

Books for Prisoners Marketing Strategy
and Communications Campaign

Books for Prisoners

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1 / Organizational Audit

1a / *Organization or Program Overview*

Founded in the early 1970s, Books to Prisoners (BTP) is a Seattle-based nonprofit that sends free books to incarcerated individuals across the country. Their mission is to “foster a love of reading behind bars, encourage the pursuit of knowledge and self-empowerment, and break the cycle of recidivism”. Sponsored by Seattle’s beloved Left Bank Books, BTP is one of the largest and oldest prison book projects in the US with three associate organizations in Washington and Oregon. BTP fulfills thousands of requests per month, relying on the work of dedicated volunteers and book donations from the community. Research shows that strengthening access to educational materials for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals often correlates to successful rehabilitation and reentry into society along with decreased recidivism (or reconviction) (Hall, 2021). From African American history books and sci-fi texts to foreign language educational materials and sketchbooks, BTP provides tools for learning to incarcerated individuals who seek them out—in turn, benefiting society as a whole.

1b / Organizational Audit

OTSW (Backward SWOT) Analysis

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More partnerships with organizations and social justice figures • Chance to get involved in global/nationwide dialogues about incarceration issues • More grant funding from public sources and private foundations • Chance to expand digitally and consider electronic reading options • A variety of local news outlets and publications to spread awareness of BTP and the importance of its work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising cost of packaging and mailing materials • Sociopolitical perspectives on incarceration could tarnish views of BTP's work • Stricter book bans and regulations within prisons • Higher competition for grants and funding • Changing reading habits and reduced interest from incarcerated folks
STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear, unambiguous mission that attracts people interested in the cause • Volunteer network with various ways to get involved • Org partnerships that lead to book/monetary donations and larger awareness • Sponsorship from Left Bank Books • Visible impact and feedback from incarcerated individuals • Decades of work and community support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-reliance on volunteers to provide labor • Over-reliance on partners to provide resources • Resource scarcity; BTP can only fulfill mission if books are available and can only give what they have available • Distribution challenges including logistical issues with mailing • Limited knowledge about BTP's work outside of Seattle area

1c / Audit Recommendations

1. Education and community engagement is a major, relatively untapped opportunity BTP. To increase awareness around the cause and keep people inform, BTP should **connect with various prison justice scholars and/or book influencers**. These connections can take the form of formal partnerships or can be more casual in

- nature. Among many other options, these connections can bring about broadcasted conversations, interviews, social media campaigns, or article publications. Scholars' expertise and research can help substantiate the organization's mission and advocate for policy changes. Similarly, book influencers have a significant following and influence in the literary community. Research shows that the top 5% of an organization's database, on average, has a reach 200 times larger than the organization's entire email list (SocialMediaToday.com, 2015). By collaborating with these public figures, BTP can tap into their audience and amplify their message, reaching a wider demographic. These partnerships would not only generate increased visibility for the cause but also establish credibility and legitimacy, strengthening the organization's position as a leader in access to books behind bars.
2. Develop a more cohesive "brand" identity. BTP's image is currently pretty disjointed across different platforms like the website and social media profiles. It's well-known that first impressions matter and many people consider a brand more capable or trustworthy if it has a strong presence (Kylander & Stone, 2012). If BTP **creates a more compelling brand identity that resonates with the mission**, people will be more likely to recognize the organization. This includes defining organizational messaging that emphasizes the transformative power of books behind bars, and ensuring consistency across all marketing materials.
 3. **Host/attend more in-person fundraising and informational events.** There are numerous flea markets, outdoor fairs, and other special events in the greater Seattle area—especially in the warmer months. BTP should regularly set up a stall at these events and strengthen its peer-to-peer marketing efforts and position in the community (Miller, 2021). The organization can sell merch, advocate for relevant policies, spread the word about the mission, and request donations. This provides an interactive platform to engage with potential donors, volunteers, and supporters,

fostering personal connections and inspiring them to take action. Even more, being present at local events offers the chance to network with other vendors, local businesses, and community members, potentially leading to valuable partnerships, sponsorships, or collaborations. Achieving this may necessitate developing a more robust volunteer structure and program that includes signing up for shifts and additional trainings. BTP will need to identify recurring and special events around the city and likely create a master calendar where volunteers can sign up to assist.

