



Marketing is the key to success with any organization. You can have a flashy website or an amazing portfolio of services. However, unless your members find value in your services you have NOTHING!

Marketing is everything you do to promote your Association. Without an aggressive marketing effort, your members will look at you as a provider of MLS services. Without a planned marketing effort, your members will pay their dues but won't feel the value of their membership.

Follow these "to do's" and you are well on your way to creating the ideal member experience.

Do #1. Be specific and shoot for the target!

Think of the difference between rifles and shotguns. Rifles leave a neat, clean hole where you point them. Shotguns scatter shots in the general direction you point them. Most failed marketing efforts are the result of a scattered marketing message aimed at the world. IDENTIFY YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE. Understand the generational and cultural differences in your population and develop a plan that targets them where possible.

Let's take a crazy example: Let's say you were trying to sell a snowboard. To effectively sell a snowboard to an eighteen year old requires an entirely different conversation than selling the same item to his mother. Segment your possible customers into different groups who share common concerns. If your product could be sold to an eighteen year old or a 40 year old, you want to decide who you are going to focus your marketing efforts upon for the greatest success.

Do #2. Know your member like yourself

Once you identify your target audience, you must communicate how your services can help them. We refer to this concept as WIIFM (what's in it for me)? This means writing a new member brochure that states how the member will succeed from your services, not just a listing of services.

Eight must-do's for a Marketing pay-off for your Association!

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Members pay attention for their reasons, not yours. If you want to sell them your service, you *must* sell to their concerns, not your own. Every piece of marketing copy must *focus* on solving their problems. If you don't speak their language, you don't get their attention.

An ideal place to start is to solicit your members for their feedback on your offerings; their satisfaction levels, what adds value to their membership and what they would like to see changed. Consider a MEMBER STUDY to get an idea of where you can transfer this feedback to your marketing plan.

Do #3. Show your passion for your Association

Enthusiasm, like attitude is infectious. If you are passionate about your Associations and your services, your members will be more likely to be that way too. What do I mean by showing passion? Talk and write about what you do with enthusiasm and tell members what your services will help them accomplish in their business. If you have difficulty working up enthusiasm for your services, it's time to re-think what makes you unique! Branding yourself helps your members understand what it feels like to do business with you. Branding puts emotion into your service.

Do #4. Failure could be the first step to success!

Whenever you deploy a new marketing approach, remember, the worst that can happen is they say "no." So, try it! This is not a matter of life or death.

In marketing, everything you do moves you forward. If one idea fails, you are that much closer to the one destined to succeed. Watch your members. Listen to your members. Learn from your mistakes. MEASURE! Seth Godin, author of *The Purple Cow*, says "Measurement means admitting what's broken so you can fix it...Every product, every interaction, every policy is either working or not."

Your marketing plan is a blueprint, so that when you meet an obstacle, the plan acts as the compass that keeps you moving in the direction of your objectives. So if an idea fails, you re-focus, modify your plan and keep going!

Do #5. Take care of your members at all costs!

The cheapest and easiest marketing in the world is free advertising. How do you get free advertising? The easiest kind of advertising is a referral. Referrals come from those Associations who relentlessly take care of their members. And we all know members talk to other members. And it is easy when all goes right.

From the receptionist to the others on your staff, consistency is vital. Continue to solicit feedback from members, the board and others to identify the areas where can make a positive difference. Start small, and then when those areas are working right, move on to others across your organization.

What if something goes wrong, due to either a human error or a problem with the process? The recovery process should include four steps: 1. Fix the problem 2. Fix the perception (with a personal intervention) 3. Offer the member some kind of token of appreciation for sticking with you and finally, 4. Fix what might be a flaw in your process. In the rare case of a mistake, use *disservice* situations to build member loyalty.

Do #6. Always Be Closing

“Always be closing” is often referred to as the “ABCs of selling”. It also applies to marketing. The objective of marketing is to increase sales. For an Association, this equates to getting more member attention. “Informing”, “Educating”, and “Entertaining” are early steps of the sales and marketing process. Remember to connect the so what? What’s in it for the member? Why should they care? Here’s a business example about a cardboard business to help make the point to think like a member instead of the Association Executive:

“We’ve been in business since 1972.” (So what?) “Our product folds flat.” (So what?) “We’re a family owned business.” (So what?) And now...the alternative presentation:

“We have been in business since 1972 **so you’ll always know where to find us**. Since we are a family-owned business, **you’re always talking to an owner who can answer your questions and solve your problems**. Our product folds flat **to save you valuable office space when not in use.**”

See the difference? Now the message is about the *customer’s concerns*, and the benefits to the prospective buyer. Every communication you send should speak to the benefit to the member.

Do #7. Communication matters

How consistent and effective are the communications coming out of your office?

Effective communicators respect the reader’s time. When did you last review all the communications available to your members from the readers’ point of view? Is it clear and simple to read? Does it help better connect the member to your Association?

Effective communications also link to the members’ needs. If you haven’t had a third party review your communications, it might be time. The nSight communications audit is the tool we use to evaluate the variety, frequency and content in your communications. We then give you suggestions for positive change. By focusing on your communications, you show your members that you understand their needs and will respond to their business challenges.

Do #8. Make a plan and commit it to writing

Similar to a financial audit that prevents risky business practices, a marketing audit helps make sure you offer programming and the promise to your members to keep them with you during these turbulent market conditions. Marketing always links to the Association’s annual objectives and is a supplement to your business plan.

If you nodded your head “yes” at most of these 8 activities, you are well on your way to making your marketing efforts pay off. They are based upon 25 years of business and marketing experience. Keep these handy and continue to put into practice these eight must do’s of marketing. When you do, your marketing efforts will result in the only true value of marketing – increased value to your members.

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