

Developing A Strategic Marketing Plan

Create consistent messages to reinforce your brand

If your agency is looking to enhance its marketing efforts, start by developing an overall strategy. Like a systems plan, a marketing one should not and cannot happen through a patchwork approach.

This might seem like a big undertaking, but there are basic questions to ask and steps to take that will make this process simple—and ultimately effective:



STEP 1 **DEVELOP A CONSISTENT BRAND.** Your agency already has a brand, or perception, but there is a need to develop strategies that promote that perception. Today, marketing has evolved from a product-focused strategy to an idea- or story-focused one. People are connecting with brands that tell the best story and with which they can identify. Being a public agency, it already authentically represents its market.

STEP 2 **DEVELOP GOALS FOR THE MARKETING EFFORT AS A WHOLE.** These goals should be unique to the agency. One of the biggest mistakes made in marketing is not defining goals that promote the agency's brand, story, and authenticity. This lack of purpose will make it difficult to communicate value to the community.

STEP 3

DEFINE TARGET MARKETS AND SEGMENTS. Defining the target markets or segments for an agency goes deeper than “everyone.” Target segments may be defined in many ways:

- Underserved portions of the community
- Demographic segments
- User segments.

Focusing efforts on market segments streamlines communication, and allows an agency to communicate directly to a select group rather than have its messages muddled when trying to communicate with the entire community.

STEP 4

DEFINE THE GOALS FOR EACH CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION. Due to the nature of parks and recreation services, marketing channels take on a wide variety of forms in the industry:

- Recreational programming
- Events, festivals, and concerts
- Level of service
- Pricing
- Social media, including a website
- Print media
- Online searches
- Museum services
- Mobile applications
- Online media/video
- Text
- Email
- Signage/way-finding
- Trail connectivity

Each channel, and subsequent goal, should be developed with specific target markets in mind. For example, millennial populations should be engaged through fitness opportunities promoted through mobile applications.

STEP 5

DEFINE THE CONTENT GUIDELINES FOR EACH CHANNEL. Content guidelines should also be developed so that messages consistently reinforce the brand, story, and goals of the marketing efforts.

STEP 6

DEFINE EVALUATION METHODS FOR MARKETING EFFORTS. Lastly, evaluation methods should be based on the brand, segments, goals, and content that are unique to an agency. To establish and reinforce an agency as an authentic brand, it must focus on evaluating its own efforts. If these are evaluated based on other benchmarks, an agency may form inaccurate conclusions about the success or failure of its efforts.

Each of the items above can be read as beginning steps, meaning that if the brand of an agency is not defined, it cannot necessarily evaluate its current efforts. Or if an agency doesn't have a target market, then it cannot evaluate its channels. Without these steps in place, marketing efforts cannot effectively develop or evolve.

As parks and recreation services look for ways to build relationships with communities, marketing becomes an essential business tool in today's industry. Even if an agency doesn't currently budget for marketing, or have a marketing staff, it is constantly communicating with potential users. It is in an agency's best interest to proactively develop these strategies. **PRB**

Dylan Packebush is an educator for GP RED, a non-profit organization, and a Project Consultant at GreenPlay, LLC, the leading edge in parks, recreation, and open-space consulting. He is a proud Alaskan living in Denver, Colo. He holds a Bachelor's Degree of Science in Recreation from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and a Master's Degree of Business Administration with a concentration in Sports Business from the University of Oregon. Reach him at dylanp@greenplayllc.com or (303) 483-1850.

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