

Success

by Design

Building Strong Organizations... Strong Communities

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Promoting Your Organization's Activities

Effective promotion of an organization's activities can be one of its best assets. A well planned and executed promotion does more than help ensure attendance at meetings. It also enhances your organization's sense of purpose, builds pride and creates community awareness.

A good promotion plan serves as a communication link with members and the general public. It informs people of upcoming events, promotes items of interest and provides newsworthy information.

Developing a Promotion Plan

It takes research, planning and careful evaluation to develop an effective promotion plan for your organization.

In preparing a promotion plan consider:

- What are your organization's promotional needs?
- What events and information do you want to publicize?
- Who do you want to inform?
- Where are the information centres and what are the media options in your area?
- How will you build a working relationship with your local media?
- What budget is available?
- How will you evaluate the effectiveness of your promotional efforts?

A small group, with few financial resources, should never feel compelled to orchestrate an expensive, high-gloss promotional campaign. However, an organization should ensure that its

promotional materials are well organized and have a professional look.

Promotional Tools

Ongoing events, such as upcoming meetings, can usually be publicized by an announcement. Special events, such as fundraising, membership drives and community activities, require different approaches to ensure a broader audience is reached. Consider the options available and determine which one or combination will be the most effective. Some options might be:

Announcements

An announcement provides basic details about your activity. It's usually publicized without charge in the coming events or community

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bulletin sections in newspapers, or as a public service announcement for radio and television.

Press Releases

A press release is a longer story about the event. In preparing a release, you should ask the following question: “What would the public want or need to know about this activity?” Answer the five Ws – Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How? Look for a human interest slant that gives your story an unusual angle. Make it stand out.

Paid Advertising

A well designed media campaign begins with consulting media outlets for advice on costs and content. If you plan to purchase advertising space or air time, allocate your money where it reaches your target audience and obtains the results you’re after.

Other Promotional Options

One attractive option is “free” advertising via local businesses, storefronts, grocery bag stuffers and other avenues. Free advertising may have limitations. You may be limited in the size of your advertisement and the location of it.

Posters, flyers and brochures can be produced at low cost and distributed through local businesses, direct mail, libraries, etc. Other ideas could include displays at shopping centres, schools or community events. You might consider ads on restaurant place mats, other organizations’ newsletters, community banners and internet sites. Slide presentations or personal speaking engagements are viable options.

One of the strongest promotional tools is word-of-mouth. Everyone involved in your organization is a salesperson. The promotion committee should ensure that everyone is well versed in the organization’s activities so they can be effective promoters.

Tips on Presenting a Good Message

- Answer the basic questions: Who? What? Where ? When? Why? How?
- Keep the information brief. Announcements should be kept short (40-50 words). Press releases should be no more than one page.
- Make a written message easy to read, have it typewritten and double spaced.
- Include a photograph, graphic or local artwork.
- Include a contact name and telephone number.
- All material should be dated and sent in at least two weeks before the media deadline.
- Make a phone call to the editor to further discuss coverage of the event or any questions they may have.
- Invite the local media to the event. Include tickets and meal vouchers if needed.
- When material you provide is not published or broadcast, politely find out why. This will help you avoid similar problems in the future.

Develop a Written Plan

The promotion committee should decide what needs to be done and develop a promotion plan. This provides a checklist so that all jobs get done. Remember that the plan is a guide, so you can change it as necessary. All duties and tasks should be listed in chronological order. For example:

Activity	Date	Person Responsible
Contact radio station	October 1	John
Prepare press release for “My Home Chronicle”	October 5	Susan
Mail press release to “My Home Chronicle”	October 10	Connie

Discuss and give copies of the schedule to the executive before you finalize the plan. All organization members should be aware of the committee’s plan.

Budget

Predicting the cost of a promotional campaign isn't an easy task. With your promotion plan in hand, you can determine what the fixed costs will be for the year. Examples of fixed costs are printing, postage and supplies. Investigate the costs for additional promotion such as advertising, brochure design and specialty items like key chains and pencils. Take your time, shop around and creatively tap whatever resources are at hand to make the most effective use of your promotion budget.

At the Event

What do you do the day of the event? Promotion plans should include arrangements for promotional coverage during the event. Make sure you and the promotion committee are available to answer questions from the general public and the media. You might want to appoint a specific person to be the media spokesperson. Have written material available about your organization for the media. This is an opportunity to promote your organization and advertise other activities.

Evaluation

Evaluation of a promotion plan should consider cost and effectiveness. Are you getting the appropriate message out to your intended audience? At what cost? Evaluate the outcomes of your promotional activities from both your group's perspective and from the perspective of people outside the organization.

Check the reaction of your committee members upon completion of the event. Each person should be asked for their reaction. Review your promotion efforts and its success.

Compare the budget with the actual expenditures. Look at how you spent money and the return received. It's important to analyze what worked and what didn't work, in order to make recommendations for the next event.

Evaluate outside impressions by using surveys and participant evaluations. These should consist of a series of questions about the program. One question should deal with how the participant heard about the program.

Talking with the participants during the activity can be effective. The promotion committee should make sure they record the reactions of a good cross section of the participants.

File Information

Remember to keep a file on anything associated with the event. Things to include in your file are mailing lists, media contacts, newspaper clippings, photographs, posters, brochures, budgets, bills, receipts, information packets, advertisements, memos and notes, copies of all agendas and minutes, press releases, background material on sponsors and correspondence.

This will make the job easier when designing the next promotional campaign.

Thank You

Remember to thank all the people who helped with the promotional campaign. It's important to recognize the efforts of all involved. Although you probably thanked them on the day of the activity, show your appreciation later on. Give both private and public recognition when possible.

Summary

Promotion of your organization is an ongoing activity. Developing and using a good plan ensures that your members and your community will not be saying, "I've never heard about that group ... event ... activity". Effective promotion builds pride and increases community awareness about all the great things your organization is doing.

Sample Checklist for an Activity Promotional Plan

Three Months Prior

- Determine who your target audience is.
Contact the media – introduce yourself and your organization’s requirements.
- Lay out the promotion timeline for the event (i.e. dates, times, who’s responsible).
- Send initial press release to magazines, TV, newsletters and community calendars.

Six Weeks Prior

- Have printed material ready.
- Confirm all details.
- Make contacts re: advertising and exhibit space.

Two Weeks Prior

- Send press releases to daily and weekly newspapers.
- Mail special invitations and complimentary tickets.
- Assemble information for the media - press releases and information on the organizations.

One Week Before

- Make phone calls to remind media.
- Check on arrangements for any special coverage.
- Meet with organization or promotional committee for final briefing and any last minute details.

The Day of the Event

- Arrive early.
- Greet the media.
- Answer any questions.

Evaluation

- Complete internal and external evaluation.

Prepare for Next Time

- Organize and file all materials used.
- Follow-up with thank-yous.

Adapted from *Promoting Your Organizations’s Activities*, 1987, written by Ann Hankinson and Cindy Lindsay, with the permission of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food.