EFFECTIVE MARKETING PRACTICES:
A GUIDE FOR SMART POLICING INITIATIVES

In carrying out their day to day activities, police departments typically do not think of using business marketing concepts to be more effective. For decades, private for-profit companies and corporations have used tried and true marketing techniques to increase customer satisfaction and improve business performance. Law enforcement innovators can easily adapt and apply the principles of business marketing to help them reach their customers (citizens) and other stakeholders with effective communications strategies in order to achieve successful outcomes.

For those involved in Smart Policing Initiatives (SPI), thinking like a marketer and adopting a “marketing” mindset may provide just the edge required to build success. SPI team leaders can gain advantage and be in stronger positions to achieve their goals, if they apply the principles of marketing when they plan, develop, launch, and deliver their initiatives. If the innovator fails to establish and maintain a focused project “message,” decision makers may not fully understand the importance of the initiative and direct needed resources elsewhere, team members may unintentionally work at cross purposes, and stakeholders may undermine rather than support project success.

A marketing mindset will empower police innovators to develop strategically-timed and targeted messages that create visibility and engagement with all key stakeholders, both internal and external to the department, including the public. This ensures that all parties inside the police department, in the external justice system environment, and out in the community understand, internalize and embrace the project, share clear goals and a unity of purpose, and provide steadfast support for the initiative.

This Guide explains how to apply marketing concepts in the context of Smart Policing and crime control programs. There are many tools in a marketer’s toolkit - but a few are particularly relevant for Smart Policing teams. This guide discusses these tools - marketing communications, the marketing strategy and social marketing -- in detail. Throughout the guide, law enforcement examples describe how these business tools apply to Smart Policing.

Law Enforcement and the Marketing Mindset

“Don’t Lie for the Other Guy”
“Take a Bite Out of Crime”
“Drive Hammered. Get Nailed”

These are high profile recognizable public safety messages promoted within states and often nationwide. They communicate vivid images that are strong, memorable, and intentional. They are a result of effective marketing communications, one of the key tools in the marketer’s arsenal.
Marketing communications involve the use of messages and related media to communicate with specific audiences. The ultimate goal is to present an integrated, uniform and relevant impression across all forms of communication - this increases opportunities to achieve the program mission. This marketing tool ensures that key audiences: (a) are knowledgeable about the program, (b) are willing partners in the initiative, (c) believe they benefit from the program, and (d) are inspired to act in order to achieve the program mission.

Before developing an effective communications plan, there must be a clear and consistent SPI program mission as well as goals and objectives. Once the program mission and goals are set, developing the communications plan is a systematic process that provides a road map for traveling from where you and the impacted community are to where you want to be. Following are the key steps to follow in developing this plan.

The Marketing Strategy

Step 1: Identify Target Audiences
The target audiences include the people or organizations that you want to influence, involve, educate, change behavior or receive support from in order to make your program a success. A key to marketing involves analyzing the current situation and the needs of these target audiences. This may involve collecting demographics on the populations impacted or ascertaining what moves these people, what they want, what they don’t want, and what gets in their way. This means you ought to develop a demographic profile using variables such as age, gender, family size, income, occupation, education, race, and nationality. It is also meaningful to provide information on the target population's values, lifestyle and personality characteristics. Information regarding related behaviors will be helpful as will any insights you have on when and where your target audience might be most open to your messages or likely to notice them. For all target audiences, you want to identify the potential benefits each will receive as a result of taking actions based on your program mission. Basically, you should always be asking “what’s in it for them?”

For the law enforcement innovator, the target audiences will fall into four primary categories:

- Police managers and executives, who provide the needed approvals, support, resources, and recognition
- Colleagues inside the department, who implement the initiative ‘on the street,’ provide critical information, serve on the project team, and give general support
- Stakeholders external to the department, who are critical partners and form the program collaboration
- Community members, who comprise the populations impacted or whose behavior change is a focus of the program
Step 2: Create Positioning Statements (for each relevant audience)
Positioning is the process of analyzing your program in relation to each target audience and identifying the specific information you want to communicate. The result of this process ought to be a few bullet points or statements that clarify how you want your project to be viewed by the target audiences. The aim is to determine and articulate a distinct position, one that highlights benefits and diminishes barriers, and one that places you and your project in a favorable light that is likely to inform, persuade and impart the desired behavior. This step is vital and lays the groundwork for all subsequent steps. The positioning statements should relate to each target audience considered key to the program.

Step 3: Develop Messages
Messages are ideas and images you actually want to communicate. They are inspired by considering what your target audience currently believes and understands, needs to know, and must assimilate into their beliefs and behavior in order to achieve program goals. Four questions provide a starting point for developing these messages.

