibilities. Time and money are the two most primary obstacles that stand in the way of these organizations reaching their full potential in terms of audience reach and content creation. See **Figure 3.9** below for an in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of communication team size relative to number of employees. The chart also takes into account the skill level of each employee and ranks the knowledge of the communication and marketing industries on a scale from "Beginner" to "Expert".

Effectiveness by Communications Team Size

	Total % of Teams	0.5 FTE	1 FTE	1.5 FTE	2 FTE	3 FTE	4-5 FTE	6+ FTE
By Level of Effectiveness								
Most Effective	44%	25%	44%	39%	44%	68%	49%	50%
Less Effective	56%	75%	56%	61%	56%	32%	51%	50%
By Level of Expertise and Capacity								
Beginner	3%	7%	3%	4%	4%	0%	0%	3%
Capable	20%	37%	22%	26%	13%	4%	22%	6%
Skilled	50%	46%	50%	46%	55%	62%	41%	50%
Advanced	23%	8%	21%	20%	25%	30%	34%	42%
Expert	3%	1%	3%	3%	3%	4%	2%	0%

FTE: Full-time equivalent. **Level of Effectiveness:** "Most Effective" includes survey participants who said their communications in 2020 were Very Effective or Extremely Effective. "Less Effective" includes survey participants who said their communications in 2020 were Somewhat Effective, Slightly Effective, or Not At All Effective. **Level of Expertise and Capacity:** Survey participants were asked to select the level that best described the combined level of communications expertise and capacity at their nonprofit.

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Figure 3.9: Effectiveness by Communications Team Size (The 2021 Nonprofit Trend Report, 2021)

Based on the findings of The 2021 Nonprofit Trend Report, 2021, a three full-time communications staff is the most effective and efficient size for optimizing marketing initiatives for the organization. "From past Trends Reports, we know that nonprofit communicators say that if their team were to grow by one person, they would use that additional staffing for social media and for video production," (Miller, 2021). If teams were to jump from two employees to three, the communications team would be able to place more emphasis on website/blog content as well as update this information more often, be able to more successfully manage multiple social media channels, prioritize more public relations and media relations work, and utilize direct mail more frequently (The 2021 Nonprofit Trend Report, 2021). As discussed in earlier, all of these digital and print tactics are crucial to reaching and cultivating a response from donors, volunteers, and the surrounding communities at large, further identifying the gap that

exists between available creative resource availability and organizational need. A team of one marketer, although fully capable, will not be able to carry out the same tasks as effectively as a team of three. In the next section, interviews of North Mississippi nonprofit employees will further support these findings and justify the need for a resource that helps alleviate the challenges of maintaining a multi-channel social media presence that often fall upon one employee. It must also be noted that out of the 547 nonprofits surveys, no matter the yearly revenue or communication budget size, on average have communications teams of only 2.5 full time employees. In fact, 52% of nonprofits with budgets that exceed 20 million dollars still only have a communications staff of 2.5 employees, on average (The 2021 Nonprofit Trend Report, 2021). This is a major shortcoming within the entire industry, not just in smaller nonprofits.

Lastly, in terms of actual creative capital and knowledge of the industry, nonprofits regularly face the possibility of slipping behind. In her interview, Alibine Bennett stated, "Unless employees of a nonprofit have marketing knowledge and understand its value and importance, nonprofits usually don't put an emphasis on marketing." In fact, spending on marketing communications was not deemed as critical as it might be argued to be in commercial organizations by the sector as a whole, which after investigation and analysis, proves to be false (Chapleo, 2015). When it comes to physical creation and implementation of digital content, website upkeep and internet marketing (to name a few tasks), there exists a lack of understanding. Only 3% of charities rate their board and executive leadership as being digitally savvy and 66% of charities are worried they will miss out on opportunities for digital fundraising (The Nonprofit Source, 2019).

This creative deficit facing the nonprofit sector is the focal point of this project and validates the need for a resource that provides these nonprofit organizations struggling in these areas with a means of outsourcing creative, marketing, and graphic design-related projects in a way that does not pose additional budget challenges. In the next section, Mississippi nonprofit employees and executives will provide deeper insight into the need for this resource on a more localized scale and provide information on how to best suit the needs of these participating nonprofits located in the Oxford/ Lafayette area and North Mississippi .

c. Insight from Industry Professionals and Employees

Insight from both executives of local nonprofit organizations as well as other industry professionals provided a clearer understanding of the specific needs facing local North Mississippi nonprofits and were useful in the execution and creation of UMCreativeConnect. These interviews allowed the website to better suit the needs and wants of these organizations, thus ensuring that the platform would be utilized most effectively as well as to better understand the day-to-day communication-related activities of these organizations, current marketing practices, current resources available to them from a marketing perspective, and whether or not they would be receptive to the website UMCreativeConnect as a whole. The researcher interviewed four local nonprofit organizations and two industry professionals between December 7, 2020 and February 2021, as well as receiving general insight and guidance from the School of Journalism and New Media, advisors, and The Office of Community Engagement on campus. The specific questions asked during the interviews can be found in Appendix B.

The researcher submitted information regarding the content of the questions, interview method(s), and recruiting procedures to the University of Mississippi's Internal Review Board (IRB). This study was approved by the University of Mississippi Internal Review Board on November 19, 2020. These interviews were conducted via Zoom, phone, or email, depending on the availability and preference of the interviewees. The researcher aimed to uncover whether or not local organizations were receptive to the idea of a platform where marketing-related jobs could be completed by university students. For a visual regarding the specific job titles and places of employment of the interviewees, refer to **Figure 3.1.**

Name	Job Title	Nonprofit/Company Name
Dana Engelbert	Assistant Director of Experiential Education	Leap Frog
Zach Scruggs	Executive Director	2nd Chance
Evie Story	Director of Marketing and Special Events	Boys and Girls Club North MS
Sarah McLellan	Executive Director	Lafayette Literacy Council
Albine Bennett	Director of Communications	CREATE Foundation
Wesley Dickins	Assistant Director of Experiential Education	UM School of Business
Kurt Brummet	Executive Director	United Way

Figure 3.10: Personnel Interviewed within Nonprofit Sector

Interviewee Information

The first interview that took place for the purpose of this project was with Zach Scruggs, Executive Director of 2nd Chance Oxford. The interview took place on December 7, 2020 and was conducted over Zoom. In short, 2nd Chance is a nonprofit organization with the mission of raising awareness and funds to support adult education

in Mississippi. It provides underkilled adults or undereducated adults the support needed to obtain these skills. The ages of clients range between early 20s to 50s/ 60s. 2nd Chance works closely with state community colleges to find individuals who are in search of employment but require assistance with overcoming obstacles, whether they be monetary, transportation, or academic related.

Additionally, on December 7 over Zoom call, the interviewer spoke with Dana Engelbert, Assistant Director at Leap Frog. Leap Frog is an after-school literacy and enrichment program for first through third-graders with tier 2 reading support in the Oxford and Lafayette County schools. The organization relies heavily on volunteers from the University of Mississippi for support with the program.

Next, the researcher spoke with Evie Story, Director of Marketing and Special Events with the Boys and Girls Club of North Mississippi. The interview took place on December 10, 2020, over Zoom call. This organization has been serving youth six to 18 years of age year-round and provides children a safe place to go after school and during summer months. "We have five Clubs serving more than 1,700 youth in Lee, Lafayette, Tippah and Union counties. Boys & Girls Clubs meet the social, physical and educational needs of children through quality programming".

The final nonprofit organization interviewed was the Lafayette Literacy Council. Executive Director Sarah McLellan was interviewed on January 14, 2021, over email to best fit her schedule. The organization's mission is to improve the quality of life in Oxford and Lafayette County through literacy and reading. They do so by hosting awareness events among other reading initiatives.

The researcher interviewed Professor Wesley Dickens, Assistant Director of Experiential Education at the University of Mississippi School of Business Administration. The researcher spoke to him on December 18, 2020, over Zoom call. Because Mr. Dickens is directly associated with the University, he was able to provide great insight and recommendations regarding the best way to connect campus organizations and students with UMCreativeConnect. Coincidentally, he has been looking for ways to give his students more opportunities with local businesses and organizations, so he has been a major proponent and advocate for the website.

