

*The voice of the Voluntary Arts*

## Planning a marketing campaign

If you want people to take part in your activities, marketing is an essential and inherent part of what you do. It is about communicating with people who are interested in what you are doing, giving them access to something they want, and building a closer relationship with them. Planned promotional activity over a period of time – weeks, months or years – is usually called a marketing campaign. Marketing campaigns are designed to generate a response i.e. getting people to come to a performance or an exhibition, having new member sign up, attracting donations, enlisting volunteers or changing how people think about your organisation. If you do this well, in the future they will feel comfortable about getting in touch and participating in your activities again.

This briefing sheet will explain how to plan such a campaign to get the most out of the money you spend promoting your activities. It will take you through preparing your plan step-by-step, to help you think logically about what you are promoting, who you are promoting to and what marketing activities you should use. Your answers will vary depending upon the product you are promoting, the size and type of activity, and the geographic area you work in. What works for one activity may not work for another – some things will change and you may need to adjust your campaign accordingly. We will use ‘activity’ as a general term to describe what you are promoting.

### 1. Your product

Your product might be a person, an exhibition, an artwork, an idea, a performance, a fundraising event, a workshop, membership of your

organisation, your new website or even your organisation itself. Research the product carefully, asking the ‘creators’:

- Why are you doing this work, now?
- What inspired you to create the work?
- What’s the central idea?
- Is it different to things you (or others) have done before or are doing now?
- How do you want the audience to feel when they leave the event/theatre/gallery etc?

### 2. The key selling points

(These are also sometimes known as ‘USPs’ – Unique Selling Points)

**Decide what is going to attract the most people to your ‘activity’.**

Possible selling points could include:

- **Rarity:** has it ever been seen before? What makes it unusual (e.g. location)?
- **Scale:** a spectacular/one off/unique attraction on large scale?
- **Appeal:** is it funny, entertaining, escapist, family entertainment?
- **Topicality:** does the event hit the nerve of hot issues/popular pastimes?
- **Need:** will it help people in their lives, at work, with problems?
- **Known credentials:** previous success, familiar performers/painter/writer etc.

**Find out what your members or audience enjoy about your ‘activity’.** What makes you or one of your colleagues want to take part, go along, do whatever it is you do? Make a list of all the things that make your activity worthwhile. Often things you might not have thought about are important: e.g. social factors – coming along with family, making new friends, and sharing an interest with others.

**Similarly consider all the things that could act as barriers, no matter how small.** We’ve all experienced lack of car parking, inadequate box



office facilities and poor refreshments spoiling an otherwise wonderful time. (Note: pay attention to disability access)

**Think about the future** – if you intend to make this a regular event, then you must get things right the first time. You will only sell a poor service once – people just won't come back next time.

Having done this you can then decide what to say about your activity in your publicity material i.e. your leaflets, press releases etc.

It will also enable you to do something about overcoming the problems you might encounter: if car parking is a problem, tell people so they can arrive early, or use public transport.

### 3. The competition

It is worth finding out who you are competing with. If you are going to attract and keep your audience, you need to make your product not just 'as good as' whatever else is out there, but 'the best'. Try to discover:

- what they are offering;
- what similar events charge for admission;
- how your product differs from theirs;
- what gives you the edge;
- if you could perhaps run a joint promotion.

### 4. Your target audience

The next stage is to identify the people who are most likely to participate in your activity – your 'target audience'. Your activity will probably attract different kinds of people but it is most important to identify who you think the main audience will be, so you can target the right people.

Ask yourself how old your core audience is likely to be. Will they have young children, be grandparents or students? Are they likely to work in similar jobs or professions? With many of the activities you run your target audience is likely to share similar characteristics to yourself and the people already taking part – so perhaps do some 'market research' and examine your current audience. Look at your mailing list to identify where most of your participants live, what the proportion of men, women and children is, how old they are etc.

If you don't already have a mailing list, you can gather one together by having a simple registration form or mailing list card available at events, or taking information at the box office. (NB see Data Protection issues)

### TIPS: Mailing lists & Data Protection issues

- If you keep your mailing lists and other information on a computer, remember that your organisation will need to be registered with the Data Protection Registrar.
- the Data Protection Act means that you **MUST** tell the people whose details you are keeping what you will be doing with their data, who you'll be sharing it with, and the legal name of your organisation (as it appears on the Data Protection Register) so that they know who is keeping information about them.
- Make sure the list is up to date as sometimes they are old and inaccurate.
- For more information see [www.dataprotection.gov.uk](http://www.dataprotection.gov.uk), or have a look at *VAN Briefing 46: The Data Protection Act*.

### 5. Your message

By developing a creative concept – usually an image or a slogan – you can create a central reference point which will become identified with your product. For a short-term campaign, this means coming up with a great idea which sums up the activity, will be noticed and will encourage people to buy, visit, give, become a member and so on. Repeating the concept gets recognition for your activity quickly and if you get the right message to your target audience they will then spread the word for you to people with similar interests.

The best concepts are simple, powerful and evocative. They relate strongly to their target audience and the product they are selling and show people what it will feel like to be involved. Be creative – brainstorm as many ideas as possible. Go through all the images you have of the show/event. Talk to the whole team involved. Trawl through magazines, leaflets and design books to get ideas.

