



BSSEC

resources

Promoting Your Enterprise - a resource pack

Part 1 - Getting Started

Before an organisation or individual can use the services or products offered by your enterprise, firstly they need to know of your existence. This is why promoting your enterprise is key to developing a customer base, a credible image, and long-term sustainability.

As an essential part of business development, promotion requires a professional, considered approach to be successful, but there are many promotional initiatives and techniques that enterprises themselves can undertake.

This part of the Promoting your Enterprise resource pack aims to give a general overview of promotion, its functions, and some broad principles that will help improve the effectiveness of your promotional activities.

Promotion and its aims

What is promotion

Promotion is communication about products or services that is directed towards individuals, groups, organisations or the general public who form your target markets.

What are the main functions of promotion?

The main functions of promotion are to:

- Inform people about your products or services and create awareness of your enterprise
- Educate people about what you do and the benefits your enterprise provides
- Remind people, who may already be aware of your enterprise, that you're still operating and the range and benefits of what you do
- Persuade people that your services/products are of interest to them
- Influence people to choose your enterprise rather than another business that offers the same services or products
- Facilitate action by telling people what they should do if they're interested in your services and/or products

Promotion categories

Promotion covers a range of different approaches and activities:

- Advertising: paid messages conveyed through print, broadcast or new media
- Personal selling: word of mouth, telesales, canvassing, public relations
- Publicity: free media coverage – news stories, mentions, etc.
- Events: special events, talks, presentations, exhibitions, etc.
- Print media: leaflets, brochures, etc.
- New media: websites, CD-ROMs, etc.

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Promoting Your Enterprise - a resource pack has been produced by Birmingham & Solihull Social Economy Consortium (BSSEC) - a practitioner-led network that supports and promotes the social enterprise sector.

The pack provides guidance and information for social enterprises to help them improve the effectiveness of their promotional activities. It comprises:

Part 1 - Getting Started

Part 2 - Defining Your Market

Part 3 - Writing press releases

Part 4 - Creating leaflets and brochures

Part 5 - Producing a newsletter

Part 6 - Building a basic website

The pack can be downloaded, free of charge, at www.bssec.org.uk

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See the test version of our Purchasing Guide to Social Enterprise & the Voluntary Sector in Birmingham & Solihull at www.bssec.org.uk

Planning and preparation

Before you undertake any promotional activity, planning and preparation is required to ensure that time and resources are not wasted. As a first step in your planning, you could consider the following questions:

How is your enterprise currently perceived by customers?

Be realistic about how your enterprise is widely seen by others at present. If possible, use any information available to you to inform your assessment - customer feedback, wider research about your sector, sales income from repeat clients, etc.

How would you like your enterprise to be perceived by customers?

Your ideal perception may differ from the reality. If this is the case, compare the current perception to the ideal and use the information to your advantage in promotional material. For example, if your enterprise is viewed as a very technical business, whereas you'd like it to be perceived more as a people-orientated enterprise, then look at ways of emphasising the latter message in your promotional material.

How much time and money are you able to allow for promotion?

A lack of time and money are the two main reasons for promotion being neglected so it's important to look carefully at what your enterprise can afford and make decisions on your methods of promotion based on your findings. For example, enterprises unable to allocate a large budget to promotion should consider developing materials that are relatively inexpensive - such as press releases, PDF newsletters, etc.

For any business that does not have a dedicated marketing/promotions officer, it can be difficult to find 'spare time' to create promotional material so it's important to designate specific 'promotion time' -

even if it's just an hour every week - to make sure that it gets done.

What are your promotional objectives?

Consider what you'd like to achieve from any promotional activities. Usually, the objectives will relate directly to those set out in your mission statements, business plans or other strategic objectives. You may wish to promote a new product or service, or promote sales and take-up of an existing service. Perhaps you have been successful in recruiting new, specialist staff who will significantly enhance the quality or volume of services you can provide. Perhaps you have undertaken a new initiative - such as a previously unavailable training course - and now need to spread the word about this as rapidly and as effectively as you can. Any or all of these scenarios might provide a legitimate purpose for your promotional activity.

Have you defined your market?

Defining your market - having a good impression of who your customers or services users are - is essential. And the more detailed you can be, the better.

This is sometimes called 'market segmentation'. Breaking down your target markets into definable 'segments' can help you in a number of ways. Not only can products or services be fine-tuned for specific segments, it also enables you to fine-tune and adapt the messages you wish to project and the techniques you use to do this. For example, you may have a service that appeals equally to young people and their parents. However, in 'selling' the service to young people you may need to emphasise quite different messages to those you want to get across to their parents. Remember, you are looking to create a 'fit' between your promotional messages (and the techniques you use) and the groups these are aimed at. The better the fit, the more effective the message and the less you are likely to waste resources in activities that fail to reach their target audience.

What actions do you want from your target markets?

Although the desired action may seem obvious to you, make sure it's clear in your promotion. For example, a website about your enterprise may be very informative, but if it doesn't clearly state how people can access your services, buy your products, volunteer to assist the organisation, or make donations to support your work, then its promotional value is greatly reduced.

Making decisions on these questions will help steer the direction of your promotion - both in terms of its content and the kind of image you'd like to convey. Your answers should also help you to determine

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what kind of promotional methods are right for your enterprise. For example, would a leaflet reach your market better than an email? Would you reach your target audience better by handing out flyers in busy high street locations? Do your customers travel primarily by public transport? Can they be reached more effectively through existing centres, such as public libraries, local nurseries, sports centres?

