

Marketing and communications for clubs

Marketing is the ability to talk about what makes your club unique and appealing to a target market. There are two main forms of marketing a club: formal and informal.

Types of marketing

Formal

- Formal marketing can increase a club's profile and membership in a particular area. Listing your club in the telephone directory, advertising membership registrations in the local newspaper, or updating the website are all examples of formal marketing activities. These formal marketing activities should be recorded and planned for in a club's marketing plan.

Informal

- This involves the little things club management and members do everyday – like offering help and providing information to prospective customers over the phone, or encouraging their friends to join up

Both forms of marketing rely on club members talking positively about the club. It is critical to make every experience or contact with your club a positive and rewarding one.

Who does marketing?

- Everyone in the club should be involved in informal marketing whenever they can. Encourage your members to tell their friends and family about what the club can offer.
- For formal marketing, it's useful to appoint a marketing and promotions officer, or a small team to oversee the development and implementation of the club's marketing strategy

Why develop a marketing plan?

- It helps you find out more about potential members needs, how you can develop new and existing services to keep up with their needs, and how to let them know about this.
- A marketing plan should not be complicated or difficult to develop. It is important to be realistic about the club's marketing objectives as some marketing strategies can be costly to implement and may not have the desired effect.

Things to consider

- There are many ways to develop a marketing plan, but before you start it may be useful to raise it with members at a club meeting. Discuss what sets your club apart from other clubs, what it offers that other clubs don't, and what the benefits of joining your club are.
- These messages about the club should be included in the marketing plan and subsequent marketing activities. These are the things that attract new members and make people feel good about joining.
- It may be helpful to look at how other clubs markets themselves. This may give you some ideas to adapt for your own plan. Many clubs make the mistake of spending a lot of time and money on promotions to recruit new members but forget existing current members. To retain members in the long term, it may be less expensive and more effective to improve the basic services the club provides, the attitudes of staff and volunteers towards members, and the standard of operations.

A simple plan for a small club would contain some basic elements including:

Objectives- These should be specific, measurable and achievable (i.e. recruiting four new junior members by the start of a specific season).

Situation analysis- What's the club current situation? It could be helpful to do a SWOT analysis to establish your clubs' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Strategies- These are the tools and activities to address the club's needs (i.e. not enough members). These tools and activities must be targeted at specific markets.

Target marketing- The practice of designing and directing services at specific individuals or groups of customers. Find the most effective way of communicating with your target market. Take into consideration what they like, what they read, where they go, and how you can attract their attention.

Budget- Develop a realistic marketing budget within the club's capabilities. Focus on low-cost or no-cost strategies to begin with.

Evaluation- Make sure you have a chance to evaluate the strategies. Some activities such as a membership

drive are easy to evaluate. But it won't be possible to evaluate others until after an event or season.

- Collect copies of press clippings or media coverage, records of attendances at functions or competitions, and any feedback the club receives - positive or negative.

Marketing, communication, and promotional techniques

There are lots of techniques that your club can use to market and promote itself.