Another highly influential industry professional interviewed for the purpose of this project was Albine Bennett, Director of Communications at the CREATE Foundation. The interview was conducted over email on January 6, 2021, to best accommodate the interviewee's busy schedule. CREATE Foundation is Northeast Mississippi's premier philanthropic resource regarding comprehensive charitable planning for individuals, nonprofits, communities, and businesses. Working together with fund donors, grant recipients, organizations, and communities, the Foundation is a powerful catalyst for building charitable resources for the region. Ms. Bennett has also been involved with a multitude of other nonprofit organizations including but not limited to: Boys and Girls Clubs of North Mississippi; Friends of Lee County Library; United Way of North Mississippi; New Expectations for Women in MS (NEWMS); Tupelo-Lee County Community Foundation; Sanctuary Hospice; Volunteer NEMS; Tupelo Bloggers; READ First Coalition; Gum Tree Museum of Art; and United Blood Services Community Leadership Council. She is responsible for the overall direction of

CREATE's communications and marketing efforts. Ms. Bennett has ample experience in the nonprofit sector and was an important resource for this project.

Lastly on the nonprofit oversight side, Kurt Brummett, Executive Director of Oxford/Lafayette County branch of United Way, was interviewed on January 9, 2020 over the phone. Mr. Brummett currently works to oversee local nonprofit organizations located in Oxford, Mississippi. United Way provides these organizations with yearly funding as well as any other assistance they might need in dealing with events, fundraising, etc. In partnering with United Way, UMCreativeConnect gains a direct connection with these organizations, thus, staying connected to them in the future will be much easier. Mr. Brummett showed great interest in UMCreativeConnect and offered support in gaining awareness from local nonprofits as well as general guidance in assisting with the website's development.

ii. Interview Insights

Every interview conducted provided great insight into the needs and available marketing-related resources of not only smaller nonprofit organizations in general, but on a much more localized level in Oxford, Mississippi. Each of the four NPOs spoken to had less than four total employees on payroll, supporting the statistic discussed earlier in Chapter 3. See **Figure 3.11** below for the overlapping insights gained from the interviews with local North Mississippi nonprofits and other industry professionals.

Insights from Industry Professionals

A majority of Oxford nonprofits have less than 4 employees total, one of which deals with marketing-related responsibilities

Unless employees of a nonprofit have marketing knowledge and understand it's value and importance, nonprofits usually don't put an emphasis on marketing.

Every organization interviewed said they would be extremely likely to outsource to UM students

Figure 3.11: Insights from Industry Professionals

The term "marketing" is rarely used within the nonprofit industry. according to these industry professionals, which supports the information discussed previously. The word often comes with a negative connotation and is heavily associated with for-profit businesses, even though it simply means a company is getting the word out to its target audience and potential stakeholders. This being said, however, every nonprofit organization interviewed stressed the importance of community perception and branding when it came to the success of their organizations and the increasing need for prioritizing marketing within their organizations despite these preconceptions. Marketing for nonprofits is merely storytelling and image is everything, especially in a sector that is service-oriented rather than product-oriented.

Gaining awareness from donors is just one facet of the strategic challenges NPOs face. These organizations must also work towards gaining awareness from potential volunteers and the surrounding community as a whole, sometimes on a state-wide or

national scale. When a nonprofit is viewed in a positive light, it has a greater likelihood of success.

In their interviews. 2nd Chance MS, Leap Frog, and Girls and Boys Club North Mississippi all stated that one employee is solely responsible for the development of marketing materials for the entire organization as well as making sure the content is reached by the correct audience(s) through proper channels, whether that be social media, print, email, or events. "Nonprofits are typically limited in the number of staff/volunteers," Albine Bennet said. "They are tasked with numerous responsibilities which at times makes it difficult to execute additional items that are not in their scope of work or a matter of urgency. Consistent creative communication needs are very much needed and sought after." The issue becomes not whether or not these employees are capable of understanding and developing a strategic marketing plan and digital content but whether or not they have adequate time to do so in the scale the organization demands when combined with the other responsibilities these employees are tasked with. Time and money are the two most primary obstacles that stand in the way of these organizations reaching their full potential in terms of audience reach and content creation.

Of the four nonprofit organizations interviewed, Girls and Boys Club North Mississippi is the only nonprofit with a set marketing and communications budget, which can reach as high as $60,000 per year. Conversely, Leap Frog and Lafayette Literacy Council both described their budgets for these expenses as "small" or "extremely limited" and expressed this as a weakness within the organization. "Once we finally fundraise more, we are expecting to undertake a major rebrand," said Leap Frog Assistant Director of Experiential Education Dana Engelbert. These three organizations, however, are able

to allocate donations and funds raised towards operational overhead and marketing expenses as they see fit. 2nd Chance MS, in contrast, has no communications budget and allocates zero donations towards operational expenses. "Most nonprofits, especially the small ones, have a limited budget so nonprofit employees have to become creative in accessing resources that are free or recruiting volunteers who have knowledge/expertise in certain areas," said Albine Bennett. These observations support **Figure 3.8**, which analyzed the communications budget size of nonprofits based on yearly revenue levels. As hypothesized, the segment of nonprofits that bring in the lowest yearly revenues are more likely to have smaller communications budgets, 80% of the organizations that fall into this revenue bracket have budgets of $5,000 or less. Although Boys and Girls Clubs of North Mississippi is an outlier in this case, every other nonprofit organization interviewed fits into this category, thus increasing their likelihood of outsourcing to UM students who undertake these projects for the experience more so than monetary compensation.

When it comes to insights gained about the actual creation of the website itself, all interviewees remained consistent in terms of their willingness to outsource the creation of marketing materials to UM students. Many emphasized the importance of having postings be on an assignment-per-assignment basis since they were uncertain about what level of need or what types of projects would exist for students in the future. "We have had multiple student interns in the past," Zach Schruggs said. "We have chosen not to incorporate those positions recently just because we don't always have a steady amount of work for them to do. We love having them around, but we want to make sure they are making the most of their time with us." Schruggs also stated that 2nd Chance MS

specifically would be interested in using a resource that allowed the nonprofit to choose

from a list of job types including: freelance, internships, temporary, part-time, or full-

time. Leap Frog, as a whole, utilizes dozens of student volunteers annually, but never

specifically for the purpose of marketing or content creation. Englebert expressed the

need for student assistance within these areas due to the fact the world of social media is

changing so rapidly and students tend to be more "up to date" with these platforms and

the types of content that will resonate best with the target audience(s). It was also

encouraged by every interviewee that the website interface be simple, modern, and as

easy to navigate as possible. Although the organizations interviewed specifically do not

struggle in adopting new platforms such as UMCreativeConnect, they warned about the

possibility of other organizations rejecting the site if the interface were too complex.

"Posting jobs on UMCreativeConnect should be easy to follow. Evie Storey said. "That

way more nonprofits will be drawn to it instead of intimated by the site"

All these factors combine to guide the researcher towards the initial creating a

website model that is simple to use for both students and nonprofits to navigate as well as

creating an option that allows the nonprofits to post jobs themselves in multiple different

categories to best fit their needs, such as: internships, freelance work, and temporary

work to assist these organizations in the fields of content creation and digital marketing.

CHAPTER FOUR: MEASURING AND GAUGING UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI STUDENT INTEREST IN WORKING WITH NONPROFITS ON MARKETING-RELATED PROJECTS

This project is dual faceted and aims to highlight the creative resource/ time shortage that exists for nonprofit organizations and their employees, as well as analyze the overall importance of strategic messaging and campaign implementation in the sector and verifying the need for the resource UMCreativeConnect. Because of this, it is also necessary to discuss the second audience that UMCreativeConncet must directly appeal towards in order to ensure the website can effectively serve North Mississippi nonprofits. The secondary audience is University of Mississippi students, specifically those with majors relating to marketing, content creation, graphic design, or a digital media focus. UMCreativeConnect is directly aimed at serving North Mississippi nonprofit organizations, specifically centered around the cities of Oxford and Tupelo. Through outsourcing these creative efforts directly to University of Mississippi students, these nonprofits can obtain current industry knowledge from these individuals while also allowing these students to expand and develop their portfolios and gain job experience serving real clientele outside of the classroom in their own community.

