**“What’s Next: The Future of Nonprofit Marketing**"

American Marketing Association’s recent Nonprofit Marketing Conference speech by Thomas Cott

**INTRODUCTION**

What’s next?  What’s coming up in the next year, the next five years -- and beyond -- that we should be thinking about and doing something about?  Larry Page, co-founder of Google, [**said at this year’s TED conference**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=c3f1258487&e=0dbb70a2f9) that **“The main thing that has caused companies to fail…is that they missed the future.”** He didn’t mean they missed opportunities or that they were not adaptable to change.  His point was that the people running these companies did not have enough curiosity about -- and constant focus on -- what's next.

One of the most forward-thinking people I know, Ben Cameron, the Program Director for the Arts at the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, says he finds inspiration from an unlikely source – Wayne Gretzky, the great ice hockey player who, when asked to account for his greatness, said, “I don’t skate to where the puck is. [**I skate to where the puck will be**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage2.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=25bf1fd4b5&e=0dbb70a2f9).”

I love that quote.  And so does the emerging arts leader Todd Hawkins who [**recently blogged**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=13e3cd8b8b&e=0dbb70a2f9) about the opportunity that exists for nonprofit organizations to think ahead, to explore new ideas, new values, and new models. After all, as Todd wrote, all of us today will help our organizations navigate through the largest generational shift in decades.  So who will our audiences be in the future and how will we best communicate with them?  Or, to put it another way:  **“How can we skate to where the puck will be?”** It is clear to me the answer lays largely in the digital arena.

You may have seen [**a recent Adweek story**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=725b010298&e=0dbb70a2f9) that reported on a survey of Chief Marketing Officers in the for-profit sector.  Nearly 4 out of 5 CMOs they surveyed said they expect that “marketing will undergo radical changes over the next 5 years – but over half are worried about managing these changes.”  Many of the CMOs surveyed said that, **by 2018, digital marketing will account for more than 75% of their budgets,** with mobile marketing accounting for more than half of their budgets – now that is a radical change.  What’s more, about a third of the CMOs surveyed said that they expected their marketing campaigns to begin unfolding in real time.

If that all seems like a lot of change ahead, take comfort in this: even as technology becomes even more central to what we do, technology will still only be a tool -- the means, not the end.

**PART 1: WHAT’S NEXT IN TECHNOLOGY AFTER MOBILE PHONES?**

30 years ago, the computer scientist Alan Kay -- one of a handful of visionaries responsible for propelling personal computers forward – gave [**an interview**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=c8eb3e1039&e=0dbb70a2f9) in which he said: **“The best way to predict the future is to invent it.”** Most of us are not going to invent something as world-changing as personal computers, but we can all make an impact in our own way.  It’s important to remember, as Alan Kay added in that same interview: “There are certain things about human beings that, if you remove [them], they wouldn’t be human any more.  For instance, we have to communicate with others -- or we’re not humans.”  So, as cool as some of the technology is that I’m about to discuss, the best ideas will be the ones that enhance and expand the human experience.

One last thing from Alan Kay before I move on.  In predicting the future, he explained that: “…it takes 10 years to go from any new idea in the laboratory to a product of some kind. So anything that’s going to happen in ten years is in someone’s lab right now.”  The cloud systems specialist Justin Pirie also points out that [**tech cycles tend to last about a decade**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=ad087f370c&e=0dbb70a2f9) before something else comes along and completely eclipses it – starting with mainframe computing in the 1960s, followed by mini-computing in the 70s, personal computers in the 80s, desktop access to the Internet in the 90s, and most recently, mobile access to the Internet in the 2000s.

But perhaps even more important is the fact that, there is **a tenfold growth in users with each new decade**’s technological advancement.  About one million mainframe computers existed in the 1960s, but there were 10 million mini computers in the 70s, 100 million PCs in the 80s, one billion desktop computer users on the Internet in the 1990s, and ten billion mobile devices online during the first decade of this century.

I want to point out that **“mobile” means more than just mobile phones**. That count of 10 billion mobile devices also includes tablets like the iPad… eReaders like the Kindle -- even car dashboards and home appliances which access the Internet in some way. The percentage of people using a mobile device to access the web is growing exponentially. Small wonder, since smartphones have become as powerful as the desktop computers we use.  Are you familiar with [**Moore’s Law**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=56260ed445&e=0dbb70a2f9)?  It says the power of microchips doubles about every two years, meaning that in 20 years’ time, chips in smartphones – or whatever device will hold these computer chips – could be more than 1,000 times as powerful as they are today!

So if the first decade of the 21st century was all about the ascendancy of mobile phones, what’s our current decade going to be remembered for?  **Some people think that the next big technological advancement will be wearable devices**.

