

Marketing strategy & marketing plan

What is a marketing strategy and why is it important?

Put simply, marketing is everything that your organisation does to get potential customers, funders and beneficiaries interested in buying your services, or engaging in your activities.

Marketing is key to the success of any organisation. The passion that you have for your organisation's mission, no matter how great, or innovative is not enough to sell services. Your customers won't just 'get it' - they have to 'buy it' and you have to 'sell it' to them. That is what a marketing strategy is for.

An effective marketing strategy will help you understand and clarify where you are, where you want to be and how you can get there.

How to develop your marketing strategy

A successful marketing strategy is one that concentrates on your customers and their needs and that is based around your overall business strategy. Here are some essential elements of a marketing strategy:

1) A definition of your enterprise and your products and services: do you know what you offer? What are the key messages you want to communicate to your stakeholders?

2) A profile of your target market(s): do you know who your customers are? This is about defining who your customers and beneficiaries are (if applicable), what their specific needs are and how you can meet those needs. This will require that you carry out market research or use the information that you have already collected.

3) A summary of your benefits: what's in it for the customer? What benefits and value do your customers get from your products or services? This involves identifying, defining and communicating the benefits that your products or services provide to your customers and beneficiaries. Benefits are about how you solve your customers' and beneficiaries' problems or meet their needs. Remember that in this case it is about the direct benefits to the customers, rather than society or the environment.

4) Your position in the market: who else is out there? This involves developing an understanding of where your organisation is positioned in the "market" with regards to other charities, VCOs, social enterprises and commercial companies delivering similar services. This also involves thinking about your services in terms of value for money (quality versus cost) and defining what your competitive advantage is. It could be that you are able to deliver the same benefits as other organisations but at a lower cost. Or it could be that you are able to offer superior

benefits over and above other organisations. Understanding your position in the market will also help you to develop a pricing strategy for your services.

5) Your differentiator or unique selling proposition (USP): how do you stand out?

To find out what your differentiator or USP is, try to answer the following questions:

- What is the best of all of your benefits?
- What is the most convincing reason you could give a potential customer for buying from you or commissioning your services?
- What do people find most attractive and interesting about your organisation?

More often than not, your differentiator will be one of your benefits. It can also be the source of your competitive advantage.

6) Your routes to market: how and where you sell

This is about finding out the best way to get your services purchased by your customers. This may include different distribution channels and will depend on the nature of your organisation and your strategy.

For instance, if you provide services, you can sell directly to your customers, or through an intermediary that brokers similar services and matches what you have to offer with the right customers. Service providers, especially those that provide health and social care, education or training services, often get customers through a formal commissioning and tendering process.

Another route to market is by working in collaborations and partnerships with other organisations.

Implementing your marketing strategy

Organisations use what is called a marketing and communications plan (sometimes shortened to MarComms Plan) to set out the actions that need to be undertaken in order to meet the objectives of your marketing strategy. This involves allocating time and resources in the best possible way to communicate and promote your chosen messages to your chosen audiences (see next section).

Your marketing strategy is likely to remain the same or very similar along the years. Your marketing and communications plan is what is going to change and adapt to changes in the market and customer trends, etc.

What is a marketing and communications plan and why is it important?

Your marketing and communications plan will be the reference document outlining the steps or actions that should take place to meet the objectives of your marketing strategy. A marketing and communications plan also involves setting out how you will communicate your key messages to your chosen audiences by allocating time and resources in the best possible way.

Key messages are what you want to communicate to customers, beneficiaries, key influencers and other relevant stakeholders. They can include the benefits that your organisation provides (e.g. 'reduced stress through holistic therapy') or the social or environmental impact that your organisation creates (more disadvantaged young people into sustainable jobs).

Most organisations will have a variety of messages for a variety of audiences.

How to develop a marketing and communications plan

Your marketing and communications plan must do more than just say what you want to happen. It must describe each step required to make sure that it happens.

1) Target audience - Who do you want to reach? This relates to the customer groups that you identified in your marketing strategy. Remember it is not just about your direct customers; you should also have something to say to your potential beneficiaries or end users and to key influencers in your sector.

