



Back-to-basics media: making the most of media you can control

When used effectively, these old reliables can become mainstays of a marketing and communications campaign

by Brigid McHugh Sanner

Relying on local newspapers, radio and television stations to provide information about your programs and services can be a hit-or-miss proposition. News or feature articles and interviews generated by the media, referred to as *earned media*, do not always come exactly when you need them. You also have little control over the content or tone of this coverage.

If you represent a charitable or nonprofit organization, you may benefit from public service advertising (PSA) donated by the media. But usually you have no control over when or how often your message is placed. Most people with experience in nonprofit communication are familiar with the less-than-desirable outcome of their fabulous PSA being broadcast in the middle of the night.

Purchased media (or paid advertising) allows you to control your message, as well as when, how often, and where it is communicated. But paid advertising in mainstream consumer media can prove costly for some. And even though you do have some control, you compete with a myriad of other messages. Consider the estimated \$200 billion spent on advertising annually in the United States. That's a lot of ads!

The good news is an array of back-to-basics media tools can put you in control when promoting your health and wellness offerings. When used effectively, *old reliables* such as newsletters, direct mail, brochures, flyers and posters, videos and Internet messaging can serve as mainstays in a

solid marketing and communications campaign.

Start with a plan

To make the most of back-to-basics media in a marketing campaign, you must begin with a solid plan. The following points outline the steps involved in creating this blueprint:

1. Define your communications and marketing objectives clearly and specifically. What are the messages you want to communicate? What do you want your audience to do
2. Identify your target audience(s). If you have multiple audience groups, prioritize them by importance in reaching your marketing objectives. Define your audience groups as clearly and specifically as possible using psychographic as well as demographic characteristics. Avoid the tendency to generalize, i.e. to say your audience is the general public or define this group by a single demographic, such as adults older than 50.

Here's an example of a solidly defined target audience: women, ages 50 and older, homemakers or retired, who have tried an exercise program within the past two years, and who prefer to work out on their own. To further delineate this group, you could include such things as the distance the women live from your facility, their income and marital status, and whether they shop near your facility. By clearly defining your target audiences, you enhance your ability to develop and deliver messages the audience will respond to positively.

3. Learn about your target audience(s). Insight into your audience(s) helps you both create

messages that people will understand and relate to, and select the appropriate media for your messages. You can choose numerous means of finding out about your audience, such as marketing research, reviewing published information about the audience, focus groups, and talking to people.

In a health or wellness setting, you have opportunities to learn more about your audience from those who currently use your services. For example, you could host low-cost chat sessions by inviting members or residents for refreshments and an informal focus discussion. You want to *listen* and *learn*, so don't spend time telling people what you are doing, planning or offering. Instead, ask people what *they* think. Discover your audience's concerns, opinions, desires, likes and dislikes.

4. Fine-tune your marketing messages based on your audience research. Make messages clear, concise, audience centered, and include a specific call to action that relates to your objectives. Remember, less is often more for a message that works well.
5. Create messages that carry across different media. In other words, if you use newsletters, posters and brochures in your marketing campaign, strive for consistency in your message and graphic design in all these pieces. The more often people hear, see or read a single message, the more apt they are to remember it. Use the same slogan, colors, design elements and photos to strengthen consistency.

Once you have determined your marketing objectives, target audiences and messages, your next challenge is to

select the communications tools for your campaign.

Tools of the trade

When deciding which media to use for a specific marketing initiative, keep in mind you need not include every option at your disposal. Determine what tools will work best to reach your audience effectively, as well as what fits within your budget.

Newsletters. Desktop technology makes producing high quality newsletters relatively easy today. In addition, you can create versions of your newsletter customized to different segments of your clientele. For example, a monthly, four-page newsletter geared towards the 50-plus age group could include information about how physical activity increases stamina and energy, tips for healthy aging, and articles on dealing with arthritis and keeping limber.

You can deliver newsletters in print and/or electronic versions. One low-cost way to distribute print newsletters is to put them in your facility's kiosks or reception area. Electronic newsletters can appear on your website. You can also use newsletters as part of your direct mail and Internet messaging efforts. If you keep mailing lists of home and/or email addresses, you can send customized newsletters to the appropriate target group.

And don't forget *pass-along potential*. In a prominent place in your newsletter, encourage readers to share the publication with friends and family members who might find your programs or services of interest.

Direct mail. Used effectively, direct mail can be a valuable part of a marketing campaign. According to the Direct Marketing Association, 40% of Americans respond to a commercial

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Effective health messages don't preach

by Aaron Levin, *Health Behavior News Service*

Public health professionals have to learn what people need for health, find ways to get it to people and then persuade them to change individual behavior, says advertising executive Chris Jones, a presenter at a symposium on behavior and public health at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health.

"Scaring people has only a short-term effect," says Jones, former CEO of the J. Walter Thompson Company. "Panic often subsides into complacency."

An effective public health message has to be simple, can't preach and must offer more information so the audience can follow up, states Jones. Reaching the public is more difficult today than even 20 years ago, he adds. Cable, the Internet and handheld computers now compete for the public's attention with radio, television and print. Public debate today is much more adversarial than in the past. This overwhelming load leads to commercial message fatigue and then to indifference.