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, 81.1% of graduates reported that the internships they held during their collegiate years helped them focus their career directions significantly and contributed to their job placement (Saltikoff, 2017). Internships and work experience are invaluable undertakings that many

students in these disciplines should complete in order to significantly raise their chances of securing employment after graduation. In fact, in response to a survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, 91% of employers prefer that their candidates have work experience, and 65% responded that the work experience should be relevant (Saltikoff, 2017), meaning that university students should be utilizing their resources to obtain this relevant work experience during their collegiate years in order to better prepare themselves for the workforce post-graduation.

As discussed in Chapter 3, many of these smaller nonprofit organizations are working through budget constraints themselves and are able to provide these students with work experience or potentially academic credit instead of monetary compensation. Although the idea of providing "free labor" may scare off some students, studies show that financial compensation, for many students looking to build their resumes, is not a priority. In fact, employers reported that they found that unpaid interns performed better than paid interns and were more willing to learn and become active team members. In a focus group conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, one employer stated, "A job that is unpaid would let me know that the candidate has gone above and beyond. Likely shows a passion—willing to work without pay". Because the mission of UMCreativeConnect is to serve local North Mississippi nonprofits that are aiding relevant and community-centered causes, it is hypothesized that students will be willing to donate their time and talents towards assisting these organizations, in addition to also gaining relevant work experience. A mutually beneficial relationship between the two groups is expected to form from the use and implementation of UMCreativeConnect. In order to verify these hypotheses and gauge UM student participation and interest in

working alongside these nonprofits through UMCreativeConnect, the researcher conducted a survey aimed directly at the students within creative disciplines and majors. The survey results will be shared and further explored in the next section.

UMCreativeConnect Capstone Survey

By analyzing previously conducted secondary research and statistics regarding the vital role marketing and digital content creation play in leading to increased donor retention and brand development of nonprofit organizations, as well as unpacking insights from industry professionals through the process of interviews, this thesis also aims to understand and measure students' interest and their likelihood of participating in serving these organizations with their creative talents through the platform UMCreativeConnect. Because students are searching for resume boosters and real-world experience working for clientele, a survey was conducted to verify the hypothesis that students would be willing to donate their talents to the organizations in exchange for relevant industry experience. The survey, titled "UMCreative Connect Capstone Survey" was created on Qualtrics. The survey had 28 questions and had 76 respondents, all of whom are involved with or attend the University of Mississippi and specialize in areas of marketing and content creation. It took roughly 15 minutes for participants to complete and all respondents were over 18 years of age. All of the data retrieval was in accordance with the University of Mississippi Internal Review Board, meaning no personal information was gathered from the survey participants.

The survey was female-leaning, with 76% respondents being female, 22.6% being male, and 1.3% preferring not to answer. Although this appears to be female-biased, it is also important to note that the IMC and art programs here at the University of Mississippi

are majority female –the integrated marketing communications program is 78% female and 22% male (School of Journalism and New Media, 2020). In the survey results, 48% of the respondents are enrolled in the School of Journalism and New Media, 44% of them being IMC majors. 13.3% of respondents are current BFA or graphic design students. For a majority of the student respondents, the projects listed on UMCreativeConnect would fall under their specific skill-sets and match their abilities. As for the distribution of student academic year, every grade was well represented, with seniors being the highest at nearly 41%.

The goal of the survey, which is fully described in Appendix A, is to gain a deeper understanding of the types of skills UM students can offer in these areas, as well as the type of experience they either have obtained during their collegiate years or hope to obtain down the road as these students enter the workforce for their prospective disciplines. It also assesses their willingness to give their time and talents towards working with nonprofits, despite the possibility of no financial compensation. With regards to the topics of work-experience, when asked, "How important do you feel a portfolio of work is to your getting a job after graduation", 71.6% of the respondents answered "important" or "extremely important". This supports the creative industry standard: agency and other jobs of that nature are more likely to require a portfolio of work (Chris W. and Chris M., 2008). In reference to actual industry experience of the respondents, 41% of student respondents felt as if they had only "some" experience working with real clientele, the second lowest increment option besides "none at all." 65% of respondents felt as if real-world experience would prepare them for their future careers, which aligns with the data presented by the National Association of Colleges and

Employers. When asked if these students felt as if they had an "adequate portfolio to show potential future employers," a shocking 54% selected either "somewhat disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree." This statistic emphasizes that the University of Mississippi must make strides towards ensuring more students feel confident in their portfolios entering the workforce. This statistic also suggests that a large number of UM students are searching to expand on their existing bodies of work, which is also illustrated in **Figure 4.1** below, where 40% of respondents selected that they "strongly agreed" to the statement "I am looking for ways to expand my portfolio with real-client materials that I create."

Q13 - I am looking for ways to expand my portfolio with real-client materials that I create.
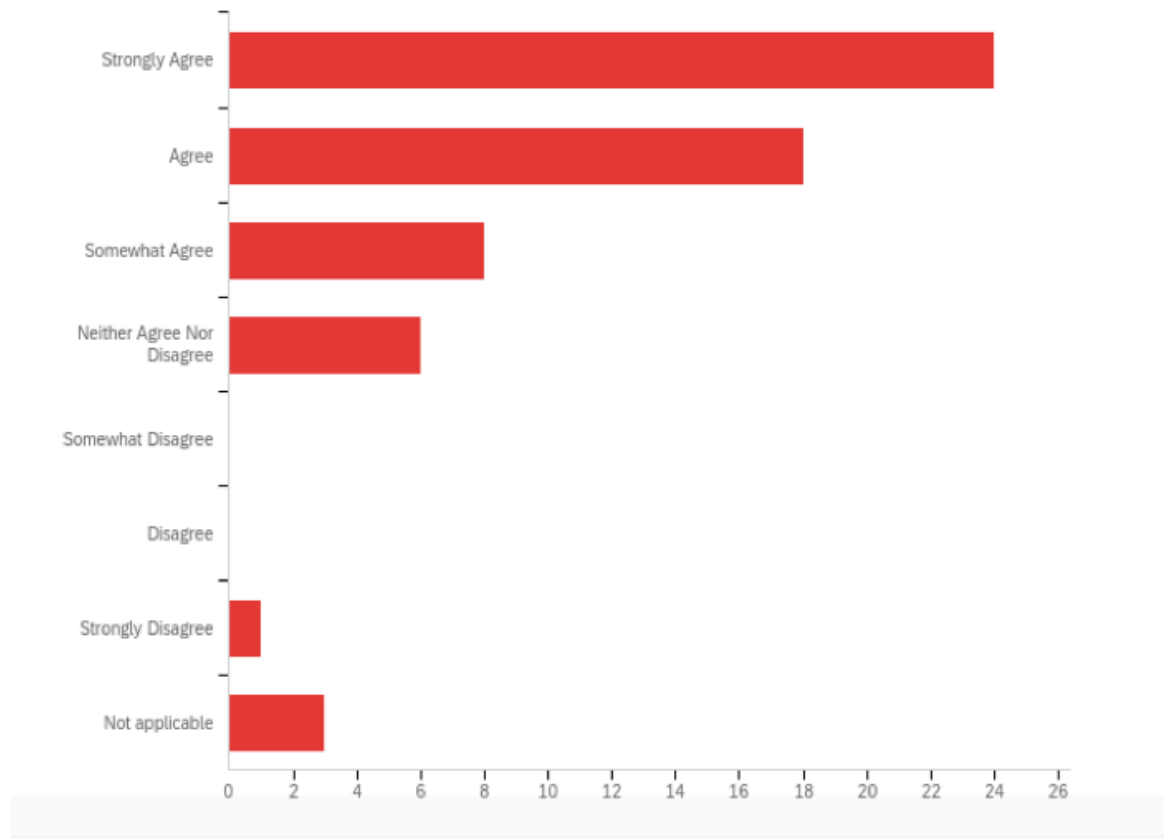
Figure 4.1: "I am looking for ways to expand my portfolio with real-client materials that I create."

