

### Promotions

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*Promotion* is one of the “four Ps” and therefore part of the marketing mix for any program, service, or facility. Promotion has two basic purposes:

1. To inform target markets about programs, services, and facilities.
2. To persuade target markets to use or buy those programs, services, and facilities.

There are additional goals that promotion may address but for the moment we will concentrate on these two basic purposes.

#### Response Hierarchy to Promotions

The two basic purposes of communication are, as noted earlier, to inform target markets about a product or service and to persuade target markets to use or buy those products or services. The transition from being aware of something to buying or using it is not quite as simple as this suggests, however. There are several intermediate stages between a potential consumer’s awareness of a product or service and her/his decision to buy or use it. Together, these stages form what is often called a response hierarchy. The stages in the hierarchy represent the different stages of consumer decision-making in response to promotional messages. By understanding the response hierarchy, it becomes possible for leisure marketers to design messages specifically targeting consumers at different stages in the decision-making process.

Several formulations of the response hierarchy exist in the marketing literature. The consensus view is that there are four levels in the hierarchy, each associated with a distinctive psychological response (see Figure 1).

1. *Awareness*: A potential consumer must first be made aware of a product or service.

Awareness is *cognitive* response to a message, that is, the consumer *knows* something after receiving the message that he/she did not know before.

Promotional messages intended to create awareness should be crafted to convey the essential information a potential consumer needs about a product or service, e.g., name, purpose, benefits, where available. It can be tricky to package the needed informational content in a message that will catch and hold the consumer’s attention, especially in an environment where a great many messages are being transmitted and consumers are involved in many activities.

2. *Interest*: New consumers must become interested in a product or service; existing consumers must have their interest sustained or intensified.

Interest is an *affective* response to a message. *Affect* has to do with emotions, mood, or desire. An affective response means the consumer feels differently about a product or service than he/she did prior to receiving the message.

Promotional messages intended to generate interest should be designed to extend the consumer’s initial awareness by demonstrating the beneficial or desirable consequences of buying or using a product or service. Messages should also create positive emotional associations with the product or service.

3. *Intention*: Also called *consumer readiness* or *desire*. At this stage, consumers make a preliminary decision to buy or use the product or service. This decision must be reinforced while consumers are informed how they can convert their intentions into action.

*Intention* is also an *affective* response, but with a *cognitive* dimension. Consumers who are emotionally predisposed to buy or use a product must also know how, when, and where they may do so.

Promotional messages intended to reinforce consumer intentions should build on existing emotional associations with the product or service, using them to motivate the consumer to follow through on her/his intention. Typical messages will both remind consumers of the beneficial consequences of a product or service and tell them exactly how the product or service can be obtained.

4. *Action*: Consumers carry through on their preliminary decisions to buy or use a product or service by actually doing so.

Action is a *behavioral* response to motivation or intention. Consumers may be motivated or intend to buy; and they may know when, where, and how to buy; but they must still be encouraged to follow through.

Promotional messages intended to prompt consumers into action must be persuasive. One of the most important barriers to converting intention into action is *self-efficacy*, the individual's belief that he/she may actually be able to do something. At this stage, therefore, messages must convince consumers that access to a product or service is simple, direct, easy, inexpensive, and so on. Messages must demonstrate that people just like the consumer (or people just like the consumer *wants* to be) use or can afford the product or service.

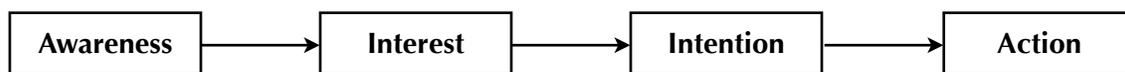


Figure 1. The Promotions Response Hierarchy

### The Promotions Mix

The *promotion mix* is the specific combination of communication channels, formats, content, and visual and audio themes that an organization uses to deliver its promotional messages to potential consumers. (Note that the promotion mix is *not* the same as the marketing mix. The promotion mix is one *part* of the marketing mix.)

