

Volunteering in the 21st Century



Marketing for community groups

Marketing is about increasing positive awareness of your group and its good work. It is about communicating with your present support base – donors, members, sponsors, business partners, residents, clients and local decision-makers – and also about increasing support to your group.

Community groups often overlook the importance of marketing but in truth, it's hard to achieve anything significant without it. You can't attract members, volunteers, supporters, you can't generate vital dollars, get further support for your cause, attract an audience for your event or make an impact with the work you do, if people don't know you exist. Marketing helps get your message out there!

Marketing plans

We know that community groups operate on limited budgets and the idea of developing and implementing a marketing plan may seem a financial challenge. But remember – marketing is not just advertising! There are a lot of free and low cost options for marketing your group or its activities. Marketing encompasses promotion, publicity, media, networking, advertising and branding. By incorporating varied marketing activities in all these categories you can develop a rounded marketing strategy and increase your chances of success.

The best ambassadors of your community group are your members, volunteers and supporters. They know what you do and they are best placed to tell others. This is your most powerful form of marketing – one on one, word of mouth, direct marketing. When developing a marketing plan, you should include as many people in your group as possible to help spread your key messages.

Different marketing strategies may be required for different target groups and different intended outcomes. To minimise the risks and stress involved, it makes sense for community groups to prepare a marketing plan and to plan how, who, where and when you intend to implement your plan.

FIRST STEPS

Before you prepare a marketing plan, you need to consider aspects of your group's aims, identity and standing. You should document these reflections as an introduction to your marketing plan. This is your research, analysis and organizational audit. Firstly, your group should look at:

Where does your group currently stand?

What your group does and how it does it. Who are your existing members, supporters or stakeholders

and where do they come from? What are the group's strengths and weaknesses? How is the group positioned in the community? For example, are you strong and well-known, and do you have any competition for members, donations or volunteers?

What you want to achieve from your marketing?

Is it increased membership, financial support, promotion of an event, a raised profile of the group?

Who you wish to market to?

Know the people or groups you wish to market to - your target audience – and in what ways they are most likely to receive your information.

IDENTIFY RESOURCES

To help implement your marketing plan, identify what resources you currently have or may need to bring in to assist.

Consider the skills base you have amongst your members and volunteers and their networks. Conduct a skills audit and document who can help in what area. Do you have anyone with graphic design skills? Who is familiar with writing media releases? Who is at ease in online communities? Who is regularly on facebook? If there are significant gaps in your skills set, consider a partnership with your local school or seek out a skilled or corporate volunteer to take on the project.

What promotional outlets exist in your community and region? Identify all media outlets including community websites, regional newspapers and local newsletters? Does your school or local council publish a newsletter? Is there an online calendar of events or what's on listing? Where can posters and handbills be distributed?

Identify any potential costs and consider ways to offset or reduce them. Local MPs have electorate budgets which allow them to print materials for community groups. Consider sponsorship of your printed materials

where a local business pays the printing costs in exchange for having their logo and details promoted on the materials. Can you do a joint promotion with another group?

PREPARE A TIMELINE

Your timeline is at the core of your marketing plan as it brings together the key elements of who, what and when. It helps everyone work as a team by understanding where their role fits in within the overall marketing plan.

Your timeline should identify who is doing what marketing step when and set out clear dates for when these tasks need to be completed. Due dates for materials to be submitted and publication dates for when media is released should also be recorded in your marketing timeline.

Remember that many media outlets have long deadlines and will require you to submit material weeks or months in advance. There are also annual calendars of events to consider. When developing printed promotional material allow plenty of time for drafts, revising and approval by other members of the group as well as the turn-around in actually printing and distributing the materials.

LOCAL, FREE OR LOW COST MARKETING OPTIONS

MEDIA: Access local and regional newspapers, community radio, ABC, community newsletters, regional TV. Generate interviews and media releases for substantial coverage and use community service announcements and community calendar / gig guide listings for brief information. Letters to the editor are also useful.

ADVERTISING: Classified ads are cheaper than display ads whilst community newsletters are very affordable. Advertising with local newspapers builds relationships and helps ensure editorial support and coverage.

PRINT PROMOTION: Produce brochures, posters, postcards, handbills. Display in shop windows, cafes, noticeboards, etc and distribute at markets and events; give / send to members, supporters and stakeholders.

ON LINE: Use facebook events and page promotion, website, email / e-newsletters, online listings (eg: ABC, TV community service calendars), news outlets (eg: on-line print media), links on other websites.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT: Newsletters, facebook page, events (morning tea, Christmas function, AGM), annual report, participate in existing networks related to your sector, explore broader networks.

SCHOOLS: School newsletters, school noticeboards, departmental networks, school assemblies, classroom presentations, curriculum links, local TAFEs and Unis, U3A and adult learning networks.

COMMUNITY GROUPS: Build relationships, partnerships and networks with other community groups including local churches, service clubs, youth groups etc. Send promotional material, include your link on their website, request information to be forwarded to their members, provide presentations and information sessions for groups.

COUNCIL: Departmental and officer networks (think: community development, recreation, arts, events), council newsletter, council website, joint media releases.

REGIONAL POLITICANS: Newsletters, facebook page, community noticeboards, electorate office, invite to events, request a meeting to outline who and what you do.

EVENTS: Support and participate in existing events: school fete, agricultural show, Volunteer Week, commemorative days. Distribute marketing materials at events.

