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## MODERN TRANSIT MARKETING I: *HOW TO GET STARTED*

by Belynda Johnson, Majic Consulting Group

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Marketing is a mirror. It reflects what your organization is to your customers, potential customers, and stakeholders. Before producing a *dynamite* radio spot, buying that *cute* promotional item, or even setting pen to paper to draft your marketing plan, a transit entity must first define the *what, where, when, who, why, and how* of the organization.

The first three have simple definitions:

- *What* is your product or service—transportation, mobility.
- *Where* defines your service area—the community or boundaries in which your service operate.
- *When* delineates your operating schedule—hours and days of operation.

Yet, the next three require a little more thought.

*Who* describes your target market. Most transit agencies have several different levels of target markets. On the first level are your customers and potential customers who directly use the service. Since few transit entities are self-supporting, the general public, businesses, and taxpayers, who pay for the service through their tax dollars or employee incentives, form another level. Elected officials and other key stakeholders characterize another level. Each of these target markets can and should be further segmented in your marketing plan. For example, customers and potential customers may be further segmented into three broad categories: (1) transit-dependent, who have no other means of transportation; (2) semi-dependent, such as seniors and youths who have some alternatives; and (3) non-dependent, for whom riding transit is a matter of choice. These segments may be further broken down into demographic groups, such as seniors, youths, commuters, persons with special travel needs, etc. Understanding the wants and needs of each level and each segment is fundamental to developing a successful marketing program.

*Why* expresses the mission of your organization. Why does it exist? Dr. David Shore, who teaches the graduate course Branding, Positioning and Competitive Strategies at Harvard University, ascertained that although 70 percent of U.S. employees know their organization has a mission statement, only 41 percent know what it is. When it comes to actually *understanding* their company's mission, the numbers are far lower. To ensure effectiveness, a mission statement should be brief, concise and memorable. Ideally, your mission statement should be no more than 25 words and clearly express *why* the organization exists.

Tied closely to an organization's mission is its vision. A vision can be defined as a BHAG—Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal. This is a goal that the more right-brain members of your organization will scoff at and say, "Are you crazy!" Your vision could be to have every member of the community that you serve ride your service at least once a year. A clear vision and mission focuses all of an agency's resources in a single direction.

*How* clarifies the core values of your organization—the basic philosophy for your operations. The values of an organization are an important signpost for customers and stakeholders. Does your

organization value efficiency more than service effectiveness, customer service more than cost effectiveness? Other values may include financial responsibility, integrity, excellence, innovation, diversity, advocacy, stewardship, and involvement. To be effective, the number of core values should be limited to the most important five. By highlighting all values, you really highlight none.

To determine your agency's core values, ask each employee to list the top five values of the organization and determine the common themes. Then ask your customers and stakeholders, and compare the results. Are the agency's values clearly communicated?

Successful marketing reflects the *what, where, when, who, why, and how* of the organization. If your marketing program is developed in a void and without a clear definition of your organization, it will not achieve the desired results.

*Integrated marketing* is a popular term these days. Integrated marketing is an extension of classical *product marketing*. It relies on building a successful *brand culture*, which permeates throughout the entire organization. It allows people with a common focus to speak with a strong voice, share a strong vision, and pursue a common goal with a passion.

All elements of the organization contribute to a transit agency's brand culture: marketing, planning, operations, and even finance. An agency's brand is not awareness; it is not advertising. A brand is a promise! To be successful, your service must deliver on its promise. The invisible, but extremely valuable ingredient, in any brand is *trust*. "The brand makes a promise to the customer, and the customer trusts the brand to fulfill the promise," concludes Harvard's Dr. Shore. Your organization's brand represents the image that people think of and the feelings they experience when they think of your service.

As Dr. Shore explains, "Most organizations don't understand that a brand is like a house with a front door and a back door. Most organizations work very hard to get customers through the front door. Unfortunately, few business leaders recognize that the house has a back door through which customers can leave."

To be successful, your organization's marketing will reflect your brand culture, and your service will deliver on the promise of the brand. The first step in developing a successful marketing program is to articulate the brand for your service by asking and answering the questions *what, when, where, who, why, and how* your agency will deliver its service.

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*This is the first of four articles on marketing your transit service. Next issue will include the second in the series **Modern Transit Marketing II: How to Put it Together**, which will explain how to create effective marketing strategies.*