Chris Dancy is a software developer who has been called “the most connected man in the world.”  [**Looking at his photo**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=82346655d2&e=0dbb70a2f9), you can see why.  He uses over 300 trackers to record every data point in his life.  He monitors his every movement with wearable devices.  He even tracks his dogs and his car.  He thinks a communication breakdown occurs when we’re not able to create a comprehensive overview that pools all of these data sources into one platform, and thus Dancy has developed his own system to see the big picture. He [**recently told an interviewer**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=7d5d711e31&e=0dbb70a2f9): “There will be no one major wearable product. [But] I do see the rise of a ‘Human operating system’ …The biggest thing we will see in the next five years will be these different devices working together and creating lifestyle systems with receipts for goals or outcomes… Humans and their environment are the next big business to change the globe…**we will leave the Internet and create the ‘Inner-net.’ ”**

Is Chris Dancy way ahead of his time or just a tech-obsessed extremist?  Who knows?  But there are plenty of other seemingly “out there” uses of technology right now.  For instance, could you ever have imagined that we would be creating medicine or food using a 3-D printer?  Well, that’s already happening.

Of course, it’s [**easy to make fun of wearables**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=4be0348341&e=0dbb70a2f9) – we’re still in the early adopter phase, and for many people, they just seem like unnecessary, expensive toys. And while it’s doubtful that wearables will reach the 100 billion unit mark by the end of this decade -- which is what we might expect for the next big technological advancement -- [**analysts report**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=c073b7aca4&e=0dbb70a2f9) that **sales of wearables have tripled in the last year** and are forecasting 500% growth over the next four years – growing from 19 million wearables sold this year to 112 million units in 2018.

Smartwatches, in particular, seem to be driving this growth.  According to the Wall Street Journal, the first generation of smartwatches failed to gain much traction with consumers, but they expect Google’s new Android Wear to become the first viable wrist-top platform.  Why?  Because of Google Now, an online personal assistant – which works sort of like Siri on the iPhone and iPad.  “What sets Android Wear apart from previous smartwatches,” [**the Journal writes**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=02dab515ee&e=0dbb70a2f9), “is that **they tell you what you need even before you realize you need it**, by searching your Gmail, calendar, web searches and other Google interactions…Of course, to reap those benefits, it means [giving] Google access to a lot of your personal information,” but as Richard Clarke – a senior advisor to the past three U.S. presidents on matters including cybersecurity – [**recently said**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=b5c78a161f&e=0dbb70a2f9): “it is time we gave up on any illusion of online privacy.”  That boat has long since sailed.

Another wearable I’m keeping my eye on is Oculus, the virtual reality goggles. This is [**what the New York Times said**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=cacbf701c3&e=0dbb70a2f9) this past April: “The news that Facebook paid $2 billion for Oculus might strike you as a bit zany. What would a non-techie, non-gamer do with virtual reality? The answer: pretty much everything. **Virtual reality is coming, and you’re going to jump into it.** That’s because virtual reality is the natural extension of every major technology we use today — of movies, TV, videoconferencing, the smartphone and the web. It is the ultra-immersive version of all these things, and we’ll use it exactly the same ways — to communicate, to learn, and to entertain ourselves and escape. …it will even alter how society deals with such weighty issues as gender parity and environmental destruction. The only question is when…”

They note that Chris Dixon, who is an investor in Oculus, “pointed out that the rise of the smartphone industry had helped push down the cost of powerful displays and tracking components required for new VR headsets, putting virtual reality on the trajectory of mobile electronics and computers, which became cheaper and more mainstream as the technology improved. He predicted that VR would be useful even before it was perfect, and said that gaming would not necessarily be its first breakout hit…. **It’s this ability to let us feel a sense of human connection that boosters say will make virtual reality** **a powerful communications platform.”**

**PART 2: WILL YOUR ORGANIZATION STILL NEED A WEBSITE IN THE FUTURE?**

Let’s start by looking at a website I’m guessing all of you have used within the last day: Google, the most visited website in the US.  A few months ago, Raheel Gauba, creative director at Blackbaud, wrote an article for the digital magazine NP engage, in which he asked “[**what if Google were a nonprofit – what would their website look like instead?**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=3cae317261&e=0dbb70a2f9)”  This kind of busy web design is all too common in the nonprofit sector – packed with lots of competing visuals plus lots of copy filling the screen.  This approach is focused on the needs of the institution, and not on what the visitor wants or needs. Mr. Gauba wrote that he is “not suggesting that a nonprofit website consist of just one element – [like Google] – [he’s] simply illustrating the importance of connecting the purpose of your nonprofit to your website’s user experience, to better serve your supporters…. **The creation of a simple and usable user experience is one of the hardest things to do**,” he says,  “After all, a nonprofit website is tasked with quite a complex challenge – reach the visitor’s heart and mind in a way that drives them to support you.”

So what is next for nonprofit websites?  Well, if your organization hasn’t already done this, you probably have at least heard about the idea of “responsive” web design -- meaning the content adjusts visually so that it is easy to read on a computer, tablet or phone.  An important variation of this is called [**“mobile first” design**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=523e5b4fe2&e=0dbb70a2f9), because it starts the design process with mobile devices, the smallest screens on which your web content will be viewed.  Since we’ve reached the tipping point where[**mobile web browsing has surpassed desktop web browsing**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=2b4d6d3d88&e=0dbb70a2f9), a “mobile first” approach is something we should all be thinking about.

