



British Columbia  
Museums Association  
SINCE 1957

# Best Practices module

## MARKETING OF MUSEUMS AND DEVELOPMENT OF AUDIENCES

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## Content

Introduction	Page 2
Identifying Audiences	Page 3
Marketing Plan	Page 4
Communications	Page 5
Media Releases and Press Releases	Page 6
Paid Advertising	Page 7
The Museum Site	Page 8
Budget and Implementation of Marketing Plan	Page 9
Assessment and Development	Page 10/11
Conclusion	Page 12
Resources	Page 13

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## Introduction

Marketing is a comprehensive communications strategy that encompasses all communications undertaken by a museum. Promotion of the museum's activities (collections, exhibits, facilities and public programs) is often the most visible form of marketing, but marketing also includes other elements such as the presentation of the museum site itself, and informal communications with the community through board members, volunteers and staff as ambassadors of the museum.



## Identifying Audiences

The museum visitor has been generally characterized as a person who has a higher than average level of education and income, is middle-aged, and is a tourist rather than a local. This visitor is seeking learning experiences, community participation activities and social interactions.

Development of a marketing strategy starts with research to identify target audiences so that you can determine the most effective way to communicate to your audiences.

It is important to set a benchmark of your visitor profile and this information can be collected in a number of ways:

- **An exit survey** will give you information on your current visitor. Be strategic about the time of year that you conduct the survey. You may need to do a survey at different times of the year to track seasonal differences in your visitation.
- **Clearly identify the goal** of your survey and ensure that the information you are gathering will be meaningful to your analysis. Be mindful of the time it will take to administer the survey when developing your questions. Be sure to respect people's privacy. Ensure your institution complies with the Privacy Act in all of its activities
- **Use prize draws** to collect demographic information. When you hold a special event at your museum, you can offer a door prize and collect entry forms. Review entries to collect data on where your visitors are from noting that you cannot use this information for anything else unless you have asked the visitor for their permission, for example, to add them to your mailing list.
- **Track postal codes** at the admissions desk to get visitor data. Comparisons (for example by months) can indicate patterns in your visitation that will help you target your marketing.
- **Institute a guest book** to give the visitor the opportunity to comment on their visit. Include a field for their city and country, so that you can analyze your visitors' region or country of origin.
- **Research your local community** for demographic info from comparable institutions or related businesses. Information may be available through local chambers, tourism organizations, business groups or museum associations.



## Marketing Plan

It is worth the effort to invest in the development of a comprehensive marketing plan. This will allow you to be strategic and realistic in the allocation of current resources and help you identify where new resources might be most effective. Be inclusive with other members in your team so that the marketing plan addresses their needs as well. As an example, volunteer recruitment requires communication to the local community but you may not be thinking of this as part of your marketing. Ensure that you include these kinds of activities in your plan so that your marketing efforts are coordinated.

Marketing is about distinguishing yourself in the marketplace. Review your museum's vision and mission statement as a catalyst for thinking about the qualities that make your museum unique. As you develop your marketing, these unique elements need to be communicated to the public.

Timelines are important. As you develop your marketing plan, develop a detailed schedule that flags the amount of lead-time that you require for each element of the marketing plan.

Develop a list of priorities. There are so many good ideas that the difficulty is finding the resources for effective implementation. Establish your priorities, access financial and human resources and seek out the best bang for the buck. Guerrilla marketing, using creative ideas that have good residual benefits, may not require a lot of cash, but can require a big investment of time. Get in the habit of doing a quick cost/benefit analysis to help you set your priorities.



## Communications

- **Research and compile a list of suitable media contacts** – in TV, radio, newspaper publications or other cultural organizations. Whenever possible personalize the message to individual members of the media, so that your message stands out in the crowd.
- **Assign a particular staff member to communications** to ensure consistency and professionalism. Create clearly defined staff roles when dealing with the media.
- **Community involvement** is important – make contact with community leaders/influencers by participating in organizations such as a business or tourism association.
- **Work with your local Destination Marketing Organization (DMO)** to develop regional and international media promoting your museum to visitors.

### TIPS:

- *TV stations are often looking for places to broadcast community listings and local programming. Connect with the producers and suggest your museum as a potential site for filming. This is especially effective if there is a connection to a community theme. TV is a visual medium. They are always looking for interesting and different footage.*
- *Become the expert, the person that the media thinks of when a certain issue/topic is in the news.*
- *Radio stations that offer talk show formats are often interested in non-commercial discussions that indirectly promote the museum. Again, be the expert sharing expertise and stories that relate to a community theme.*
- *Print editorial coverage is more effective at marketing an event or program than an advertisement.*



## Media Releases and Press Releases

Information given to the media can be classified in two different categories. A media release gives information on events and activities at the museum; a press release announces information that is considered newsworthy such as the appointment of a new staff person or a significant acquisition for the collection.

