

Marketing Communication



What it is

Businesses use a range of marketing communications to promote the company, their products and their services. Examples of marketing communications tools include: brochures, mailshots and websites. The objective of all of these is ultimately to achieve sales so it is important that you communicate effectively.

Before you engage in any communications programme with your customers, you have to decide:

- What you want to say
- Who you want to say it to
- How to present your message
- Where to distribute your message
- When to send your message

You also need to consider the style and tone of your message and the follow-up actions that will be required by you and your staff in order to generate that all-important sale.

Why it is important

The purpose of any form of marketing communication is to provide a set of information to your target audience in a way that encourages a positive, or buying, response.

For example: A clothes shop is expanding and moving to larger premises. The proprietor needs to communicate this fact to her target audience and has considered the following key elements as part of her marketing communications activity:

- The business is moving and increasing its range of designer clothes (*what*)
- Both new and existing customers are welcome (*who*)
- She will make contact with potential customers using direct mail, local press articles and posters (*how*)
- She plans to contact existing local customers by mail, potential customers from a wider geographical area by press activity, and passing trade by placing posters in the shop window (*where*)
- The mailings will be sent out two weeks before the opening, press releases one week before the opening and a press feature is planned for the day of the opening (*when*)

In terms of the style and tone of the message, her customers are invited to a 'champagne celebration' with the opportunity to buy new stock at a special discount on the opening day. As part of her follow-up campaign, she also plans to host a fashion show two months after the opening, offering the proceeds to a local charity.

By developing this planned programme of marketing communication with her customers, the proprietor of this business is providing them with more opportunities to buy. She is not just opening up her new shop and waiting for customers to walk through the door.



What you should do

Here are 10 simple steps for deciding on and developing any form of marketing communication.

- Start by deciding what your objectives are. Do you want to improve the general awareness about your business? Are you launching a new product? Are you looking to attract new customers or to encourage existing customers to buy more from you? A successful marketing communications campaign will use a mixture of promotional techniques to get the key messages across to customers. Once you have decided your objectives, consider the various elements of the promotional mix and decide which are the most appropriate for you at this time. For more information, or a reminder, see the Promotional Mix factfile.
- Decide what you want to say about your business or product/service. This is harder than it sounds. For more information on identifying your unique selling proposition, or USP as it is known, see the USP factfile.
- Focus on the main benefits that your product offers customers and use short words and sentences to explain this clearly. Try not to use too much jargon - and if you do have to use it, then explain what it means in simple terms. If you can include a picture of your product or a diagram showing how it works, this will help customers to remember you. Also - don't forget to include basic company information such as name, address, contact numbers and a web site address if you have one.
- Once you have decided what words and pictures you want to use, think about the way you want your communications material to look and 'feel'. The design, colours and layout of your brochure, mailing, website, exhibition stand, annual report etc will create an image of your business in your customers' minds and should reflect what you do. If you are not really sure what you want, check what your competitors and other local businesses are doing. This exercise will help you to decide the things that you like or dislike and will help to focus your mind so that you can then formulate your own ideas more clearly.
- At this point, unless you have the specialised skills to do it yourself, you will need to talk to a designer to develop your ideas into the promotional material you are seeking. If you haven't worked with a designer before, invite at least three different companies to quote for your design and print requirements. It is also helpful to talk to other business colleagues to see if they can recommend someone to you.
- Prepare a short written 'brief' for your designers. This ensures that you have your ideas straight and that there will be no misunderstandings in what you are asking them to do. Let them see any existing ideas that you like or dislike and provide as much text, photographs, diagrams, maps etc as you can.
- The designers will usually provide you with a number of 'outline design ideas' from which you can select your favourite for further development. You can amend these as you see fit, but remember that all amendments take time to do and will therefore add to the cost of the finished material. Most designers work closely with a number of print houses, so they will be able to provide you with an estimated cost for converting their design ideas to say, a full colour A4 brochure or a single colour A5 flyer. You can then decide what you can afford and proceed on that basis. Remember - the more planning you can do at the start of the project, the more cost-effective an exercise this will be.