To break through the clutter and din, a public health communications strategy must identify which behaviors can be affected by communications, Jones says. However difficult it seems, health and communications professionals must then collaborate to simplify the message to make it persuasive for mass audiences.

direct mail solicitation annually. Portland-based Zairmail, a print-on-demand company, points out three key elements to every direct marketing campaign: the list, the offer and the creative. "Experts agree that the single most important element is the list," says Wilson Zehr, CEO of Zairmail. "In fact, many direct marketing professionals claim the relative ratio of importance is 70% list, 20% offer and 10% creative."

What's your first likely source for a mailing list? Your rosters of current members or residents and those who have left your organization in the last two or three years. You can also buy direct mail lists. In fact, you can choose from an estimated 30,000 lists available for purchase. These lists fall into two general categories: *compiled* mailing lists and *response* lists.

Compiled lists are developed from public records and sources such as courthouse records, mortgage and deed records, and phone books. Response lists are derived from individuals or organizations responding to an offer, subscription, etc. For example, people who subscribe to certain fitness or lifestyle magazines or people who use a particular credit card may make up a response list. Your marketing objectives will help determine which type of list you should use.

Direct mail allows a wide range of flexibility in what you can send. Brochures, letters and coupons are common examples.

Keep in mind people may quickly label direct mail as *junk mail* and delegate it to the trash basket. To get your audience to read what you send, make your direct mail piece as personal as possible—for example, address envelopes and greetings to targeted individuals, rather than *Current Resident* or *Neighbor*.

Direct mail pieces are notoriously designed with copious copy, small type and little white space. If you aim to reach older adults, keep in mind that this group prefers bullet points, larger type and wide margins in print materials.

Brochures. Health and wellness professionals tend to think of brochures as tools for education, but they also make terrific marketing vehicles. For instance, your brochure can describe a new program or service and provide details such as how to enroll, dates and times, and where to get more information. You can include a registration form in your brochure. Or you can promote a special offer, such as a reduced rate coupon.

Bear in mind the following keys to developing good brochures, especially those targeted at older adults:

- Select a serif typeface, such as Times New Roman or Garamond.
- Keep the type size large (at least 12 points).
- Use high contrast in your design, e.g. black or dark blue type on white or cream paper.
- Include bullet points, rather than paragraphs of dense copy.
- Make important information clearly visible, i.e. phone numbers, directions, dates and times.
- Choose photographs or illustrations to which your target audience will relate—images of people who look like them doing things they could envision themselves doing.

Flyers and posters. Thanks to technology, organizations can now design and produce attractive, yet inexpensive, flyers and posters. You can post these communications tools on walls or bulletin boards, or display them in places the audience will readily see them.

What's the difference between these two options? Flyers are usually 8.5" x 11" in size and printed on one or two sides, while posters are larger and printed on one side. However, both flyers and posters should have limited copy, large type and bold graphics that will catch the eye. Color helps, too. For instance, flyers printed on bright, neon-colored paper will capture attention and cost little more than those printed on plain white paper.

Flyers and posters often abound in health and wellness facilities, so sometimes being a bit creative (and silly) will help your message get noticed. If you have a small target audience, you might wrap flyers around bottles of water and hand them out in your reception or at the end of a program. Or try posting materials on mirrors in locker rooms and the inside doors of bathroom stalls.

Remember, posters quickly blend into the background and stop being noticed, so rotate them often.

Videos. To produce a decent quality video takes time and money. But video is an excellent means of communicating complex information, and assures the quality, accuracy and consistency of your message. This medium proves especially useful when you have speakers who address numerous groups. You can use these tools in classrooms, workshops and community presentations—even as part of in-house video broadcasts.

Because of the expense involved, aim to produce *evergreen* videos, or videos you can use for at least six months. Ensure your content runs no longer than 14 minutes. A good rule of thumb is 10–12 minutes, as even videos with the highest production values can lose people's attention after about 10 minutes. And, as with print media, choose models or spokespeople who look like your audience.

Internet messaging. The Web offers you a great means to reach your audience. People who want to receive your information often find Internet

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messaging one of the most convenient ways of your keeping in touch. But a fine line exists between reaching people interested in your information and annoying those who do not want *instant messaging*, or real-time communication.

According to *InformationWeek*, a weekly print magazine for business technology professionals, *spam* accounts for an estimated one-half of email traffic. An

article published in the January 19, 2004, issue states that just one anti-spam provider, Brightmail Inc., caught an astounding 800 billion pieces of email spam in 2003.

How can you make the most effective use of Internet messaging? Some key elements include the following:

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- Ask your audience up front if they would like to be on your distribution list. If they say *Yes*, terrific! If they say *No*, make it easy for them to opt out of your list.
- Keep Internet messages brief and clear.
- Have an electronic mechanism that allows people to request additional information. Include a telephone number, so individuals can call if they prefer to talk to someone directly.
- Ensure staff or volunteers respond in a timely manner to questions generated by your Internet messaging.