A web design guru named Jason Grigsby has been giving a talk on this topic at various tech conferences lately, and [**here are some notes**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=2ba573189d&e=0dbb70a2f9) from his presentation, courtesy of Luke Wroblewski.  In a word, Mr. Grigsby wants marketers to prioritize.  He points out that Web design has always been a balancing act of competing priorities: of sales & fundraising goals, search engine optimization, website speed, and now device diversity. Studies show that people expect web pages to load in two seconds or less on a desktop computer – even faster on mobile devices.  If given the choice between optimizing for speed and optimizing for mobile, he thinks speed should win out.  But, it’s important to remember that there are other benefits to developing a “mobile first” strategy. **Determine priorities on all of your key web pages** and, by the time you’re done, you’ll likely be able to make the desktop version of your website better, based on what you learned designing for mobile.

Looking a little further into the future, we might see more companies using what I would call a “no design” design.  Earlier this year, the digital strategist [**Benjamin Spiegel wrote**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=13e4a2ee64&e=0dbb70a2f9) that the proliferation of different devices on which you can view a website is the big factor in driving the move away from visually appealing, highly designed sites.  New devices lack conventional interfaces like keyboards and browsers but may still be used to display web content. He argues **we are headed for a browser-less world** in which content will be in the form of unstyled data, not traditional websites.

For example, [**here’s what the Wall Street Journal website looks like**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=4eb2f5f5e4&e=0dbb70a2f9) if you go to wsj.com.  But if you’re at Starbucks and log onto their Starbucks Digital Network using their free wi-fi, you’ll notice they offer stories from various sources including the Journal, but [**here’s what the Journal’s homepage looks like -- at Starbucks**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=cd75cc566d&e=0dbb70a2f9).  As Roy Dooley writes on his blog Neuromarketing, “This display’s only unique feature is the Wall Street Journal logo. The articles listed look the same as the articles on similar pages for the New York Times and The Economist.  There’s no emphasis on individual articles, and no images to draw one in. Of course, this kind of display is great from a technical standpoint as it translates easily to mobile. [But] looking at the mobile version, other than changing to a single-column display, there’s essentially no difference… it would look the same on just about any other device you might use at Starbucks.  Unfortunately, these barely-styled pages are so ugly that only a minimalist could love them. They convey no branding, no emotion, no guidance to the viewer.”

Speaking of news websites, nonprofits might want to think about re-imagining the whole point of their website.  This is a developing trend in the for-profit sector, with **companies transforming traditional sites into a content-driven platform that looks and feels like a news source**. Here’s an example of what I’m talking about.  In 2012, Coca Cola began to move away from a traditional website.  As [**Coke’s Ashley Brown wrote**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=25a85cf564&e=0dbb70a2f9): “We made a big bet that storytelling is the cornerstone of 21st century communications… that building a digital newsroom would lead not only to a transformation in how we engage with our consumers but also how we work.” And so they came up with a new site, [**Coca Cola Journey**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=5d2e2cc187&e=0dbb70a2f9).  Featuring content around pop culture, social media, recipes, career advice, and more, it is a far cry from the traditional corporate website – in a good way.

As the digital marketing advisor Jessica Gioglio [**blogged**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=b19c1b32a3&e=0dbb70a2f9), “The company also discovered something surprising – specific types of Coca-Cola news and information ranked among the top performing content. Yes, even with [all that] lifestyle content alongside company news. For example, background on marketing campaigns, historical stories about Coca-Cola, or information on the jobs people have within the company, all generated a high level of readership. During the testing phase of the re-design, Coca-Cola’s Unbottled blog [section] secured a 106% increase in page views, plus 1,247% increase in home page visits. This showcases the potential companies have to redefine their website into a curated visual, shareable experience. Consumers are always looking for content and information that appeals to their needs. However, they’re most likely not expecting it from a corporate website.”

Now I have no idea if what Coke did is what’s next for most nonprofit websites, but it certainly would make sense to at least think about this approach.  Michele Mehl of Geekwire [**blogged recently**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=1301745260&e=0dbb70a2f9), “If Coca-Cola is right and the [traditional] Web site is dead, marketing’s world just got rocked into requiring more of a narrative mindset where **[companies] must become great, fast-paced storytellers.”**

Regardless of what kind of site you develop, **keep in mind how the Web itself is changing**.  As Jean Paul-Edwards of iMedia [**wrote**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage2.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=5cc4ad740b&e=0dbb70a2f9), “a good understanding of where the web is heading has proven to be critical… It is clear that success in the world of Web 2.0,” …the social web, where most of us are now… “has stemmed from the understanding of the next generation of the web, the semantic web or Web 3.0” which makes use of all the personal data being collected online.
If this idea of anticipating the next generation of technologies has any weight, we need to ask what will define Web 4.0 and how it will shape innovation… Of course “Web 4.0 is still a long way away… and the third age of the web is only just getting going, so is it really relevant?”  Yes.

Web 4.0, also called Web OS, means “**the entire web [will become] a single operating system** where information flows from any one point to another.”  This approach will give rise to a whole new way of interacting on the web, as things that were once very separate can be linked together for mutual benefit.  Want an example?  How about online currency such as Bitcoin?  It’s currently in the early adopter phase but quickly becoming more mainstream.  The number of people using online currencies grew 800% in the last year.  And a number of nonprofits have already [**begun to experiment with it**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=a622233237&e=0dbb70a2f9).  How soon until most nonprofits start accepting – even encouraging – donors to use Bitcoin and other online money?

