

VicSport – Guide to Marketing & Communication Strategies

To increase your membership and market your sport organisation properly, it is imperative you develop an appropriate marketing and communication strategy to help reach your objectives, whether they be increasing your membership, securing a sponsor, or attracting some media coverage.

The key components of a marketing/communication strategy are:

- **Market Research** – helps you to find out more about the perceptions and preferences of your potential target audience, including members, sponsors, participants and influential organisations.

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

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

- **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis** – helps your organisation identify and list all its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and develop a strategy to target strengths and opportunities, limit the impact of weaknesses, and negate threats.
- **Detail 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 your overall aims. These objectives can be very specific, for example increase membership levels by 15% during pre-season recruitment drive.
- **Identify target audiences** – the target audience for each marketing objective should be clearly identified to ensure maximal returns for effort.
- **Developing general and specific messages** – a general message that reflects the vision of the strategy, and specific messages that will appeal to each of the target audiences, should be developed to maximise impact.
- **Select your method of communication** – there are a range of options available to promote your message, such as newsletters, media promotions or direct selling. Your organisation should select the option that will maximise exposure to your target audience, whilst keeping costs within your marketing budget.

- **Develop a budget** – develop a realistic budget to determine the costs of 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 each area of the strategy, and ensure those responsible have the resources required to successfully achieve their targeted aims. Note that in a volunteer run organisation, the time taken to implement strategies may take longer than in those organisations who have paid staff who are able to dedicate more time to the task. This should be taken into account when developing timelines, and your strategy overall.

Methods of Communication

There are many ways your organisation can market your strategy. You should choose the most effective methods 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 it allows all parties to use their full set of senses. There is immediate feedback to the communicator on how successfully they are getting the messages across – from the smile or nod of the head, to the frown or look of disinterest on the face. In addition, questions and exchange of information maximise the chance of clear communication.
- **Presentations, Seminars and Workshops** – allows for face-to-face interaction with multiple people at the same time. This makes it more time efficient than one-on-one contact, whilst maintaining the many positives of the one-on-one meeting. Successful presenting does require good presentation and public speaking skills to ensure the audience does not become distracted, so choose presenters wisely.
- **Publications** - printed leaflets, flyers or brochures are excellent, relatively low cost 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. Publications will only be read in the first place if they are available to the reader, and the look attracts the attention of the targeted reader. Brochures sitting in boxes in the office storeroom, or brochures that are difficult to read, will not make a significant contribution to your marketing strategy.
- **Direct Mail** – direct mail-outs allow you to make an appealing offer directly to your target audience, and as such can attract quite positive returns for effort. The key difficulty with direct mail is locating mailing addresses without falling foul of privacy requirements. Keeping an up-to-date database of persons interested in your organisation or activity will be of assistance.
- **Email** – is an inexpensive, fast, and efficient medium for marketing communications. The precise targeting available through this medium, plus the personal nature of it, make it a powerful tool. Due to the ever-increasing amount of “Spam” or junk circulating, there are requirements for opt-outs and unsubscribe clauses to be included in some electronic mail, so be sure to include appropriate clauses as required under privacy laws.

- **Editorial in the media** - media, especially the mainstream mass media, can be a very effective communication option if the editorial is well placed to reach the right target audiences. Credibility is a key to getting your information into the media. Make sure your media releases, op-ed pieces, or other forms of media targeted information, are well written, interesting and relevant. Credibility is also established by speaking only when you have something worth saying, so choose quality over quantity.
- **Advertorial** – is a mixture of editorial and advertising, whereby you pay for advertising space which allows you to run some of your own editorial, often unedited. Advertorial is usually available in special interest media and the non-mainstream mass media.
- **Advertising** – you pay to control your message, its layout, position and timing of promotion. Advertising is not limited to print media, so think laterally of ways you can access your target audience to ensure you are getting impact for your dollars, such as billboard advertising or signage at sport events for example.
- **Video** – professionally written, produced, and directed videos can be an effective marketing tool with a lot of advantages, and can be used effectively in conjunction with other forms of communication such as presentations and seminars.
- **Telemarketing** – can be a very cost-effective form of marketing communication if your organisation can afford the initial outlay of money to engage the services of skilled telephone people. With the right list of targets to be called, telemarketing can be much more effective than the relatively expensive and “shot-gun” style of the mass media, which reaches high numbers of people, but possibly not those you are necessarily targeting.
- **Web-sites** – web based communication provides a highly accessible marketing option. Interestingly, in many cases more traditional marketing communications options are used to create awareness of the existence of a web-site. Web based communication can be particularly effective if your organisation regularly uses it to distribute information to members.
- **Newsletters** – in printed or electronic form, newsletters can be a highly effective form of communicating with a target audience. Standard of writing and content are two key elements of successful newsletters, so keep them interesting, succinct and relevant.
- **Events** – launches and other kinds of events, where the media and/or target audience are invited to attend, can be an effective communication tool. Maximising attendance is critical so choose a venue, time of day, day of the week, and time of year to suit your target group.
- **Posters** – can be used effectively to display a message where the audience might pass. Posters are most effective if the design is uncluttered and the message is conveyed simply and succinctly.
- **Promotional items/Merchandise** – the best promotional items/merchandise are those that will be displayed or used time and again so they continue to circulate a message. Everything from t-shirts to golf balls, fridge magnets, stickers and pens, have been used as promotional items, in many cases very effectively. The key to a promotional item is to make it appealing to the customer. Remember that sometimes, the more expensive items will give greater long-term benefits as they are used repeatedly.

Branding

A brand is more than just a name and a logo. The brand is a reflection of your organisation or product, and, if it is done well, it should immediately elicit from the viewer the kinds of positive ethics and values you aim to portray.

Establishing a brand, and belief in a brand, is something that happens over time. It is not the result of developing a flashy new logo, but rather is the result of an ongoing effort to communicate a message, and to consistently deliver to the promise of that message over time.

Good branding creates confidence in the organisation or product, and successfully distinguishes the organisation or product from competitors. If your organisation is considering a large scale marketing strategy, a comprehensive assessment of your brand, and what it means to your target audience, should be included as part of that strategy.



As the brands above show, successful branding is all about what the 'brand' means to the individual. What does your brand mean to your stakeholders?

Further information:

The Western Australian Department of Sport & Recreation has developed a "Marketing Your Club" document to assist sport groups develop their marketing plans. To view this document visit the VicSport website at www.vicsport.asn.au

VicSport would like to thank Andrews Marketing Group for their assistance in developing this information. If you would like to know more about marketing and branding contact Andrews Marketing Group on (03) 9654 4480