The survey also identified that 92% of respondents are interested in developing their skills outside of class to a certain extent. That figure alone leaves a massive opportunity for a platform like UMCreativeConnect to flourish since these students are already actively searching for opportunities in creative areas.

The survey also investigated student interest in working with nonprofits specifically, not just local businesses in general, which further gauges the interest level of students, specifically in regard to the organizations UMCreativeConnect would feature. 37% of respondents agreed they were interested in working alongside nonprofits and 32% strongly agreed, accounting for 69% of the total survey group.

Another key finding of the survey is the determination of the specific skill sets and digital media experience of the respondents, which allows the researcher to verify whether or not UM students possess the knowledge and skills in the areas where nonprofit organizations need the most assistance. According to the results, the students do possess these skills. The top platforms that students identified themselves as being "experienced" with was Instagram (69%) and Facebook(59%), which are the top two platforms that research suggests drive the highest amounts of giving for nonprofit organizations. Additionally, 53% of respondents selected that social media marketing was an essential skill necessary for success in their prospective careers, and 47% said the same for creating digital campaigns. Other common answers were graphic and website design, both of which are also essential for nonprofits to optimize. This finding showcases that UM students feel a certain degree of confidence in the same areas in

which nonprofits need expertise, creating yet another opening for a platform such as UMCreativeConnect to bring these groups together.

As discussed earlier in this section, the small to nonexistent communications budgets of local North Mississippi nonprofits will, by necessity, result in UM students doing marketing and graphic design-related tasks for these organizations without financial compensation. However, as previously mentioned, these students are not doing this work for nothing. Work experience, resume boosters, and the creation of portfolio material can be arguably just as, if not more, valuable than receiving money as a form of payment for college students. Industry experience and connections with these organizations will prove to be invaluable for these students and enrich their overall academic experiences while also providing them with opportunities for growth as creatives. It is crucial, however, that the survey results verify these notions and that the student respondents demonstrate a desire to participate in UMCreativeConnect even though they might not receive tangible compensation. **Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3** below showcase the results, making it very apparent that students heavily selected "agree" and "strongly agree" when it came to still being willing to do work for no financial gain if it aligned with their passions, which many nonprofits do. It is important to note, however, that when the question was reworded, more respondents felt indifferent. It is still evident that the majority of student respondents are more than willing to do passion projects or work for a good cause despite there being no personal financial gain, which aligns with the website model of UMCreativeConnect.

Q22 - I enjoy doing work for topics I am passionate about, even if I am not financially compensated.
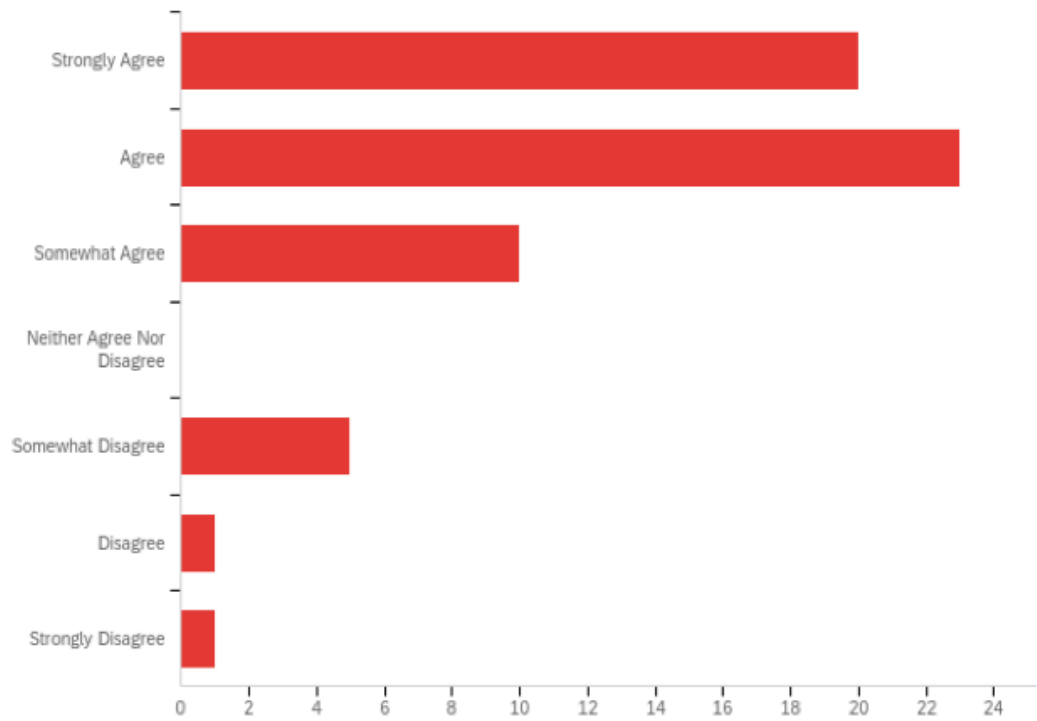
Figure 4.2: "I enjoy doing work for topics I am passionate about, even though I am not financially compensated."

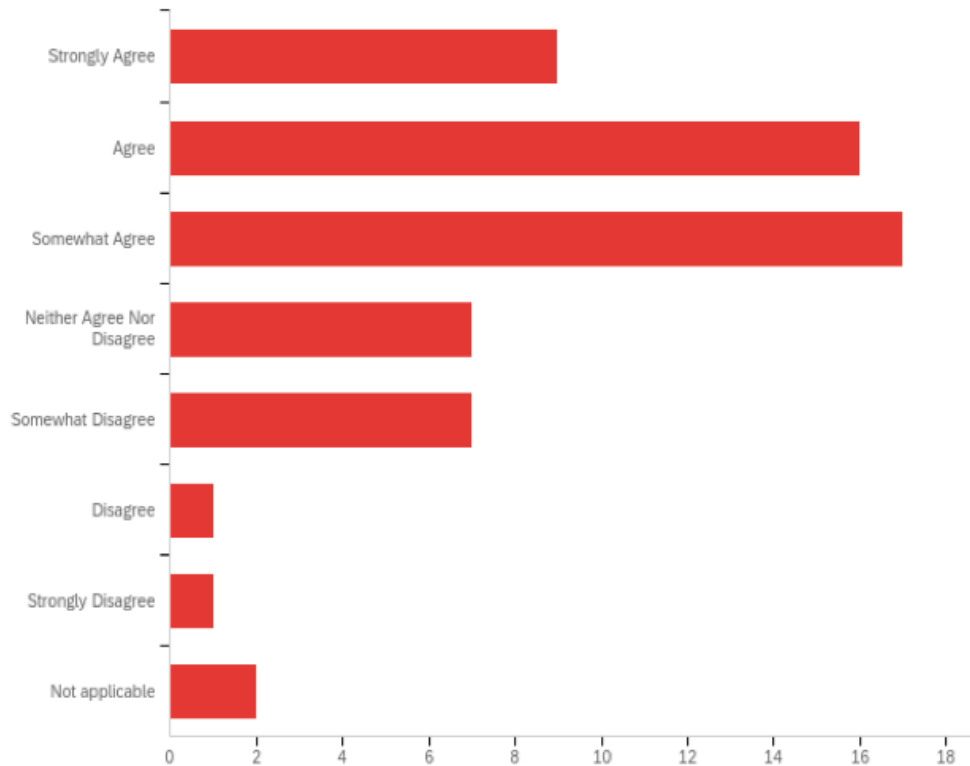**Q16 - I do not mind doing design or marketing work for free as long as it is for a good cause.**

Figure 4.3: "I do not mind doing design or marketing work for free as long as it is for a good cause."

The most crucial piece of information that directly supports the University of

Mississippi student respondents' willingness to participate and engage in a platform such

as UMCreativeConnect and further validating its development as a whole is Question 27,

which is shown in **Figure 4.4** below. It asked "How likely would you be to use a service

that connects you with real-world projects working with/for nonprofit organizations?"

The response was overwhelmingly positive with both "extremely likely" and "moderately

likely" with 35% and "slightly likely" with 26%, all of these totaling to 96%,

respectively. This indicates an extremely high likelihood that students will utilize a

platform such as UMCreativeConnect to gain relevant industry experience in the forms of

freelance work, jobs, or internships.

