



EVENT GARDE
MARKETING

WHAT'S YOUR
MARKETING
STRATEGY?

Intentional Marketing

SHAPING STORIES THROUGH
THE C.A.R.E. MODEL

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By 2055, the U.S. will not have a single racial or ethnic majority. It's no surprise then that the topic of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is top of mind as more companies seek to grow their workforce, engage with new audiences, build brand recognition and loyalty, and increase their bottom lines. While the destination is clear, many organizations struggle with how to get there. Worries about missteps, lack of staff, and limited knowledge, time, or other resources might slow down the process or even prevent it from beginning. On the flipside, leadership might rush in without fully thinking through the "why" and "how" of their initiative.

As marketers, we are often at the heart of DEI discussions with opportunities to inform strategies and make an impact in the DEI space, but maybe we're unsure of how to make that happen. Or we might find ourselves caught in the middle without much chance to weigh in before being charged with the task of communicating about DEI internally and externally. Working in a niche industry like the outdoors can add another layer of considerations and challenges into the mix. For example, ever try finding a stock image of folks in wheelchairs enjoying the outdoors (particularly a free one)? There goes your afternoon. With so many potential scenarios, what can we do to prepare ourselves? First, let's review the basics.

The American Marketing Association defines marketing 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."

Successful marketing and communications professionals are expert storytellers. Every time we write a blogpost, select an image, or create a campaign, there is certain information we want to convey, a feeling we want to invoke, or a call to action we want to achieve. To do this, we tell stories that engage the people we wish to reach. When we do this, we generally have an audience in mind. Our beliefs about this audience then influence "what, where, when, why, and how" we choose to communicate most effectively.

As audiences continue to diversify, a simple response to a change in demographics isn't enough. We must think about how to move from a surface-level, piecemeal approach to longer term solutions that foster more meaningful connections with diverse audiences. But what do we really know about our audience? What is the story that needs to be told? How do we tell that story honestly? And how do we remain focused and intentional?

Event Garde's guide to intentional marketing provides marketers with a simple framework for thinking through these questions and a tangible set of steps for advancing this vital work.

EXPANDING YOUR MARKETING TOOLBOX

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO INCORPORATE DEI INTO MARKETING EFFORTS?

Diversified audiences increase profitability - Organizations that value DEI---not just in image but in practice---are more apt to thrive. Those who feel represented in the print materials or the language in a job posting, or even where that job is posted, determines who works for the organization. Lack of representation contributes to low morale and high turnover. [Finance & Commerce further explores how workplace diversity can improve a company's bottom line.](#)

Positive impacts on community health - Not only does a lack of diversity impact the bottom line, lack of representation and misrepresentation can impact a group's health. [Forbes illuminates why equal representation in the media is important.](#) Additionally, a shift in media representation can reduce stigma. [This blog from the organization, Hand in Hand,](#) explains this concept more. Both what we choose to include and what we choose to omit shape this narrative.

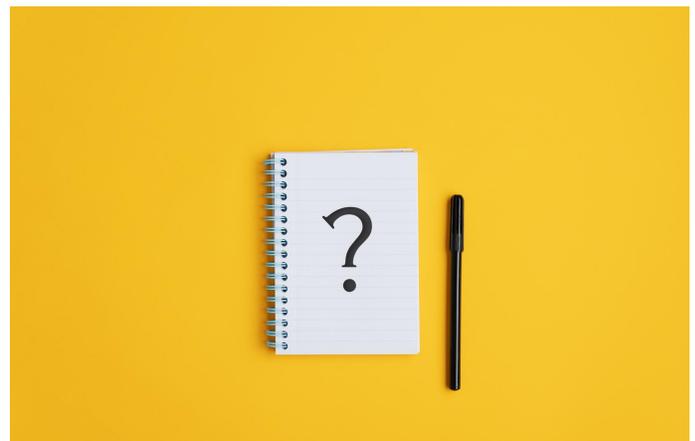
LEVERAGE EXISTING PROCESSES

One thing that is often expressed by marketers is: "I value diversity in what I'm putting out, but sometimes there just isn't time." Our everyday actions indicate what we prioritize in real-time. Think about it. If I were creating an event flyer for an organization's company picnic, I'd want them to know the time, date, and place. I'd likely feature images that communicate a fun, joyful time so that the people I've invited want to attend. Once details are decided, content is edited, review and presented. Decisions get made about where and how it gets distributed. We may consider things like budget, turnaround time, frequency etc. Often this process happens as habit or routine. No one needs to tell you to check for typos. It's just "obvious." But it's actually an involved process. It feels obvious because of how practiced it is.