We’re also seeing the beginnings of web 4.0 in what some people call **“The Internet of Things”** with people using all sorts of things – and not just a computer or smartphone -- to go online.  About a month ago the website [**Business Insider shared a compelling presentation**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=307704d332&e=0dbb70a2f9) on the topic.  It highlighted the rapid growth of an inter-connected ecosystem, including TVs, cars, wearable devices, and all of the other tools that are or will soon be connected to the "Internet of Things."  They project that the Internet of Things will surpass the PC, tablet and smartphone market combined by the year 2017 – just three years away.

By the way, there’s one big caveat about the Internet of Things becoming the Next Big Thing: at the moment, there isn’t one open-source system that allows all Internet-enabled objects to talk to one another.  For instance, your Samsung refrigerator can't talk to your Sony TV because these brands currently prefer to use proprietary technology.  However, major manufacturers such as Samsung, Dell and Intel are [**joining forces to create an industry standard**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=ca30dcda05&e=0dbb70a2f9). Called the OIC, which stands for Open Interconnect Consortium, they aim to address security and other issues not adequately handled by the current decentralized system.

So while we in the nonprofit world wait for the for-profit world to sort all this out, how should we go about building websites in this kind of environment?  **Should our organizations even have a website in a world in which people may stop visiting websites themselves**, but instead simply ask their watch, their TV or their car for the information they seek from us?  Where their alarm clock provides information they’ve asked for about favorite topics or causes?

**It makes sense to plan for a future in which information is decentralized on the Web** -- where (instead of just focusing on our company’s website) we place more information about our organization all over the Internet, so it can be easily searched and sourced by smart devices.

You can start doing that now in small ways – like making sure that your organization’s Wikipedia page is up-to-date, and working with Google to correct or update the business information they automatically generate for your organization as part of a web search – don’t forget the basics: are the open-and-close hours listed for your company correct?  (That’s in the box on the right-hand side of the Google search results page.)  You’d be surprised how many nonprofits don’t check those things on a regular basis.

**PART 3: WHAT’S THE BEST WAY TO SEND OUT YOUR MESSAGE?**

There’s just so much to keep up with that we didn’t used to have to do.  It can all be a bit overwhelming.  I mean, how are we supposed to do our jobs in a world that is changing so dramatically?  Well, at least there is *one* digital tool all marketers use that futurists don’t expect to go away anytime soon … email.

A few months back on Mashable.com, there was [**a great commentary**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=ea92dd16be&e=0dbb70a2f9) that noted, “Email is not sexy. The design and functionality of electronic mail, since its inception, have remained fundamentally consistent — we type out messages, send them to our contacts and wait for a reply. In 10 years, that foundation will still exist, but we'll likely have a lot more options. There was an idea that email was dead a few years ago. That's just not true, obviously. Though competing messaging platforms have come and gone, email has remained perhaps the primary use of the Internet since it began. When Gmail entered the mix 10 years ago, the seeds of evolution were planted. Now **email seems due for another great change.**”

So what might that look like?  Mashable thinks one part of the coming change **may involve companies that provide third-party applications** which interact with your email provider. There are some companies that do that now, but they are hampered by the fact that major service providers don’t integrate easily with third-party apps, the way, say, Facebook does.

Another potential big change is expected to come with **more widespread use of speech recognition tools** and augmented intelligence programs, which will help us figure out what to say, along with whom to say it to.”  Shiva Ayyadurai, the man who *invented* email, said exactly that a few weeks ago in The Wall Street Journal.  [**He wrote**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=8a9022ddbf&e=0dbb70a2f9): “Email originated from [a paper system with a physical inbox]. In the good old days, the secretary did all the hard work and the boss did two things: dictating and editing. But email has made secretaries of us all; we spend up to 38% of our day managing email. **[In] the future, email systems will have integrated artificial intelligence** that will automatically sort your inbox, file and archive, prioritize, and even come up with reasonable responses, which you simply review, edit and send. So you can go back to the future: Be the boss, and your email system will be the secretary."

Current research estimates that about [**70% of all emails are spam**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=ec08e42c10&e=0dbb70a2f9) or unwanted messages, and so services like Gmail have begun to filter messages for their users.  A lot of legitimate, wanted emails are getting shunted off to folders along with the spam – as Gmail does, for instance, with its Promotions tab.  And that has begun to affect open rates.  One recent study claims as much as [**22% of opt-in emails are not making it to people’s email inboxes**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=1d671887bf&e=0dbb70a2f9).

There are ways to help improve deliverability, but even once you get your emails delivered properly, you also need to keep giving them a reason to want to open your emails. I think personalization is going to be a key reason.  Now, I know some of you have been personalizing email subject lines and copy for a long while now, but **personalizing a *video* in an email** is not yet a common practice, in part because of the upfront costs involved.

[**MarketingSherpa published a case study**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=b120096f01&e=0dbb70a2f9) last month about the impact of using a personalized video inside an email to promote an annual convention for people who teach Zumba Fitness dance classes, which got *my* attention. Inserting a personalized video message into their email helped the convention organizers achieve their highest open rate ever, at over 50%.  The folks at Zumba had a lot of compelling video assets from prior years and so it was easy for them to find elements that could be personalized to help the email recipients picture themselves at the convention. The metrics the campaign was able to achieve were impressive.  In addition to their high open rate, readers spent an average of 9+ minutes on their video landing page and some of the videos had over 700 views, because so many were shared through social media.