- 1) Use the club logo on letterhead, signage, and other promotional material.
- 2) Websites are a simple and effective way to communicate to your members, supporters, and the local community. Use your resources to your advantage (i.e. a club member may have the skills to design and write the club's website). Basic websites should include: what your club offers, a calendar of events and meetings, membership information, and your club's contact details
- 3) Link your website to related sites. Ask your local council, wheelchair sport clubs, schools, provincial and local impairment organizations, and recreation centres to provide a link to your site. Assign someone to update pages and add new information.
- 4) Newsletters provide information to members about club events, activities, and news. Again, use your resources to your advantage. Note, it is less expensive to email your newsletter to members rather than printing it. Publish each newsletter on your website and link it to social media pages.
- 5) Signage with club name and logo should be used at registration days, presentation days, competitions, and promotional events.
- 6) Flyers and brochures that outline the club's services or competitions, membership fees, and contact information. Distribute to local community notice boards, library, recreation centres, rehabilitation facilities, medical offices, religious facilities, grocery stores, recreation or occupational therapy offices, prosthetic clinics, and schools (school aged and university).
- 7) T-shirts and uniforms can enhance a club's image while promoting a club at events and activities. Hats, socks, jackets, backpacks, and t-shirts can be sold to raise funds and promote the club at the same time.
- 8) Advertising is paid information that appears in different forms of media (i.e. newspapers, radio, and television). You control what is included in the advertisement. However, it is costly so it's wise to consider cheaper forms of marketing first. If you decide to advertise, choose the most appropriate method for your target market or audience.
- 9) Using media to promote your club
 - It may be as simple as calling your local newspaper with an interesting story or information on an event. Find out what they're interested in covering and how you can give them the information. Check their deadlines and requirements.
 - Developing a good relationship with your local media can be useful for raising the club's public profile. Once this relationship is established, future contact will be a lot easier.
 - The media is more likely to publish or broadcast stories that will appeal to their audiences. Work out ways to make your information more interesting and find angles to attract attention. This is more likely to get your club in the news.

Dealing with the media (DOC)

If you have an event or an interesting story to tell, contact the following people.

- o **Local or community newspapers.** Your local paper is most likely to be interested in covering your event but sometimes they don't have the staff to do it. If the paper cannot send someone to cover the club's event, they may still publish a statement from the club. Media releases are the standard way to provide information to the media.
- o **Radio.** Make contact with your regional radio station to let them know who you are, what the club is doing, and the types of events coming up. Your local radio may have a regular community events notice that can include your club's events.

Communication within the club

Each club is different and will have efficient ways of communicating with their members. The responsibility for communication may be shared by everyone in the club or one person may be dedicated to it. The important thing is that communication is kept up. A few simple systems will ensure everything runs smoothly.

Correspondence

- All sorts of information will arrive in the mailbox and email inbox of a club. Someone will need to sift through this information and distribute it to the relevant people in the most effective manner.

Official circulars/bulletins

- Clubs may receive regular newsletters or bulletins from their national sports or recreational organization. Someone in the club needs to ensure that officials and members are made aware of the relevant news, deadlines, opportunities etc.

Records and databases

Ideally the club database should be organized to allow for specific targeted communication. This database is not just necessary for marketing and communication, but it is also a tool for developing stats, booking flights, applying for memberships to provincial organizations.

- Athletes
 - o Legal name of individual
 - o Nickname
 - o Contact information (including e-mail, phone, and address)
 - o Birthday
 - o Position
 - o Team, if there are multiple teams within the club
 - o If the organization has an equipment rental program, this is the spot to document inventory and payment system
- Coaches, staff, board, officials
 - o Name of individual
 - o Contact information
 - o Role
 - o Any certifications if applicable
- Partners
 - o Partner organizations
 - o sponsors and VIPs
 - o critical network
 - o media

Also note: The database should be compatible with the club's email system to allow for targeted emails. Some clubs assign their secretary to manage their membership database.

How is everything communicated?

- Newsletters are the most common and direct way of communicating with members, especially if it is via email. Newsletters should be clear and easy to read. A good newsletter needs to get all relevant information to the right people in a timely and accessible fashion.
- General emails make communication between clubs and their members incredibly easy. But be thoughtful about what you are sending out to your members. It is more effective to send out a single notice with five or six key points than five or six separate emails, especially if this follows a committee meeting. When sending out mass emails list all the email addresses in the "bcc" box not the "to" box or the "cc" box. This prevents everyone on the list seeing every email address and avoids FOIP and spam problems.
- Websites and social media (i.e. twitter, facebook, Instagram, linkedin, etc.) have become the single most powerful communication tool. They are cheap and effective ways to get information out to existing and prospective members alike. It is great if your club can maintain a vibrant, informative, and up-to-date club website.