

# Marketing: An Emerging Area

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Communications professionals in the land-grant system are becoming more heavily involved in nonprofit marketing, a holistic client-centered approach to integrating program and communication efforts to advance the goals of the organization. This paper looks at some of the most successful programs and delineates several issues that Cooperative Extension and information units must face in implementing nonprofit marketing.

The national trend by the Cooperative Extension System toward organizational and program marketing has positive implications for communicators working with Cooperative Extension. They are likely to have more resources and to be more thoroughly a part of the total program effort. There will also be far more demanded of them.

The need for marketing or, at a minimum, more visibility, is widely felt among Cooperative Extension personnel and supported by public surveys which show that the urban public often has little knowledge of Cooperative Extension. Listen to what those in the system have to say:

**A county home economist in a city of 200,000 in Nebraska, speaking of the competition in her community: "Our training is much better, but others look more polished. Marketing is not immoral; we need not to hide our abilities."**

**An agricultural agent in a county of 35,000 in Vermont, addressing the question of whether good material requires good presentation: "We are dealing with limited time. There is a tremendous amount of information out there. Consumers are bombarded with tons of paper. If we don't keep up, whether information is valid or not, they are going to put us aside."**

The writer recently had the opportunity to study nonprofit marketing as part of a six-month professional leave. During that leave, 54 face-to-face interviews were conducted with administrators, field agents, subject specialists, program/evaluation specialists, and information professionals at five land-grant universities: Cornell (New York), Nebraska, Ohio State, Oregon State, and Vermont. The broad scope of the interviews shows the broad scope required in marketing. It cannot be confined solely to communication.

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Communication without consideration of program or product is promotion—not marketing. In that spirit, this paper will look first at Cooperative Extension programming, then at the supporting role of information professionals.

### **Cooperative Extension and Marketing**

Robert S. Topor, author of three books on marketing higher education, makes these observations about Cooperative Extension (Topor, 1989):

- Cooperative Extension must stop its self-fragmentation and self-destruction. It must use one agreed-upon name and stick to it.
- Cooperative Extension must document its results.
- Cooperative Extension must provide collective materials all can use.
- Cooperative Extension must have common programs across county and state lines. There must be commonly agreed upon program attributes that can be used in promoting programs and these attributes must be validated with external research.
- Cooperative Extension must structure itself with the user as the most important person.
- Cooperative Extension must invite new issues, new technologies.
- Cooperative Extension must remember that client perception is a reality, often the most important reality.
- Cooperative Extension must become visual, not verbal.

Over the past few years, a number of states have adopted marketing programs of varying degrees of sophistication. Some states house marketing in communications units, as at Nebraska or Vermont; in other

states, there may be a broad-based marketing committee, as at Cornell or Oregon State. Either system can work, given solid commitment and financial support from top administration. Ideally, marketing should embrace all levels of the organization, including office staff and volunteers.

The most vital and successful marketing programs are those which have their roots in a local response to local challenges. Even though there have been several national workshops, marketing has not taken vigorous hold until it has met perceived local needs. Those who would introduce or strengthen marketing in their states thus have a dual task: Obtain firm administrative support and apply marketing in a way that meets the most critical local needs.

Keeping marketing alive is also a critical question. It is not a one-time effort. Training for staff needs to become deeper and richer as they learn more about marketing. If it is simply more of the same, Cooperative Extension agents will lose interest (of course, new staff need basics). Fortunately, the field of nonprofit marketing (and also that of services marketing) has matured dramatically over the last 15 or so years. From a not terribly appropriate application of business principles to nonbusiness areas, it has become a sophisticated discipline in its own right.

Christopher H. Lovelock and Charles B. Weinberg make this analysis of the distinctive characteristics of nonprofit marketing (Lovelock and Weinberg, 1984):

- Services and social behaviors, not physical goods, are the product.
- Nonfinancial objectives are dominant, making objective setting and performance measurement more difficult.

- Need for resource attraction.
- Multiple constituencies other than the immediate user.
- Tension between mission and consumer satisfaction.
- Public scrutiny.
- Nonmarket pressures, such as political directives, regulatory agencies, or professional associations.
- Availability of free or inexpensive support.
- The need for management to deal with board members, volunteers, managers, and professionals sometimes pulling in different directions.

Marketing programs and marketing training that truly serve the needs of the institution must recognize and deal with these differences. As staff become more involved in marketing, they also realize they need advanced training in communications skills. Thus, communications training that goes beyond basics is another need in supporting an effective marketing program. So is ongoing help with evaluation methods and techniques.