Q27 - How likely would you be to use a service that connects you with real-world projects working with/for non-profit organizations?
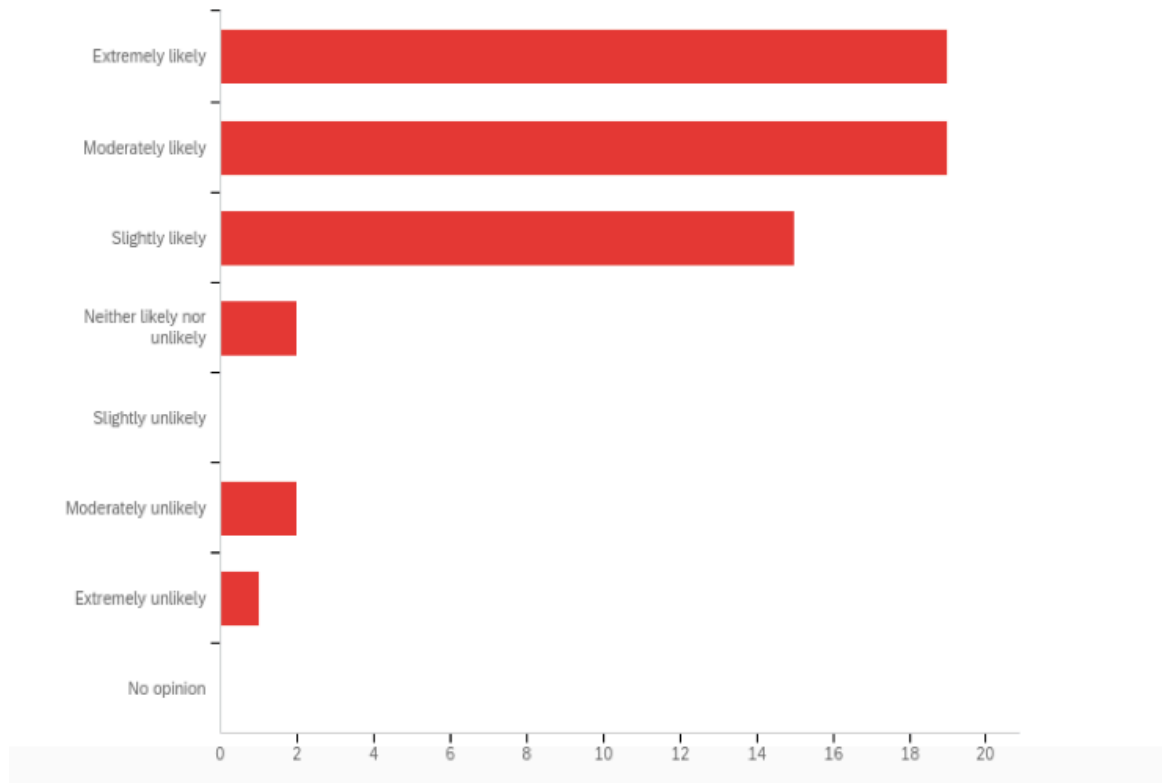

Figure 4.4: "How likely would you be to use a service that connects you with real-world projects working with/for non-profit organizations?"

A final key finding from the survey results is that nearly every respondent put

"email" as their preferred method of hearing about job, freelance, or internship

opportunities through the University. This insight provides a clearer understanding of the

most effective method to promote UMCreativeConnect once it is launched to these

targeted groups of students in order to best generate a response and engagement.

CHAPTER FIVE: UMCREATIVECONNECT DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION, AND PROMOTION TO NORTH MISSISSIPPI NONPROFITS AND UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI STUDENTS

After applying primary and secondary research findings to verify the gap that exists between local North Mississippi nonprofit organizations' needs for creative outsourcing for digital content and design work while also measuring University of Mississippi student likelihood of donating their time and expertise to these charities with marketing and graphic-design related projects to gain industry experience, it is clear that the development of UMCreativeConnect would assist in closing this gap and provide ample opportunities for both parties to benefit.

Platform Description and Creation

After much investigation and exploration regarding the most effective site model to suit the necessary demands of UMCreativeConnect and its two audiences, the researcher developed UMCreativeConnect as a WordPress site using the theme "Jobify", which is a simple interface where jobs can be posted and applied on. "Jobify" is easy to navigate and does not require that nonprofit organizations make an account before they post a job listing. The theme purchase and domain acquisition was funded by the School of Journalism and New Media and for a total cost of $45.30. Every job listing goes through the WordPress administrator, which in this case is the researcher, and is verified after it is checked to make sure it appropriately matches the criteria of the site. **Figures**

5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 below provides a visual of the homepage of the site including the main search bar, a popup that allows for students and nonprofits to subscribe for email alerts when a job is posted, and the most recent job opportunities.
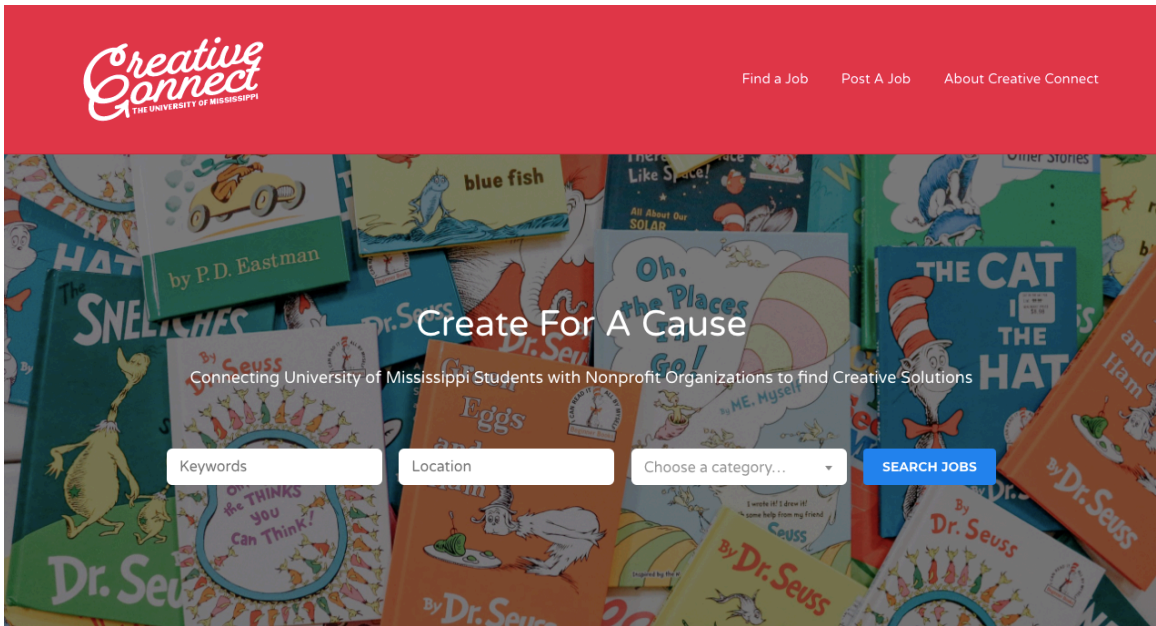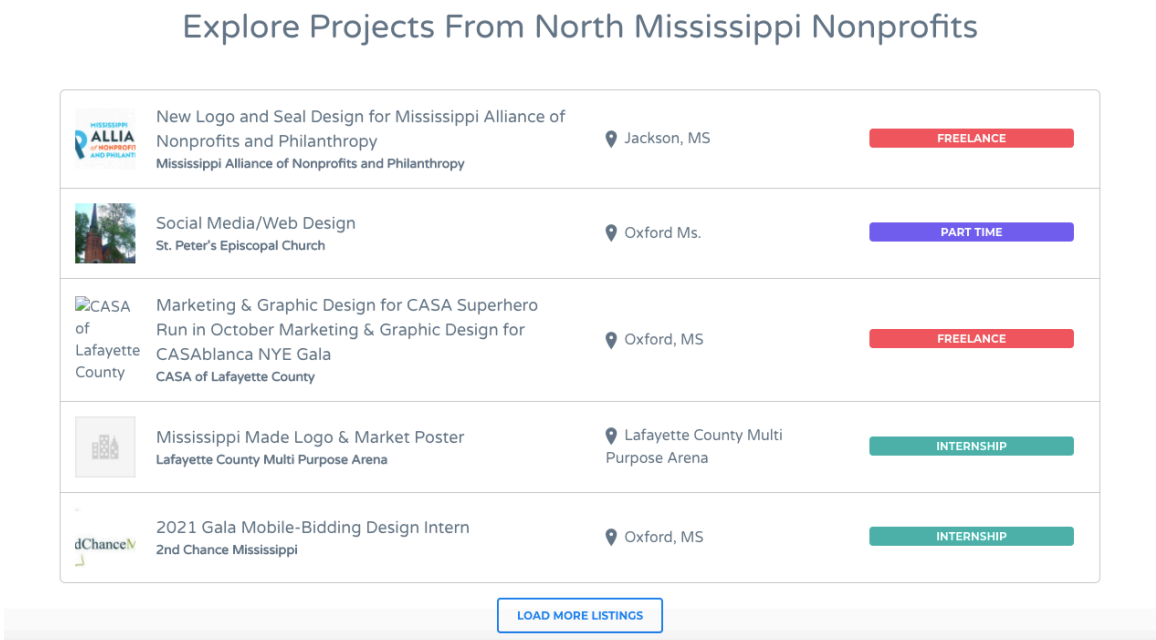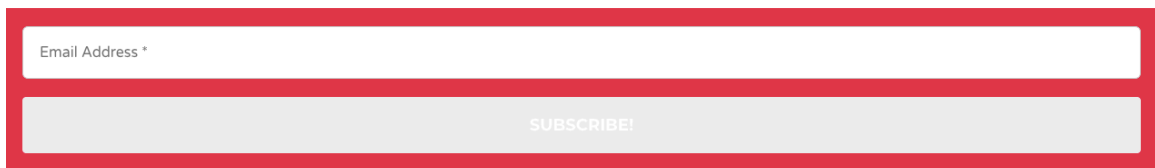

