Marketing and promoting your organisation

The terms

Marketing is the action or business of promoting and selling products or services
The purpose of promotion in the marketing function is to convey to clients/consumers the features of the product or service and how it will meet their needs.
Promotion is persuasive communication it’s necessary as clients/consumers have to select products and services from a wide range of competing products and services.

What does promotion mean for a community organisation?

Usually marketing and promotion is not high on the list of priorities for a community organisation. Marketing and promotion require allocations of time, money and resources. When organisations feel 'stretched' they often don’t associate these with their core business.

Many non-government organisations feel that they are stretched and hesitate to publicise their services for fear of creating a greater demand as they already have waiting lists and don’t want to disappoint clients. This is a real issue but if marketing and promotions are included in the organisations broad planning (strategic and/or business) then solutions will have been discussed.

Why promote your organisation

The usual reasons non-government organisations have for promoting their organisation, particular service or programs, include: increasing visibility in the community; looking for volunteers; increasing membership; launching new projects or services; increasing connections with stakeholders; attracting sponsors or raising their profile to attract more clients.

There is now another reason for non-government organisations to consider how marketing and promotions are linked to their core business. It is that they are increasingly operating in a highly competitive environment. There is a great deal of competition for limited government funding and corporate sponsorship.

Another factor for organisations rethinking their marketing and promotions is the introduction of Consumer Directed Care (CDC) and especially the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

This has huge implications for the non-government sector as it will mean significant changes – (i) services previously delivered by non-government organisations with government funding will
now be from a user pay system; (ii) Organisations will move from relying on grants to a client and market focus and (iii) There will also be competition from the private sector.

Marketing and promotion can help your organisation by getting information out to the people who need the services your organisation provides; it can assist with fundraising; improve referral processes; assist with campaigns and improve your competitive advantage.

The basic questions

When you do your promotion planning (as part of your strategic planning) - the basic questions to ask are:

- Who do we want to communicate with?
- Why do we want to communicate with them?
- What do we want to communicate with them about?
- What is the best way to communicate with them?
- How much will this strategy cost? What is our budget for this?
- How will we know if we have been successful?

Regardless of the size of the organisation the process is the same.

Where to start: Step-by-step elements of a promotion plan

1. **Who are we?**
   History/ what do we stand for/ who do we serve/ do we meet our aims and objectives/ identity/ etc. This emerges from your organisation’s strategic planning. It is the document that informs and guides your promotion work, including your communication and promotional activities plans.

2. **How are we seen?**
   What’s our profile? How well known are we? How do people see the work we do? How do we compete with other organisations? You will draw some of this information out by doing a SWOT analysis and an environmental scan.

3. **What are our organisational goals and objectives?**
   This also emerges from your strategic plan. Your strategic plan comes first and promotion plan second. It is designed to complement and help your organisation achieve its aims and objectives. Every communication or promotional activity must have as its goal to strengthen your organisation’s aims and objectives.
4. What do we want to achieve through our promotion plan?
Why do we need a promotion plan? What do we want to achieve through it? How will this help to achieve our organisation’s aims and objectives? How will we measure whether we have been successful? Set measurable goals.

5. Who do we want to communicate with and why?
Who are our different target audiences? Do we want to prioritise just one? What is our reason for communicating with each one of them? What do we want the people we aim to reach to know, think, feel or do as a result of our communication or promotion activity? How will we measure our success?

6. What are our key messages for our different target groups?
Who are our different target groups/audiences? Do we want to prioritise just one? What is our reason for communicating with each one of them? What do we want the people we aim to reach to know, think, feel or do as a result of our communication or promotion activity? How will we measure our success?

7. What is the best way to communicate with each target group?
Now you are ready to come up with strategies for communicating with each group that you have identified in Step 5. Remind yourselves what you want to achieve, and then ask - how this will best be achieved. Develop your different strategies as part of your promotion plan, e.g. get more stories into media, have an event etc.

8. Get the plan into action
What will it take to implement your promotion plan? What will each strategy cost in time and resources? Come up with mini-budgets for each strategy and then an overall budget. Do we have the money and resources to do it? If no, rework plans. Draw up a schedule/timelines.

