
Modern Transit Marketing Part II: *How to Pull it Together*

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Building an effective transit marketing program is similar to building a house. The *Mission, Vision, and Values* of the organization form the foundation (See *Modern Transit Marketing Part I – How to Get Started*). *Strategies* are equivalent to the frame. *Tactics* make up the walls and roof. *Advertising and promotions* are really just paint on the walls.



Strategies give shape to your marketing program, just as the frame gives shape to a house. Like the frame of a house, strategies need to be built on a solid foundation, your organization's mission, vision, and values. While few people would build a house without constructing a solid frame, many organizations execute their marketing programs without developing solid marketing strategies, which form the framework for your marketing plan.

Strategies provide focus for your marketing program and all marketing-related expenditures. Without clearly set and well-defined marketing strategies, your marketing efforts become scattered, not achieving their intended purpose. In the worst case, efforts conflict with one another, often doing more harm than good.

The focal point of a strategic marketing plan is its *branding* and *positioning* strategies. The customer or potential customer, including non-riding stakeholders, is at the heart of *branding, positioning, and associated strategies*.

Branding defines the personality of your service. It reflects the values of the organization (functional, expressive, even philosophical). It personifies the image and identity of the service to form the opinions and attitudes people have of your service and organization. Marketing has the assignment to conceive, develop, and maintain an integrated, consistent image for the transit service. Successful *branding* focuses on the customer's needs and wants. At the same time, it must reflect back into the organization and onto its employees so that every action reinforces the image that is the outward manifestation of the *brand*. *Branding is a promise* to your customers.

Seven Laws of Branding

1. Branding is building a relationship with the customer.
2. The brand is about value: tangible and emotional.
3. Brands are about the customers' perception of the service.
4. The smaller your budget is, the stronger your brand must be.
5. Brands are built from strengths.
6. Awareness is not branding.
7. If you can't articulate it, neither can anyone else.

Positioning describes the place your service holds relative to the competition. Before you say your service has no competition, think of all the ways people may choose to travel from one location to another in your service area—bus, car, taxi, carpool, bicycle, motorcycle, train, helicopter, walk, scooter, or they may decide not to go at all. Your *positioning* strategy describes how your service is unique and distinctive from these other modes. It offers your potential customer benefits and values not otherwise available. *Positioning is the difference* as your customer perceives it to be.

Classical marketing embraces four associated marketing strategies, the four P's: *Pricing* (fares and targeted offers), *Product* (service characteristics), *Promotion* (advertising, special events, and public relations), and *Place* (ticket sales and employer programs). Your *branding* and *positioning* strategies will guide the development of these associated strategies. Together they will form the strategic framework for your marketing program.



To develop your *branding, positioning*, and associated strategies, look for the inherent **drama** in your service. Yes, public transit can offer drama! Boulder, Colorado turned its Community Transit Network, a fleet of small, colorful buses that provide high frequency, inexpensive, and direct service within that community, into a *fun* way to get around town. Today, there are five buses in the Community Transit Network — HOP, SKIP, JUMP, LEAP and BOUND. Each possesses a unique identity with amenities shaped

from community input and direction (for further details see www.ci.boulder.co.us/goboulder/html/transit/index.html).

Perhaps the best example of *branding* and *positioning* for a transit property is San Francisco's cable cars. People come from all over the world to stand in line for hours, sit on hard benches or just hang on, and endure no climate control and crowded conditions to be able to ride **transit** at the lowly speeds of nine and one-half miles per hour to go to places they have no interest in going. That is successful *branding* and *positioning*! You can create successful strategies for your service by understanding what your customer values and being creative in your approach.



Once a solid strategic framework is constructed, the selection of specific tactics and the implementation of a marketing program are simple and straightforward. Most importantly, the strategy will yield quantifiable results in revenue, ridership, and public support.

This is the second of a series of four articles on marketing your transit service. Next issue will include the third in the series, Modern Transit Marketing III: How to Make it Work, which will explain how to develop effective tactics and programs to implement your strategic marketing plan.