Figure 5.1: UMCreativeConnect Homescreen

Figure 5.2: UMCreativeConnect Homescreen pt 2.

Are you a nonprofit organization looking to expand your digital reach? University of Mississippi students are here to serve. Let's get the word out!

Subscribe to receive job notifications!

Email Address *

SUBSCRIBE!

Figure 5.3: UMCreativeConnect Homescreen pt. 3

The welcome emails and job notification emails follow the same format. In detail, the email explains the purpose of UMCreativeConnect and outlines the processes that students must follow to apply for a job, as well as the types of work available to them. It also outlines when subscribers will receive emails as well as provides the subscriber with descriptions of the most recent job postings and a direct link to view them on the site. **Figure 5.4** provides a visual of the email notifications subscribers will receive when they first register and receive job listings notifications.

Welcome! Time to get creative.

Natalie,

Thank you for joining our mailing list! If you are a University of Mississippi student looking for experience working with real clients and building your resume with marketing or graphic design- related projects, you've come to the right place! **When a new job is posted, you will receive an email notification with the job description and link to apply.**

What is UM Creative Connect?

Creative Connect is a website designed for Nonprofit Organizations located in north Mississippi to post jobs, internships, and assignments that University of Mississippi students can complete.

Possible job categories include:

- digital marketing

- graphic design

- social media management

- photography

- content creation

- website management
- & more!

How do I get started?

Head on over to umcreativeconnect.com and on the home screen you will find a list of featured jobs. You can find more jobs under the "Find a Job" page. Each job has an email allowing you to contact the nonprofit you are interested in working with. You can also click the **APPLY FOR JOB** button.

Check out our most recent job postings below

Art Cards/Art Deck Designer

These community partners organize free family art and activity days. The partnership is trying to create a deck of Art Cards, roughly 5 x 8 cards - size of a large post card, that would feature a short educational lesson about an art technique and then instructions for a craft with items that can be found around the home. We …

FIRST REGIONAL LIBRARY

Serving DeSoto, Lafayette, Panola, Tate and Tunica Counties in Northwest MS
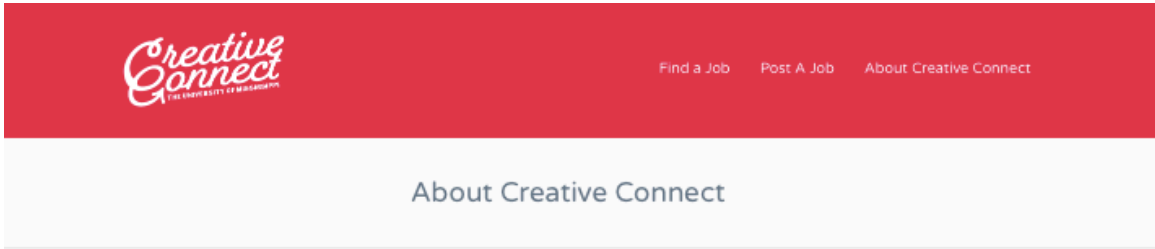
Read more

Figure 5.4: Email Notification

The home page menu has three tabs: "Find a Job," "Post a Job," and "About Creative Connect." The "Find a Job" section is aimed at UM students and is an extension of the job listings found on the homepage. It provides UM students with a complete list

66

of available opportunities and also provides them with the option of narrowing this list

based on job type, such as freelance, internship, part-time, etc. The "Post a Job" page is

where nonprofit organizations will go to upload their own job listings. In application of

the primary research gathered from interviews with industry professionals, this job-

posting form is easy to navigate and provides sections where these organizations can

upload their job description, location, job type, company logo, company information, and

where students can email their application information and portfolios. The rest of the job

acquisition process is handled by the nonprofit contact for the organization and takes

place outside of the UMCreativeConnect interface.

The final tab on the homepage is titled "About Creative Connect" and provides

both nonprofits and students with more detailed information regarding the job posting

and application process and further outlines which types of jobs fit the site's criteria.

Figure 5.5 provides a visual of the information provided by this page.

Figure 5.5: UMCreativeConnect About Page

Logo Creation and Brand Development of UMCreativeConnect

  The researcher applied her design and marketing skills acquired through her time

in the IMC program at the University of Mississippi to create the logo and establish the

brand identity of UMCreativeConnect. **Figures 5.6 and 5.7** illustrate the logo below in its

two forms. These logos are used in every piece of promotional material for the site and

online. "Creative Connect" was created using the "Fairway Script" font on Adobe, but was angled and edited slightly to ensure the look wasn't easily replicated. The C's were also modified to connect to each other and an arrow was placed at the bottom, representing the outward-facing goal of the site and symbolizing the connection the site generates. The tagline "Create for a Cause" is featured on promotional material, the website heading, and in the search bar for the site.

Figure 5.6: UMCreativeConnect Circular Logo

Figure 5.7: UMCreativeConnect Stand-Alone Logo

The remaining brand elements will be discussed and displayed in the following section.

UMCreativeConnect Implementation and Promotion

This section will discuss the researcher's application of IMC and industry principles to promote UMCreativeConnect to North Mississippi nonprofits and University of Mississippi students, while also analyzing the most recent statistics from the platform's use. Before the official launch of the site, Kurt Brummett, Executive Director of Oxford/Lafayette United Way, stated that he recommended a few opportunities be on the site before it is released to the public. With this in mind, the researcher contacted five nonprofit organizations and manually added these opportunities for those organizations. The organizations featured were: Boys and Girls Clubs of North Mississippi, Mississippi Presenters Network, Yoknapatawpha Arts Council, Cassa of Lafayette County, and 2nd Chance MS. These organizations were fully aware that they

were the first trial opportunities on the site. UMCreativeConnect was launched to the

public on March 3, 2021.

<u>Nonprofit Side</u>

In their interviews discussed in Chapter 3 and according to secondary research,

email remains the most effective and simplest method to reach nonprofit

organizations. In order to reach as many nonprofits in the most efficient way possible,

the researcher developed emails that were sent out on her behalf from Oxford/Lafayette

United Way, United Way Northeast Mississippi, and a local community engagement

group[you could use the name of that group if you have it. These organizations are

overseers for dozens of nonprofit organizations across Northern Mississippi, and the

number they support changes annually. The email explained the mission of

UMCreativeConnect and provided the nonprofits with a detailed explanation of what

types of jobs and opportunities they could post while also demonstrating how to post. The

email also included a PDF utilizing the proper brand standards that explained the site in a

more visual manner. **Figure 5.8** shows the PDF featured in the nonprofit-centered email.