2) Key messages - What do you want to say to your target groups? Keep the message simple, vivid and, if possible, try to lead it to specific actions. This is particularly important if your customers and beneficiaries or end users are not the same. There may also be key messages for other relevant stakeholders such as your potential partners, suppliers, the media, as well as your funders and member organisations (if applicable).

3) Marketing channels - How are you going to communicate your message? How can you best reach your audience? Think about where you can best promote your key messages so that you can reach your target audience as much as possible. Marketing channels include everything that helps promote your services:

- Brochures / flyers / leaflets
- Banners
- Advertising board / Posters
- Goodies
- Newsletters
- Direct mails
- Your website
- Information on other organisations' websites
- Social media (Twitter, facebook fan page, Linked-in, blogs)
- Publications / articles in the press
- Radio interview
- Events / public meetings
- Face-to-face meeting / Phone calls
- Open days and exhibitions
- Service user- panels
- Word-of mouth etc.

4) Resources - What resources do you need and what will the marketing channel you selected require (For example, advert or brochure design, write up, coupons etc.)? How much is it going to cost to design, develop, print or deliver and can you afford it? How much time is this going to take? Are there other ways to reach your target audience more effectively or efficiently? Ensure you are not spreading time and resources too thinly and concentrate your efforts.

5) Duration - How long are you going to communicate these messages for? Setting timescales is essential to ensure you review your messages regularly and stay relevant and effective.

6) Outcomes - What are you aiming to achieve through this action? Relate this directly to your marketing strategy objectives. This could be an increase in potential leads, contracts, awareness of your services or visits to your website, etc. Make sure that you have defined what the success looks like (e.g. achieve a 20% increase in new memberships by the end of the year) and measure and review progress against those outcomes.

7) Actions - Finally, what exactly are you going to do to make this happen? For example, you could place an advert within a specific publication, send a press release about your new service, write on your blog about your impact, or even have an in-store promotion or organise a launch event.

Example of a marketing and communications plan

You are meant to have as many target audiences as you have identified in your marketing strategy.

Target audience	Key messages	Channels	Resources	Duration	Outcomes	Actions
Young people not in employment, training or education in East London	Our organisation can help you find an exciting job through our 3 month training and mentoring programme	Youth centres, shops and local voluntary organisations and statutory bodies working with youth	Design and printing for 2000 brochures. Cost: £500.00	2 months recruitment period until the programme starts	50 increase in young people from East London applying and engaging with the training programme	Distribute 2000 brochures through the identified channels.
Local Authorities in East London	Our training programme will reduce youth unemployment in your borough through our high success rate	Direct emails, phone calls with key opinion leaders & face-to-face meetings	Time to schedule meetings, draft emails and attend meetings.	Ongoing until meetings are arranged.	Get two Local Authorities from East London to commission our training programme for next year.	Devise list of contacts and call, email to arrange a meeting to present training programme.
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Marketing and communications on a budget

A marketing and communication plan does not need to be costly to implement - you can tailor your actions to the budget and resources that you have. For example, it may be that you have the time to invest and have recruited an intern to help you, but that you do not have money to spend on advertising or promotion.

There are many truly effective ways to promote your products and services - and most are almost free. For instance, digital communications and online tools such as websites, blogs and social networking sites are free to use and can complement your own newsletters and website.

Here is a list of the types of things that could be included in your marketing promotion (part of your “public relations”) that will help you raise the profile of your organisation for no (or very little) cost:

- Developing relations with the media (e.g. trade journals, Third Sector publications such as Social Enterprise Magazine, Third Sector magazine, etc)
- Online communications and copy writing (e.g. newsletters, websites, blogs, twitter)
- Events (e.g. speaking opportunities, running workshops and sharing your experience)
- Writing articles or editorials (e.g. raising awareness about the social or environmental need you are tackling), contributing to other people’s publications.
- Joining membership organisations
- Joining relevant email lists to ensure that you keep up-to-date with what’s coming up

Further resources:

- <http://www.charitycomms.org.uk/>
- <http://www.mediatrust.org/>
- www.thirdsector.co.uk
- www.societymedia.co.uk
- www.ngomedia.org.uk
- NHS Social Enterprise Network: www.networks.nhs.uk/networks/page/155
- <http://www.charitymarketingblog.com/>