Continually embedding DEI as a regular part of your practices as a marketer will reduce the amount of time spent going forward. It becomes operational. Look at your existing processes and think about where you could insert checkpoints to ensure inclusive and intentional design.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

- Are all members of your community able to participate or engage with your work?
- Who you are including and potentially excluding?
- Who is represented in your stories?
- Who gets to tell your stories?
- How are you requesting feedback to gauge your progress?
- What do you want people to know and how do you want them to feel?



Connect Assess Respond Evolve



THE C.A.R.E. MODEL

The C.A.R.E. Model (Connect, Assess, Respond, Evolve) can be applied to support the expansion of a marketer's creative toolbox. Each one of the four steps provides a framework for meeting any opportunity or challenge in the communications world----from long-term strategies and ongoing projects to the launch of new initiatives and developing an effective plan for communication in a crisis response.

In this guide to intentional marketing the four steps of C.A.R.E are used to outline DEI best practices for organizations and teams looking to shape authentic stories and messages that resonate with people from many different backgrounds and perspectives.

Developed in partnership with Event Garde's Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), this informative resource also features a self-assessment tool, includes a series of questions to consider when approaching this work, and provides numerous links to further reading and supports.

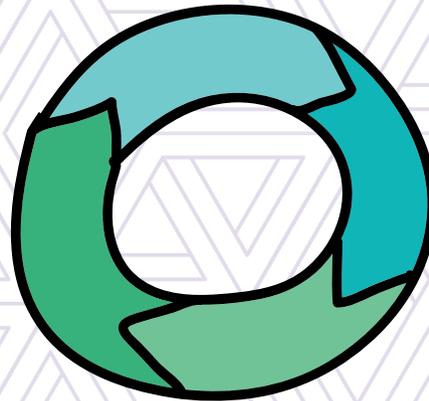
THE FOUR STEPS OF C.A.R.E.

CONNECT

Identify Your Audience
Do Your Research
Personalize Messaging
Embrace Collaboration

ASSESS

Evaluate Content
Be Authentic
Check for Bias
Ensure Accessibility



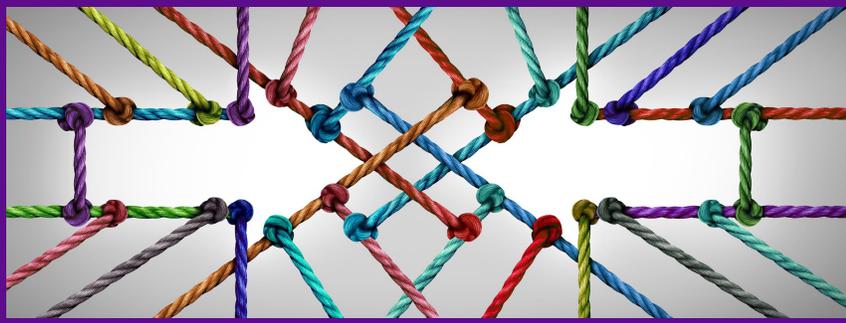
RESPOND

Solicit Feedback
Build Community
Follow Your Brand Heart

EVOLVE

Reallocate Budgets
Be Proactive
Redefine Success
Embrace a Growth Mindset

Connect



IDENTIFY YOUR AUDIENCE

Being intentional about an audience improves engagement---both how many people engage with your content and who's engaging. Identify who you want to reach, why you want to reach them, and whether or not your communications make that clear. [The Denver Foundation provides tips on identifying and understanding your audience within the context of DEI.](#) Also check these guidelines for [best practices from the Human Rights Campaign.](#)

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Just like every other skill or application you learned in order to be good at what you do as a marketer, consider DEI as an integral part of your practice. You will tokenize and stereotype less if you do the work ahead of time. The good and bad news about institutions having increased interest in DEI is that there is more content available on the topic than ever before. The bad news is that as volume increases, you need to be even more careful about who your sources are and the quality of your content. [Diversity & Anti-Racism campaigner and TedX Speaker, Nova Reid, shares more on the topic of tokenism here.](#)

PERSONALIZE MESSAGING

People aren't one-dimensional. Each of us come with our own perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds. It's important that the stories about us affirm the many aspects of who we are. Move away from blanket language and generalized marketing templates. Share relevant information that is tailored to the unique needs of each audience. This includes factoring in the most effective outlets and timing for delivery. [Communication experts at the University of Kansas offer this detailed toolkit on developing a communications plan](#) and remind us that "Knowing your audience makes it possible to plan your communication logically. You'll need different messages for different groups, and you'll need different channels and methods to reach each of those groups."