Beyond personalization, I think **another trend to watch is the** **increased informality of business emails**.  This is not surprising in a world where so many people shorten or invent words on Twitter and in texting.   I think we will see more people using emoticons in business emails – you know, smiley faces and the like.  (Do I detect some *un*-smiley faces out there?  For many of us, this seems unprofessional.)  But I encourage you to watch a short video on PBS’ YouTube channel entitled [**“Are Emoticons the Future of Language?”**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=03856ce2e4&e=0dbb70a2f9)  It makes a surprisingly strong case for why we should consider **using emoticons** in our organizations’ messaging.

And Huffington Post [**recently reported**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=df74356a7b&e=0dbb70a2f9) that “evidence from a decade of academic research suggests we should be emoticon-ing with greater abandon. Studies reveal that emoticons can either temper or boost the emotional punch of what we write, suggesting they're not extraneous flourishes in a message, but helpful cues that clarify what we mean to say. Also, the surprise of seeing a smiley face in a buttoned-up business correspondence [is] an act that defies our predictions, but in a way that intrigues or delights us. In the sterile context of a work email…receiving an emoticon is an unexpected, but welcome, "friendly, emotional and personal" act… Emoticons have become an everyday part of our culture, and the popularity of emoji -- emoticons' more expressive and colorful cousins – is further evidence that we might benefit from sprinkling our prose with funny faces and emotional cues.

Kevin Fox, who created the Gmail interface, sees the future of email evolving on a similar path to that of the greater web. As he says, "lots of communication that would've been done through email 10 years ago is now being done through [other methods].”  Fox believes that **emails in the future will need to have more user personality** if they are going to compete with things like Facebook, Twitter, and mobile messaging.

And we are going to need to **build up our audiences on these social platforms**.  According to M+R’s [**2014 Nonprofit Benchmark Study**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=904228eb5e&e=0dbb70a2f9), for every 1,000 email subscribers nonprofits have, they only have 199 Facebook fans, 110 Twitter followers & 13 mobile subscribers.

Mobile messaging is an area that nonprofits are clearly not pursuing enough, even though tools like WhatsApp and SnapChat have been growing rapidly in the last few years.  In the last year, about [**50 billion messages were sent each day via WhatsApp**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage2.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=5d68e37554&e=0dbb70a2f9) – that’s about half the volume of business email.  And then there’s SnapChat – it has much lower usage so far, with about 1.2 billion messages sent each day -- but the allure of SnapChat is as a way to communicate with teenagers and people in their 20s who prefer to use it instead of email.

I love this cartoon from Tom Fishburne (a.k.a. “The Marketoonist”), in which he depicts [**the 5 Stages of Social Network Adoption**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=653eec47d5&e=0dbb70a2f9) by marketers, sort of like the 5 Stages of Grief:

* RIDICULE: Snapchat is a fad for teenagers and sexting
* LEGITIMACY: That’s a lot of consumers just waiting for our marketing
* URGENCY: Drop everything and get our brand on Snapchat
* PROMOTION: For immediate release: our brand is now on Snapchat! #we’re cool
* FRUSTRATION: Why isn’t anyone engaging with us?

Fishburne notes that “Marketers have been closely watching the explosive growth of Snapchat. [But] because of the one-to-one nature of its messaging and pictures that self-destruct after just a few seconds, it hasn’t been obvious how brands could use [it].  Snapchat introduced “Snapchat Stories” in October” – and it already represents a little less than half of all messaging on Snapchat each day. And they’ve just rolled out Geofilters which should help marketers to target their messages.  Still, “Snapchat won’t be a good fit for every company. But brands ultimately want to be where their consumers are spending time.  When they join the conversation, they need to remember to **bring value to that conversation, wherever that conversation lives.”**

Just to be contrarian for a second, don’t assume that conversation isn’t still happening via good old reliable email.  David Carr, a media columnist for the New York Times, [**recently reported**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage2.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=d5d73d243c&e=0dbb70a2f9) on the growing popularity of something marketers have used for decades: email newsletters.  Carr notes that “newsletters are clicking [with] readers [who] have grown tired of the endless stream of information on the Internet.  Having something finite and recognizable show up in your inbox can impose order on all that chaos.  At a time when a lot of information is whizzing by online, email newsletters help us figure out what’s worth paying attention to.”

He further reports that the email service provider MailChimp -- which I use for You’ve Cott Mail -- is adding more than 10,000 new creators of email newsletters *each day*. So “what may seem like a very retro movement has relevance in the modern media environment.”  Why?  “Increasingly, news is a list that appears on your phone.  Whether it’s Twitter, Facebook or a mobile app, news shows up as a list of links.”  An email newsletter typically works the same way – it’s content you want in list form.  [And] with an email, there is a presumption of connection, of something personal.

**For some people, email newsletters are now their main source of information**.  This past March, 1,000 top business executives – you know, the kinds of folks who write big checks to nonprofits -- were surveyed for Quartz's [**Global Executive Study**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=f4bc27f087&e=0dbb70a2f9). They were asked what news source they checked first each day.  60% of top execs read an email newsletter, while 43% who read news via the mobile web, 28% used a news app and just 16% who visited a news website on a desktop.  And although 61% of those surveyed said they *subscribe* to magazines and newspapers, only 3% said print was a primary source of news.