- When you get to a 'final proof' stage, be absolutely sure that the material says everything you want it to and that the colours, style, paper weight and quantity ordered are agreed before you 'sign it off'. Mistakes at this point can be very costly to change.
- Generally, you will need to allow up to two weeks from 'sign off' of the final proof to delivery of the printed material - so allow time for this within your planning calendar.
- Once your promotional material has been delivered, then your full marketing communications plan can swing into action. Remember 'AIDA' - use your material to:
 - get your customer's **Attention**
 - keep them **Interested**
 - generate a **Desire**
 - encourage them to take **Action**
- Finally, be consistent in your overall promotional approach and measure your success against your original objectives.
- Even if your budget is limited, there are still a lot of different ways to make the most of what you have to spend. Consider a two-colour brochure rather than a full colour one, or compare the value that your business would achieve by printing, say 1000 posters, compared to having a good press release printed in the local paper.
- The World Wide Web is becoming an increasingly popular tool for communicating with your customers. Remember that you can use your website not only to communicate with them but also to get feedback and even take orders. However, as with all marketing communication tools, you should integrate use of your website into the marketing plan. For more tips on how to develop your website strategy, see the Directors' Briefing on Internet Marketing.
- Many businesses use a web design company to do the specialised job of setting up a professional looking website. Unlike printed material, a website needs to be updated regularly to keep the site fresh and interesting to visitors. It is not enough simply to develop a website. You need to be prepared to invest time and resources in 'website maintenance' to make the most of your investment. For more information on designing your website, see the Directors' Briefing on Design.

What you need to know

To use the marketing communications tools effectively, it helps to follow some cardinal rules.

- Different customers have different needs. So your marketing communications activity may be wasted if you target it at the wrong customer group. It is therefore important to tailor your promotional message to meet the needs of each different segment of your audience. For a reminder about customer profiling and market segments see the factfile of the same title.
- Your designer will be able to advise you on the different layouts that are possible for both websites and printed materials and which are most cost-effective. Keep in regular contact with the design team throughout the process, so that you can provide feedback on their ideas, monitor progress and keep them on track regarding your deadlines and budgets.



- Whatever form of marketing communication activity you undertake, have a plan in place to ensure that you follow-up all your activity to generate a sale. Many forms of communication raise Awareness, get Interest and create Desire, but prospective customers may need to be reminded gently to take Action and buy. For example, if you send potential customers a mailing, follow-it up a few days later with a telephone call. If you meet a lot of new contacts during an exhibition, write to them with the information they requested from you within a week or 10 days.

What to do now

Make sure you are clear on your promotional mix and plan. You can simply decide what aspect of your business you want to promote and ask yourself the questions 'What? Who? How? Where? And When?' Decide what methods of communication you want to use and then plan your activity.

Alternatively, if you want to review your plan more thoroughly, see the 10 Minute Checklist on the Promotional Mix.

And remember:

- Ensure that your key messages are clearly presented and that they promote the 'right' image for your business.
- Don't forget to follow-up your activity and to get feedback from your customers.

Where to find out more

There are a number of Directors' Briefings on www.cim.co.uk that will provide you with more information and guidance on preparing specific forms of marketing communication. The Small Business Solutions area of the Knowledge Hub.

An example in practice

To find out how Greenfingers Ltd have effectively used a range of marketing communications activities to support the development of their business visit the Case Studies area of www.cim.co.uk site.

When the company was originally set up in April 1999 to sell garden equipment and plants over the Internet, it was one of the few sectors that had very little competition online.

At this time, gardening as a hobby was becoming much more popular and there was a huge demand for information on plants, stockists and specialist nurseries or growers. Greenfingers set out to provide this information for their customers by setting up a database so that users could quickly find the plant that they were looking for.

It took the company almost a year to pull together all the information they wanted to include on the website and in doing so, they linked in to existing and well respected organisations such as the Royal Horticultural Society and the Natural History Museum, thus gaining credibility and positive publicity with their customer base.

Over time, they introduced additional 'information products' to their range - gardens open to the public, a monthly online magazine, gardening workshops and a history section on gardening 'through the ages'.

Customers can order plants or equipment direct from the website. They are invited to complete a customer satisfaction survey after their order has been delivered. This provides valuable feedback direct to the company.



Greenfingers try 'not to make promises that they cannot keep' in order to ensure that levels of customer satisfaction remain high. They use specialist plant suppliers and delivery services to ensure that live plants are delivered safely and within the time deadlines stated.

Over time, they have developed their skills in direct home delivery - whatever the product. They have now launched a mail-order catalogue service, which will be distributed nationally via well-known gardening magazines and they also plan to use interactive TV to expand their business. This illustrates well how they have used a range of marketing communications tools to support the sales process.

This company demonstrates the value of thinking through the whole process of marketing communications activity - not just focussing on one aspect of the promotional mix. They have planned what they wanted to do and how they wanted to achieve it. They have also used customer feedback to monitor their success and to improve the services and products available.



The Chartered Institute of Marketing will work with you to identify and develop your training needs.

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