EMBRACE COLLABORATION

You're not going to know everything. This isn't about "getting it right" or checking a box. Connect with other marketers or folks outside your field who's work you admire to gather additional insights and expertise. But, remember to ask: How are you both benefiting? Be sure the relationship is authentic and reciprocal. Exploring an option such as resource-sharing is one way to do this. You don't want to tokenize your thought partners anymore than you want to tokenize those pictured in your materials. [Try using this Collaboration Spectrum Tool from the Tamarack Institute.](#)

Collaboration also inspires creativity. "While you can read blogs, magazines, and books for inspiration, if you are not [communicating](#), sharing, and discussing that information, the benefits are limited. It is vital to get outside of your own head to get a fresh perspective, trigger your creativity, review incoming information objectively, and add new context to the data you are gathering so you can use it effectively. Going beyond what you do and see each day to explore collaboration can be inspiring and help you think in a new way." [This resource from the Balance for Small Business](#) outlines other ways collaboration can be a powerful tool.

Assess



EVALUATE CONTENT

As you engage with this work, be sure to set realistic goals and expectations, remain flexible, and evaluate plans often in case adjustments need to be made. Perform a review of current materials, language, media assets, and delivery methods/platforms to identify opportunities for growth as well as make a plan for addressing challenges that exist. Ensure imagery is meaningful to your intended audiences. Check to see if messaging is on target with tone and timing, being mindful of factors like cultural celebrations and public tragedies, which may impact the communities you wish to engage. And always confirm that the information you're sharing is credibly-sourced news.

BE AUTHENTIC

As important as it is to make sure your communications represent a variety of social identities, it's important that they aren't so removed from what your organization looks like that it misrepresents who you are. In fact, a telltale sign of a predominantly white institution (PWI) is often the number of people of color featured on their brochure. The front page of college brochures often depict more racial diversity than is actually represented within the student body. [NPR details one example of this phenomenon.](#)

CHECK FOR BIAS

As Doug Chayka states in this [Neiman Reports article](#): "A commitment to addressing implicit bias—an automatic or unconscious tendency to associate particular characteristics with particular groups—in news coverage could improve and transform audience engagement, increase trust, and lead to more accurate coverage depicting our increasingly diverse world."

ENSURE ACCESSIBILITY

Now think about accessibility for person with disabilities in your marketing materials:

- Can they be opened?
- Can they be read?
- Can people find the info they need easily (can they find them at all)?
- Can they be understood?
- Is the event itself accessible?
- Where are you distributing your materials (can they be found in the first place)?

Still not sure? [AMAculturehive pulled together 20 simple ways of making your marketing more accessible.](#)

Respond

SOLICIT FEEDBACK

Ask the hard questions and offer multiple ways to provide input (Examples: personal phone calls, targeted surveys and polls, website feedback forms, stakeholder focus groups, etc.). [In this article from the Content Marketing Institute, learn about a marketing research and interviewing technique called "Voice of Customer" that can be applied to better understand target audiences.](#)

Don't underestimate the story that data can tell about an audience. Review analytics to discover how people are engaging with each other on community message boards, social media, and more. [This DEI reporting guide from ChartHop covers how to identify, collect, understand, and drive action with your DEI data.](#)



FOSTER COMMUNITY

Jennifer Kim and Bukky Adebayo from Inclusion at Work make the point that "The work of diversifying your audience requires deliberate thought and intentional action...your website [and other marketing materials], as part of your company's brand, is a promise to customers. By adding more images of people of color (POC) to the site, your company is implicitly promising an inclusive experience for people from diverse backgrounds." They further point out the importance of a company's actions matching its marketing strategies. Don't just add photos of people not represented within your organization and think your work is done. [These DEI best practices offer more guidance.](#)

To build organizational momentum, leverage internal communications like staff newsletters, create and promote employee resource groups, and provide access to DEI resources and learning opportunities (in-person and self-guided). Highlight diverse stories within your board, staff, and volunteers. Offer opportunities for your audience to share their own personal experiences with your brand. [Charity Village lists top tips for effective community-building in a variety of settings.](#) To strengthen relationships, partner with other organizations and marketing professionals also working to diversify their marketing. Share resources so that your relationship is reciprocal and you can continue to engage in honest dialogue about what's working and what's not. [This article from the Corporate Learning Network showcases tips on partnering both inside and outside your organization.](#)

FOLLOW YOUR BRAND HEART

Whenever you're unclear about how to effectively communicate DEI values, go back to your brand's core belief and consider how it relates to the brand's vision, mission, and values. Know the purpose for what you're creating.