There is an almost unlimited range of promotional possibilities, restricted only by leisure marketers' ingenuity and available resources. As Howard and Crompton (1980, p. 456) pointed out some time ago, all these possibilities fall into one of four basic categories: advertising, personal contact (also called personal selling), incentives, and publicity.

1. *Advertising* is generally defined as a *paid* and *impersonal* presentation about an organization and its products or services. The sponsor (i.e., the person or organization who paid for the presentation) is identified as part of the presentation.

As a paid form of promotion, advertising is more often associated with commercial organizations than with public or nonprofit agencies. This is misleading, however, since many channels frequently used by public or nonprofit agencies (e.g., newspaper ads or inserts, brochures, posters) are in fact forms of advertising.

There are three important considerations when deciding how to incorporate advertising into the promotion mix.

- A. *Message*: To create an effective advertising message requires answering the following three questions.

*What is desired consumer response to the message?* It should be clear from the discussion of the promotion response hierarchy that there is a considerable range of possible consumer responses to

any message. The more specific the response desired, the more focused a message must be. Messages intended to create awareness will be different than messages intended to persuade.

*What is the appropriate message content?* The content of a message will be strongly influenced by the desired consumer response and by the relevant features of the sponsoring organization and its products or services, sometimes in comparison to competing organizations and their products or services. Based on her review of the marketing literature, O'Sullivan (1991, pp. 122-23) suggests the following as the most common categories of message content.

- ▶ Information, or the straightforward delivery of basic facts (e.g., dates, times, places).
- ▶ Argument, or the use of a chain of logic to support a proposition (e.g., "You won't get in shape sitting in your easy chair – you have to work out").
- ▶ Motivation, or combining emotional and psychological elements to make a product or service more attractive.
- ▶ Repeat assertion, or the steady repetition of one basic fact or appeal (also often called the hard selling approach).
- ▶ Command, or a direct order to do something (e.g., "If you want the best vacation ever, call this number right now!").
- ▶ Symbolic association, or using symbols to establish desired emotional associations with a product or service (e.g., manipulation of product placements or background images; incorporation of patriotic images or color schemes).
- ▶ Imitation (sometimes also called emulation), or presenting the product or service using people or contexts that the target audience is likely to want to be like or to enjoy themselves.

*What style is best suited for the message?* Style refers to the general tone or feel of a message, including such elements as the presence, type, and volume of background music; announcers or other characters, their characteristics and activities; or tones of voice and types of gestures.

Possible message styles include (based on Andreasen & Kotler, 2003; O'Sullivan, 1991):

- ▶ fantasy (e.g., images of vacation fun as a family chooses a destination resort).
- ▶ musical (e.g., happy customers singing in the aisles: "I don't want to grow up / I'm a Toys 'R Us kid!").
- ▶ mood (e.g., a young couple holding hands while strolling along a beach).
- ▶ authoritative (e.g., a physician cites scientific research on the benefits of regular exercise in preventing heart attacks) (wonder where this example came from, huh?).
- ▶ lifestyle (e.g., using lifestyle settings familiar to target audience).
- ▶ testimonial (e.g., in dialog or quasi-interview format, customers or participants talk about their satisfaction with a product or service).

- B. *Media*: Each of the many media available for advertising has its own advantages and disadvantages. The basic factors to consider when selecting an advertising medium are fairly obvious.

The intended target market: Does a specific advertising medium *reach* the intended target market? With what *frequency* will the intended market audience be exposed to the message?

The product or service: To which media audience is a product or service likely to be most attractive?

The message: Which media type is most effective in transmitting specific message formats or specific message contents?

Cost: What media type or combination achieves the best balance of effectiveness and efficiency?

- C. *Evaluation*: Although leisure marketers should evaluate the effectiveness of all promotion channels, it is especially important to do so with advertising because of its potentially much higher costs.