Gideon Lichfield, global news editor for Quartz, told the New York Times: “Email is dismissed as something old people use, but in the past few years we have started to see email as a peer to platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and the web.” Quartz’s own daily email newsletter goes to 75,000 subscribers, about half of whom open it.  “It is not a huge audience,” he said, “but it is a very dedicated and valuable one.”

**PART 4: WHO’S YOUR AUDIENCE GOING TO BE IN THE FUTURE?**

Who are nonprofits talking to now, and who should we be talking to in the future?  I doubt it will surprise anyone that I’m going to focus on Millennials.  To all of you between ages 18 and 34… you are Millennials, and you are the future.  Welcome.  For those older than 34?  We may be old…er, especially the Baby Boomers among us, but we are not entirely irrelevant to a discussion of Millennials.  I’ll get back to that in a minute.

Let’s talk first about that first group – they are part of 80 million or so Americans in their 20s and early 30s who are on track to [**outnumber Baby Boomers by 22 million**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=2655e66883&e=0dbb70a2f9) and become 75% of the workforce by the year 2030.  I’m not saying let’s forget about all people over 34 – after all, I’m one of those people -- but let’s get real.  **Millennials are the ones nonprofits need to cultivate the most**.  And, as Scott Beaudoin at MSL Group [**recently wrote**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=61309b5db6&e=0dbb70a2f9) on his company’s blog, “Millennials are eager to make a difference.  They are charitable and keen to participate in public life.  43% of Millennials actively volunteer or are a member of a community organization, 52% have signed petitions, and 63% of Millennials already donate to charities.”

He notes that “the millennial generation has a reputation of being entitled, but this is part of the result of their desire to engage with the world around them.  They feel responsible to themselves, their neighbors, their communities, and their planet.  They grew up learning their actions directly affect the world around them.”

However, as Ian Lauth of the website Winspire News – himself a Millennial – notes:  “[**Millennials can be a tough bunch to appeal to**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=135ca11fae&e=0dbb70a2f9). This hyper-connected group spends most of their day consuming media and has a higher tendency to multitask – meaning **they’re more easily distracted**.”  He references a survey from last year which asked how Millennials prefer to learn about nonprofits:

* 67% said via the Web
* 55% said via social media
* 47% said via email newsletters and
* Only 18% said via printed materials, and
* Only 17% said via a face-to-face encounter

Since websites are the most preferred way for a Millennial to learn more about a nonprofit, they were also asked the first thing they look for on a nonprofit website:

* 88% look for the “About Us” page
* 43% look for the type of donations
* 41% look for volunteer opportunities
* 41% look for a calendar of events, and
* 30% look at videos and photos

And in relation to their #2-rated method of learning about nonprofits – social media – the survey asked “What type of information about a nonprofit would you share on Facebook?”

* 74% said “cool events”
* 69% said statistics about the nonprofit
* 65% said general news about the nonprofit
* 61% said “opportunities”
* 47% said they would share a video

By the way, only 30% said they would share the fact that they had donated to the nonprofit.

As technology shifts, **expect Millennials to be the first to adopt new means of communicating**.  **It’s in their DNA.**  When a 26-year-old Millennial was only 4 years old, the [**first text message**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=7b5319a401&e=0dbb70a2f9) was sent. When she turned 10, Google launched its search engine.  By her high school graduation, YouTube, Twitter, Reddit, Facebook were all [**gaining speed in the social media world**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=2a5d461690&e=0dbb70a2f9).  [So] you can see how someone who grew up immersed in such innovative times would welcome further changes in technology.

But we, as nonprofit marketers, need to think beyond which hot new technological method we should use to communicate with Millennials. **We also need to be thinking about demographic differences**, and the sensitivity around the language we use and the cultural references we include in our marketing and other communications.

According to [**a recent Pew Research Center report**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=1082324cc9&e=0dbb70a2f9), Millennials are America’s most racially diverse generation, a trend driven by the large wave of Hispanic and Asian immigrants who have been coming to the U.S. for the past half century, and whose U.S.-born children are now aging into adulthood. Some 43% of Millennial adults are non-white, the highest share of any generation.  Michael Oleaga of [**LatinPost.com**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=17fa2a105b&e=0dbb70a2f9) reports that Hispanics represent 21% of the country’s overall millennial population.  And 40% of Hispanic Millennials are open to consuming media in both English and Spanish languages, with another 16% preferring that their media be “mostly in Spanish.”

Think about *that* as you write your next email.  I’m not saying you have to send out two versions, one in English and one in Spanish, but even those Hispanics who are happy consuming their media in English still maintains a strong sense of Hispanic identity. So **it’s important to infuse your communications with cultural nuance.**

This is not new.  Nonprofits send different versions of marketing messages to different segments of their lists all the time -- for lots of reasons -- but I don’t think most nonprofits **write differently to Millennials** than they do to older audiences.  And maybe they should.  Think about how different the life of a 26-year-old is compared to their parents at the same age.

