

THINK IT! WRITE IT! DO IT!  
MARKETING PLAN IS FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

by

Jodi L. Rudick

Would you hike into uncharted territory without a map or a compass? Would an architect attempt to build a house without a blueprint? Why, then, do so many organizations, public and private, try to operate without a well thought-out, written marketing plan?

Marketing plans are not just for profit motivated companies. They are crucial tools for any organization that wants to move forward at a calculated, manageable pace. If you feel like your park and recreation department is on a never ending treadmill or that you are constantly battling figurative fires, chances are that you need to create or reexamine your marketing strategy.

**Think it! Write it! Do it!** There are three integrated phases to developing a marketing plan. First, you must think through your department's goals and objectives.. Evaluate your strengths and weaknesses. This process can be formal or informal. It could happen in a workshop setting, through questionnaires, at regular staff meetings or at lunch. It works best when all levels of staff are allowed and encouraged to brainstorm, question and participate. Too often plans are created only by upper management which does not create sense of ownership for front-line employees who are often responsible for carrying out the actions.

Not only should your department at large have a marketing plan, but each division should develop one as well. Some organizations encourage every person on their staff to create an individual plan which clarifies priorities, expectations and measures success.

**WRITE IT!** The second phase involves documentation. In order for your department or division to commit to a plan it must be transformed from abstract thoughts and goals into a written document. Too often marketing plans are in someone's head. "We talked about it at lunch once," or "Well, at the beginning of the year the managers set some goals. What did we do with those, anyway?" Your plan doesn't need a fancy format or hundreds of pages. It is simply the answers to the marketing *who, what, why, where, when and how*. Your plan must answer the following:

- 1. What is the department mission?** What services or products do we provide?
- 2. Why invest in marketing?** What are we trying to accomplish as a result of our marketing efforts? Be as specific as possible to insure that your objectives are obtainable. Some common park and recreation objectives are to:
  - Bring in more new "customers"
  - Increase usage or repeat business from current "customers"
  - Develop more revenue generating "products" (i.e. programs, events, facilities, services)
  - Create greater awareness about our products
  - Gain support from the community at large for our products

**3. Who are you trying to reach?** Determine your target audience. Don't try to be all things to all people. Your marketing efforts will have a greater return on investment when you aim for a specific and narrow target.

**4. How will you to motivate your chosen target to action?** What will you say or depict to encourage your chosen target customer to try your product, service, program, class, facility, etc.?" Create your message as if you were talking to a specific person. Focus on how it is that you will solve his problems, make his life happier, less stressful, etc.

**5. Where will your chosen target customer see or hear your message?** What media will you use to carry your message to your target? Will they see it on a billboard, in a newspaper ad, at a trade show or in their mail? Will they hear it on the radio, at a chamber or commerce function or from a friend or neighbor? Choose the media that will reach *your chosen target audience* with the least amount of waste.

**6. When will you begin your marketing plan?** What you waiting for? Marketing timelines always begin NOW!

**DO IT!** No matter how great your plans, creative your ideas, innovative your strategies; they are worthless until implemented. Plans don't lead to results. Actions do! When writing your plan break your large marketing goals into smaller, realistic action steps. Focus on short term results rather than long term

dreams. What would you like to see happen in the next year, six months or 90 days. It may be admirable to want 100% community awareness of your after school teen club, but more reasonable to focus one school and build on success in subsequent plans.

In government, as in business, change sometimes comes about slowly and painfully. Your marketing plan will act as your blueprint as you turn your department into a more innovative, profitable, and customer driven department.

*Jodi Rudick, President, ADvisors Marketing Group is a national speaker, trainer and marketing consultant. She has developed marketing and customer service programs for many park and recreation departments as well as the private sector. She is based in Southern California and can be reached at (760)809-3231.*