

## The effective marketing health check: Ten rules of success

Marketing is now part of just about everyone's working life. We need to communicate with a diverse range of stakeholders and get our messages across effectively in a crowded and "noisy" sector. Just how effective is your marketing activity? Test your marketing against the mini health check, below, to find out.

### WHAT MARKETING IS...AND ISN'T!

Firstly, what is marketing about?

Effective marketing is not about spin, spam or indiscriminate "blanket" communication.

Marketing is about accurate contact and communication:

- [1.] Which will enable stakeholders to understand the relative value of your service offer or proposition against others in the market or sector.
- [2.] This gives stakeholders clear reasons to choose between one offer and another.
- [3.] This enables stakeholders to make informed and confident choices.

### MARKETING SUCCESS FACTORS

#### [1.] IDENTIFY AND TARGET YOUR AUDIENCES

It is critical to get information about your activities or services to the "right" people. This will include not only those that will use the services or information that you provide, but also those that influence them, make decisions or expenditure, on their behalf. In this way, it is just as important to know who will not be interested in your services, as it is to know who will be likely to use them.

#### [2.] COMMUNICATE AT THE RIGHT TIME

Communications to target audiences need to fit in with their planning and decision making schedules. For example, if you need people to sign up for programmes, it is vital to plan ahead to make sure your communications

will reach them in time to inform their choices, not when decisions have already been made. If you need people to commit to expenditure, be sure you know when they make decisions about budgets and resource allocations. In marketing planning, managing lead times for implementation or activity is fundamental to success.

#### [3.] USE THE RIGHT COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS

Which communications channels or modes will work best? Will your audience respond best to informal or formal communications? Do they prefer email, social networking, or personal contact?

#### [4.] SPEAK THEIR LANGUAGE

Remember, terms that you understand may mean nothing to your prospective audience. It is vital to communicate with people using the language and terminology with which they are familiar. Avoid jargon and acronyms; make sure that communications are not too internally focused, but have resonance for the target audience.

#### [5.] MARKET THE BENEFITS

Use a sound proposition for your service: don't just communicate the features of "what it does", but market the benefits that it will provide. Give people a reason to value your offer over that of others that are available.

#### [6.] MATCH YOUR SERVICES TO A SPECIFIC NEED

Make sure that your service is relevant. How does it respond to a specific stakeholder need? How might it solve an emerging problem?

## [7.] ADVANCE TEST YOUR MARKETING

While we might think our marketing plan is bound to be a success, it is always wise to test it out in advance on a sample of recipients. This can save money and time and enable you to fine tune marketing communications to ensure the best possible return on the efforts made.

## [8.] USE A "CALL TO ACTION" TO ENGAGE YOUR AUDIENCE

Marketing activity should aim to stimulate a response and encourage people to get involved. What incentive to get in touch with you and follow up would work best for your target audiences? Including a call to action will also enable you to monitor response levels to your marketing activity, a critical factor in evaluation (point 10, below).

## [9.] RESPONSE MANAGEMENT

If you want people to respond to your marketing, it is imperative that the systems are in place to cope with resultant incoming enquiries. Make sure that email and telephone contacts are monitored and responded to effectively. If this does not happen, there is a risk that the audience's interest will fade before they've found out more about the services being offered.

## [10.] EVALUATION

Evaluate the results of your marketing effort. This will help you to refine your plans, manage budgets or time and enable you to improve activities next time around. What worked well? What did not work? What would benefit from improvement?

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