For greatest impact, marketing must have three dimensions: 1) organizational marketing; 2) resource attraction; and 3) program and event marketing. Currently, some states emphasize organizational marketing—complete with logos, slogans, telephone answering instructions, and the like—while also paying some attention to resource attraction. Others tend more to event/program marketing, increasing visibility and attendance for Cooperative Extension programs while also emphasizing resource attraction. Ideally, each state would have a balanced program with all three components.

Marketing also needs to be con-

ceptualized in terms of an ongoing relationship with clients. In the direct mail catalog industry, for instance, the emphasis is on getting the first sale, then building long-term customer satisfaction. The profit comes not from one sale, but from repeat business. One would think that Cooperative Extension would be rather good in doing this, since most surveys show that while not everyone knows about Cooperative Extension, those who do value it. Bruce DeYoung of Oregon State University points out that Cooperative Extension must go beyond this. Prior clients are the informal sales network for future clients. We must empower them to be our champions and must better understand what it takes to reinforce word-of-mouth marketing and what it is that people are excited about (DeYoung 1989). His point is that marketers do not sell programs to clients. Instead, individuals recognize a problem and ask who can help. They are receptive to information, which is largely word of mouth, and end up selling themselves.

Lovelock and Weinberg (1984) stress the importance of positioning the organization or its services in the marketplace. Their presentation of the analysis required of the market, the organization, and competitors is shown in Figure 1.

This approach fits well with efforts Cooperative Extension has taken over the years to analyze the 4-H program. Similar efforts are now being made in other areas. One of the most encouraging is in Ohio, where an ongoing committee of agents and other staff is addressing the special marketing and programming needs of urban areas.

If Cooperative Extension is truly serious about marketing, it will need

to confront structural questions that arise when a client-centered approach is taken. The weekly work pattern, as an example, does not match the hours when clients in

two-paycheck families can attend events. Another structural problem is lack of help to agents and other staff with polishing personal presentations.

