



Taking Training to the Markets:

How to Be Looking Good

If there is something like Billboard charts for training topics, "Marketing & Public Relations" are likely to be in the top ten at the moment. It seems as if more and more organisations and institutions have an increasing need to acquire knowledge and expertise in this field, feeling the competition in their various working areas increase.

With more and more training activities covering aspects of marketing and public relations, the question arose if and how marketing strategies and techniques could be applied to promote training. I was asked to share some thoughts along that line in this article.

With space being so limited, I decided to look for answers to the following four basic questions:

1. Where can marketing be found in the context of training activities?
2. When and why does it make sense for a trainer to get involved in marketing activities?
3. How can a trainer develop and implement a (personal) marketing strategy?
4. What skills, methods and means for marketing fit a trainer's needs?

Marketing – the process and its elements

Marketing basically means communication between someone **offering** something, and the people that this offer is targeted at. So it includes **players**, and a **'product'**, and a **'marketplace'** to bring them all together. The basic concepts and theories behind the terms "Marketing" and "Public Relations" have their origin in the profit-oriented business world. Therefore, terminology and examples mostly reflect that 'culture'. It is a smart thing to keep this in the back of our minds to prevent irritations when applying the profit-oriented language to our training realities, which often deal with non-profit organisations. With a little flexibility in the mind, it is not so hard to find the 'product' of a non-profit organisation, or its 'customers', 'markets' and 'resources', etc.

If we try to identify possible marketing **players** in a training context, it makes sense to think in terms of **supply** and demand: Who is **offering** a training activity? Who has **the need** to participate in one? Possible

answers to both questions include

- ✓ an institution.
- ✓ a non-profit organisation.
- ✓ a business company.
- ✓ a political body.
- ✓ a training institute.
- ✓ an individual (e.g. a trainer or a participant)

And what 'product' would be put on this particular 'training' marketplace? Answers include

- ✓ a training activity (workshop, seminar, year course etc.).
- ✓ a training method.
- ✓ a training programme/strategy on a specific topic.
- ✓ a team of trainers/an individual trainer.
- ✓ a report/handbook/publication resulting from a training activity.

On this basis, I think we can answer the first question: Where can marketing be found in the context of training activities? Wherever there is contact/communication between the two 'players' – one **offering** training, the other one **demanding** it – related to the **'product'**. This would include

- ✓ an information brochure describing upcoming training events.
- ✓ an invitation letter to the target group of a training activity.
- ✓ a briefing document for the selected participants.
- ✓ a phone call by a participant to ask for help in getting a visa required for a training venue.
- ✓ a report describing the follow-up activities of a training course, sent to the participants.

When trainers should care about marketing – and why

If you can accept this answer, then it should be easy to find one for the next question as well: When and why does it make sense for a trainer to get involved in marketing activities?



by Martin Schneider



Well, whenever you - as a trainer - *care* for the respective training activity, its underlying topic and the target group. As long as you are satisfied with the 'product' you offer, and care about it and the goals it wants to reach, you should have an interest in marketing this product. Why? Because you want it to be successful, don't you? So people need to know about this great thing you have to offer, and you should think of ways of making your offer look *attractive* to the people you would like to involve with your training.

Finding the right strategy for your marketing

That takes us straight to question number three: How can a trainer develop and implement a (personal) marketing *strategy*? In other words: How do you *plan* to let your market know about what you have to offer? You only need to know these three things:

1. How can you express your wonderful product?
 - ↳ Find your *message*.
2. Who do you want to receive your message?
 - ↳ Find your *target group*.
3. Through which medium can your message reach your target group?
 - ↳ Find the right *communications channel(s)*.

If you have a clear idea of these three elements – *message, target group, medium* -, you have the core of your marketing strategy. To help you find the three above elements, I suggest questions like the following to ask yourself. And the best – though trivial – tip: try to think like your target groups do, try to see everything from *their* perspective.

Target group(s):

- Who would have a *need* for my 'product'? Why? (It may be healthy to test your assumptions, as it is common to be spectacularly wrong. . . .)
- How can I define *groups* among those people? And what criteria do I use for these definitions?
- Where *are* my target groups? How can I *reach* them?
- What are their *habits*? How are they different from my own?
- What is my relation to my target groups? And how does that look from *their* side?

