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## Developing A Promotional Strategy





# **DEVELOPING A PROMOTIONAL STRATEGY**

By Maureen H. McDonough and Gary A. Ackert





**F**or recreation and tourism businesses, promotion is a critical part of doing business. Potential consumers must get information that will positively influence what they think of a business and convince them to use its services. Promotion is the tool to accomplish this goal.

What is promotion, and how can it be used in an effective manner? This bulletin will answer these questions and give you a process for developing an effective promotional strategy or plan.

### **WHAT IS PROMOTION?**

Promotion is the activities people use to communicate with others about their product or service and to convince them to use it. *Everything* you do communicates something about your business. In tourism, this includes a wide variety of activities including brochures, billboards, and newspaper ads. Promotion involves careful planning. When you see or hear effective promotion it is merely the “tip of the iceberg.” A great deal of work went into planning the final product. But before talking about the planning process, we need to review the tools of promotion.

### **THE TOOLS OF PROMOTION**

Day in and day out, people are bombarded with messages. There is no way to evaluate and act on all these messages so we pick and choose between them. This makes the choice of promotional tools extremely important.





There are four main promotional tools: advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, and publicity. The following table gives examples of each tool along with advantages and disadvantages of each.

**Table 1.**  
**Examples, Advantages and Disadvantages of Promotional Tools**

Type of Promotion	Examples	Advantages	Disadvantages
Advertising	TV, radio, signs, mailers, catalogs, exhibits, brochures, billboards, stickers, hats, t-shirts, newsletters, posters.	Very public and visible. Persuasive because of repetition.	Nonpersonal, impersonal, one-way communication.
Personal Selling	Salespeople, hosts, hospitality training, tour guides, fairs, informed employees, demonstrations, festivals, bus tours.	Two-way communication. Obligates the buyer to make a response. Can foster long term business relationships.	Can be very expensive and time consuming.
Sales Promotion	Coupons, fairs, demonstrations, contests, games, lower prices, buy 1, get 2 free, entertainment.	Forces people to buy now or pay more later.	Can cast doubt on product quality.
Publicity	TV, radio talk shows, TV, radio news, community calendars, public service announcements, newspaper/magazine stories.	Catches people off guard. More credible than advertising.	Impersonal. May not tell the positive story you want. Have less control over the content of the message.

## DEVELOPING YOUR PROMOTIONAL STRATEGY

Developing an effective promotional strategy demands more than just being aware of the tools of promotion. Promotion is an ongoing process that requires much planning. A strategy is simply a careful plan. The effectiveness of your strategy depends on more than how much money you put into it. Effectiveness results from the thoroughness of your planning and the consistency with which you carry it out. The following nine steps outline an easy to follow procedure for developing an effective promotional strategy.

### STEP 1 — FIGURING OUT WHO YOU ARE Establishing Your Identity

When people talk about developing a promotional image, they





often forget about first developing their identity. Identity and image are not synonymous. Identity is what you really are. Image is how others see you. This is an important distinction because how you see yourself may not be how you are seen by the public.

To manage how others see you, first clarify your identity. You can then project it in such a strong way that identity and image are the same. To accomplish this step, make a list of all your characteristics including such things as facilities, location, price, and attractions (see Extension bulletin E-1957 to learn how to do this).

## **STEP 2 — DECIDING ON YOUR PRODUCT**

### **Developing a Theme**

The list of characteristics that make up your identity will be a long one. You cannot and should not promote all of these characteristics. You need to decide on what part of your identity you want to promote. This will be the theme for your promotional strategy.

A theme is the one main idea, or message you want to communicate with your promotional efforts. The theme must be intimately tied to your identity. To determine a theme, ask yourself the following questions. "What is there about my facility that would be appealing to visitors?" "What can I tell them that would make them want to come and visit us?" "What makes my facility unique?"

## **STEP 3 — DECIDING WHO YOU WANT TO ATTRACT**

### **Identifying Your Target Audience**

Deciding on your identity and theme is the foundation for your strategy. Build on this foundation by deciding on who you want to reach. You must decide on and contact your target audience, those people you want to reach with your information. Do you want to attract local or non-local visitors? Repeat or first-time visitors? Families or singles? Young or old?

