

Chapter 12

Marketing Strategies

NOTES

CHAPTER 12 OVERVIEW

- ✓ Provides minimum **state requirements for marketing 5311 transit service**.
- ✓ Introduces the importance of **system identity**.
- ✓ Examines **public relations** techniques.
- ✓ Details ways to **measure the effectiveness of a marketing plan**.

Minimum marketing procedures are required of all recipients of Section 5311 funds. These requirements are discussed in Chapter 5. However, marketing is beneficial to your overall program for community support, increased ridership, and generating local match.

A. Create a System Identity

The first step in building the visibility of your organization is to create a recognizable identity or so-called system identity. The following elements will help riders better identify specific transit programs: name, logo and color. If these elements are used consistently and repetitiously, the community will come to recognize anything associated with your transit system. Therefore, the name, logo and color chosen need to be used on everything associated with your transit agency, including: vehicles, passenger information, bus shelters, promotional materials, signage, brochure racks, stationery, and business forms. Consistent use of the name and logo can turn a disjointed set of services with little or no visibility into a highly visible transit network embraced by the public.

In designing a name, logo and color scheme keep the following things in mind:

- *Name*

The name should be short and easy to read or say. It should identify the nature of your service or service area, if possible.

- *Logo*

The logo is a graphic representation of your name. It may simply be the name of the organization or its acronym set in a specific typeface, or it may include other graphic elements. You may want to have a graphic artist design your logo.

- *Color Scheme*

Selection of colors for the logo is the next step in creating an identifiable transit system. These same colors should be used on all vehicles and signage.

B. Getting the Word Out to Potential Riders

Another important part of marketing transit service is getting the written word out to all potential riders.

1. Passenger Information

Passenger information is one of the most important tools that a transit agency can use to increase ridership. This information may come in the form of rider guides, schedules and maps. It should be put into an easy to read format to assist individuals with cognitive or sensory disabilities to understand this information. Factors to consider in developing designs for all your passenger information include:

- Consistent use of colors and typefaces;
- Creation of an identifiable design;
- Standard sizes that can be displayed in information racks;
- Clear, easy to understand presentation of information;
- Use of types and sizes that can be read easily (even by senior citizens); and
- Prominent use of phone numbers for those who need additional information.

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Additionally, an agency in an ethnically diverse area might consider printing the information in other languages.

Passenger information must be distributed as widely and visibly as possible. This might include:

- Government offices;
- Senior centers;
- Schools;
- Churches;
- Libraries;
- Recreation centers;
- Grocery stores;
- Banks; and
- Chambers of Commerce.

2. Customer Service

Customer service is also a method by which an agency may market itself. The relationship between transit providers and riders is crucial to the provision of transit services. Customer service skills ensure that passengers are able to share their concerns with transit agency personnel and get a positive response in return. An agency with a customer service policy will build a positive image amongst riders, especially when riders see their input being implemented to improve the services provided.

Customer service should not be limited to administrative staff. It must also include drivers and other employees who make contact with the public. Training employees in first aid procedures, public interaction, and appropriate appearances will go a long way in building a positive image for the agency.

3. Public Relations

Public relations tools, such as media coverage, can be an effective means to reach the community. The best way for a transit agency to receive adequate publicity is by developing a relationship with members of local newspapers and television and radio stations. Local media coverage is often more persuasive to potential riders than

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advertising because the publicity is prepared by a neutral party.

The following steps should be followed in order to establish a high level of communication with the media.

1. Develop a list of addresses, phone numbers and contacts for the local news media, including newspapers and radio and television stations. This list should be updated at least once a year, as personnel change.
2. Get to know local reporters. Invite them to get to know your system, employees and riders.
3. Send out news releases to inform the public of the following noteworthy events:
 - Schedule changes;
 - Special services;
 - Service improvements;
 - New buses or other equipment;
 - Introduction of new programs;
 - Introduction of new materials;
 - Periodic ridership reports; and
 - Employee awards.

Above all, work to make the local media your ally, not an adversary. Once such a relationship is cultivated, an agency must work diligently to preserve this necessary relationship.

4. Community Outreach

A labor-intensive activity that may help to publicize an agency is participation in community outreach programs. Community outreach programs provide agency employees or volunteers the opportunity to give something back to the community while speaking to area groups about the public transit services their agencies provide. Participation in such activities will give the agency a favorable identity in the community.

5. Advertising

Advertising is the traditional means of encouraging riders to try the transit services offered by local agencies. An advertisement has two components:

- Message; and
- Media.

The message is the text of the advertisement and must be attention-getting. The media is the format in which the message is presented, i.e. flyers, an ad in the local newspaper or airtime on television or the radio.

Depending on the complexity of the advertisement and the financial resources the agency has dedicated to advertising, an agency may choose to prepare the advertisement itself or to seek professional assistance. While it is possible for an agency to create a promotional campaign on its own desktop publishing software, it may be necessary to hire a professional advertising agency to conduct a successful advertising campaign.

6. Promotion

As opposed to paid advertisements, promotions include a variety of more direct activities like joint promotions with merchants, special events and free ride days. Some transit agencies have used very creative means to promote their services. For example, an agency may choose to provide free rides for special events, such as city or regional festivals. Like a community outreach program, these activities may be very labor intensive, but they can be an effective way to stretch a limited marketing budget.

7. Targeted Marketing

Targeted marketing is used to identify groups of potential riders through direct marketing. These materials can be produced cheaply with desktop publishing software, photocopied and distributed. Lists of names, such as voter registration rolls and local demographic data, can be used to help identify addresses and names of individuals who would benefit from transit services. Once identified, the

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agency may choose to contact these potential riders via telephone or mail.

8. Internal Marketing

Internal marketing is a device that can be used to inform employees and volunteers about activities in which the agency is engaged. An agency may use an internal newsletter or meetings to gain staff support. These activities are not only to inform personnel, but may be used as a means to motivate them. An incentive program that rewards employees for safety and customer service performance is a prime example of these motivational tools.

C. Evaluating Marketing Strategies for Effectiveness

There are a number of tools you can use to evaluate the effectiveness of your marketing strategies.

- Track changes in ridership;
- Track telephone inquiries; and
- Build measurement mechanisms into your marketing efforts.

These informal strategies will assist your agencies in determining how to improve the ways it is reach out to potential riders.

CHECKLIST

- Does your agency have a logo? 12-1
- Has your agency cultivated good relationships with the local media? 12-3
- Do you have tools for the measurement of success in your marketing programs? 12-6