According to [**a recent NY Times Magazine article**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=9e7b738ea4&e=0dbb70a2f9), 1 out of 5 people in their 20s and early 30s is currently living with his or her parents.  And 60% of all young adults report getting some financial support from their parents.  (**For the older folks out there, this is what I meant when I said you were relevant to this discussion, too!**)  And the Times views this not as a temporary phenomenon, but as part of a new and permanent life stage, which Millennials and their parents are still struggling to make sense of.

You hear a lot these days about income inequality, much of it centered on the top 1% of earners in this country.  But it’s really the gap between the top 20% and the rest that’s more salient to young people.  “That is a dividing point,” says Mark Rank, a professor at Washington University in St. Louis.  People in the top 20% of household income – roughly $100,000 or higher – have taken nearly all the economic gains of the past 40 years.

For those who can crack the top 20% salary bracket, there is great promise.  But for those in the much larger pool, the 80% earning under $100K a year, Professor Rank predicts there will be falling or stagnant wages and far greater uncertainty.

Interestingly, as the New York Times reports, despite all these grim forecasts, people now in their 20s are remarkably optimistic.  A nationwide poll of the group found that 77% still believe they will be better off than their parents.  Another major survey found that 91% of Millennials believe they will be able to afford the lives they want.

The difference is the lives they want aren’t the lives of their parents and grandparents. Many Millennials are rejecting a steady, if unsatisfying, job for years of experimentation, even repeated failure that eventually leads to a richly satisfying career.”

**PART 5: “WHAT WILL A CAREER AT A NONPROFIT LOOK LIKE IN THE FUTURE?”**

How will we do what we do differently? With Millennials rising up in the ranks, it won't surprise anyone if they bring their own ways of using technology with them.  **How long will it be before we** **work mostly or entirely from mobile phones or some other portable device** instead of at a desktop computer?  Michelle Paul of Patron Technology [**made this prediction**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=bc7b44fb59&e=0dbb70a2f9) recently on their blog, noting that she wrote her blog post on her phone. (“That’s not even new and strange anymore, even though the first iPhone hit the market only in 2007.”)

She predicts “there will be aspects of your job you won't have to do at all anymore. It's not that you'll be replaced by robots, but **your day-to-day busywork will get a whole lot less busy**. What if your fundraising system could accurately predict the best day or week to ask potential donors for a gift, advise you on the ideal ask amount and then automatically send the message for you?  You'd be able to spend your time and attention using your expertise to set up automated processes rather than performing the tasks yourself.”

And how about **an office that doesn't use email to get work done**?  That's already happening.  Last month, the Wall Street Journal [**had a story**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=4a3274e3f6&e=0dbb70a2f9) about a wave of startups that have reduced the number of emails their employees receive to as little as 2 or 3 a day.  Can you imagine?  Instead, they mostly use instant messaging and searchable feeds on a company webpage which workers use to create, assign and comment on projects.

Another big shift on the horizon is how we’re going to be spending our marketing dollars.  **Can you imagine a budget with no paid media in it?** Joseph Jaffe and Maarten Albarda have written [**a new book called *Z.E.R.O.,***](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=ffe4a5e456&e=0dbb70a2f9) an acronym which explains how you could achieve a zero paid media budget using these four things: **Z**ealots, **E**ntrepreneurship, **R**etention and **O**wned Assets. Their “central premise is that, if media inflation continues to outpace and run away from economic inflation, the bottom may fall out of the [paid] media model.  Put simply, it will become practically impossible to maintain minimum acceptable levels of reach, frequency, share of voice and presence in the [traditional] marketplace.”

Their Z.E.R.O. manifesto “holds that, in a perfect world, **the optimal paid media budget would be zero**, [and so your organization] would not need to spend a dime on paid media, because [you] would have enough word-of-mouth, enough rabid fans and advocates, enough partnerships, and last but not least, enough assets to activate, amplify and monetize.”  The authors acknowledge this idea is not for everyone and their book was written primarily for large companies, but smaller organizations – like most nonprofits -- could benefit from adopting some of their recommendations – especially as digital marketing becomes more of a main focus.

Some of you may be familiar with the quote by retailing pioneer John Wanamaker who said, “Half of my advertising is wasted; I just don’t know which half.”  These days, of course, we *can* know what is working.  As [**Michael Schrage wrote**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=2c032b6ff3&e=0dbb70a2f9) in the Harvard Business Review’s blog last month, “Digital media and tracking technologies, along with dramatically improved analytics, now mean that serious marketers – if they really care to know – can have an excellent idea of just how effective or wasteful their advertising really is.”  As he put it, **“Ignorance is now a choice, not an excuse.”**

He points out that a greater focus on digital marketing is going to blur even further the lines between marketing and IT departments, and we marketers are going to have to learn a lot more about what our IT colleagues know – and vice versa -- if our organizations are going to succeed in the future.  **The end of silos between departments** – between marketing and IT, between marketing and fundraising, between marketing and everyone at your organization – that is going to be crucial.

And, as nonprofit marketing guru Colleen Dilenschneider [**wrote recently**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=3eb3462f89&e=0dbb70a2f9) on her blog, the very definition of “marketing” is evolving.  As she said: **“If your organization still treats the marketing team as a service department, instead of a critical, strategic resource, then it’s time to catch up.**  Before the social media revolution, marketing often played a service role.  That is, it was tasked with delivering a message that originated from other departments… In an outdated way of thinking, [other] departments would make decisions and say, ‘okay, Marketing – market this.’”

