

Marketing Volunteerism: A Program Development Perspective

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"I do not have any time away from the job to market. How can I market my program, win public support and create ongoing resources for new volunteers without spending hours on speaking tours to organizations and churches?"

"Our organization is most concerned with marketing and promotion within our group. How can we encourage members to become involved and take responsibility especially for major positions such as the Presidency of the Board of Directors?"

"How do you identify the specific volunteer markets for your organizations?"

"How do you get volunteers to make a long term commitment, retain volunteers?"

"How can we make our volunteer program appealing enough for volunteers, and once we have them, make them really feel a part of the agency?"

"With an extremely small staff, what effective marketing techniques can be used that take a minimal amount of time?"

"We get a lot of students volunteering, but I would like to attract more permanent residents—how do we reach out to housewives and working women?"

These and other similar questions are posed frequently by volunteer coordinators and others responsible for the development of volunteer programs. The intent of this article is to address such questions from a marketing perspective. Further, we will integrate exchange theory, perspectives on volunteer motivation and a consumerist philosophy of marketing to propose a model of volunteer program development.

A MARKETING MODEL

There are as many definitions of marketing as there are marketing texts and articles. Perhaps most useful for our purpose is offered by Kratchenberg (1972):

Marketing deals with the concept of uncovering specific needs, satisfying these needs by the development of appropriate goods and services, letting people know of their availability, and offering them at appropriate prices, at the right time and place.

The implication of the definition forms the central philosophy of what Kotler (1972) calls the "Marketing Concept"; that is, that marketing is designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets for the purpose of achieving organizational objectives. It relies heavily on adapting the organization's offering in terms of the target markets' needs and desires, and on using effective pricing, communication, and distribution to inform, motivate, and service the markets. This requires that an organization with a marketing orientation possesses two things. First is an attitude on the part of the administrators and employees that their job is to understand their clients' needs and to satisfy them. The other aspect of a marketing orientation is knowledge about how various marketing variables (marketing mix) perform separately and together in influencing the market.

The essential element of marketing then, is the consumer, while marketing activities focus on producing an exchange of values between the organization and the consumer.

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In volunteer organizations it is the exchange of an experience of value for something of value from the volunteer. This means that when an organization identifies a need it has for volunteers, it figures out what it might offer those volunteers in exchange for their efforts. Marketing, therefore, is when all parties involved in the exchange relationship are convinced they have received the greatest value. If you do this, you will get this (Vineyard, 1984).

The exchange relationship is the keystone of success in marketing volunteerism as it is the "bargain" that is struck between your organization and the markets which have what you desire. Qualities of an equitable exchange include (Vineyard, 1984, p. 20):

1. honesty & fairness
2. no hidden agendas or pitfalls
3. a user-oriented position
4. a targeted approach
5. highest concern for what the other party will receive of value
6. attention to your agency's success in attaining goals
7. a lot of homework (market research).

Exchange theory provides a basic foundation upon which volunteer administrators can build their own structure for recruiting, motivating and retaining volunteers.

In recruiting volunteers, the volunteer administrator must be able to accurately ascertain what rewards or "goals" can be gleaned from the volunteer jobs and then try to find people who are seeking those goals. (This will later be addressed as future-benefit analysis.) Then the administrator must select the appropriate market place for recruitment efforts tailored to specific volunteer jobs.

All volunteer activities entail some cost to the volunteer. These costs may be time, energy, or active cash outlays for transportation, child care and the like. Consumers seek to economize activities; that is, they seek to keep costs below perceived rewards. Only those activities, in this exchange, that are perceived as returning more than that which is invested, are continued. As Bohlebar (1979, pp. 16-17) observed, the volunteer administrator responsible for volunteer recruitment must realize that people, generally, will give their time, energy, and other resources only in exchange for opportunities to achieve their own goals.

A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL

A consumerist approach to marketing incorporates the following marketing elements: Marketing Research, Market Segmentation, and the marketing mix (see Figure 1).

