

Conwy Voluntary Services Council

Your local county voluntary council

10. Promotion and marketing

10.2 Creating effective marketing and publicity materials



What are you marketing?

Before you outline your marketing objectives you must identify your organisation's product, service, or benefit. Ask what your project or organisation is about:

- What do you do?
- What is your special quality (your unique selling point)?
- How does your offering differ from your competitors or similar organisations?
- How do you want to be perceived?

Who are you trying to reach?

Try to find out as much information about your target audiences as possible: their age group, social class, interests, lifestyle and region.

Potential target audiences are:

- service users or beneficiaries
- volunteers
- individual donors and funders
- families and friends of the beneficiaries

What are your marketing objectives?

These need to be measurable and timed, e.g. a 10 per cent increase in users or volunteers over six months. However, you also need to be realistic about what you can achieve.

It is a good idea to create your marketing objectives in a yearly plan. Since you are marketing to a number of people, you are going to need a separate objective for each audience. The five W's will help you define how you are going to do it, and you should always check them when considering any form of communication:

- Why?
- What?
- Who?
- Where?
- When?

Added together, these five points = How.

What methods will you use?

What methods are you going to use to market your organisation or project? These include:

- Direct mail - post, door-drop.
- Face-to-face - e.g. door-to-door selling.
- Telemarketing.
- Advertising.
- Website.
- Events and promotions.
- Sponsorship/partnership.

Planning and timing are essential. Plan which days, weeks or months are best to approach each audience.

How do you want to come across?

How you are perceived is essential to your organisation's image.

- Establish your key messages - a maximum of three.
- Outline why you are unique.
- Summarise this into a word statement. Tesco has 'every little helps', Fairbridge has 'helping inner-city youth', the Media Trust has 'helping charities communicate'.
- Customise the tone and style of your literature to each audience. One tone will not be suitable for all audiences.
- Invest time and effort in your literature. It is crucial to have accurate and accessible communications - befriend or invest in a copywriter if you are uncertain about writing clear, simple copy.
- Memorable names and logos are an advantage - if your organisation's name or logo is difficult to use, resize or remember, then perhaps it is worth reviewing or redesigning it.

What is a brand?

'Any visible sign or device used by a business enterprise to identify its goods and distinguish them from those made or carried by others' - Encyclopaedia Britannica.

- Your brand is the image which represents your organisation and differentiates it from other charities.
- A brand should make your charity's message clear to supporters and potential backers.

In a society fixated with image, branding is big business. A fittingly-conceived and well-executed brand is essential to an organisation's survival.

Creating a successful brand

A brand is more than just a logo or an image. It provides a first impression of your organisation and shapes the way in which the public perceives your work. The charities and voluntary organisations whose brands are most successful are those that successfully emulate and are comparable to corporate packages. A clearly articulated brand should thus present to backers an unambiguous image of your organisation's competency and professionalism. Developing and establishing a strong brand, moreover, will increase the likelihood that potential backers will choose to support your organisation over a lesser known and less well-marketed charity.

- A brand should clearly express your charity's vision and values.
- Ensure that the brand appeals to your target audience.
- A recognised good brand is a result of consistent messages, steadfast marketing efforts, good experiences and positively reinforced images emanating from your organisation over time.
- Potential donors will probably interact with your brand before they meet the human face of your organisation. A brand should make explicit your charity's needs and objectives while immediately conveying to backers what it is you desire from them. It should also inform those who might benefit from your services exactly what your organisation offers.

- A brand must permeate internal and external communications. Make sure that the language and attitude of your staff reflects the charity's brand and objectives. Your brand should also feature on all materials issued by the organisation.
- Be prepared to reassess and if necessary restate your brand.

Your organisation and its brand

Before presenting your brand to the market ensure that the organisation can live up to its promises. Delivering on your assurances will encourage people to trust your organisation. Failure to live up to expectations, on the other hand, could do irreparable damage to your organisation's reputation and support. You should, therefore, take steps to ensure that your organisation's brand is consistent with your goals.

- Be clear about what your organisation represents and what you hope to achieve.
- Talk to your stakeholders and investigate whether their expectations are in line with what your organisation is doing.
- Investigate how you compare with your competitors.
- Look at who supports your brand and why.
- Ask what it is that beneficiaries gain from your service.

Why rebrand?

If you decide to rebrand, be sure of what the process entails and of the benefits you envisage your organisation will accrue.

- Revamping your brand can reinvigorate the organisation, expose it to new markets and increase financial contributions to your charity.
- The image of a long-standing organisation might appear tired and outmoded. Distinctive images and styles are closely associated with the era of their conception thus a timely repositioning has the potential to rejuvenate your organisation's image.
- Certain words or images might have a negative impact upon the success and marketability of your organisation. Adopting a brand that is consumer friendly and which encapsulates your message can significantly transform your organisation's performance and appeal.

The costs

The budgets of most organisations will not stretch to covering the costs of a full-scale, professional branding exercise. Options do exist, however, for your organisation to develop a good brand.

- Investigate which businesses are willing to offer their services on a pro-bono basis.
- Concentrate on presenting a strong image in your defined market. Be aware of how global, media-led brands perform, and where possible seek to emulate their success.

Potential pitfalls of slick branding

Good branding can make a significant difference to the financial health and public awareness of your organisation.

Nevertheless, some problems may arise. Charges of extravagance, for example, could seriously undermine your brand's value if a donor disputes the value of paying the costs of a branding exercise with funds they believe would better be spent on fulfilling your organisation's brief.

- Be careful to ensure that your organisation justifies its expenditure.
- If you are convinced that a wholesale revamp of your brand will enhance your organisation's performance, then regard the project as an investment.
- Present evidence of likely advantages to your organisation and its backers in defence of your proposal.

Ensuring the continued success of your brand

Measure the performance and perceptions of your brand through brand valuation surveys.

- Gauge the responsiveness of existing, new and potential donors.
- Assess the reactions of your employees and beneficiaries.
- Ensure maximum impact for your organisation's brand by monitoring and responding to your audience's changing needs.

Remember that branding and advertising, especially when they are well-executed, stay in a person's mind. Be consistent and persistent in your publicity and in the messages you project.

Evaluating your efforts

It is important to measure your success, especially for future funding or building awareness. Everyone likes facts and figures - they prove that your organisation is or is not making a difference. In addition to measuring numbers you can:

- Organise focus groups with your different audiences. Ask what they think of you, whether they are satisfied with how you communicate to them and how it can be improved.
- Collect feedback, whether this is by email from your website or by a survey in an annual piece of literature.

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Produced by WCVA, County Voluntary Councils and Volunteer Centres.
Last Updated: 10/04/2007



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