1) What does your target audience currently believe? You may already know, or think you know, but it may be worthwhile getting input from representatives of your target audiences through focus groups, surveys or interviews with key informants.
2) What do you want your target audience to know? This aspect focuses primarily on information and education to be disseminated as part of your SPI. It can include specifics about the program, facts and statistics the audience should be aware of, and any other important information they may not be aware of but will help them understand the issues at play.
3) What do you want your target audience to believe? As opposed to information or education, this question gets at the attitudes, values and opinions of your target audience and what you want them to believe.
4) What do you want your target audience to do? This goes beyond informing and altering attitudes, perceptions, and delivering a change in behavior. You may zoom in on how to influence individuals or organizations to act, to actually do something; for example, call 911 for emergencies only, talk with your children about drugs, evacuate before an impending disaster.

Proven practices tell us that the best messages are simple, persuasive, and visual. The message is the sum total of words, images and presentation - so the style and tone must fit the message and the goals to be achieved. Consider the differences in images for these two slogans: “You Drink and Drive, You Lose” and “Drive Hammered, Get Nailed.” The first message sends a zero tolerance message and seems targeted at social drinkers. If, however, the target is a potential drunk driver, the second slogan seems more appropriate, creating a distinct and vivid image of a stern warning directed at hardcore offenders.
Step 4: Choose Messengers
Now that you have identified your key target audiences, with your positioning statement, and your messages, the next step is to determine who best can deliver an effective and compelling message. Three factors are most important when considering the messenger: perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and likeability. If the message is primarily to educate, or garner program support, the SPI team leader may be the appropriate messenger. Perhaps other local experts or SPI stakeholders external to the department may be effective spokespersons, depending on the target audience and the message to be delivered. When considering the audience, you may find teens want to hear from other teens (peer to peer) rather than adults, and young people from distressed neighborhoods may identify a “grandmother” figure as the most stable and trusted messenger in the community. Effective messengers may be real people telling their stories of transformation, such as ex-gang members or ex-offenders.

Step 5: Select Communication Channels
Next, it is important to select the appropriate channels in which your messenger will deliver the message. There is a vast array of options for communicating key messages to the target audiences. These options are called channels of communication. Some channels will be more obvious and appropriate - again depending on the target audience and the message. The communication channels include:

Direct Marketing

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These are direct communications to specific individuals with intent to solicit some response or initiate some dialogue - most appropriate when seeking approvals, resources or support from police managers, executives, and colleagues.

Creative Outreach
Law enforcement agencies use an array of methods to promote and educate the public on community policing.

- Chicago mounted an innovative campaign intended to heighten awareness of community policing among its linguistically diverse citizens, using multimedia and multilingual information initiatives. Brochures, newsletters, billboards, television and radio ads, and information hotlines were some of the components. Partly as a result of the aggressive marketing, awareness increased.
- New Haven Connecticut has a widely acclaimed and award-winning community policing program whose outreach components include a public cable TV program aimed to increase awareness and access, a series of workshops for residents on various aspects of community policing, and production of a documentary film profiling the city’s police and community policing.
- To reach out to the many Latino residents of Corcoran, CA, the police department created Amigos de la Comunidad, a Spanish-language citizen police academy. One outcome was the formation, by several academy graduates, of a Spanish-language unit in the department’s volunteer community patrol.
Personal Communication

These involve two or more persons communicating directly. Because of the “personal” touch, these channels of personal influence carry great impact and are highly valuable when seeking information, resources, collaboration and support.

- Face-to-face meetings
- Presentations to groups
- Trainings
- Workshops

Advertising

Advertising is the most pervasive of the communication tools, allowing marketers to reach large numbers of target audiences and to do so frequently. These are most useful when trying to reach communities in specific geographic locations.

- Broadcast
  - Television
  - Radio (e.g., local talk shows)
  - Internet
- Print
  - Newspaper
  - Magazine
  - buses
- Ads on web sites
- Ads at movie theatres

Public Relations

This communication channel can be one of the more powerful means of achieving program objectives and is often considered the most authentic and credible by receiving audiences. It typically reaches a wider swath of the public than advertising.

- Stories on television and radio
- Articles in newspapers and magazines
- OpEds
- Videos

Special Events

These events include those that are part of large public gatherings as well as ones organized by you or your agency. They are particularly helpful reaching hard to reach populations such as minority groups, non-English speaking groups, etc.

- Community meetings
- Block parties/barbecues
- Fairs/Exhibits

Printed Materials

Printed materials are the public sector’s most frequently used communication channel and can be an effective means of reaching specific sub-populations.