- **Make sure that you give the media a clear message.** Include complete and essential information for the public in a concise format that can easily excerpted.
- **Personal connection can make a difference** with the decision makers who are inundated with requests for coverage. Do not underestimate people's willingness to help.
- **Produce materials that help media make the link** between your institution and editorial opportunities (i.e. highlighting a story that ties in with themes such as Women's History Month).
- **Develop specific proposals** for targeted individuals.



## Paid Advertising

- **Choose your advertising, so that it best matches your targeted market.** Ask an advertising company for information on distribution of their product and demographics for their targeted audience.
  
- **To conduct an advertising survey, it is useful to identify media that visitors recognize rather than your specific ads.** Along with your own brochure, collect samples of tourist and local publications (whether or not your ad is in them) and create a display. The publications can be everything from a weekly newspaper, the phone book, monthly magazines, annual tourism publications. Identify each publication with a number and provide the visitor with a list so that they can check off the publications that they recognize.
  
- **Establish an advertising schedule** that includes deadlines for ad copy. Often advertising companies will include production costs in the cost of an ad so this can help if you do not have the capacity or budget to create your own. Do check out the quality of ads that are produced by the advertiser to make sure that it is up to your standards.
  
- **Use the cost-per-thousand ratio when making a rate comparison between publications.** This will allow you to make a fair comparison of value.
  
- **Be open to remnant space.** Advertising companies often have space left that they have not been able to sell and the deadline is approaching. To offer this at a reduced rate to a not-for-profit organization helps them reach their goal as well as giving them a way to support an organization that they appreciate. This scenario often requires a quick response and the ability to quickly provide ad material.
  
- **Work with other groups to achieve economies of scale.** For example, when material is printed there will be a number of sections on the sheet (the terminology is 12 up meaning 12 repetitions of the same image). If a number of groups gang their images together, you can achieve the economy of scale of a large print run to the benefit of all... the downside? If you come up with the idea, you may end up being the one to manage the process. Make sure that you share the administrative load, otherwise the economies will be lost for you.
  
- **Cross promote at each other's sites.** Reciprocate with other cultural organizations to reach a greater audience, such as promoting in onsite display areas or exchanging ads in member newsletters.



## The Museum Site

Location, location, location... if you don't have the ideal location (which is often the case) visitor orientation can be a major challenge. Some suggestions include:

- **The site should have inviting, clear directional signage.** Familiarize yourself with local sign bylaws to ensure your compliance.
- Signage might be different for locals and tourists. Make sure that you are maximizing your connection to tourists.
- Identify strategic exterior points for signage that will entice the visitor through the front door.
- **Make sure that they can find the front door!** It is often useful just to put yourself in the place of a visitor and approach the site from directions that the visitor would normally use and see if the way finding is adequate and if the approach presents the best image of the institution.
- **Review to ensure parking is adequately marked** and that there is sufficient exterior lighting.
- **Is there a consistency of offer?** Does the museum keep to regular hours, do you have friendly informative personnel, both paid and unpaid, and does the museum experience match the visitors expectation?



## Budget and Implementation of Marketing Plan

- **Advertising budget is one component of a marketing plan.** But, budget drives activity and work plan drives budget.
- **Establish a calendar of activities** for the year including exhibits, events, programs and publications (such as newsletters) through consultation with all departments.
- **Set timelines** for promotional activities considering available resources.



## Assessment and Development

In order to identify and develop new audiences for your museum, you will need to establish a baseline of your current activities by evaluating your effectiveness in meeting the needs and expectations of your core audience. Do your activities reflect the museum's mandate? Are the marketing and communications activities effectively supporting the current activities? There are many areas to look at as part of this process including:

