

Marketing & Communication Strategies for Sport & Recreation Organisations

For Sport and Recreation organisations to market themselves effectively it is vital that organisations develop communication strategies that can assist them in achieving their targets. Through implementing effective communication strategies organisations may aim to increase membership, improve retention of existing members, attract sponsors or raise the profile of the organisations activities through the media.

Key elements of an effective marketing/communication plan should include:

Market Research – In order to effectively communicate with your stakeholders you must understand who they are. Conducting market research allows you to find out more about the perceptions and preferences of your current and potential target audience, including members, sponsors, participants and industry stakeholders.

Market research should help determine the type of message and communication method best suited for your target audience. Types of market research methods include:

- surveys
- questionnaires
- focus groups
- telephone
- face-to-face interviews

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis – A SWOT analysis assists your organisation in identifying and evaluating all its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and develop strategies to target strengths and opportunities, and limit the impact of weaknesses and threats to the organisation.

Marketing Objectives – Based on the outcomes of market research and your SWOT analysis, your organisation should develop a strategy that includes details of specific marketing objectives required to achieve the organisations objectives. These objectives should be very specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely, for example, To increase sponsorship revenue by 10% by March 2013.

Further information

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Who is your audience? – The target audience for each marketing objective should be clearly identified to ensure effective outcomes are achieved.

What should your message be? – A message can be developed that reflects the vision and purpose of your organisation and the activity being undertaken. Specific messages can be used to appeal to a particular target audience, specific messages should be developed to maximise effectiveness of the communication.

How will you communicate? – Communication methods available to Sport and Recreation organisations are diverse and varied. There are a range of communication options available to promote your brand and services. Your organisation should select the option that will maximise exposure to your target audience, while remaining within budget constraints.

Develop a budget – Develop a realistic budget to allocate towards implementing your communication strategy. Your budget should be regularly monitored to ensure costs remain within budget guidelines.

Allocate Responsibilities – Identify who will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the communications strategy, and ensure those responsible have the resources required to successfully achieve the targets of the strategy.

Methods of Communication

There are many ways your organisation can market your strategy. You should choose the most effective method possible to maximise returns, and use as many options as your budget allows to effectively achieve your communications objectives. Options include:

- **Face-to-face** – Potentially the best way to communicate, as there is immediate feedback to the communicator on how successfully they are getting the messages across. The face to face exchange of information maximises the chances of clear communication.
- **E-Newsletters** - A weekly or monthly email update is great if you have a database of email addresses to communicate with. E-Newsletters also provide you with an opportunity to provide current or potential sponsors a platform to advertise their product or service.
- **Website** - An essential communication tool for most audiences. This is generally the most used resource for communicating to your current and future audiences. It is essential you keep it up to date.
- **Social media** - Establishing a Twitter feed or Facebook page for your organisation can be an easy and effective way of getting your message across to a large online audience. Ensure your messages are up to date and to the point.

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- **Email** – An inexpensive, fast, and efficient tool for marketing communications. The precise and personal nature of this communication method is effective. An up to date database of email addresses must be maintained for this communication method to be successful.
- **SMS** - A fast and effective way to inform members of events and opportunities. There are many online systems available to organisations which allow a high volume of messages to be sent at low cost.
- **Presentations, Seminars and Workshops** – Creates face-to-face interaction with multiple stakeholders, can result in more efficient communication than one on one interaction. Effective planning must be undertaken to ensure the audience does not become disengaged and leave the session with the appropriate messages.
- **Publications** - Printed leaflets, flyers or brochures can be excellent forms of communication. When designing publications, ensure the language style, lay-out, and graphic design will appeal to, and be easily understood by, the target audience. A published annual report also provides organisations with an opportunity to promote the effectiveness of a marketing or communications plan.
- **Mail Out** – Direct mail-outs allow you to make an interesting offer directly to a target audience, and as such can result in positive return for effort. An up to date database of postal addresses is vital if this method of communication is to be successful.
- **Media** - Media, whether electronic, print or television can be effective in reaching a particular target audience. When creating media exposure ensure that the content is relevant to the message that you are communicating and that the organisation is displayed in a positive manner. Effective media exposure of the organisation is an effective way to service existing sponsors and can become an attractive opportunity for potential sponsors.
- **Advertising** – Advertising allows organisations to control the message delivered at a cost. You can control the messages layout, position and timing and create maximum exposure. Advertising is not confined to print media; it can also include electronic, radio or television. It is vital that the most effective advertising medium is chosen to reach the intended target audience to ensure there is a positive return from the investment in advertising.
- **Events** – Events and launches that portray the organisation in a positive light, where the media and/or target audience are invited to attend, can be an effective communication method. Maximising attendance is critical to the success of this communication method, as such you must decide upon a venue, time of day, day of the week, and time of year to suit your target group.
- **Merchandise** – The best promotional items/merchandise are those that will be displayed or used repeatedly as they continue to circulate a message. Clothing, pens and fridge magnets are examples of items that can be effective promotional items.

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Monitor and Review - Once a communications strategy has been developed, it is important that it is continually monitored to assess whether the strategy has been effective and achieved its intended outcomes. This could be as simple as asking members if they have seen the article in the local paper or received the e-newsletter. Monitoring, the number of visits to your website and the pages most visited can provide an indication of the effectiveness of a communications strategy.

An effective communications plan constantly changes according to the needs of your organisation and the messages you need to communicate and the effectiveness of the channels you use to communicate your messages.

By constantly reviewing and updating your communications plan, you can learn new ways of communicating with your audiences resulting in future success for your organisation.

EXAMPLE OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



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