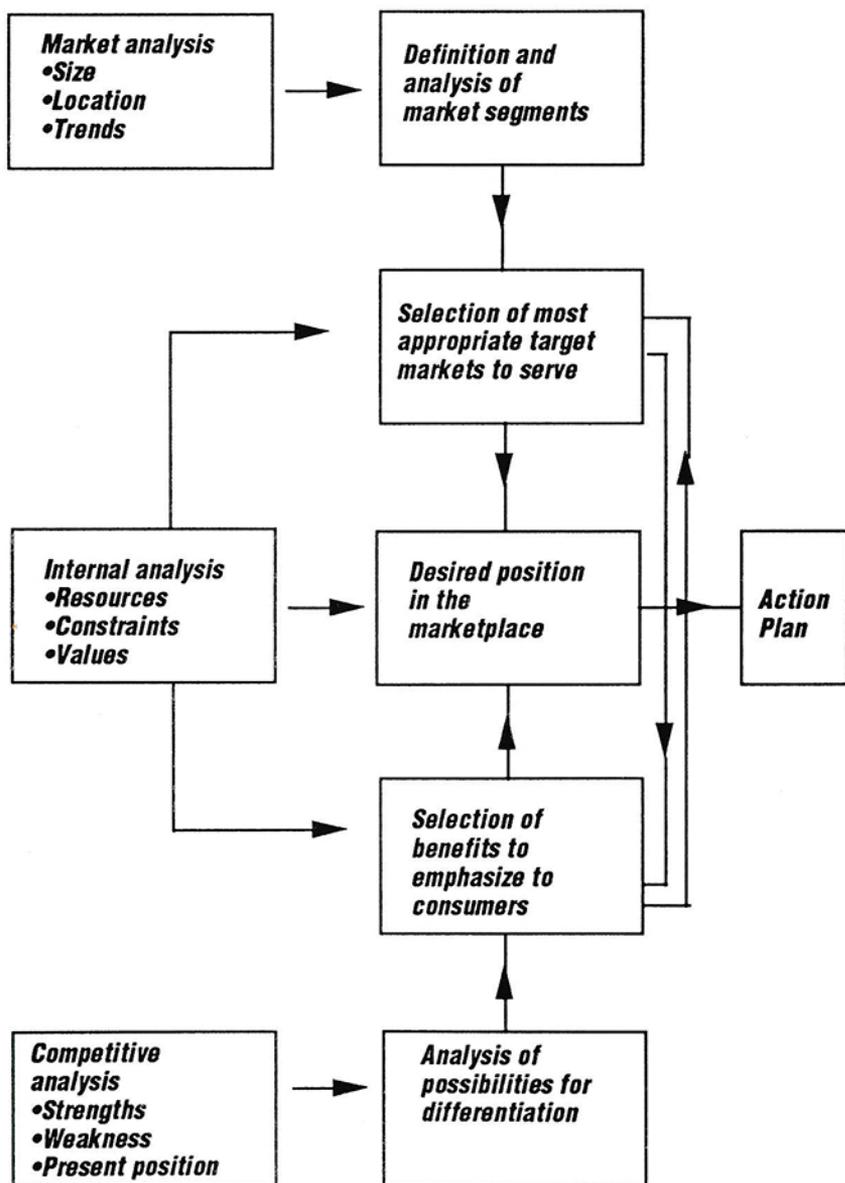


Figure 1  
Developing a market positioning strategy (from *Marketing for Public and Nonprofit Managers*. Christopher H. Lovelock and Charles B. Weinberg. New York: Wiley, 1984).

Cooperative Extension will also need to confront the likely consequences of closer identification with the parent university, a step taken by many Cooperative Extension services as they seek greater visibility. The issue is largely one of quality. If Cooperative Extension trades more heavily on the university's name, the university will expect Cooperative Extension's offerings to contribute positively to the university's image and advance its goals. If they do not, the result may be a further wedge between central administration and Cooperative Extension and a withdrawal of support. The public, also, will have different expectations of Cooperative Extension programs as a result of close identification with the parent university; expectations that are reasonable and must be met.

All in Cooperative Extension recognize that it is doing too much, and as a result, not doing well. The national and state program initiatives are an extremely useful step in focusing programming (and incidentally are client centered). Even so, there is too much to do with too few resources.

Theodore Levitt, editor of the *Harvard Business Review* and one of the wise men of marketing, points the way to an additional solution. He talks about the importance of knowing "one great thing" (Levitt, 1986). And that thing is to not let superficial differences lead to fragmentation of the market into such small segments that they can be served only at a price that is too high. His example for a manufacturing situation is treating Europe as a single market, even though there are differences in consumer preferences among the various countries. The production efficiency gained by larger volume re-

sults in prices that are enough lower to overcome the individual characteristics of the various markets. The application for Cooperative Extension is far greater: sharing of publications, videotapes, and other educational materials—sharing that would result in great efficiencies and release important resources for use elsewhere in the organization. Materials from another state or agency might not fit as precisely as materials tailored to a particular program. But can we afford exquisite tailoring? What might we otherwise do with the resources? Of course university people will still be required to publish! Let that publishing be papers on evaluation—preferably formative evaluation that helps shape and strengthen current programs or impact evaluation that provides hard data for third-party marketing.

### **Communications Units and Marketing**

Communications units that serve Cooperative Extension need to become more familiar with nonprofit marketing and its family of concepts such as "scanning the environment" (learning what others are doing and what trends are developing that may impact the program or the organization either as opportunities or threats); "gap analysis" (the difference between the desired market position and the present market position); "third-party marketing" (one party provides services, one party is the client group, and the third party funds the services and is also a market, some would say the most critical market); and "flankers" (products that are extensions of the core product and provide additional opportunities to reach the market).

Information professionals will recognize many of the concepts in

marketing from their own study of mass communications. Marketing, however, provides a holistic, client-centered approach that integrates communication and program.

Information units also need to review their attitudes with respect to marketing. The name is remarkably unfortunate and carries a heavy load of sleaze that causes an understandable reaction. Nonetheless, the term is solidly established and will remain so, because the principles of marketing are broadly applicable to non-profit organizations. Building on this foundation permits application of these insights to organizations that must compete in the modern world. Richard L. Fleming, agricultural communications specialist for marketing at the University of Nebraska, is convinced that integrity and marketing are compatible. He says, "Marketing is a tool; it can be used well. Marketing is finding out what people want and helping them get it. Of course, as educators, we also have to bring people along" (Fleming, 1989). William G. Boldt, of Cornell Cooperative Extension, puts the case in terms of programming (Boldt, 1989), "Marketing forces better evaluation, targeting, and demonstration of impact."

Marketing, if well understood by its practitioners, also can bring greater reality to expectations for the use of media. It will force a change from "product orientation" to an "external orientation" (client orientation). Key indicators of product orientation are these (Lovelock and Weinberg, 1984):

- Seeing the offering as inherently desirable for the prospective customer.
- Ascribing lack of consumer interest to ignorance or lack of motivation.

