



The Media Planning Guide for Nonprofit Attractions

The 4 rules to follow when planning
your nonprofit attraction's next
marketing campaign.

June 2025

Created for:

Zoos
Aquariums
Gardens
Museums

Over the last 10 years of helping nonprofit attractions, we've seen that our most effective media plans have followed 4 simple rules.

The 4 rules to create a disciplined media mix for nonprofit attractions

- #1 The Bucket Rule
- #2 The 60-40 Rule
- #3 The 5% Rule
- #4 The Social Rule

Media is either Impactful or Opportunistic.

All media channels - from broadcast television to influencer marketing - will be placed in one of two buckets: Impactful or Opportunistic.

Opportunistic media channels are high-*quantity* ad placements.

Impactful media channels are high-*quality* ad placements.

	Opportunistic Media Channels	Impactful Media Channels
Targeting	Audience-first	Placement-first
Ad Environment	Small screens okay; typically one-to-one experience	Large; audio and/or visual only; typically a shared experience
Objective	High frequency	High reach
Why we invest	Reasonable chance the target can act on a purchasing decision	Elevates the brand, creates excitement about the attraction

#1 The Bucket Rule

Media channels by type

Opportunistic Channels	Impactful Channels
Paid Social Meta, TikTok, Pinterest, Snapchat	TV Broadcast, cable, connected TV
Paid Search	Radio Terrestrial, streaming
Digital Display	Outdoor
Digital Video YouTube, video on desktop and mobile	Influencer
Direct Mail	Print

Here we see the most popular media channels divided into either Opportunistic or Impactful.

This exercise is similar to the classic marketing funnel that details the consumer journey through awareness, interest, intent, etc.

Our approach is simpler. We look at media channels as either a brand elevator or a sales driver.

The key is to strike the right balance between the two.

Allocate 60% of the budget to Impactful and 40% to Opportunistic.

Each attraction is unique. Your target audience, ad budget, market, and organizational goals will lead you to select the mix of media channels that's right for your organization.

We've created The 60-40 Rule to ensure you don't rely too much on one *media type*.

We need the brand-building power of Impactful media channels like TV and radio.

At the same time - we need to sell tickets, promote our events, and increase annual memberships.

Opportunistic channels like ads on Facebook and Google Search are designed to do this.

Through our experience, we've found that best balance between these two factors is a 60-40 mix between brand and promotion.

By allocating 60% of your annual ad spend towards Impactful Channels you can ensure that your Opportunistic channels can be effective when running highly targeted campaigns.

#2 The 6O-4O Rule

When to break The 6O-4O Rule

Apply The 60-40 Rule to your annual ad spend. One-off campaigns and event promotions can rely heavier on Opportunistic channels to drive ticket sales.

Blockbuster Holiday Event Campaign

Let's say your attraction holds the area's "can't-miss" event of the year. This event is used to introduce the attraction to new audiences.

Allocate 80% of the campaign's budget to Impactful media to drive excitement and demand.

This means more Opportunistic channels should be used throughout the year to drive general admission tickets.

Wedding and Private Event Campaign

An 80% to 100% allocation of Opportunistic channels should be used if your attraction wants to sell private event packages.

Adhering to the 6O-4O Rule for your annual budget means your attraction has built excitement throughout the year to make this Opportunistic-focused campaign more effective.

Only invest in a media channel if you can allocate a minimum of 5% of the total budget to the channel.

Don't spread your budget too thin.

The most common mistake we see nonprofit attraction marketers make is not placing enough weight into a media channel.

The 5% Rule applies to channels and not tactics.

Correcting a plan that breaks the 5% Rule.

Note how this plan is spending less than 5% of its budget in several different channels.

We can instantly increase the effectiveness of the media mix by consolidating the number of channels.

Channel	% of Budget
TV	45%
Radio	21%
Outdoor	8%
Influencer	4%
Print	1%
Display	15%
Digital Video	2%
Paid Social	2%
Paid Search	2%

Invest a minimum of 10% of the budget in paid social video.

Our experience tells us that video ads on Instagram and TikTok are among the best-performing channels for nonprofit attractions.

Social video acts as a hybrid between an Impactful and Opportunistic channel. It builds excitement and helps drive ticket sales.

A common challenge for cultural attractions is maintaining a steady flow of video content to support effective advertising.

In this case, we recommend leveraging local influencers to create videos about their experience at your attraction and events. Then, use paid ad dollars to amplify the influencers content as an ad.

Putting it all together.

An example plan that follows the 4 rules

Here is an optimal media mix for a nonprofit attraction's annual budget.

Note how the budget is split 60-40 between Opportunistic and Impactful channels.

And, no channel is allocated less than 5% of the budget.

	Channel	% of Budget
Impactful	TV	20%
	Outdoor	20%
	Influencer	10%
	Radio	10%
Opportunistic	Digital Video	15%
	Paid Social	15%
	Display	5%
	Paid Search	5%

A word from the author

Thanks for reading our Media Planning Guide. Over the years, I've seen advertisers and agencies try to show off how sophisticated their media plans were by throwing the kitchen sink into the mix.

Unfortunately, the client ends up doing more work to execute a diluted plan that can't effectively impact their target.

I'm passionate about helping nonprofit attractions spend their investment effectively. Your community contributes to the marketing funds via tax dollars, admission, and donations. Spending these dollars wisely is a responsibility.

Although the media universe has become extremely complex, we don't have to overcomplicate everything.

I hope these rules can help bring discipline to how you craft your next media plan.

Jenny



Jenny Williams, Media Strategist at attend

We help nonprofit attractions drive attendance through paid media

Attend is a media planning and buying agency that serves zoos, aquariums, gardens, and museums.

We specialize in:

Influencer Marketing Campaigns

We develop and execute powerful influencer marketing campaigns to help attractions increase visitation with a younger, more diverse audience.

Google Ad Grants Management

Every nonprofit attraction should look to maximize their Google Ad Grant. We help attractions setup (or reestablish) their account with the goal to spend the entire allotment of advertising.

Marketing Mix Modeling

We help attractions understand how their advertising investments are impacting visitation. Our Marketing Mix Model is tailored to the unique challenges of a local, cultural attraction.

Media Planning and Buying

Using the approach laid out in this guide, we help nonprofit attractions invest their advertising dollars wisely. We offer one-off consultations, media strategy development, and act as the attraction's media agency of record.