

Marketing Your Way to *More Effective Products*

By John B. Sieg

“The bottom line of all marketing strategy and tactics is to influence behavior,” writes Professor Philip Kotler of Northwestern University on the challenges of marketing in nonprofit organizations. “Sometimes this necessitates changing ideas and thoughts first, but in the end, it is behavior change we are after. . . . Some nonprofit marketers may think they are in the ‘business’ of changing *ideas*, but it can legitimately be asked why they should bother if such changes do not lead to action.”

The Heritage Foundation, like all serious research and education organizations, is clearly in the business of changing behavior, so these observations hit very close to home for all of us. In fact, at Heritage they are at the heart of our efforts to market key products such as the *Index of Economic Freedom*, *The Heritage Guide to the Constitution*, *Getting America Right* and *Issues 2006*, to name just a few.

Heritage has adopted a formal approach to marketing these and other important products that is based on fundamentally sound principles adapted from the for-profit sector. This approach has proven to be effective because it is a customer-focused team effort with clearly defined responsibilities, timetables and deliverables. Your organization, large or small, can easily adopt this approach and make it work for you.

Here is how it works.

ORGANIZING THE TEAM

At Heritage, marketing is a team effort. We all share in the task of identifying the needs of our customers and then helping to satisfy them. But this takes leadership, organization and planning.

Leadership is provided by a program manager, generally the person responsible for developing the product that is being promoted. That individual is most likely to have the clearest, most complete understanding of the product being offered and the customers who will benefit from it.

The program manager, working with the marketing director, organizes a team of responsible individuals from relevant departments within Heritage to develop a marketing plan for promoting the product. The marketing plan is a very simple yet powerful document that ensures all parties are on the same page. A marketing plan should answer these questions:

- Who are the key or target customer groups for this product (e.g., legislative staffers, Members of Congress, journalists, donors, general public)?
- Which individuals within our organization are responsible for dealing with each of these customer groups?
- How should we position the product in the eyes of these customers relative to similar products that might be available from other organizations? A traditional positioning state-



ment that explains in no more than three short sentences what the product offers, how it is better and different than competing products, and who will benefit from using it is indispensable in coordinating all product communications and promotional materials.

- What are the action plan and timetable for promoting the product to each customers?

Once the plan has been agreed to by all members of the team, the program manager leads implementation by coordinating the marketing actions of all the individuals responsible for reaching out to targeted customer groups. Periodic follow-up meetings and discussions are extremely useful in monitoring progress, resolving issues, identifying new opportunities, ensuring accountability and bringing the marketing plan to completion.

FOCUSING ON THE CUSTOMER

Professor Kotler also points out that one of the simplest definitions of marketing is “finding customer needs and then filling them.” To the extent that our products are developed with specific target customers and their needs in mind, the program manager and team members should be able to identify quite clearly those customers to whom the product must be distributed. This is called “targeting.”

The value of “targeting” lies in being able to tailor promotional messages, events and distribution methods in ways that most closely meet the various needs and expectations of customers. That generally results in maximum exposure of the product to targeted customers, hopefully leading to increased product awareness, usage, and desired changes in behavior. This kind of marketing represents a “rifle-shot” approach to reaching customers—rather than the often less productive “shotgun” approach.

LET MARKETING WORK FOR YOU

This is all that needs to be done to create and implement a product marketing plan:

- Appoint a program manager—someone close to the product and customers.

- Identify which customer groups will be approached.

- Identify and enlist everyone who will lead outreach to a customer group.

- Brainstorm and agree on specific actions to promote the product to each group.

- Agree on a planned sequence of events and dates for completing actions.

- Assign responsibility for each action.

- Regularly follow up to assess progress, adjust the plan and resolve issues.

- Measure success: did the desired behavior changes occur (e.g., adoption of a policy proposal, etc.)?

And, the plan benefits both customers and the organization.

Customers can benefit from:

- Access to products they need, when, where, and how they need them.

- Reduced “transaction costs” in the customer time and effort required to access products.

- Improved knowledge and job performance.

The organization can benefit from:

- Enhanced customer focus and understanding.

- Improved organizational coordination and teamwork.

- More effective product placement with improved customer usage.

- Greater long-term customer loyalty to the organization and its products and services.

- Increased likelihood of achieving desired change in customer behavior.

With marketing plans, a small investment of time can go a long way toward creating successful products.

John Sieg is Director of Marketing at The Heritage Foundation. For an example of a marketing plan, visit <http://www.insideronline.org/feature.cfm?id=167>.



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