2 / Community Analysis

2a / Community Segments

Since a major theme in our marketing goals is to garner more support and spread awareness about BTP, a very important audience segment is **(1) people who hang out in spaces—whether physical or virtual—or actively engage in dialogue surrounding criminal justice reform and the prison-industrial complex.** These people are likely to have values that align with the work that we do. Therefore, it should not be difficult to get them to support our mission. Whether they become financial donors, book donors, volunteers, or simply boost our content and organization, they will expand our supportive base. In the context of Hall's Stages of Change table, these people already recognize a problem (Hall, 2021, p. 67-68). Although individuals within this segment may be at different points of this realization/contemplation/engagement matrix, they will likely feel motivated to contribute to the cause because of their knowledge and beliefs around incarceration in the US.

Another audience segment would be **(2) people with personal proximity to incarceration.** This could include formerly incarcerated individuals, their family members, friends, or others who have been close to the prison system in that sense. Some of these

people may have been directly impacted by BTP's work. This is an important group to prioritize given that BTP's services are intended to empower and humanize incarcerated people. To avoid using cultural stereotypes, BTP should work closely with someone impacted by the prison system on how best to tactfully reach and appeal to these individuals (Hall, 2021, p. 71). It is important to remember that no two experiences are the same and formerly (and currently) incarcerated people may have different opinions on how BTP can strengthen relations with this community. This can also help reduce the threat we identified of incarcerated people feeling less interested in requesting reading materials from BTP.

Lastly, BTP should **(3) utilize their existing network of volunteers, email subscribers, and past donors to “friendraise”**. It takes ample time and effort to develop trust with people who are not familiar with your organization. However, when people are introduced to the organization through a friend or someone they trust, they are likely to engage. In other words, BTP can get their network of volunteers and other established supporters to do the work for them. This is a more resource-efficient method of gathering additional supporters; word-of-mouth can be a really powerful tool. Since many people befriend and associate with people who share common values, there is a good chance that BTP will appeal to these new folks.

2b / Persona Creation



Name

Pat the Prison Abolitionist

Age

25 to 34 years

Highest Level of Education

Bachelor's degree

Industry

Multimedia journalism

Relevant Demographics

- Lives in Seattle, WA
- \$55-65k annual income; hybrid worker
- No kids; partnered
- Has formerly incarcerated sibling
- Not much expendable income to donate
- Signs/shares petitions, consistent volunteer
- Registered Democrat, often votes Independent
- Enjoys cooking and hiking

Goals & Values

- Hopes to find joy and peace with friends and family, travel the world, eat diverse foods, attend social/cultural events
- Values sustainable living, mental health, mutual aid, anti-racism/colonialism, universal healthcare, independent creators
- Prioritizes loved ones and rest
- Strong moral compass; very vocal

Objections & Barriers

- "No, I can't because I need to take time for myself and avoid burnout"
- "No, I can't because I'll be out of town"
- "No, I can't because I have another commitment"
- Worries about local legislation and restrictions on human rights
- Worries about the safety and well-being of their loved ones

Sources of Information

- Preferred social/news platforms: Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, The Stranger, Democracy Now!, NPR
- Follows: activists, small biz owners, think tanks, friends, family, comedy accounts, podcasters, cooking/foody accounts
- Reads primarily news articles and nonfiction from second-hand bookstores or on their kindle
- Spends time at local breweries, cafes, farmers/flea markets, art shows, dog parks

Journey With Our Organization

- Involved in journalism; aware of Banned Books Week/discourse
- Learned about BTP through an article in the Stranger a couple years ago

2c / Leadership Reflection

Deepening my understanding of equity and inclusivity as they pertain to marketing and storytelling has definitely influenced my approach to this audit and analysis. Since BTP exists to serve incarcerated people—a group that is often homogenized and automatically denigrated—it is important that the organization treats and portrays imprisoned folks in a way that acknowledges their multitudes. In Mach Media's article about inclusive buyer personas, they touch on the need to focus on humanity. Organizations must make a concerted effort to really understand their served communities and that necessitates engaging with those people on a personal level. BTP must make *them* feel part of the organization's story as opposed to feeling tokenized. BTP needs to ensure that they are resonating with the people they serve. In general, organizations must divorce themselves from one-dimensional depictions of their served communities. When organizations see only one way of being, they are caricaturizing the people they are meant to uplift. For BTP, inclusivity and equity involves empowering incarcerated folks to share their own stories as opposed to the organization crafting what they think potential supporters will want to hear. By amplifying incarcerated voices and tailoring BTP's services and messaging to make a positive difference in the lives of prisoners, BTP can also transform societal perception of criminal justice and the prison-industrial complex. Overall, being deliberate in creating inclusive audience segments allows nonprofits to create more meaningful and impactful connections with their target community, ultimately leading to more inclusive and effective program outcomes.

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