### 6. Ways of reaching people

Once you know who you are targeting and where you are likely to find them, you can decide which marketing activity will be most appropriate. List your target audiences and think about the different ways of reaching them. Your target audience may include people working in similar



jobs and if so, get information to their places of work or education (e.g. local hospital, college/school, factory or office). Or alternatively they may not work (such as older people) in which case you will need to consider where they go for leisure activities (e.g. adult education centres, leisure centres, bowls or golf clubs). In larger buildings, good places for leaflets and posters are entrance halls, rest rooms and cafeterias.

### **Flyers, leaflets and brochures**

These are some of the most flexible marketing tools as they can be used in a variety of ways.

Leaflets can be distributed:

- door to door;
- in small bundles (bulk distribution) to places of work, leisure or entertainment;
- with local magazines, newspapers and newsletters;
- along with a letter posted direct to people on your mailing list;
- placed on seats or handed out at similar activities.

The nice thing about leaflets is that people can pick them up and take them away for future reference. But make sure you include your contact details so they can respond. See *VAN Briefing 76: Design Guides* for more advice on producing an effective flyer.

### **Posters**

Posters are good for displays in and around your venue and promoting your activity to people visiting similar events. Draw up a list of places to distribute them to and get volunteers to take them out and display them. Posters rely on good design, strong images and concise copy to get your message over effectively – see *Briefing 76* for useful tips.

### **Publicity**

Press and media stories are an effective means of reaching a wide group of people. Feature articles in local newspapers, magazines and on radio are more likely to reach target groups. For more details about how to contact the media see *VAN Briefing 74: Publicity Explained*.

### **Advertising**

Advertisements are particularly useful when you want to contact a wide population – e.g. if you are promoting a large scale event. However it can be expensive and space may be limited so only

include the basic information (who, what, where and when), and choose the publication carefully – for example, advertising in arts programmes and brochures is worth considering if you are trying to reach people who attend arts events.

### **Word of mouth**

Personal recommendation is an effective means of getting people to participate in your activities. However it doesn't happen spontaneously. Word of mouth is generated by your marketing being so successful that you get people wanting to talk about you.

### **Websites**

The web is becoming more and more important in many aspects of marketing. It can be a very useful tool with the ability to reach a wide range of people – but can also be time-consuming, needing frequent updating to remain current. Web users can bypass your website in seconds if it doesn't grab their attention, and may never find it again – so to hold onto your visitors and make sure your website is informative, easy to find on the net, quick to download, well organised and accessible. For more information, see *VAN Briefing 73: Writing for the Web*.

## **7. The timeframe**

It is important to plan your marketing well in advance because of the time it takes – to compile mailing lists, place advertisements, and prepare leaflets. For example, if you were to produce a leaflet using a professional designer and printer, you would need to allow time for:

- writing the copy;
- layout by the designer;
- proofing;
- printing;
- distribution.

Find out about press deadlines and think about how far in advance you want to reach your audience – giving them enough time to plan to come to the event, but not so much that they forget all about it by the time it rolls around.

## **8. Your budget – ESSENTIAL!**

Whatever marketing you do it will cost either time, money or goodwill (and probably all three). So before you finally decide which marketing activities to use you will have to consider whether you have the equipment, time and money



you need to carry out your marketing campaign. At the very least you will need access to computers and up to date mailing lists for direct mail, word processing for press releases, money to pay designers and printers, volunteers for stuffing envelopes, distributing print and selling tickets.

It will pay to think and plan carefully, and spend your time and money on a few well-selected marketing activities which you carry out well, using good quality material, rather than trying to do everything you can think of and doing none of it properly.

If money is really tight, concentrate your budget on attracting media coverage and personal contact. This will still require a small budget to cover the costs of stamps, phone calls, person hours, photographs etc. See *VAN Briefing 74: Publicity Explained* for more information.

## 9. How to monitor your campaign

If you want to find out which aspects of your campaign work you will need to monitor when and how people respond.

Keep records of:

- the number of responses (each day/week during the campaign);
- booking forms (from leaflets and direct mail) returned;
- telephone enquiries/bookings.

Ask people, when they book or attend, where they heard about your activity and record the responses. Use this information to assess which parts of your campaign were most successful.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

### Useful contacts & websites

- SAUCE: Hot Tips for Effective Arts Promotion [www.fuel4arts.com/sauce/default.htm](http://www.fuel4arts.com/sauce/default.htm)
- Arts Advice [www.artsadvice.com](http://www.artsadvice.com)
- The Office of the Data Protection Registrar [www.dataprotection.gov.uk](http://www.dataprotection.gov.uk)

### Further reading

- **DIY Guide to Public Relations** by Moi Ali (Directory of Social Change)
- **Marketing for Dummies** by Alexander Hiam (IDG Books Worldwide)
- **30 Minutes... To Write a Marketing Plan** by John Westwood (Kogan Page)

### VAN publications

This document forms part of a set of VAN briefings about marketing and publicity issues, which includes:

- **No. 73: Writing for the web**
- **No. 74: Publicity explained**
- **No. 75: Planning a marketing campaign**
- **No. 76: A guide to good design**
- **No. 77: How to... write a press release**

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