Deciding on who you want to attract is important. To reach your target audience, you must identify their needs and how they obtain information about recreation and tourism opportunities. (see Extension bulletin E-1940 for more on this topic).

Different groups have different needs. Senior citizens have dif-





ferent needs than do young adults. Handicappers have different needs than do non-handicappers. When you are developing your message you should address some of these needs.

Different groups also get information from different sources. Some groups get information through informal sources, such as past visitors or local people. Others go through formal sources such as travel agencies. Some choose personal sources, such as friends or neighbors, while others will go through non-personal sources, such as reading every brochure they see. Identifying these sources of information is important so that you can find your target audience and distribute your information directly to them.

## **STEP 4 — WHAT DO YOU WANT TO ACCOMPLISH WITH YOUR STRATEGY**

### **Establishing Your Objectives**

Before going any further, decide what you want to accomplish with your promotional strategy. This means establishing objectives that are very specific based on what you want the *outcome* of your strategy to be. Objectives should have the following characteristics:

1. They should identify who you are trying to reach.
2. They should state how much change you want to accomplish through your promotion.
3. They should state how much time it will take to accomplish your objectives.
4. They should state what you want people to do because of your promotion.

Some examples of objectives:

- Increase visitation of tent campers by 10% over the next three years.
- Increase Detroit residents' awareness of the charter-boat industry by 10% this year.
- Increase total sales to out-of-state travelers by 25% this year.
- Increase total roadside farm produce sales by 15% over the growing season.

## **STEP 5 — ACTUALLY GETTING YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS**

### **Developing Your Message Content**

An important part of your content is your theme. Do not try to





get across two or more ideas in the same message. This does not work, and will hinder your message. All information in your message *must* center on your theme. Your theme has to bind your message together. Keeping the content centered on your theme will also help limit the amount of information you present. This will help keep your message short and to the point.

There are two types of information that you can use: informative and persuasive. Informative messages tell people something without regard to their response. Persuasive information tries to convince people to do something.

There are also two types of persuasive information. The first type, rational persuasive information, uses logical arguments based on supportive evidence. The second type, motivational persuasive information, appeals to people's needs and desires.

## **STEP 6 — DECIDING HOW TO SAY IT**

### **Developing Your Message Structure**

Putting your message together is called message structure. How it is put together depends on what type of information you are using. For persuasive messages, it will depend on whether you are using rational or motivational information.

A rational message has three parts. The first part is the claim of the message. This is what you want people to believe is true of you. The second part is the evidence, or facts, that you use to support your claim. The third part is the warrant. The warrant is a general hypothetical statement that ties the evidence and the claim together. It is the “glue” that holds the message together and helps it make sense (Table 2).

With rational messages, you need to decide if you want to use a one-sided argument or a two-sided argument. A one-sided argument only presents the pro side of the argument, while a two-sided argument presents both sides. Which one you use will depend on which one meets your needs and the type of audience. Generally, one-sided arguments are better with audiences already favorable to your message. Two-sided arguments are best with audiences who are opposed to your argument, are better educated or have already been exposed to counter arguments.

For motivational messages, there are two parts: the claim and the appeal. Again, the claim is what you want people to believe





is true of you. The appeal is a statement aimed at your audience's particular needs or desires to motivate them to do what you want. (Table 2).

**Table 2.**  
**Examples of Rational and Motivational Messages**

<b>Rational message:</b>	<b>Claim:</b>	<b>Private campgrounds are the best place to stay!</b>
	<b>Data:</b>	<b>Private campgrounds have showers, pools, washing machines, electric hook-ups, trash pick-up. They are quiet and clean.</b>
	<b>Warrant:</b>	<b>The best way to judge a campground is by its facilities.</b>
<b>Motivational message</b>	<b>Claim:</b>	<b>Private Campgrounds are the best place to stay!</b>
	<b>Appeal:</b>	<b>They are safe from rowdies, vandals, and thieves.</b>

When using rational or motivational messages, make sure the promotional tool you are using is credible with your audience. This is especially true if you are using a spokesperson. Your spokesperson must be competent and trustworthy in the eyes of your audience. He/she should be likeable and appear to fit in with your message.