9. Implementing our plan
Decide how you will implement your plan. Write down who is responsible for what and by when and who is responsible overall.

10. Monitoring and evaluation
Check that all tasks get done. Monitor progress with plans. Evaluate afterwards in relation to measurable goals set out in Step 4. You will then be ready to develop your next promotion plan for the year or two, based on your learnings from this plan overall.

Source: CIVICUS.org
Methods of marketing and promotion

Organisation identity - Developing and maintaining a visible and credible identity through marketing will increase local support for your organisation. The identity should capture your mission/ vision, purpose, values, brand/ logo/ look and feel.

Your website - is a part of your communication strategy. It is one of the most important sources of information on your organisation and it supplies information to a number of audiences – current clients, people looking for services, volunteers, funding bod and possible sponsors. Your website needs to: be legible (readability is more important than looks); have a concise, clear description of your mission or purpose; have information on your programs and services; have contact information phone and email; if you produce newsletters have them available; donations; testimonials and lastly the website needs to be kept fresh (e.g. How long goes by with no new content? How long since you up-dated your ‘About Us’ page?)

Media

Press releases - should be brief and well written. The headline is key - gripping, make sure it sounds like news not an advertisement. For more information Tool: Media release

Newspapers - offer to have staff with expert knowledge write a feature article; write letters to the Editor

Community newspapers are often looking for content which is relevant and personal for their readers – usually small so will appreciate well written articles with photos

Community radio - one of the best ways to reach specific groups e.g. language and cultural groups; offer to have staff interviewed on topics and/or answer listeners questions

Radio – it’s an effective medium – commercial and non-commercial often promote local events and activities. Local radio may use local people to discuss a national issue of homelessness (e.g. your organisations youth worker interviewed on the impact of youth homelessness in your town)

Community Service Announcements (CSA’s) - radio or television. CSA’s are an affordable and easy method to reach large numbers of people (e.g. you can record a public service message and email it to the appropriate stations. It could be a 15 – 30 message about the need to check on isolated seniors in the community brought to you by the Local Neighbourhood Centre.)

Community newspapers - look at the demographic groups these papers target and see if they are appropriate audiences for your organisation. If so, include them in your media release list; possibly provide them with articles and definitely invite them to cover any events (if they can’t attend send them an article covering it and some photos)

Television - often the hardest medium to crack. Organisations in regional areas can build relationships with the nearest networks news and current affairs staff. Try and become known as a source for a range of topics (e.g. youth, aged care)

Social media - provides organisations with an accessible and affordable opportunities to extend their brand and offer another form of personalised contact with the organisation. There are some challenges and some risks which the organisation should consider before utilising it.
Free advertising - posters or brochures at supermarkets, Centrelink, Department of Housing, medical clinics, schools, TAFE or via other organisations with similar demographics.

Relationships

There is enormous value in personal contact and this will help develop new relationships, strengthen existing relationships and build trust.

1. Networking - highly beneficial and cost efficient way to get the word out about your organisation’s programs/service or specific activities. Work with similar organisations (or those delivering similar services to provide and exchange information to customers, including displaying brochures etc.)

2. Testimonials - the real life impact of your organisation; highly valuable and can be used on websites, in newsletters or brochures. Audiences like a personal story of how someone's life has benefited from a service more than a description of the service.

3. Collaboration - establish marketing alliances/collaborations – formal and informal – to keep costs down and spread the message.

4. Keep in touch marketing - e.g. sending personalised messages to new clients or to new volunteers

Sponsorships - the values of your organisation will influence which sponsors will be an appropriate ‘fit’. There are large corporate organisations that have processes for organisations seeking funds (including banks and large supermarket chains). There are also philanthropic sources of funds; awards and grants

Talks/speaking opportunities – often clubs or groups are looking for interesting speakers – your it provides the audience with the topic information but also a chance for exposing the audience to the organisation

Public events - the local festival or fete, special celebrations such as Seniors Week, NAIDOC Week, Youth Week, Harmony Day – whichever events are appropriate for your organisation. Your annual general meeting is good opportunity to promote the organisation

Useful links

- A publicity guide How to promote your community relations project
- A document that explains the impact – positive value, challenges and risks of Social media and not-for-profits