To succeed with back-to-basics media, you must create a solid plan, choose the right tools to reach your audience(s), and use these tools effectively. But these steps are just part of the overall equation. Once you launch your

campaign, your ability to track, evaluate and respond to results becomes vital to your effort.

Measuring success

Sometimes even well-planned and well-executed marketing programs do not yield expected results. Determine in advance how you plan to monitor your marketing campaign and measure success. With this process in place, you can make midcourse adjustments, rather than allowing an unsuccessful program to eat up your resources.

You can track people who respond to a particular promotion by simply coding the marketing vehicle you use. For example, you might use colored registration forms and assign individual colors to newsletters, direct mail pieces or brochures, so you can discover which

distribution channels provide the best results. Or you can use different media at specific times of the year.

You may find your audience responds well to posters at sites such as community centers in the fall and spring, when those facilities have more participation. But that same tactic may prove less effective during the winter, when participation might be lower. Your marketing campaign can also benefit by coinciding with seasonal events and observations that raise audience awareness of health in general. Here are some examples:

- Many people feel motivated to start a fitness program in September or January. Campaigns in July/August and November/December will likely produce good results if you focus on

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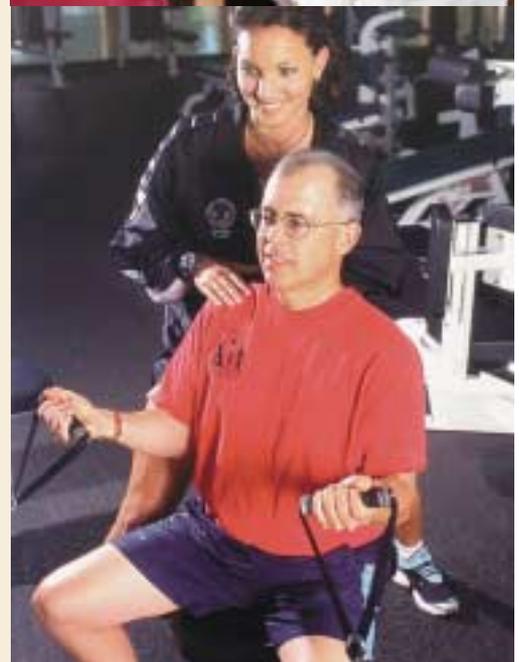
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resolutions or making a fresh start. Keep in mind, however, that many individuals go on vacation in the summer. And people in our society generally face plenty of distractions between late November and the end of December. During these periods, you will need to deliver your messages numerous times.

- February is Heart Month in the United States and Canada. To tie in with this observance, you could stress the cardiovascular benefits of fitness as you launch a program for older adults in February.
- Take advantage of people's tendency to want to get outside as the weather warms by focusing messages in March, April and May around spring or summer activities.

When you employ media you can control in your marketing campaign, you add to the ways you can reach your audiences. But this approach does not mean you should abandon other

activities. Keep using news releases, advertising, special events and promotional items (water bottles, lid turners, key chains, etc.), especially if they have yielded results in the past.

A strategic campaign uses the right mix of tools to meet the objectives of getting information to a target audience and enlisting a desired response. What are the keys to a successful effort? Think and plan strategically. Be creative and flexible in choosing the media you use. Monitor your results and adjust your program execution as needed. And, above all, keep your audience in mind every step of the way. ▼

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10 tips for getting the most from your promotions

- 1. Start with a plan.**
Clarify the objective of your marketing initiative, then define and prioritize your target audiences.
- 2. Do your research.**
Do not assume you know all about your audience. Market research goes hand in hand with planning.
- 3. Talk to your members or residents.**
Go into your facility and simply talk to people. The best way to keep up with your current audience is to listen to what individuals in this group have to say.
- 4. Talk to people in your target audience who are not already clients.**
If you want to expand your communications to reach a broader audience, spend time learning about people who are *not* engaged in your programs.
- 5. Think audience preferences.**
Consider the variety of media you can use (brochures, newsletters, direct mail, etc.) and select tools that appeal the most to your target audience(s).
- 6. Design with your audience in mind.**
If your audience is midlife and older adults, design print materials with them in mind. Use a serif typeface and ensure your text is at least 12 points in size. Feature lots of white space. And choose photos or illustrations that reflect your audience.
- 7. Write with your audience in mind.**
Keep language clear and simple, and avoid technical terms or jargon. Use bullet points instead of lengthy text. Aim for about a sixth grade reading level for a general consumer audience.
- 8. Be creative.**
Customize your newsletter. Make your posters and flyers bold and fun, and post them in unexpected places. Distribute brochures in high traffic areas of your facility or in the community.
- 9. Leverage the advantage of repetition.**
Keep campaign messages consistent across media. Develop a graphic and color theme, slogan or tag line, and set of key message points, and use them consistently throughout your media.
- 10. Invest in high quality lists.**
If you engage in any type of direct mail promotion, invest in top quality lists. Ensure you have a system to update and refresh those lists every six months.