

# Marketing for Voluntary Associations

## Engage – Communicate – Participate

### Getting it right.

The Primary goal for voluntary industry associations is engagement. This means building and maintaining an audience and encouraging participation so that the voluntary organisation can fulfil its mission of spreading education and awareness.

Fundamental to maintaining and growing organisations like this is an engage, communicate and participate cycle. This article outlines the key stages of the cycle which repeats to continue engagement and audience growth; a fundamental philosophy of most not-for profit, voluntary associations.

### The Draw in

Whether a launch event, or used as a tool for intermittent audience building, this is key to attracting new or dormant participants into taking part with the organisation. The 'Draw in' event offers something of great value to the potential audience in a non-confrontational style. Non-confrontational essentially means that the event is approachable and requires little commitment other than turning up, in return for receiving something of great interest or value. Building up this offer creates the buzz for the event and must lead to a no brainer attendance decision by offering something over and above the usual opportunity cost decision.

Examples of this may be;

- A free event to non-members
- Discounted membership
- A free item
- A sought after respected speaker or attendee
- A structured networking experience
- Complimentary nibbles and wine

These examples form a foundation from which to evolve different ideas, for instance even the type of consumptive goods could be a draw – a bubbles and chocolate reception could be as much of a clincher as a speed networking event, depending on your audience.

People like to feel they have received something for nothing, which is why deciding what the added value will be and how you frame what they will get are central to commanding attention and interest. Since the 'Draw in' looks to recruit a new (or dormant) audience, the communication strategy must be particularly strong.

### A Strong Communication Strategy

A strong communication strategy combines great copy, visuals and design to convey the value that you provide and that they can gain by fulfilling the call to action. Generally a well designed HTML email, alongside strong social networking may do the trick. Including the design element, even if it's just a header and logo, creates familiarity and recognition of your association, which is invaluable. Yes, many html emails require an extra click to download the pictures, and no, this is not a bad thing. Even the requirement to click to reveal the html email fully, is a commitment by your audience to give it their attention. Having 'clicked' they will now spend longer browsing the email, than if it remained in their preview pain. Take this opportunity to tell them what you can do for them.

Adding a direct mail campaign to your marketing mix is a great way to capture new interest from an existing database. Combining traditional and online marketing together is the most solid base for engaging new interest as it provides optimal cross media personalised contact attention and repetition.

### No Budget?

This is the cry of many a voluntary organisation. Despite membership fees, extra income is often vital to fund marketing needs. As well as raffles, sponsorship is a fantastic way to raise funds. Companies look to sponsoring associations due to their dedicated follower network and specialised audience. For a company, sponsorship provides direct contact with sort after target markets, gives them a sought after respect by attendees and provides them with cross media coverage to that audience at a price often cheaper than a couple of misplaced advertisements. Companies allocate sponsorship money in their yearly marketing budget, and approaching a marketing manager with a well targeted offering; with an outline of how your audience fits their target market, is a sure-fire way to getting some much needed funds. Striking a sponsorship deal is a great way to fund all your organisations marketing collateral.

### **Hard copy media need not cost the earth**

Traditional marketing need not be expensive either, places like printing.com regularly have ½ price offers and leaflet design can be created at a fixed fee for 2 hours work with a talented freelancer. In marketing it is often about who you know, which is why Whitematter Marketing has designers for all budgets on their books.

With design in hand, setting up an HTML email need not be cost heavy either, dependent on the design, you can do this for a minimum cost with the right freelancer. Think of this as a set up cost, since once design is there, copy variations and hyper links are the only things that need changing in the future, and at a minimal cost.

A planned design process in this order creates a cost synergy for all marketing materials, and enables a voluntary association's budget to go further.

The key to marketing is consistency for recognition and repetition. With a memorable design, even with a 4-10 second view, it will quickly become familiar and remind the recipient of the event, organisation or to revisit when they can.

### **Engagement**

Engagement exists on many levels, and begins with the words you use in your communication. Using techniques such as asking three questions they will answer 'yes' to, and then posing the value engagement question will create an instant affinity for them to engage in your offering, call to action or event. Including a picture of graphic may be just as important for some organisations, for instance; a charity client that saves children in Africa has incorporated graphics to this nature in their communications as an instant reminder of the value that they provide.

### **What Value do you provide?**

Everything that connects your audience's interest to you is driven by the value they perceive you provide. Every element in your communications should convey these values, (design, copy and communication mode) and reinforce them to incite action. Drilling down to the core value offering is often the hardest and most rewarding question to answer. Brainstorming what is important to your audience and what their values are will uncover the best way you can (a) serve them and (b) market your association.

### **Regular Communication is fundamental**

People only know where to look, what they've been shown to look for. Regular email communication provides predictability and in today's world plays a role in a busy daily lives for reminders. Regularity provides reliance and familiarity, carving a place in peoples lives that they recognise and can rely on. Email predictability provides a foundation that these emails are put last in the case of a busy inbox, because it is relied upon that a reminder will arrive at some point. Dormant interest should not be construed as simply a lack of interest.

### **Social Media Advertising has its place**

Social media advertising is a fantastic promotional device that creates buzz and commitment to an event by trusted sources. Being in multiple places for the audience recaptures and reinforces attention, interest and commitment.

### **Commitment and Personalisation create a relationship**

The second step to engagement is commitment. Getting people to commit to attending an event with an action, be it email, form or click through, increases the likelihood of attendance or action fulfilment.

At this point an automatic response, welcoming them to attend the event is a great reinforcement. It is here that email campaigns should split between those that have committed and those that have yet to commit. This is relationship marketing at its most basic level.

After meeting debrief emails are also great way of drumming disappointment at missing out on an event and introducing the next one.

### **Data Capture**

It's always helpful to understand who your interested audience is, who your regulars are and if you are drawing in different interested parties with each new event. The more information you capture, the more you can deduce about your audience and position yourself to attracting their attention and engaging them again. The cycle doesn't stop once you have an active audience, often re-engagement can be more difficult than a launch event, novel events and understanding your audience base are key to maintaining a following.

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