Figure 5.8: Nonprofit-Aimed Promotional Material

Robin McKinney, Director of Communications at United Way Northeast Mississippi, said, "Many of our local nonprofits are very small and don't have a dedicated marketing or communications person so they are very much in need of this type of help" and mentioned she was very excited to share this resource with the nonprofits she oversees.

In addition to directly contacting North Mississippi nonprofits, an email also went out from the School of Journalism to alumni in order to expand the reach of the site and

awareness with individuals currently in the creative and mass communications industry.

More information regarding this email will be addressed in the next section.

<u>Student Side</u>

In order to most effectively reach interested student participants and encourage their interaction with UMCreativeConnect, in accordance with the insight gained from the survey, a mass email was sent out to every student in the School of Journalism and New Media. The email also included the school's alumni, totaling to 5,450 recipients. See **Figure 5.9** below

Figure 5.9: Mass Email Sent to University Students

The same email is set to be sent to every student in the University's Art school, allowing the resource to be utilized by interested art students and broadening the number of services able to be provided to the nonprofits utilizing the platform. Additionally, the

researcher conducted a presentation and website demonstration with the art school's

graphic design club on March 3, 2021. This population of students are some of the most

talented graphic designers at the University of Mississippi and are constantly looking for

projects to serve the local community, according to the club's president, Lauren Taylor.

Another method used to spread the word about UMCreativeConnect was through

an Instagram feature on the official School of Journalism and New Media account, which

has a following of 1,237, with most of these followers being current University of

Mississippi students. The account also posted relevant student-centered graphics and

information in the post and on their story. **Figure 5.10** shows the graphic below. The

school also placed **Figure 5.11** on the digital screens that are located within the school

itself.

Figure 5.10: Student-aimed Promotional Material

Figure 5.11: Student-aimed Promotional Material displayed in the School of Journalism and New Media

In order to expand the reach to the entire university, University Marketing and Communications, the University's official communications agency, released a feature story about the website and its creator. The article discusses the website's creation, purpose, and includes a direct link to UMCreativeConnect. The article was posted to

official university channels, including: OleMissNews.org; Linkedin, which has 98,334

followers; Twitter, which has 97,800 followers; and Facebook, which has 98,512 page

followers. The School of Journalism and New Media also directly linked the story to its

own personal website and LinkedIn, which has 5,925 followers. Additionally, the official

Office of Community Engagement Instagram reposed these graphics, this account has a

following of 499 people. Overall, all of these elements combine to create an opportunity

for over 300,000 total impressions for UMCreativeConnect during the month of its initial

launch.

Statistics of platform use/effectiveness

Because UMCreativeConnecet is such a new resource, released less than a month

before the final draft of this project is due, that will continue to grow and develop as it

expands, it is difficult to analyze overall success besides looking strictly at preliminary

data. When the website was first released to the public, it had five freelance jobs featured

from nonprofits all located in Oxford, MS. The list of these participating nonprofits can

be found in section ____. Since the launch, six more nonprofit organizations have added

new job opportunities for UM students, an incredibly sizable amount considering the site

has only been up for three weeks. Additionally, 26 students have successfully subscribed

to the site's email list and will continue to get email notifications as opportunities are

added. On social media, the site has generated an extremely positive response from the

community. Kurt Brummett, Executive Director of Oxford/Lafayette United Way, stated

"I sincerely hope UMCreativeConnect will be a sustainable initiative that will benefit

both students and our local nonprofit community for many years to come." The

researcher will continue to update these figures as they increase.

CHAPTER SIX: LOOKING FORWARD AND DISCUSSION

Partnership with the University of Mississippi Office of Community Engagement

Since this platform was created with the interion of curating community engagement and an enriched student experience, as a way to ensure its longevity and upkeep of UMCreativeConnect, the researcher partnered with the University's Office of Community Engagement platform: GivePulse. The University of Mississippi GivePulse is a website launched in Spring 2021 as a way for Oxford/Lafayette community members to post volunteer opportunities for UM students, the site has a mission extremely similar to that of UMCreativeConnect. With the help of Anthony Siracusa, Director of the Office of Community Engagment, and Erin Oethm Assisnta Director, the researcher was able to work alongside an intern at the Office of Community Engagement to sync UMCreativeConnect with GivePulse. This intern makes sure that every opportunity posted on UMCreativeConnect is also populated to GivePulse, increasing the amount of exposure for those opportunities. UMCreativeConnect has its own subpage on GivePulse, which includes the site's description and link. This also helps form a connection between the two sites and will make it easier for nonprofits to post their job in one place instead of two. This intern also has access to the WordPress administer interface and will be able to approve and remove job listings as they see fit in the future. This individual will also be encouraged to continue the promotion and marketing of the website itself to both nonprofit and student audiences in order to maintain its relevance in the community. The

GivePulse subpage also retains the current UMCreativeConnect branding. Through this partnership, UMCreativeConnect expands its reach and influence to the students and community partners that are currently active members of GivePulse and vice versa. Because of this connection with GivePulse, the possibiltty does exist for the gradual phasing-out of the UMCreativeConnect website in the future as the GivePulse gains popularity, in order for the community partners and nonprofits to have one clear resource for them to upload their opprotunties.

Potential Growth in Social Media Accounts

Additionally, as more student work and success stories from the website become available, a recommendation for future growth is to create an Instagram account for UMCreativeConnect that can be used to showcase student and nonprofit work. This account could also be linked directly to the School of Journalism and New Media account. A Facebook page currently exists for the website, but the site is too new for extensive content and still needs development.

Additional Website Recommended Additions

Because the website model of UMCreativeConnect is to provide students with experience and resume-building opportunities in exchange for their design and marketing-related services rather than payment, due to the nonprofit's budgeting constraints, it is recommended that an additional page be added to the website main menu to illustrate the typical pricing of the design work featured on the website. This addition will provide them with a deeper understanding of the value of the services that they are

receiving from UM students. The page will also feature small sections of research from this paper, further highlighting the importance that marketing materials play in the success of these organizations and help educate these nonprofit employees further on the crucial role strategic communications plays in the industry. Overall, the addition of this page is needed and will contribute to an increased understanding of the need for a service such as UMCreativeConnect and how valuable it will be for these organizations.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

The overall purpose of this thesis is to explore the need for marketing resources among North Mississippi nonprofit organizations and apply the findings to develop and launch a website connects local North Mississippi nonprofit organizations with University of Mississippi students eager to use their learned-skills to serve the community. Over the course of this project, the researcher applied primary and secondary research in three parts to achieve this objective: 1) To understand and verify the needs of multiple local nonprofit organizations from a marketing perspective, 2) To measure and gauge University of Mississippi student interest in participating with a platform that allows them to complete marketing and graphic design- related tasks for North Mississippi nonprofits, and 3) To develop and launch the website and then implement an awareness campaign based on industry principles- this section will summarize the conclusions from the findings and specify the further implication of UMCreativeConnect.

In the third chapter, nonprofit marketing strategies were analyzed as well as the sector's overall need for improvement in the marketing, content creation, and graphic design fields. Through primary and secondary research findings, it is clear that the switch to primarily digital marketing strategies has put a strain on the already limited number of employees that work at these nonprofits. Otherwise known as a "creative drought", this lack of creative resources can be attributed to three factors: limited communications

budget sizes, employee constraints, and the general industry knowledge gap that exits. Through in-depth interviews, the researcher explored this gap further with nonprofits located in the North Mississippi and Oxford areas. The interview findings supported the initial hypothesis that NPOs do not always have adequate resources to maintain the organization's digital presence to meet the company demands. Three initial insights from these seven in-depth interviews with industry professionals were: 1) A majority of Oxford nonprofits have less than 4 employees total, 1 of which deals with marketing-related responsibilities, 2) Unless employees of a nonprofit have marketing knowledge and understand its value and importance, nonprofits usually don't put an emphasis on marketing, 3) Every organization interviewed said they would be extremely likely to outsource to UM students.