Message:

- What is *unique* about my 'product'? Would my target groups agree?
- How can I express this uniqueness in the language of my target groups?
- Is there a special *appeal* (something really attractive; a "goodie") in my product for them? If so, how can I include it in my message?
- Is my message *short and clear* enough? Again, testing would not hurt. . .

Medium:

- What media reach my target groups? How do I know that?

- What media do I use anyway, and could they transport my message (e.g. an invitation letter with an application form could be included in an already existing newsletter)?
- Who will be *excluded* from my message by choosing a specific medium to transport it?

With these three elements found, you basically have your marketing strategy: *To get your message across to your target group(s) through the selected channels.*

Putting plans into practice: implementing your market strategy

Implementing a good strategy is often easier than planning one. I suggest to look for every possible interaction between you (the offering party) and your target group(s), and check its potential for your marketing: Every contact is a marketing potential. Try to ensure a clear, understandable and reliable line of communication throughout the whole process, from the invitation letter all the way to follow-up activities. And it is smart to keep in mind: marketing is a specialised form of *targeted* communication, and it is your responsibility to ensure that *your* message was received and understood by your target group(s) in the way you *intended* it.

Besides that, let your product speak for itself: if your workshop is inspiring, if your training performance is motivating, if your seminar created friendships, people will remember, and they will tell others. That's how an image is being created and maintained. Since this particular mechanism works both ways, and people tend to have a better memory for negative experiences than for positive ones, it is always worthwhile putting some quality into your work, your 'products' . . .

So what does it take from a trainer to get actively involved in marketing activities, what methods and means are there? Most of all, a true understanding of the 'product', e.g. what exactly are the goals of a workshop? Who actually needs it, and why? Further, you need a good feel (empathy) for your target groups (or skills and money for researching them). Add some creativity and the ability to question your own ideas, and you'll have a good chance to enjoy yourself as a successful marketing person.

And what means are out there to be used for implementing your marketing strategies? Probably more than we can think of, including

- The internet: websites, mailing lists, chats, bulletin boards, electronic news letters. . . .
- Print media: local/national media, news letters, magazines, brochures, flyers, stickers, banners, flags. . . .
- Audio/Video: Radio and TV stations, Video tapes, CDs, CD-ROMs. . . .

And not to forget merchandising articles, education fairs, pool meetings, congresses, your letter heads, business cards, propaganda by word of mouth, and a thousand other things.

And there is a lot more out there....

I hope that these very basic thoughts triggered some further ideas in your heads, reflecting your very own situation, experience and needs. I would have liked to explore some further aspects, such as marketing yourself as a trainer, maybe building a brand and an image, and how to maintain these. Where are your limits in terms of skills, ethics and morals, or simply resources? How do you do marketing towards sponsors, funders, political bodies? What's the difference between marketing and lobbying, or marketing and public relations?

As you see, there are many aspects to explore out there. Please let me know if you find something interesting!

If you'd like to know more about the world of marketing, I can recommend the following publications and websites:

Books:

- Alexander Hiam (1997). *Marketing for Dummies*. IDG Books Worldwide: Foster City (CA, USA). A great introduction to all important aspects of marketing in a very practice-oriented way. A pleasure to read, with one eye always ironically winking.
- P. Kotler and A. Andreasen (1996). *Strategic Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations*. Prentice Hall: New Jersey (NJ, USA). More on the theoretical side, this publication offers the relevant aspects of strategic, big-scale marketing for nonprofits.
- G.J. Stern, Amherst H. (1994). *Marketing Workbook for Nonprofit Organizations*. Wilder Foundation: St. Paul Minnesota. More on the practical side, it offers ready-to-adapt marketing concepts for nonprofits.

WorldWideWeb:

- <http://www.dmnews.com> | Direct Marketing via Internet. A competent forum, including a free daily email newsletter to subscribe to.
- <http://www.knowthis.com> | Virtual Library on marketing and advertisement topics.
- <http://www.marketing.org> | Network for business-to-business oriented marketing with interesting resources.

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