- **Review the status of your permanent collection.** Are the permanent exhibits getting tired and require attention? Are there conservation issues that need to be addressed?
- **Review your temporary exhibit program.** Is there untapped potential in the permanent collections that could help you reach out to different audiences? Do you currently have the resources to effectively mount and promote your temporary exhibits? Is there potential to make community connections through your temporary exhibit program?
- **Are there other programs that could be developed that would appeal to a different audience?** Does the museum's programming reflect current community issues and interests, and make use of past-present-future connections to make history more immediately relevant and appealing to ever increasing numbers? Does the institution have the resources to effectively promote?
- **Review the public events held at the museum.** What is the response from your visitors? Who is the current audience for your public events and is there the potential to increase your profile in another segment of the market? Is there the potential to host public events organized by other groups in the community to increase your profile without a big investment of your resources?
- **Review the position of the museum as a community resource.** It can be a great benefit if you make the museum available to other organizations for functions such as volunteer appreciation nights. This gives the museum greater profile as a community resource and supporter. If you have the resources, seek opportunities to provide services to other organizations, such as selling tickets for community events, which will bring the public into your museum. Providing free passes for other organizations that are fundraising is also an inexpensive way to create goodwill and profile the museum as a community supporter.



## Assessment and Development cont'd...

- **Evaluate your website.** More and more visitors are making decisions using information from the Internet. Make sure that you assign some resources to your website to keep it updated. Develop strategies such as exchanging links with other sites to improve your presence on the web. Research funding programs such as Virtual Museums of Canada to identify resources to support your website development.
- **Evaluation of admission rates.** Make regular comparisons with other sites such as review group rates and incentives for membership.
- **Analyze membership for demographics.** Set up data fields so that relevant information can be tracked.
- **Research market areas for shifts in current audience and potential areas of audience growth.** Obtain information from sources such as tourism organizations, local chamber of commerce or other business groups for informal networking purposes.
- It is always a challenge to gather information from non-visitors. **Developing and administering a formal survey to non-visitors** could be developed in conjunction with other heritage sites to help defray the costs of getting professional assistance. One way of gathering informal, anecdotal information on your local marketplace is to participate as a vendor in a festival or tradeshow that is aimed at a general audience. Engaging attendees will give you some insight into the public perception of your museum and may give you some ideas on ways to improve your connection into the community.
- When you identify potential audiences **undertake a realistic cost/benefit analysis of attracting these audiences.**
- **Develop a corporate identity.** Think about graphic standards, stylistic standards and logo. What is the image the museum is attempting to portray. How does this tie into mission/values?



## Conclusion

### **Marketing is integral to everything that you do:**

If you adopt the idea that any communication is part of marketing, you will become more strategic in activities that give you the opportunity to improve awareness of your museum. There are strategic opportunities to affiliate with other organizations that reach into your community. For example, to participate as a board or committee member in a business improvement association increases the profile of the museum as a business leader, creates opportunities to collaborate with other businesses, and improves your knowledge of the business environment in which you operate. You can broaden the profile and reach into the community by building informed networks for support and promotion. Encourage different staff members or volunteers to formally represent the museum in the community (as long as you have the resources to accommodate attendance at meetings, etc.).

It is important to maintain and build personal connections. Take the time to visit businesses that have the potential to refer visitors to your museum. Engage them in the goals of your organisation, offer to include them in your mailing list so that they can keep up to date on events and programs, provide free passes for staff to visit your museum or offer to set up a familiarization tour. Also work to build alliances with for-profit organisations that share your goals. Just as the museum is looking for profile in the community as a valuable resource, businesses are looking for affiliations that communicate their commitment to the community. This can require time and effort to research and identify potential supporters, but the museum's increased involvement in the community could help in this process.

As custodians of history, it does seem ironic that museums are not always the best at preserving their own organizational history. Leave a legacy for your organization and keep a record of your marketing activities. The benchmarks established, the ideas and programs developed (or not!), the connections that were made, all this information is invaluable when creating effective, long-term marketing strategies.



## Resources

Drucker, Peter F.

*Managing the Non-Profit Organization*

HarperCollins Publishers, First Edition, 1992

Trade paperback ISBN: 0-88730-601-2

*(A basic reference that includes a chapter on marketing).*

Hiam, Alexander

*Marketing for Dummies*

John Wiley & Sons, Second Edition, 2004

Trade paperback ISBN: 07645-5600-2

*(A great reference series with useful information in an accessible format.)*

Levinson, Jay Conrad

*Guerrilla Marketing*

Houghton Mifflin, Third Edition, 1998

Trade paperback ISBN: 0-395-90625-3

*(The classic work on creative marketing.)*

Neumeier, Marty

*The Brand Gap: How to Bridge the Distance between Business Strategy and Design*

New Riders Publishing, First Edition, 2003

Trade paperback ISBN: 0-7357-1330-8

*(One of the best summaries on branding with practical information that you can put into action.)*

Media Guide Online (a News Group Weekly Newspaper website) provides good information on developing a media release: <http://cougar.bcnewsgroup.com/mgo/>