Evolve

REALLOCATE BUDGETS

Organizations should not view DEI initiatives as the low hanging fruit that get reduced or eliminated when budgeting gets tough. Build the purchasing of accessibility tools and the development of a diverse media library into department budgets from the get-go. There are many free resources available online as well.

BE PROACTIVE

Finding images that represent a wide range of identities definitely takes more preparation. There are fewer photos out there and as Neosha Gardner, Founder of CreateHER Stock, describes: “The ones that are available are either outdated and scream cliché or stereotypical.” Have options on hand. Build a robust collection of photos and videos that represent a wide range of backgrounds and identities so you’re not spending extra time looking when you’re up against a deadline. Continually adding to this marketing toolbox will welcome in creativity, allowing you to tell more stories. It also gives you the opportunity to share this media library with thought partners. [This Forbes article provides a great resource for getting started.](#) Here is another [list of online databases](#) to explore as you build out your media assets. Another fantastic tool is the [Conscious Style Guide](#), which allows marketers to build their knowledge and understanding of language that is inclusive, empowering, and respectful.

REDEFINE SUCCESS

Representation matters from the inside-out. In order to truly reflect DEI values, marketing efforts need to have DEI woven into brand identity from the get-go---from the engagement strategies and content we develop to how we collaborate with our colleagues, leadership, clients, and the types of consumers we engage. As marketers, we can ask questions that will help connect these dots and build stories that resonate with those we want to reach. Through the power of our stories we can help to showcase the strength and contributions of those we partner with and dismantle negative stereotypes that cause harm to marginalized communities.