Information on the size of newspaper or magazine readerships, radio listening audiences, and television viewing audiences is available from a number of sources. Leisure marketers can use this information to approximate the *possible* reach of advertising placed in a specific media type, but does *not* tell them how effective a particular advertisement or advertising campaign is.

Information needed to evaluate advertising effectiveness can be obtained using some relatively easily techniques, however.

- ▶ Post office boxes: Direct inquiries to different post office box numbers, with each number corresponding to the media outlets in which advertisements were placed. This allows leisure marketers to test the effectiveness of ads placed in different magazines, for example, or the effectiveness of ads placed in magazines versus those placed in newspapers.
  - ▶ Telephone numbers and contact persons: Where inquiries or orders come primarily by telephone, it may be possible to use different telephone numbers the same way as different post office boxes can be used. Using different names for contact people is also a possibility. (Note that sometimes the contact names listed in advertising are not those of actual employees, but are used instead to code which advertising generated the inquiry. Thus "Jane Smith" might be used in the *Tribune* and "John Doe" in the *Sun-Times*. When a prospective customer calls for "Jane Smith" or "John Doe," neither of them is "in" and the call is handled by an actual sales employee.)
  - ▶ Registration and entrance forms: It is now common practice at many regional or national facilities to ask for visitors' home zip codes. This information tells leisure marketers something about the distances people are willing to travel to visit a facility. In other cases, people can be asked how they first heard about a facility or a service. Sales or reservation staff can ask telephone callers for this information, which is often collected after the fact for products using product registration or warranty cards.
  - ▶ Interviews: Some organizations hire marketing research firms to interview customers on site about the effectiveness of the organization's advertising. If trained employees are available, it is possible for an organization to conduct such interviews themselves.
2. *Personal contact* or *personal selling* is direct contact with potential customers. In some organizations, there is a trained sales staff that handles personal selling. In an organization that has adopted a *market-driven management* orientation (as discussed during class), however, all employees will be understood as engaged to some degree in personal selling.

As a promotion method, personal selling takes place both on and off site.

On site personal selling primarily involves sales and service employees: the registration clerk and concierge in a hotel, for example, or the sales clerk and gift wrapper in a department store. These employees interact with potential customers who have *self-identified* themselves by coming to or otherwise contacting the hotel or store. The chief task of these employees is to "plant the hook" and "close the deal."

Off site personal selling involves responding to potential customers who have self-identified themselves. More importantly, however, off site personal selling often requires *prospecting* for potential customers who match a customer profile but who have *not* contacted the organization. Trained sales staff are required for this task, which includes conducting customer research (also called prospect development) and designed specially targeted sales materials. A significant amount of work may be done before making an initial approach to the potential customer. The goal of the initial approach is usually to make the potential customer aware of an organization's product or services, to gauge whether these are of possible interest to the potential customer, and to establish a working relationship. Considerable time

and effort may then be spent crafting presentations and developing proposals before an actual sales offer is made.

Personal selling has certain advantages. By cultivating an apparent or real personal bond with a customer, the sales person can determine the nature and scope of the customer's interests, possibly redirecting those interests to other products or services when appropriate. Knowledgeable sales people are particularly valuable because they can educate customers about more specialized or technical product features, including advice on product set up and use. If a customer's attention or interest begins to wane, the sales person can adjust the *offer* (the product or service, the price, and so on). Finally, the sales person may also be positioned to use incentives with customers otherwise unlikely to buy.

3. *Incentives* are items or special terms offered to potential customers as inducements to buy a program or service, or to participate in a program. The incentive is offered by the sponsoring organization, though the incentives offered by public or nonprofit agencies are most often underwritten by sponsors and partners.

Incentives are intended to create the impression of receiving special attention or treatment, getting something other people won't have, or getting a good deal. They can be especially useful for marketing services because incentives like t-shirts, coffee mugs, beverage holders, water bottles, and the like provide tangible evidence of services. Crompton and Lamb (1986, p. 476) identify the following four types of incentives as most commonly offered by leisure services organizations.