Informational messages are different from persuasive messages. For them, organization is the key. Since this is an informative message, all your information needs to be presented in a logical and orderly manner.

Finally, whether using informative or persuasive messages, there is one problem that always arises—where to place your punchline, the key to your message. This will depend on the type of audience you have. If you have a captive audience and a lot of time, place it at the end of your message as a climax. If your audience is non-captive, place the punchline at the beginning of your message to get and keep their attention.

## **STEP 7 — DECIDING HOW TO PRESENT IT**

### **Developing Your Message Format**

Formatting your message is the next step. Format refers to how your message will appear to people when you distribute it. The media or the method used to convey your message will determine your format.





The number of types and combinations of media available to use are almost endless. You are only limited by your imagination. Examples include television, radio, employees, community calendars, and newspaper feature or human interest stories. A good way to decide what you want to use is to look at what others are already using. Take any ideas that you like and adapt them to your format, but do not directly copy them and make sure that you are adapting the ideas to your needs.

Second, learn the good and bad points of various media, including their limitations. Find out what best suits your needs and what will allow you to meet your audience's needs. Finally, check to see what will be most cost-effective (see Extension bulletin E-2005).

Once you select the media you want to use, the actual message must be put together. Pay close attention to the nonverbal aspects of the message. Things such as graphics, color selection, type style and size will have a big effect on how people perceive your message. It is important that these things relate to your theme, message, and audience for the maximum effect. Finally, your message must be united. Each part of your message must relate directly to your theme.

## **STEP 8 — TAKING YOUR MESSAGE TO YOUR AUDIENCE**

### **Choosing Your Delivery System**

Most businesspeople in the tourism industry would agree that coming up with a good promotional message is only half the battle. The other half is getting your message to your target audience. Thus, the delivery system you choose is very important.

A delivery system is how you distribute your message and your media. There are two types of delivery systems. The first type is the formal delivery system, one that you plan to use or in which you have control over the content of the message, such as television, radio, newspapers, newsletters, and catalogs. The second type is the informal delivery system. An informal delivery system is one that you do not have control over, such as word-of-mouth, friends, family members, and repeat visitors.

Whether formal or informal, each system is composed of a message and the media that is used to present it. Many times your choice of media goes with your delivery system (promotional





ads in newspapers, for instance). With some forms of media, such as brochures and exhibits, this is not always the case.

Many times people overlook how they intend to distribute their brochure or display their exhibit. Know in advance how you will use these items. Overlooking how you intend to distribute any kind of media can cause it to become ineffective.

Finally, different audiences obtain information from different media. A thorough understanding of what media your target audience uses is essential to distribute your message effectively. (See Extension bulletin E-1940).

## **STEP 9 — HOW IS IT GOING?**

### **Evaluation**

Creating and implementing a promotional strategy can drain your resources if you do not regularly evaluate the strategy to see how effectively it is working. This is where your objectives come in handy. To evaluate your strategy you need only to determine whether you have made progress in meeting your established objectives. Generally, it is good to wait one year after implementing your strategy to see if it works because promotional effects can be cumulative. Always be ready to make changes.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

First, remember that promotion is a process. The nine steps outlined here are guides to develop an effective promotional strategy. The process is the same whether you are promoting a business, community, or region.

Second, remember that the only promotional strategy worth anything is the one that is cost-effective. Know your budget and understand the resources available so that you do not create a “monster” that uses resources but does not return visitor dollars.





Third, this bulletin is to give you an idea of what is involved in developing an effective promotional strategy. More detailed information on developing themes, traveler information networks, tourism information systems, and on selecting promotional media are found in other bulletins in this series. If you are serious about developing a promotional strategy, order or pick these up today. Good luck!

### **OTHER SOURCES**

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