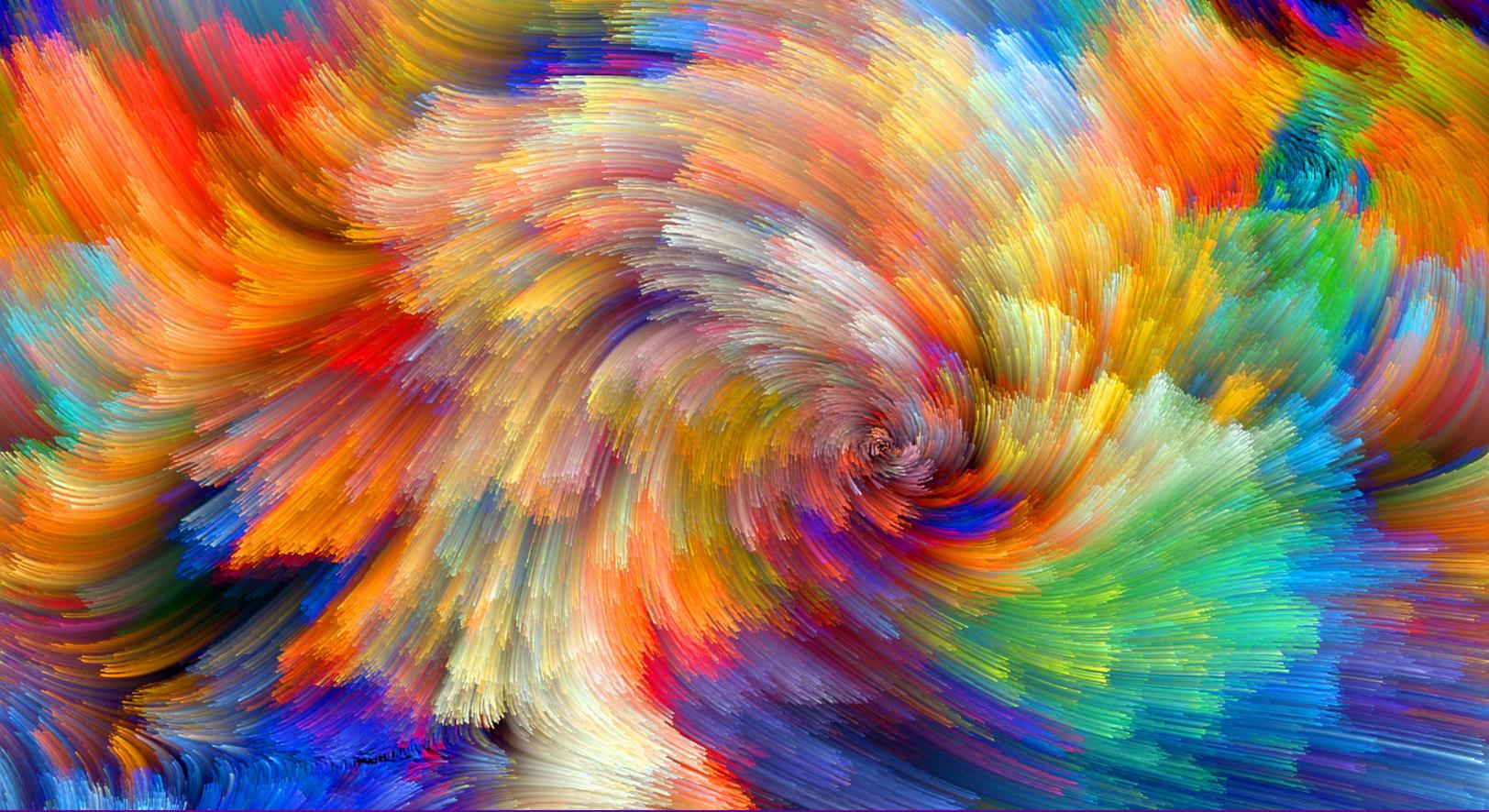
EMBRACE A GROWTH MINDSET

Incorporating DEI principles isn't something you need to accomplish all at once. Approach DEI as an ongoing conversation, where content, strategies, and plans are regularly reviewed and adjusted, when appropriate, to reflect the evolving needs of your audience. Remember success always involves failures. You won't always get it right, and that is OK. Even those who are deeply committed to fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment have biases and can make false assumptions. Reflect throughout the process, pace yourself, be curious, recognize when room for growth exists.

Intentional Marketing Self-Assessment Tool

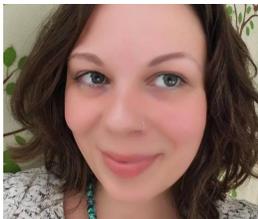
Self-assessment is key to continued development in any profession. Using the tool below, reflect on each one of the four steps of the C.A.R.E. Model within the context of DEI marketing. First, identify your level of expertise for each row under the "Knowledge & Skills" section on the left and mark your response by placing an "X" in the appropriate column. Perform the same self-evaluation under the "Confidence Level" section on the right to determine your degree of confidence relative to each competency. You can then use the completed assessment results to leverage collective understanding within your organization and make a plan for growth in areas where gaps exist. During this process, it is important to seek out accountability partners and collaborators in order to accurately assess what is needed and form comprehensive strategies. [According to the Evaluation Journal of Australasia](#): "In the evaluation profession, there is shared agreement that cross-cultural understanding is relevant for those working in communities and countries different from their own. This helps inform the selection of appropriate approaches, tools and processes. Perhaps more importantly, the concept of evaluation itself could be considered through a cross-cultural lens; such consideration may reveal a lack of shared understanding between different cultures."

KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS				CONFIDENCE LEVEL			
None	Limited	Moderate	Extensive	CONNECT			
				None	Limited	Moderate	High
Identify Your Audience							
Do Your Research							
Personalize Messaging							
Embrace Collaboration							
				ASSESS			
Evaluate Content							
Be Authentic							
Check for Bias							
Ensure Accessibility							
				RESPOND			
Solicit Feedback							
Foster Community							
Follow Your Brand Heart							
				EVOLVE			
Reallocate Budgets							
Be Proactive							
Redefine Success							
Embrace a Growth Mindset							



CONTACT US!

Our team welcomes the opportunity to chat with you about the results of your C.A.R.E. Model assessment. Email us for a free 30-minute consultation to brainstorm and jumpstart your DEI marketing strategies!



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Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

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Our expert storytellers craft powerful, intentional messages that pack a punch---leaving audiences engaged, informed, and hungry for more. We specialize in strategy, campaigns, annual planning, event marketing, communications development, coaching, trainings, and more. [Visit us on Event Garde's website to learn about our marketing and communications offerings.](#)