Using the information gathered from your answers, you can now put together a promotional schedule outlining roughly what you'd like to produce, and when.

When putting together the plan, also consider if there are any external events that can be utilised for your promotion.

Conveying the right image

Once you've defined your market, decided upon what promotional material you'd like to produce, and drafted a rough promotion schedule, you're ready to begin production. However, regardless of whether you're planning on creating press releases, websites or emblazoning hot air balloons with an advert, it's essential that you convey the right image - one that reflects your promotional objectives and the way you wish your enterprise to be perceived.

Your enterprise's image - its 'brand identity' - creates the first impression between your business and its potential customers, so it's important that it is appealing, accessible and memorable.

Large corporations spend millions developing and protecting their brand identity. Indeed, for many corporations, the value of their brand massively outweighs the value of the actual products they sell. We are not advocating that social enterprises can or should mimic the biggest corporations, but basic principles of consistency, clarity and accuracy will help even the smallest organisations to improve their promotional material and techniques and convey a more professional image.

It's also absolutely crucial to consider your target market(s) when creating any material and think about what image they are likely to be attracted to. For example, if your enterprise aims to appeal to teenage boys interested in music, its image should be somewhat different to an enterprise that aims to appeal to grandparents interested in gardening.

Consistency

Consistency in promotional material mainly achieves two things - it develops familiarity between an enterprise and its target market (what colour is a can of Coca-Cola?) and gives a professional, defined, organised impression of the enterprise.

Enterprises that ignore consistency, creating promotional materials in wildly differing styles – different fonts, colours, even language and terminology - risk being perceived as indecisive, amateurish, even chaotic.

The best way to achieve consistency throughout promotional material is to establish a 'style guide' - a document defining the appearance (font styles and sizes, colours, use of graphics) and content (language, standard terminology, key messages) - that should be used in your promotional materials.

The strictness of style guides varies - while some may suggest little more than broad guidelines, others will dictate the exact appearance of every item the company issues.

It's up to you how detailed your style guide is, but by putting a guide together that can be used as a source of reference throughout the organisation, you significantly increase the chances that your promotional materials will have a clear, consistent and professional appearance.

Clarity

As well as being consistent, you also need to ensure that your promotional material is clear and easy to understand. Overly complex material is usually disregarded before it's even read. Therefore:

- Ensure that promotional material reflects your services/products
- Use simple layouts and clearly legible fonts that enable text to be easily read
- Select images that support text rather than distract
- Use a minimum amount of text to convey your message

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Accuracy

We all make mistakes, but accuracy helps to create a professional impression and assures customers that you are thorough and considerate.

This can be achieved by:

- Ensuring that all information is precise
- Checking spelling and grammar
- Ensuring that facts are consistent with other promotional material

Common problems

We all occasionally overestimate our abilities, and one of the most common problems is making claims that can't be delivered on by the enterprise. It is vital to avoid making claims or conveying messages that suggest service standards you know you cannot meet.

Other promotion problems are:

- Material does not appeal to target markets - this occurs when material is created often to the specific tastes of the designer or staff without consideration for who it's supposed to appeal to.
- Cost of the material is too high - avoid unexpected costs by carefully planning what you can produce within allocated time and budget.
- Poor value - low response: what's being offered just isn't of interest to the target market.

■ Misinterpretation of promoted messages - if clarity is not exercised throughout your materials, then potential service users and customers can be confused and dismiss the information entirely.

■ Material does not gain initial attention - if this occurs, it's likely that material wasn't circulated via the right route (for example, press releases could be being sent to the wrong contacts) or at the right points (leaflets inserted into publications that are not reaching target markets).

■ Material is directed towards the wrong target markets

■ Promotion message is poorly delivered

Monitoring

It can often be difficult to know which of your promotional materials or initiatives work and which don't, but there are steps you can take which will help you monitor the effectiveness of the promotional activities you undertake. Here are just a few examples:

■ Ask anybody who makes a new enquiry with you how they heard about your enterprise. Keep a record of the answers and use them to see which promotional methods are proving to be the most successful.

■ Provide a unique reference number or address for postal or telephone responses which identify the source of the information.

■ If you have a website, access your site's statistics (these are provided by most hosting companies)

■ Check news coverage

Issues to consider

Accessibility

The Disability Discrimination Act places a legal duty on service providers to make reasonable adjustments to the way they provide services to ensure that disabled people can use them. This may not impact on all of your promotional material, but it's good practice to follow accessible design guidelines to enable your material to be read by as many people as possible.

Refer to: Disability Rights Commission www.drc.org.uk, W3C's Website Accessibility Initiative www.w3.org/WAI, RNIB See it Right campaign www.rnib.org.uk

Inclusiveness

Always consider if your promotional material meets the needs of ethnic minorities and reflects a multi-cultural society.

Refer to: Commission for Racial Equality, www.cre.org.uk

Liability

Any description of products or services must be accurate - it is an enterprise's responsibility to ensure that this is the case in all promotional material regardless of whether it's produced in-house or externally. Also, if any text, slogans or images that do not belong to your enterprise are used, then reproduction permission must be sought.

Refer to: www.tradingstandards.gov.uk

Further reading

Branding social enterprise

A free report published online by Social Firms UK. The report features information on why and how to brand social enterprises and it includes case studies on the development and implementation of brand identities.

To download go to the resources section at www.socialenterprise.org.uk

Marketing Your Social Enterprise

A guide published by Social Enterprise London that aims to give an insight into what marketing is, why it must be considered as part of organisational planning and how it can achieve maximum results for modest efforts.

Available from www.sel.org.uk, priced £10.00