- Forms
- Brochures
- Newsletters
- Flyers

- Posters
- Door hangers
- Stickers/Decals
Special Promotional Items

- **Clothing**: T-shirts, Baseball hats, Temporary items
- **Functional Items**: Key chains, Flashlights, Refrigerator
- **Temporary Items**: Magnets, Coffee sleeves, Buttons, Stickers
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- **Functional Items**: Refrigerator
- **Temporary Items**: Magnets, Coffee sleeves, Buttons, Stickers

These items can help launch a campaign or program message. They also serve as prompts, reminders, or a form of recognition, and are often effective because they are highly valued by the receiving parties.

Signage and Displays

Signage opportunities in the public sector are numerous and are highly visible ways to communicate with citizens in specific communities or groups such as teens.

Case Study - Amber Alert

The Amber Alert System is an effective example of how channels of communication can help meet law enforcement objectives. The program first started in Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas in 1996 when local radio stations teamed with local police to develop an early warning system to help find abducted children, a legacy they created for a 9-year old girl, Amber Hagerman, who was abducted while riding her bicycle and later found murdered. AMBER (America’s Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response) Alerts are emergency messages broadcast when a law enforcement agency determines a child has been abducted and is in imminent danger. The radio broadcast provides information on the physical description of the child and anything known about the abductor’s appearance and vehicle. Over time, the program evolved from local radio to high profile public relations activities. Nowadays, AMBER Alert messages are often flashed on highway signs too. This successful program spread rapidly across the states. In 2005, Hawaii became the 50th state to complete its statewide AMBER Alert system.

Step 6: Evaluate and Assess

Assessing the effectiveness of the overall SPI is critical and the same is true for your communications plan. Did you reach your goals? Which program elements worked well? Which ones didn’t pull their weight? How do costs stack up against benefits? Many of these questions can be answered with straightforward measures, such as the following:
Case Study
The national initiative Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) promoted the development of state and local communication plans to help achieve the overall program mission to reduce gun crime. The PSN initiative in Phoenix, Arizona is one example of an effective communications program. In 2007, the South Mountain precinct experienced a sharp escalation in shootings and homicides; in one 11-month period murders increase 41% over the previous year. In response, the police department undertook special operations resulting in almost 4,000 arrests and seizure of 309 firearms. Police and city officials recognized that sustaining any reduction in violence hinged upon forging effective partnerships with residents, neighborhood groups, faith-based organizations and other stakeholders. This commitment to community engagement led to the development of a joint venture with a non-profit agency (the state’s PSN community outreach partner) and several others on the Take Back Your Neighborhood Campaign. The month long Campaign saturated the community with one well-positioned message - Take Back Your Neighborhood: Prevent Gun Violence through billboards, posters, flyers, newspaper ads, radio spots and door hangers. Images of real people and strong colors were integrated in the message - and the messages were translated to Spanish. Faith-based leaders organized a Steps to Stop Gun Violence march, the community was invited to attend two job fairs and a neighborhood clean-up, an anonymous, no questions asked gun buy-back enabled residents to trade a gun for a $100 grocery store gift card. The Campaign ended with a community celebration to strengthen the sense of community and renewal. The Campaign outcomes included: 5 billboards creating 1.5 million impressions in the community, Spanish language radio spots heard 500,000 times, 22 TV stories, a collaborative group of 14 government, non-profit, and for-profit partners, 125 guns turned in, and 4 new community organizations involving 50 residents formed. The Phoenix Police Department found the program so valuable, that it invited the PSN partner to create similar Campaigns in two additional Phoenix neighborhoods at-risk for violence.

Social Marketing
Social marketing is a well studied and distinct discipline that uses marketing principles to influence human behavior in order to benefit society. Its intent is to improve the quality of life and, as such, plays a direct role in the programs of law enforcement agencies. It is this focus and commitment to behavior change that distinguishes social marketing from other disciplines, say public awareness or public education. A public education campaign attempts to teach the target audience a new skill, additional knowledge and new information. In social marketing, the goal is achieved when people in the target audience exhibit the desired behavior - most often on a regular basis i.e. reduce teen pregnancies, stop smoking, wear seat belts.
The practice of social marketing began in the mid-1970s with the belief that a consumer-oriented approach could facilitate advances in public health. The assumption behind social marketing was, and is, that well-honed and demonstrably effective techniques from the commercial business sector can successfully and efficiently be applied to advance social causes.

Using social marketing processes, the public health field has changed the landscape in many health-related areas - drunk driving, smoking, seat belt use. Not only have communication campaigns been memorable on a national scale but they have been impactful in terms of attitude and behavior changes - resulting in reduced tobacco use, increased seat belt usage, and changed public attitudes toward drunk driving.