In chapter four, the "UMCreativeConenct Capstone Survey" is described and the results are analyzed in depth. Based on the findings from the survey, it is clear that University of Mississippi students were more than willing to participate in a resource such as UMCreativeConnect as well as donate their time and talents towards serving nonprofit organizations in need of their services. The main takeaway is that 96% of the respondents answered positively when asked, "How likely would you be to use a service that connects you with real-world projects working with/for nonprofit organizations?", helping pave the way for the creation of the site. It is because of these students that this platform will serve the nonprofit community in North Mississippi for years to come.

Overall, UMCreativeConenct has a high success rate and adoption rate, specifically stemming from the influx of job additions (six) just three weeks after the site's launch. The UMCreativeConnect model even has the likelihood of expanding to

other universities across the state of Mississippi to expand its reach to a multitude of other nonprofits, further leaving a positive impact on students, nonprofits and the communities in which they inhabit.

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UMCreativeConnect Capstone Survey

The researcher administered a survey that was open from Nov. 24, 2021 until Feb. 20, 2021. The survey had 28 questions and had 76 respondents, all of whom are involved with or attend the University of Mississippi and specialize in areas of marketing and content creation. It took roughly 15 minutes for participants to complete and all respondents were over 18 years of age. All of the data retrieval was in accordance with the University of Mississippi Internal Review Board (IRB), meaning all responses were submitted anonymously. This study was approved by the University of Mississippi Internal Review Board on November 19, 2020.

The goal of the survey was to gain insight of the types of skills UM students can offer nonprofit organizations in the areas of content creation, marketing, and graphic design as well as what types of experiences they either have obtained during their collegiate years or hope to obtain down the road as these students enter the workforce for these prospective disciplines. It also assesses their willingness to give their time and talents towards working with nonprofits, despite the possibility of no financial compensation.

The specific questions are listed below:

Potential Survey Questions: University Students

1. What is your age group?
   - Under 18
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54

- 55-70
- Above 70

2. What gender do you identify as?
- Male
- Female
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

3. What best describes you?
- White (Non-Hispanic)
- White (Hispanic)
- African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

4. What best describes your current relationship with the University of Mississippi?
- Full-time student
- Part-time student
- Gradate/ Doctoral Student
- Instructor/ Professor
- Staff Member
- Alumni
- I have no relationship with the University of Mississippi
- Other

5. If currently a student, what is your academic year classification?
- Senior
- Junior
- Sophomore
- Freshman
- Graduate Student
- Not applicable
- Other

6. Which academic major are you currently studying?
- General Business
- Entrepreneurship
- Marketing

- Graphic Design
- Bachelor of Fine Arts
- Journalism
- Integrated Marketing Communications
- Other

7.   What level of experience do you feel you have working with organizations on real world projects
- None at all... A great deal

8.   How important do you feel a portfolio of work is to your getting a job after graduation? (a grid ranking question)
- 1 Not important at all... 7 Very important, No opinion

9.   In general, where have you gained experience working with organizations on real world projects? (check all that apply)
- In-class
- Internship
- Work outside of class
- Other

Of the following statements, indicate to what extent the statement describes you.

10.   I feel as though I have a an adequate portfolio of my work to show my future employer
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

11. I am interested in gaining more experience within my major for local organizations and businesses located in the Oxford/Lafayette area.
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree

- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

13.   I am looking for ways to expand my portfolio with real-client materials that I create.
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

14.   I am interested in working with nonprofit organizations.
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

15.   I am interested in developing my skills outside of class.
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

16.   I do not mind doing design or marketing work for free as long as it is for a good cause.
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

17. I have work experience in the design and or marketing fields.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

18. I used my connections made through the University of Mississippi to obtain a job or internship during my collegiate years or after graduation.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

19. The University of Mississippi does a good job at providing student with adequate opportunities to gain real-world experience during collegiate years.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

20. I feel as though I need real-world experience to prepare for my future career.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

21. Real experience will give me a competitive edge in finding a job when I graduate.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree

- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

22. I enjoy doing work for topics I am passionate about, even if I am not financially compensated.
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

23. Rank what's important to you from most important to least important
1. Internship in college
2. Portfolio
3. Work experience

24. Which of the following skills are necessary for success in your future career (check all that apply)
1. Graphic Design
2. Social Media Marketing
3. Website Design
4. Illustration
5. Creating digital campaigns
6. Copywriting
7. Not applicable

25. What forms of media do you use/check daily?
1. Facebook
2. Twitter
3. Instagram
4. Snapchat
5. Tik Tok
6. LinkedIn
7. Not applicable

26. Which of the following job fields do you hope to work in post-graduation?
1. Agency
2. Public Relations
3. Non-Profits
4. Corporate
5. Local Small- Medium business

6. Family Businesses
7. Freelance
8. Not Applicable
9. Other

27.   How likely would you be to use a service that connects you with real world projects for non-profit organizations? (grid ranking question)
         1 Not likely at all- 7 Extremely likely, No opinion

28.   How would you expect to hear about portfolio building opportunities from the University?
(short answer)

APPENDIX B

Industry Professional Interview Questions

Insight from both executives of local nonprofit organizations as well as other industry professionals provided a clearer understanding of the specific needs facing local North Mississippi nonprofits and were useful in the execution and creation of UMCreativeConnect. These interviews allowed the website to better suit the needs and wants of these organizations, thus ensuring that the platform would be utilized most effectively as well as to better understand the day-to-day communication-related activities of these organizations, current marketing practices, current resources available to them from a marketing perspective, and whether or not they would be receptive to the website UMCreativeConnect as a whole. The researcher interviewed four local nonprofit organizations and two industry professionals between December 7, 2020 and February 2021.

The specific questions asked are listed below:

Interview Questions: Non Profit Employees

1. What resources do you have available to you in regards specifically to marketing?

2. How would you describe your organization's social media presence?

3. Describe your organization's website. Are you content with the website's current state? Is it updated frequently?

4. Through what methods does your organization accept donations?

5. How important is marketing in regards to the success of your organization? Do you owe much of your organization's success to marketing or other methods?

6. What is your organization's budget for marketing and operational expenses if that information is able to be shared? What is donation allocation to operational expenses?

7. Are you allowed to use donations to fund marketing operations?

8. Do you feel like you have adequate resources to create successful marketing materials in house?

9. Have you ever outsourced for the creation of marketing materials? Would you consider allowing students to produce these materials or have you in the past?

10. Are you happy with your current branding? If your company does not have a logo, or your current logo is not meeting your brand's needs would you be open to a rebrand of your company's identity?

11. Would this nonprofit be interested in joining a platform that would allow them to post assignments for marketing materials that UM students could create using expertise learned through their concentrations?

12. How many employees does your organization have currently? How many of them focus on marketing specifically or handle those tasks?

Interview Questions: Nonprofit Subject Matter Experts (other organizations)

1. What local or MS nonprofit organizations are you currently involved with or have been involved with in the past if any? Describe the role you play within the organization and or the tasks you are involved with.

2. Please describe your position and any daily responsibilities you may have.

3. What creative or communication needs do you perceive nonprofit organizations to have?

4. If applicable, what are some ways you get students involved with the nonprofit organizations?

5. How do you think students and nonprofit organizations would benefit from the a website that allows for these organization to post small job assignments that students could complete and do you have any additional questions about it?

6. What resources do most smaller-scale nonprofits have available to them in regards to marketing if any? Do you feel these organizations have adequate resources to create marketing materials?

7. What is the biggest marketing challenge facing smaller-scale nonprofit organizations?

8. What digital or media platforms have you noticed the most success in in regards to nonprofit fundraising?

9. Do you feel there is a current need for many nonprofits to outsource for assistance on larger-scale marketing endeavors?

10. Is Oxford/ Tupelo/ North Mississippi as a whole a supportive environment in which these nonprofits can thrive in your opinion? What is the climate like right now for these organizations in smaller towns such as Oxford?

11. Do you have any other advice or recommendations on any resources or people

that would be helpful going forward with this project?