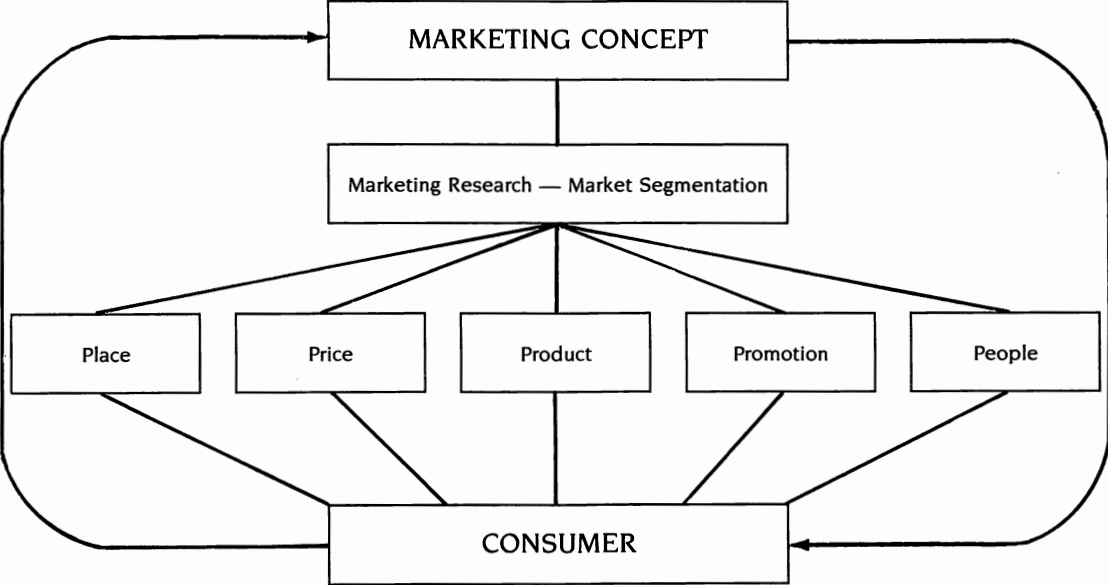


Figure 1
Marketing Elements

Marketing Research

Successful marketers make good use of accurate, timely, and relevant research. They either do research themselves or hire others to do it, and/or they read the results of research reported in the literature.

Good marketing research and its findings are crucial to the success of volunteer organizations. Good marketers are in tune with current marketing practices, consumer studies, new and revised products and services, business and economic trends, historical and projected sales data, and competitors' strategies. They make heavy use of such secondary sources as government documents; internal records; trade, business, and professional journals; reports from universities or business research foundations; analytical reports completed by consulting firms; and information from trade resources.

Many businesses also conduct primary research. Such qualitative research strategies as focus-group interviews, case studies, naturalistic inquiry, and systematic observation are regularly used. Quantifiable research under carefully controlled conditions is also conducted. Thus numerical results such as counts, intensity, and market penetration are used to project to the target universe with known precision.

Volunteer agencies need to use the results of research in developing, operating, promoting, and evaluating their programs. We know some things about volunteers from research:

- Volunteers contributed more time in 1985 than they did five years earlier when the Gallup organization did its first volunteer survey (Gallup, 1986). They volunteered 3.5 hours per week, nearly an hour more each week than they did in 1980.
- Volunteers may be found in all age and income groups: 51 percent of all females and 45 percent of all males volunteered; 43 percent of those between 65 and 74 years and 25 percent of those over 75 years of age volunteered in 1985.
- Gallup Poll results show a slight decline in volunteering among college

age and single volunteers. The proportion of general population volunteering remained fairly constant.

- Typically more women than men volunteer.
- Elderly people are volunteering in greater numbers.
- With regard to types of organizations—apart from informal volunteering (*e.g.*, helping out your elderly neighbor), 80 percent donated time to non-profit organizations in 1985, 40 percent of which were religiously affiliated (*e.g.*, churches, hospitals, schools). The remainder worked for non-profits with no religious affiliation.
- The major activity areas reported (60 percent reported giving of their time) were: (1) civic, (2) social and fraternal associations, (3) recreation, (4) general fund-raising, (5) arts & culture; (6) social services & welfare, (7) arts & culture, and, (8) community action.
- Eighteen percent reported giving their time to government, most at the local level in education, health and community action programs.
- Most popular volunteer work was assisting the elderly, the handicapped or a social welfare recipient. Two other common activities given were babysitting and fund raising.

These data may or may not reflect your local community. Only a systematic research activity will yield the type of data you will need to adequately plan your marketing strategies.

Marketing Segmentation

Market segmentation is the act of dividing a market into distinct and meaningful groups that merit separate products, services, promotion, or other elements of the marketing mix. Market segmentation requires identifying the different bases for segmenting the market, developing profiles of the resulting target marketing; that is, selecting one or more of the market segments and developing a position in and marketing mix strategy for each.

Typically, marketers segment according to:

- Geographics (for example, rural area, southeastern county area, north side of town, western part of state).
- Demographics (for example, sex, age, family size, income, occupation, education level).
- Psychographics (for example, personality, life-style, activities, interests, opinions, social class).
- Behavioristic characteristics (for example, knowledge, attitude, use or response to actual product or service).

By segmenting the market into better defined groups who have similar needs and wants in relation to the volunteer agency, the program coordinator will be better able to:

- Identify and describe current prospective client groups.
- Survey and identify the needs of prospective client groups.
- Deliver targeted programs more effectively.

- Cut costs by targeting programs more effectively.
- Determine target messages and appeals.
- Direct communications more effectively.
- Develop and implement an appropriate marketing mix designed to satisfy the chosen market segments.

