



## Board Recruitment – a Strategic Marketing Campaign

**By Sol Kasimer, CEO, Altruvest Charitable Services**

Some in the charitable and not-for-profit sectors are uncomfortable using terms and skills from the business world. To those people I say “get over it!” A charity or not-for-profit is not a business but we can act in a business like manner. And a great place to learn from business is in using marketing skills to attract, recruit and keep board members.

The board has ultimate responsibility for an organization. And being a member of a board is an exciting, rewarding (psychically rewarding – remember this isn’t a business!) and challenging job.

At its most basic a board’s job is (working with staff) to set and communicate direction, understand the resources (financial and human) required to achieve the plan, monitor and evaluate performance (performance of staff and performance of the board and individual board members) and provide general oversight.

So what makes a great board? I suggest the best boards are a group featuring a variety of skills, diversity of background and opinion but most of all a group united in their passion for the cause and commitment to the organization.

The most important contribution a thoughtfully composed board offers is not just a difference in background, or a difference in job but the difference in opinion and perspective that diverse job skills, experience and education provides.

Where do many organizations look for new board members? Often they “ask their friends.” And I bet that if you ask people “just like you” and look to people “just like you” you will probably end up with a group of people “just like you.” The group might be fun but I doubt the group will hold the differences of opinion, skills and background so important to meaningful governance.

Rather than relying on friends and personal contacts a thoughtful search for board members should be a strategic marketing campaign.

The methods of the campaign might differ – it could involve advertising and other “classic” marketing tools – but more likely will count on one-on-one contacts and discussions. A marketing approach demands the same thought process and strategic thinking no matter the methods.

There are lots of definitions of Marketing but all the good ones embrace the notion of matchmaking – meeting the needs of the individual in order to satisfy organizational objectives.



So in marketing a charity one not only defines and presents the cause but also has to understand what is it in the individual that will make them respond to the case. It isn't enough to say "we do good work" we also have to have the idea "and here is why our good work should be important to you."

Marketing for board members not only involves marketing the cause but also board service. It is important to communicate what the board – the board not just the organization – is all about and what skills and attributes are being sought in new directors. As well it is important to help people see "what's in it for them." Again, in our sector there is no monetary reward from board service but the reward of service could include meeting new people and networking, the chance to use skills in a new setting, recognition, personal contentment of "helping a good cause" or some combination of these and other factors. Asking current board members why they are involved and what motivates them is an interesting and worthwhile exercise.

Effective marketing for directors will involve presenting the organization – "here's who we are, what we do, who we help and why you should care" as well as marketing board service – "here is the skill set we need on our board and why board service with us will be good for you."

A key factor in this marketing campaign is a thorough understanding of the skills and experience you lack at the board today and so want to recruit for tomorrow.

The great strength of the charitable sector is program skills but what about resource development (fundraising), planning, finance, technology, HR, legal – all skills demanded and present in any business setting? A small charity can't afford to have all these skills on staff so naturally turn to the board. I don't suggest for a moment forcing board volunteers on a "busman's holiday" – let's get a lawyer on the board for free legal work, an IT professional can fix my PC, ... – but business people with these skills can act as guides and offer a critical second set of eyes to a problem.

So understand what skills and perspectives you have, what you need and get creative on how you can bridge the gap.

A great place to look for new talent and diverse skills and backgrounds is the BoardMatch program. (Now I put on my marketing hat!). In BoardMatch individuals interested in board service go through an orientation and create a skills inventory. At the same time organizations identify the skills they are looking for in new board members. When there is common ground the two parties talk and – if it works for the individual and the organization – hopefully a new person joins the board.

For more information on the program visit [www.boardmatch.org](http://www.boardmatch.org)



There are many advantages to recruiting using the BoardMatch program. Organizations are forced to be thoughtful in advance – “here are the skills we need.” Individuals have already done some thinking on and have an identified interest in board service – they just don’t know where best to serve. With a thoughtful and fact based matching new board members have a much better sense of “what they are getting into” and usually make an impact much faster. And by definition a BoardMatch candidate is “new blood” – a thoughtful person interested in board service and with the skills and background the organization needs to succeed. Not someone “just like you” in terms of skills and experience but soon someone just like you in passion for the cause and making a real difference to the organization and our society through volunteer board service.

### **Sol Kasimer**

With almost 35 years service in the charitable sector Sol Kasimer is regarded as a knowledgeable leader in the sector.

Sol Kasimer is CEO of Altruvest Charitable Services – an organization dedicated to expanding the talent pool and enhancing governance skills of charitable sector boards and senior leaders fostering more effective charities and stronger Canadian communities. BoardMatch is the best known of Altruvest’s programs.

Operating in the Greater Toronto Area and now in partnership with Volunteer Vancouver almost 1,000 trained and enthusiastic people now serve on more than 500 charity boards through BoardMatch. ([www.boardmatch.org](http://www.boardmatch.org))

Sol is very active in the voluntary sector especially interested in collaboration between the voluntary, public, and private sectors. Currently, he is Co-Chair of the Capacity Joint Table for the Voluntary Sector Initiative, Director with the Public Policy Forum, was a founding member of the Voluntary Sector Roundtable, and active in several voluntary sector networks.

Sol Kasimer is the past Chief Executive Officer of YMCA Canada, a national body providing coordination and support to 63 Associations from coast to coast with operating budgets of \$400 million.

Sol has a Masters of Science in Human Development from Purdue University.