- Placing too much emphasis on advertising and public relations.
- Limiting the role of research to confirming management beliefs.
- Failing to tailor the product to market segments.
- Ignoring generic competition that can provide alternate services.
- Selecting marketing staff based on product knowledge.

Communications professionals face this kind of orientation daily, and are consequently regarded by some as shamans who should be able to invoke the magic phrase or symbol. At the same time, they are ignored until the product development process has ended. Marketing can alleviate both problems by providing a process that is "outside-in," not "inside-out" and a framework that embraces communication as part of the total planning process. In Nebraska, this has already happened. An agricultural communications specialist and an evaluation specialist sit on planning committees for all major events and programs. Also represented: Members of the target group. Additionally, for a recent statewide nutrition program, *Eating Today for a Healthier Tomorrow*, both the marketing specialist and the evaluation specialist were part of the agent training team.

There is an inherent tension between marketing and serving the media in the long-range interests of the public and the institution. Marketers would sometimes like institutional media specialists to be more supportive. Media professionals can decline improper requests by countering with marketing terminology of their own—"relationship marketing"—and then going on to explain the need for credibility in maintaining a long-term relationship with

media. Emphasis on long-term results helps with nearly any ethical question that arises in marketing.

Communicators in the land-grant system also must be more outward looking. We need to talk to members of target groups; we need to find out what other organizations are doing (and get on their mailing lists); we need to study social, economic, and political trends; we need to form networks of people who are interested in various parts of the marketing process; we need to attend marketing workshops and join organizations that support marketing. A good way to start is by reading a marketing book, some pamphlets, or a newsletter. A sampler:

#### **Books**

Boldt, William (no date). Creative Marketing. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Cooperative Extension. A workbook; strong on planning, personal marketing.

Kotler, Philip and Fox, Karen F. A. (1985). Strategic Marketing for Educational Institutions. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. Kotler is the guiding force in nonprofit marketing. This book has all the principles, in depth.

Levitt, Theodore (1986). The Marketing Imagination. New York: Free Press. About business marketing, but full of wisdom.

Lovelock, Christopher H. and Weinberg, Charles B. (1984). Marketing for Public and Nonprofit Managers. New York: Wiley. Another big book, with all the principles and very fine.

Simerly, Robert G., ed. (1989). Handbook of Marketing for Continuing Education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Comprehensive; by and for practitioners in continuing education. Valuable bibliography of more

than 60 useful books; also lists marketing magazines and organizations that focus on marketing.

Topor, Robert (1983). Marketing Higher Education: A Practical Guide. Washington, D.C.: Council for the Advancement and Support of Education. Application of marketing to colleges and universities.

Topor, Robert S. (1988). Your Personal Guide to Marketing a Non-profit Organization. Washington, D.C.: Council for the Advancement and Support of Education.

#### **Newsletter**

##### Marketing Higher Education.

Topor and Associates, 6737 Friars Road, Suite 164, San Diego, CA 92108.

#### **Pamphlets**

Learning Resources Network (LERN), P.O. Box 1448, Manhattan, KS 66502. Ask for a listing of publications. Orientation is to marketing adult non-credit courses.

#### **Marketing Works**

Marketing works. There is no question about it.

Nine Oregon counties now have their own Extension and 4-H tax districts, passed by voters and assuring budgets (Calvert, 1989). Cornell Cooperative Extension, Broome County, successfully raised funds to renovate the Extension building (Knack, 1989). And Cornell's Rockland County office increased staffing from four to 10 agents and is conducting an appeal for private dollars to buy a satellite dish, a computer for every agent, and to provide internal grants for innovative projects (Graf, 1989). Sales dollars from Cornell's publications and videotapes increased 24% in one year, due in good measure to inten-

sive promotion via database mailings, including purchased lists (Doolittle, 1989). Cornell also encloses promotional leaflets with every order shipped. In Nebraska, attendance at Whole Hog Days increased 20%, due to a marketing plan (Reese, 1989). And in Ohio, the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center at Wooster has 5,000 to 10,000 visitors a year for formal tours (Furbee, 1989). Many of the visitors are school and senior citizen groups. An Information and Applied Communication staff member serves as tour director.

## References

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- Calvert, Leonard J. (1989). Personal communication with the author. Corvallis, OR (August 15).
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- Fleming, Richard L. (1989). Personal communication with the author. Lincoln, NE (September 18).
- Furbee, Robert R. (1989). Personal communication with the author. Wooster, OH (November 9).
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- Topor, Robert S. (1989). Personal communication with the author. Palo Alto, CA (July 24 and July 26).