



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

by
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Could you imagine trying to build a brand new library without a blueprint? Picture the confusion, chaos, waste and disaster that would erupt from the lack of a well-designed, concrete plan. Why, then, do so many library systems, large and small, operate their facilities, programs, clubs and events without a strategic written marketing plan?

Marketing plans are not just for profit-motivated companies. They are crucial tools for any organization or agency, including libraries, which want to effectively move forward and attract new customers, donors, sponsors, readers, volunteers, patrons or cardholders at a calculated, manageable pace. Because the world of marketing communications reflects changing demographics, psychographics, trends, technology and media; it's also critical, to not only create a marketing plan, but to regularly update the marketing strategy you may currently have.

Think it! Write it! Do it! There are three integrated phases to developing a marketing plan. First, you must think through your department's mission, goals, objectives and current brand or public image. Inventory current assets and evaluate your strengths and weaknesses. This process can be formal or informal. It could happen in a workshop setting (like the one being offered by NELINET on May 19), 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

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consultants or 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 overall department or agency have a marketing plan, but each division, facility, "product segment" or event should develop one as well. Don't panic, though! Marketing plans are not master plans. Often a marketing plan is a one or two page document. 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, goals and ideas into a written document. Too often marketing plans are in someone's head. "We talked about it at lunch once," or "I remember 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 mission of the library or department? What services, products and benefits 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 objectives for libraries are to:

- Bring in more new "customers." A customer is anyone who you serve – it could be an internal customer (another staff member or volunteer) or an external customer (card holder, child, parent, book club member, donor, volunteer, special event attendee, etc.)
- Recruit high-quality paid or unpaid staff/volunteers.
- Increase literacy.
- Increase usage or repeat business from current "customers."
- Develop more revenue generating "products." (In the world of marketing the word, "product" refers to "anything that you sell or offer." It could be a service,

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idea, activity, class, programs, book, computer program, event, events, facility and more.)

- Create general greater awareness about our “products.”
- Gain political or financial support from the community-at-large for our products.
- Get voters to approve or defeat a ballot measure.

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. Most “one size fits all” brochures, ads, campaigns or promotions are less effective than custom-fitting a message and media to a smaller niche audience.

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 library, 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, more successful, 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, in their mail or on-site at your library? 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! Because you may have limited time and money to invest in your marketing, you may have to break your overall plan into smaller, realistic

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action steps. Focus on short term results rather than long term dreams. Determine what you want to see happen in the next year, six months or 90 days.

For example, your long-term goal may be for every single school-age child and parent in your service area to be aware of your after-school tutoring center. But, with limited time and money resources, it's may be more prudent to select, test and measure the results from one school at a time.

With libraries, as in other public and private businesses, change sometimes comes about slowly and painfully. Be patient with yourself and those around you. Keep in mind that your marketing plan will act as your blueprint as you turn your department into a more innovative, valuable and customer driven organization.

Jodi Rudick, Owner, ADvisors Marketing Group, is a national speaker, trainer and marketing consultant specializing in marketing for public and non-profit agencies. On May 19 Jodi will present a seminar, sponsored by NELINET, called, "Creating a Marketing Plan for Your Library." Space is limited for this high-energy interactive workshop designed especially for the Library Profession. NO MARKETING EXPERIENCE NECESSARY! To register, [log on to www.nelinet.com/marketing or return the registration form on page x] of this issue of [publication title].