Marketing expertise is not required to practice social marketing. It does however involve more than effective communications. The social marketing process is rigorous - relying on both qualitative and quantitative research and data in order to design effective behavior change strategies and employing the 4 Ps of marketing (see below). Here are the major recommended elements (although not all are required) --

- Research and planning to specify realistic and measurable objectives, identify population segments for whom the program may be most effective, conduct a thorough market analysis, and examine communication channels to determine which are best suited for reaching the target audiences and achieving program goals
- Strategy design to develop the marketing mix (the product or service to be employed, its price or benefits and disincentives, the place or system of distribution, and means of promotion - known as the 4 Ps of marketing), create messages and produce communication materials
- Implementation and evaluation to enlist collaborators, execute the program, and conduct evaluation and assessment

Case Study - Ceasefire Chicago
Social marketing has been shown to have utility in the prevention of crime and other law enforcement goals. For example, in addition to client-oriented outreach work and case-oriented conflict mediation, CeaseFire-Chicago employs a broad-based public education campaign to promote nonviolent behavior in neighborhoods experiencing high levels of gun violence. The campaign seeks to change community norms and increase awareness of the costs of violence, specifically homicides and shootings. Neighborhoods are saturated with succinct nonviolence messages (“Stop the Killing,” “Stop Killing People,” “No More Shooting”) in a variety of formats (posters, flyers, yard signs, bumper stickers) that point out the consequences of gun violence. CeaseFire staff believe it is the volume of literature distributed rather than the details of the message that result in behavior change, which is why saturation is key to the CeaseFire public education component. The communications goal is “massive messaging.”
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Case Study - “Click it or Ticket”
“Click it or Ticket” is another social marketing program - it is considered a model program nationally, which had its beginnings in North Carolina. The program shows how success is possible by combining law enforcement with communication outreach. The first step in the program was to re-define the product benefits - seat belt usage was important not to save your life, but to keep you from getting “busted” by the police. A new law was passed by the North Carolina legislature which made it possible for police to stop and ticket motorists who were not wearing their seat belt. This legislation made the price of not wearing a seat belt a financial fine and possible jail time. Places, or checkpoints, were established throughout the state where motorists were stopped and checked for seat belt use. Promotion strategies were directed at advertising the new law and its legal consequences. An extensive evaluation of the program showed not only when both communication and enforcement were combined in a single unified marketing strategy, the results were impressive (a 14% reduction in traffic fatalities), but when the communication was withdrawn and the enforcement left in place, seat belt use dropped dramatically. Once the communication component was restored compliance went back up.

With a marketing mindset you can design a more effective SPI and deliver better and improved outcomes in the communities in which you and your law enforcement colleagues operate. Consider the tools and frameworks here as another weapon in your arsenal to control crime and increase public safety.

Marketing Resources

Lucy Hudson; Ann L. Poritzky; Annette Beacham. SafeFutures Marketing Tool Kit, February 1998, OJJDP. (NCJRS)

This toolkit is a “how to” guide on developing a marketing plan for the SafeFutures program - an initiative to improve the quality of services for youth or reduce juvenile crime and delinquency.


This article discusses the Marketing Available Police Services (MAPS) plan to provide citizens with a positive experience, promote greater cooperation, and improve and maintain the image of a police department.


The research described here investigated how the relationship between the police and the media affects coverage of community policing.

This web-based article focuses specifically on the steps to follow in developing a marketing plan for government agencies and workers.


This book is written exclusively for government agencies and workers who want to become familiar with the marketing toolbox and how these tools can be used to engender citizen support for your agency, increase utilization of your services, and influence positive public behaviors.


This guide presents the fundamentals of a communications plan designed specifically to prevent gun crime in your community.

The Basics of Social Marketing: How to Use Marketing to Change Behavior
Social Marketing and Public Health: Lessons from the Field
Social Marketing: A Resource Guide
From the Social Marketing National Excellence Collaborative, The Turning Point Social Marketing National Excellence Collaborative www.turningpointprogram.org

Turning Point is a collaborative effort between state and local public health agencies, national public health organizations, and The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. It provides a variety of tools and resources, discussed in a series of articles, that identify best practices in social marketing to promote healthy behaviors.

The Media Tool Kit for Anti-Drug Action, Office of National Drug Control Policy, August 2000. (NCJRS)

This toolkit provides methods, models, and templates for tying anti-drug efforts to the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign. It helps organizations deliver campaign messages to the media and to other groups and individuals who also promote anti-drug messages.
W.A. Smith. “Social Marketing: An Overview of Approach and Effects. The science of safe
www.injuryprevention.bmj.com

This paper reviews the applicability of commercial and social marketing to teen driving
safety. It draws on a wide range of information, including evaluation studies of specific
programs as well as standards of practice within these two professions.