

Exploring Arts Marketing and Communications

Seven Steps to a Communications Plan

There are seven stages to preparing a marketing / communications plan:

The quality of marketing decisions usually rests on the quality of research behind them. But only do the amount of research you need to: decide the relative 'risk' of the decision you are going to make (will getting it wrong cost you a few pounds, a few hundred pounds, or your whole business?) and judge the degree of research you need accordingly.

For large or complex decisions, you may well need to recruit specialist help in carrying out the research. On the other hand, research that investigates everything and ends up in a large document is unlikely to be read – so only research things that you might act on.

1. An internal marketing audit.

- What do you aim to do/ achieve? What do you judge as success?
- What do you know about your market? Research both the potential and existing audience.
- What are the barriers preventing people attending?
- What is your level of take up?
- What marketing and promotion have you done for your enterprise so far?
- What is the purchasing behaviour of your customer? How do they buy, how often, are they loyal to one venue, why do they come?
- Of the buyers that you have, how have they heard about you or what bits of your marketing have people been responding to?
- How much do you know about the people buying?
- What segments or groups does your market fall into – and which of those groups are most appropriate or important to you?
- Who are your frequent attendees – and what counts as frequent for your organisation anyway?
- What proportion of your database has never bought a ticket? Why? These people must be on your database for a reason – how can you convert them?
- What proportion of your database are 'lapsed' – and what counts as 'lapsed' for you? How can you contact them more effectively? Which of your contacts takes risks with new and challenging work – and is that all they are interested in?
- Create a 'pen portrait' to know your typical customer from the inside – income, family size, life cycle stage, location, lifestyle.
- What are your audience's needs and preferences? Do they want to attend something known and familiar – something 'safe'? How important is price? Or quality?

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- How successful is your sales process: research from a software company showed that in more than 50% of cases a sale was lost simply because the sales person failed to ask the right questions about the customers' needs or didn't understand their motivation.
- Other major reasons for deals falling through was the sales person's inability to listen or even get basic company details correct.
- Develop hypotheses about your audience or customers based on the information you have already gathered and then test it against other information or further research.
- Are repeat visitors showing loyalty to you – or are they just acting out of habit, unthinking allegiance, trust or emotional attachment?

2. An external market audit.

- What data about your particular audience is available outside your enterprise? This might be:
- Social trends or population changes predicted from the Census or from MORI or other polls published in the
- newspapers.
- Trends in use of leisure time? E.g. what is the prediction for take up of music lessons in schools?
- Learn more about cultures by observing without judgment, initiate dialogue about the differences you observe,
- conduct culture-specific focus groups to get information, read about different cultures.
- See www.developaudiences.co.uk/resources/best-links for research location ideas.
- There are two types of research you can do: primary and secondary. Primary research helps you build an
- understanding of your customer and might include quantitative research (number-based), qualitative research
- (anecdotal or comments). Secondary research sets that understanding within a wider perspective and can include
- reading journals and publications, the press, websites, analysts' reports or talking to your contacts and networks.
- These are often referred to as desk-based research.

3. A competitor audit.

- Research your competitors.
- Look at their websites or go and visit them.
- Look around and see what they are doing.
- Who are they?
- Where are they?
- What do they offer?
- What size/ share/ growth rate are they?
- What are they good at?
- What are they bad at?

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- If they're doing something well, maybe that's a good idea – but how might you improve even further?
- Or how might you work together with them to share the benefits of their success?
- Find out if your theatre company or proposition really is unique. Time Out listings are full of actors and theatre companies. People buy on the basis of uniqueness of your offering and the trust they place in your quality (or value for money)

4. **A PEST analysis.** Political and legislative; Economic; Social; and Technological and Developmental factors. For example:

Political (and legislative) factors:

- National arts funding policies
- Local authority funding policies
- Health and safety legislation
- Child protection legislation
- Data protection legislation
- The educational curriculum

Economic factors:

- Levels of household income
- Levels of disposable income
- Levels of unemployment
- Prevailing interest rates
- Rate of inflation

Social factors:

- Demographic trends (eg composition of families and overall aging of population)
- Levels of unemployment
- Levels of disposable time
- Degree of social exclusion
- Levels of educational attainment

Technological factors:

- Local and regional communications infrastructure
- Increased availability of internet and cd-roms as entertainment
- Increased number of leisure alternatives
- Fragmentation and proliferation of media
- Filing and ticket sales systems used

NB – 1. Try to look for the positive aspects as well as negative ones – to identify not only threats but also opportunities. 2. Make it relevant to your organisation – some of the items listed above will not be

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important in your situation. 3. It doesn't really matter under which heading you place an item – it's more important that you don't forget it. 4. Don't just think about the item but about its implication for your organisation – what the impact is likely to be.

5. **Conduct a SWOT analysis.** This stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats. Then turn this into an action grid.

Data (information) alone counts for nothing until it is interpreted: Data (independent facts) needed to be converted to information (interpretation of data) and then information converted to knowledge (assimilation of information to predict the future and finally knowledge becomes wisdom (optimisation of knowledge to make the best decisions)). This is the process you are completing in the SWOT.

NB: You may want to refer to 'Weaknesses' as 'reasons not to come' and 'Strengths' as 'reasons to come' if you're involving non-marketing staff in this brainstorm: it may help them understand what you're looking for. Also try swapping the order of the focus so you finish with 'strengths' or 'opportunities' to help boost morale!

This feeds into an **Action Grid**:

Strengths		Weaknesses
Opportunities	actions that use your strengths to take advantage of opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none">list ideas for action	actions that overcome weaknesses to let you take advantage of opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none">list ideas for action
Threats	actions that use your strengths to help reduce your vulnerability to threats <ul style="list-style-type: none">list ideas for action	actions that will help prevent your weaknesses making you succumb to threats <ul style="list-style-type: none">list ideas for action

6. Communications / Marketing Plan.

The marketing plan itself pulls together everything you've found out in the above stages, and pinpoints what exactly is it you're offering:

- Its unique points of interest that differentiates it from anything else that is out there (**Product – or customer value**).
- It looks at the competition, what they're offering and charging and what you would need to charge to be more attractive than them but still meet your financial targets (**Price – including customer costs**).

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- It looks at how and where your product or service is delivered – whether you are opening a shop or gallery, whether you have to be seen on the internet or whether you need to go into clients offices and work directly with them (**Place – i.e. convenience to the customer**).
- And finally, out of all of that, you can look at **Promotion (that is, communication)**.

Deciding on the Tools to Use When deciding which, or which combination, of the above are going to be best for your purposes, try scoring them in the following matrix. Those with the highest success or conversion rate would likely be used first. Reach – number. New or existing?

	Reach – number. New or existing?	Reach – among target	Frequency	Effectiveness	Relevance	Timing	Competitors	Cost	Staff Skills
Direct mail									
Direct e-mail									
Website									
Brochure									
E-mail bulletin									
Poster									
Word of mouth									
etc									

7. Monitoring.

- Which adverts were effective? Use a voucher system that people have to hand in to redeem or have to quote a code from on line or over the phone.
- Are sales increasing? This one *ought* to be easy to monitor. But what about profit margins?
- Is your renown spreading? Check the local or national newspapers and keep cuttings by date, so you can see if something you do generates coverage in the following days.
- Remember to listen carefully. Successful audience development takes hearing what potential audiences have to say and then building their ideas into our organisations.
- After you've researched, listened and assessed the information, act on it. How can you show that you've taken on board the comments? Then go back to the people with whom you met to discuss your ideas.
- Are people happy with slight adjustments you've made? Invite them to fill in comments cards or get a few clients round a table with some refreshments, and let them chat...

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- An online questionnaire can have a high response rate as people can fill them in quickly. Send them Thursday lunchtime and you may have most back by Monday evening.
- A 'video box' can gather feedback from young people. Smiley, non-smiley or neutral faced post it notes can let very young children grade their reaction to an experience. Or they can be asked to draw a picture of the 'best thing'.