I know I am preaching to the choir here, but marketers can help **re-educate colleagues and boards by making the 4-point argument** that Colleen lays out in her blog.

1. The Marketing department is now the ears of your organization and not just its mouth, thanks to the 24/7 nature of the web and the need to actively listen to audiences online.
2. Connecting with audiences every day forces Marketing to become the expert in the wants of your constituents.
3. Organizations determine priorities, but the market always determines what’s actually important – and who better to know the market than the Marketers?
4. Initiatives have a greater chance of success if Marketing has been involved in the development of these plans.  Since we now live in a data-rich world, we no longer have to guess what our audiences want or need.  Since Marketing is typically the one gathering and analyzing audience data, how can they not be part of our organization’s planning processes?

Which leads me, finally, to the issue of planning for what’s next. Barry Hessenius (who writes a terrific blog for WESTAF, the Western States Arts Federation) [**commented recently**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=9672f12d42&e=0dbb70a2f9) that
long-term planning has become increasingly difficult.  He points out that, when the economic crisis of 2008 first hit, the nonprofit sector came up with some quick fixes until things got back to normal. Six years on, even though the economy has recovered in many ways, we are not back to the way things were six years ago.  The “new normal” is one of constant flux and change.  So now, **making long-term plans – the five-years-out plan – is no longer practical.**

He points out that a more nimble approach “forces us to be in the moment and continuously rethink *what* we are doing and *how* we are doing [it]…. **The quick fix – while far from ideal – is nonetheless one way to be adaptable and innovative.”**

Okay, let’s wrap this up with a final question: How many of you out there drink Snapple beverages?  (This is not a complete non sequitur.)  If you do, then you know they include what they call a “real fact” on the underside of each of their bottle caps.  Here’s a fact that got my attention: “The can opener was [**invented 48 years after the can**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=3489521891&e=0dbb70a2f9).”  Yes, this is true -- the first can was created in 1810 to help better preserve food – and it had an enormous impact on the world.  But, for the first 48 years after the can came on the scene, all cans had to be opened with brute force, using a hammer and chisel.  The first dedicated can opener was not created until almost five decades later, in 1858.

So what does this have to do with the future of nonprofit marketing?  I think it’s valuable to remember that, even as big changes occur in our world today, it is an ongoing process, and it may take us 48 years before we can come up with the nonprofit marketing equivalent of a can opener.

By the way, I happened to look back 48 years ago.  Back in 1966, a principal at the McKinsey consulting firm, a man named John D. Louth, published an essay called [**“The Changing Face of Marketing**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=86b9e7e7d2&e=0dbb70a2f9)."  It’s telling to read now what he wrote then: **“Change is the dominant fact of life in every business today**. And the ability to master and exploit change has become one of the most sought-after management skills. This is particularly true in marketing, where the very tempo of change is constantly quickening.”

Among the factors he cites that were contributing to this quickening pace are many of the same issues we’re dealing with now: **shifting demographics, the fragmentation of the audience, changes in people’s priorities, the rise of automation, and a greater need for data analysis.**

The more things change, the more they stay the same?  Yes and no.  This is not 1966.  Our world now *is* different. So what’s next?  I don’t really know.  But remember Alan Kay: [**“The best way to predict the future is to invent it.”**](http://verizon.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7b3692e5974d30da3d7aca79f&id=c6cd6a0cfc&e=0dbb70a2f9)

I’ll leave you with **10 takeaways to get you started.**

1. Marketing should stop acting like a service department, and get in on your organization’s planning process.  That should help you break down silos between Marketing and all the other departments, which is essential.
2. And then, while you’re doing that, prepare yourself, your colleagues, your boss, and even your board for the idea of moving to a mostly-digital approach to marketing.
3. As part of that, aim to achieve a ZERO paid media budget by relying more on your organization’s zealots, entrepreneurial thinking, retention of existing patrons, and your owned assets online.
4. But to do that, you’ll need to move away from your institutional thinking and focus on your audience’s needs instead.  Meet them on their terms and adjust your messaging and your means of communications.
5. If you can, re-imagine how you communicate.  Thinking ‘mobile first’ means more than just creating a website or email that looks good on a mobile phone.  And remember that “mobile” now includes a huge range of non-phone devices.
6. Accept that you don’t control everything that is said about your organization online.  But whenever possible, monitor and update all 3rd-party content about your nonprofit.  Start with the easy stuff like Wikipedia profiles and Google business search results.
7. This may seem self-evident, but “be human.”  Don’t be afraid to add personality to your communications.  And when you can, personalize your messaging – staying sensitive to cultural and generational differences in your audience.
8. Be nimble.  Easy to say, hard to do, especially if you work at an established nonprofit with ingrained practices.  But shorter-term planning can foster innovation.
9. Be patient. Remember it took 48 years for someone to invent a can opener.  Our work is never done – it’s all part of a lifelong process of discovery.

Which leads me to my last, and perhaps most important, takeaway:

1. Make time in your day to keep up on the latest news and ideas.  Stay curious about, and stay focused on, the future.

Personally, I can’t wait to see what’s next.