- A. *Promotional pricing*: Familiar pricing incentives include discounts during special hours, good for a limited time, differential pricing for children, seniors, and groups; season or bulk rate pricing, and "two for one" deals.
  - B. *Free offers*: These incentives are often intended to create the impression of a special deal, especially if costs are a concern for potential customers. "Kids stay free" or "Kids eat free" or "Kids get in free" are all common offers by businesses that target families. Related incentives are offers of a free trial visit or membership in a fitness club or a golf course or a free overnight stay at a vacation condo development.
  - C. *Prizes*: These are common incentives. Customers may be automatically registered for prize drawings or door prizes, for example, or fitness club members may be given t-shirts or water bottles. People who sign up for programs or services by certain dates might be given some token prize.
  - D. *Celebrity endorsement or association*: Customers may be attracted through endorsements by celebrities of various types. It is important to realize that what counts as "celebrity" depends on the nature of the market being addressed. The desire to be "like" a celebrity, or the trust that many people for some reason seem to have in celebrities, can be a powerful incentive. In other cases, the opportunity actually to meet a celebrity (e.g., at a book signing or a fund raising event) can be an effective incentive. Some organizations offer access to exclusive access to celebrities as part of their fund raising (e.g., for donors giving large amounts of money, a university might offer dinner with the university president or – more likely these days – the football or basketball coach). The travel industry now caters to highly specialized interests with tours accompanied by experts well known in certain fields (e.g., tours to Civil War battlefields or other historic sites led by prominent historians or military leaders).
4. *Publicity* is *unpaid* non-personal media communication (print or broadcast) about an organization and its products or services. Publicity is *not* sponsored by the organization itself, but results from media attention to the organization and its activities. The organization may seek out and invite this attention (e.g., through press releases, invitations to special events) but the media decide what coverage will be provided and the content of that coverage.

The great *advantage* of publicity for public and many nonprofit agencies is that publicity can be free or very low cost. But it can also be very high cost, depending on its scope and purpose. The quality of publicity materials is often taken as an indicator of the organization's overall competence, so giving careful attention to these materials and other publicity efforts is very important. Organizations may have

full time publicity staffs responsible for producing and distributing highly professional promotional materials like videos, CDs, computer-based simulations, and written reports. Organizations may also have no publicity staff whatsoever, relying instead on personal contacts in the media to provide the needed coverage. Special events, community projects, or fund raisers are often used to provide a pretext for media coverage to generate publicity.

Publicity has *two significant drawbacks* stemming from its dependence on the media.

- A. An organization surrenders almost all control over the content, timing, scope, and extent of the resulting coverage. The media may choose to focus on the worthiness of an organization's mission and activities, or the media may decide to focus on something completely tangential. If it occurs on what is known as a "slow news day," a special event may receive several minutes of coverage on a regional television news broadcast. On the other hand, should something more newsworthy or media attractive happen on the same day, there may be no coverage of the special event at all. This holds even if special arrangements have been made (e.g., interviews, staged activities).
- B. Although some writers mistakenly describe publicity as "favorable communications" by definition (e.g., O'Sullivan, 1991, p. 120), publicity can be *either* favorable or unfavorable. This is not just a matter of how the media interpret an organization or event. It also includes, for example, how news video is interpreted by the viewing audience. Stereotypes are an important factor. Bearded participants in a community-wide Earth Day clean up and tree planting project have been mistaken as "environmental radicals" and people drinking lemonade from plastic cups during a free afternoon concert have been misidentified as illegally consuming alcohol in a public park (both examples come from personal conversations with recreation professionals).

In general, the more control an organization can maintain over publicity, the more reliable it is likely to be. This can be achieved through in house production of publicity materials. More often, however, it is a matter of establishing cordial, cooperative working relationships with the media, which includes thoroughly educating its representatives about the organization's mission, goals, and activities, and how publicity can support them.

### References

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