



# Community & Voluntary Service

Mid and North Bedfordshire

## How to Market your Group Effectively

Traditionally voluntary organisations have not been very good at marketing. This is usually because they are too busy running activities and offering their services. However, a little time and effort can work wonders in the long run. Marketing doesn't have to be very expensive or glossy and can be tackled quite easily. It is simply the ways in which you get your message heard and your name known.

Think about all the different ways that the public might find their way to your organisation. Each of these methods needs to be addressed so that the public gets a consistent message and you make the best of your organisation.

### **1: Your premises**

Not all organisations are lucky enough to have their own premises. If you do, then you need to make the best use of them you can. If you do have premises of any kind then make sure you let people know where they are.

This can be done quite easily by having a sign on the building. Walk around your area - what signs (if any) catch your eye? If your organisation is a registered company you are required to have the company name visible from the outside of its registered office (usually your premises).

Ensure that your leaflets have your address, phone and fax numbers, email and website addresses and if possible a map of how to find your premises. Make it as easy as possible for users to find you.

Finding your premises is one thing - but what do people think when they get there? Again first impressions are important and there are some quite simple steps you can take to make your premises welcoming to visitors:

- If there is a waiting area, make sure it is clean and tidy
- Put pictures or informative posters on the walls
- Imagine you're walking in for the first time - is it a welcoming atmosphere?

## **2: The telephone**

### ***Answering the telephone***

First impressions do count and a phone conversation is often an individual's first contact with your organisation. You might not be comfortable with the private sector style of having a script that people must use when answering the phone, but politeness and efficiency goes a long way.

### ***Answer machine message***

An answer machine is a cheap and effective way of being available to your users when you're not actually there.

- Your message should make it clear whose answer machine it is!
- Explain your opening hours, any details about fax numbers, e-mail addresses or an alternative number that callers can ring, such as a mobile phone number. This is particularly important if your organisation offers any kind of emergency service.

Remember that if you are inviting people to leave a message, you should make sure you return the call. If not people will get the impression that you are inefficient or worse, incompetent.

## **3: Word of mouth**

This is rather more difficult to control. If people have had a bad experience of your organisation, you can bet that they won't keep it to themselves. It is vital to take steps to ensure that people are generally happy with your organisation. However, problems do occur and you need a complaints procedure to deal with these. In notifying your users that there is such a procedure, you will be making it clear that your organisation welcomes feedback.

On a more positive note, user comments can be very effective. Some methods of collecting information might be:

- Feedback forms at an event
- Suggestions box in reception

Make sure that any comments you receive, both positive and negative, are taken into account in the development of your organisation.

## **4: Networking**

You might not think about it in this way but every time you talk to someone at a meeting, you are publicising your organisation. Talking to other people who work in the voluntary sector is vital for raising awareness about your services and activities, and raising your profile in the community.

Getting to know your local councillors, networking with people in the local council, health authority and other statutory organisations can be a good way of building up networks through which you can publicise your organisation.

## **5: Letterheads, Compliments Slips, etc.**

The official face of your organisation needn't cost a fortune to produce and it does look more professional. Remember, if you are a registered charity you are required by law to include your registered numbers on your cheques, invoices, receipts and orders for money or goods. It is good practice to include these on your headed paper as these may get used for orders, etc.

## **6: Consistency**

Good practice means that you undertake services and activities consistently, i.e. if you advertise a Parent and Toddler group every Wednesday at 11.00am then make sure you do run it then. This can also apply to the way your organisation is run, e.g. answering the phone between certain hours, answering letters within a given number of days. If you have email, make sure you check your messages regularly. All this will go a long way to giving your organisation a reliable image.

## **7: Website**

A website is another means of telling the world about what you do and how you do it. Try to ensure that it is kept up-to-date and interesting, so that people come back to use it again. You must include the name of your organisation, your address, phone numbers, email address and registration number; so that users of your website know that you have a presence in the real world.

## **8: Media relations**

If you have a major campaign or event coming up, then don't forget to use the local radio, newspapers and even television if you can. If you are doing something that's a bit different, or has a good story behind it, then you'll get yourself a lot of free publicity. Some points to remember when using any of these methods of publicising your event:

- Make sure everyone understands exactly who is going to do press releases, make comments to the press and so on, so your message is clear
- Check with the TV and radio listings, so you are targeting the most appropriate programmes for your message

Doing radio or television interviews can be quite daunting, but just remember some basics:

- Prepare some of the essential details, but don't rehearse a speech as it won't sound natural. Try to let your sentences flow and avoid 'er' and 'well' as much as possible!
- If it's a phone interview, make sure you won't be interrupted by ringing phones

- If you're giving out a phone number for people to get in touch and support your cause or event - make sure you've got people ready to answer the phone immediately after the programme has aired

## **9: Further help**

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**The Media Trust** - helping charities communicate - [www.mediatrust.org](http://www.mediatrust.org)

**Community Newswire** - is a free service run by the Media Trust and The Press Association, the national news agency of Britain and Ireland, to help community and voluntary groups gain coverage in the media - [www.communitynewswire.org](http://www.communitynewswire.org)

### *Reference Books:*

- **The DIY Guide to Public Relations for Charities, Voluntary Organisations and Community Groups** – Moi Ali – [www.dsc.org.uk](http://www.dsc.org.uk) - £16.95
- **Promoting Your Cause** – Karen Gilchrist – [www.dsc.org.uk](http://www.dsc.org.uk) - £14.95
- **A DIY Guide to Charity Newsletters** – Chris Wells – No longer available to buy, but can be loaned to your organisation

*CVS – Mid & North Beds have some of the aforementioned books in our reference library & these can be loaned to CVS members*

### **See Other Related CVS – Mid & North Beds Information Sheets:**

- **How to Create Effective Publicity Materials**
- **How to Write a Press Release**

*This is one in a series of fact sheets produced by CVS – Mid & North Beds, on subjects of interest to voluntary and community groups. It is intended for guidance only and is not a comprehensive statement of the law.*