A market segmentation strategy for a volunteer agency might resemble Figure 2. Four key questions need to be asked concerning potential segments:

1. Is the segment measurable?
2. Is the segment large enough to warrant attention and communication?
3. Is the segment reachable?
4. Will the segment be responsive?

THE MARKETING MIX

Marketing research will help identify segments. At a very simple level, there are market segments for volunteers, clients, and funders. Each segment could

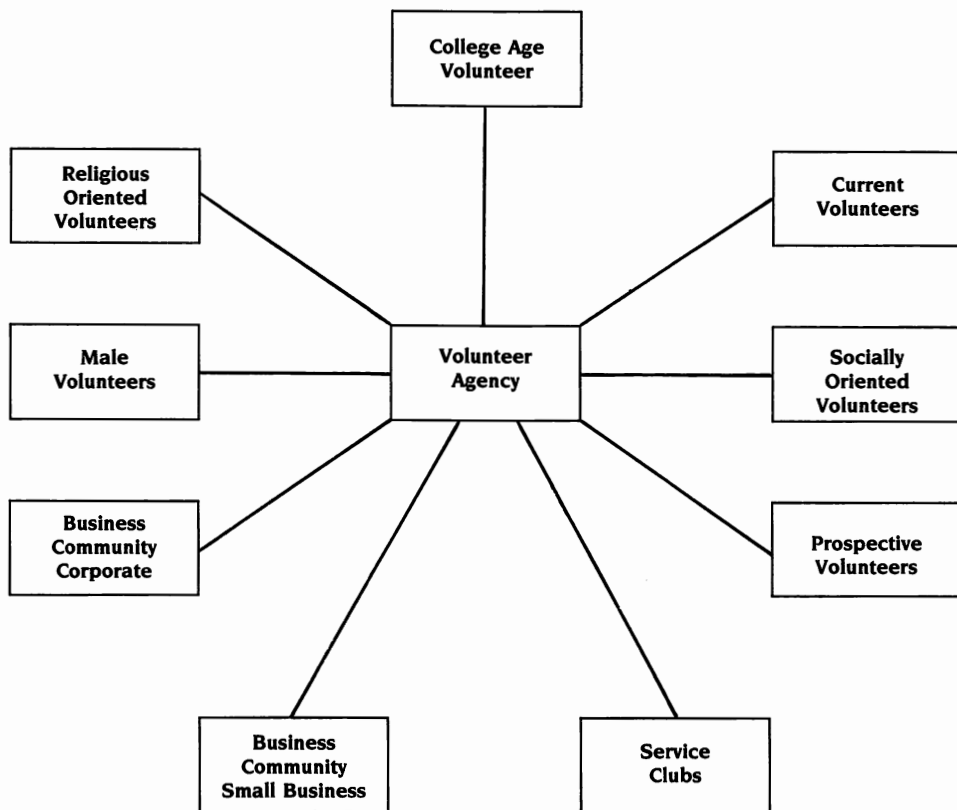


Figure 2
Market Segments for a Volunteer Agency

be further refined into smaller or more precise marketing segments. Whom does the agency want to attract as volunteers to the program? Identify one or two types of people desired as volunteers and then design a marketing plan around those groups. Research the markets and find out their needs, wants and desires, and design a volunteer program to meet those needs.

Once segments have been identified the next step is to assemble the marketing mix. The 5 Ps of the marketing mix are the controllable variables marketers use to adapt the organization to meet the needs of target markets or segments. Market segmentation reveals the market segment opportunities facing the organization. In assembling the marketing mix, three general strategies are possible:

- * *Undifferentiated Marketing:* This is a typical approach, it assumes everyone is alike. This strategy focuses on a common need, and offers one marketing mix. For example, a local volunteer agency assumes all volunteers are alike, all are motivated by altruism and all that is necessary is to simply announce the volunteer opportunities.
- * *Differentiated Marketing:* This strategy recognizes there are different target markets. The different products are de-

veloped to meet the needs of different markets. For example, hospitals are in the health maintenance business, as well as "sick" business.

- * *Concentrated Marketing:* This strategy recognizes that an organization has several markets but has limited resources. The decision is to concentrate on one market or one market at a time. For example, if a Voluntary Action Center wishes to increase recruitment of single people between the ages of 25 and 40, they would conduct marketing research to identify the needs, wants and desires of that volunteer segment, then develop programs and promote those programs to the segment in ways that will attract their attention and provide benefits desired by these segments.

The volunteer program director must ultimately choose a marketing mix and strategy that will provide an edge over the competition. In addition, the strategy must be congruent with the organization goals and resources.

The marketing mix, or the 5 Ps, are examined in more detailed in the next section.

Product Planning

The first step in assembling a marketing strategy is to examine the "product" or

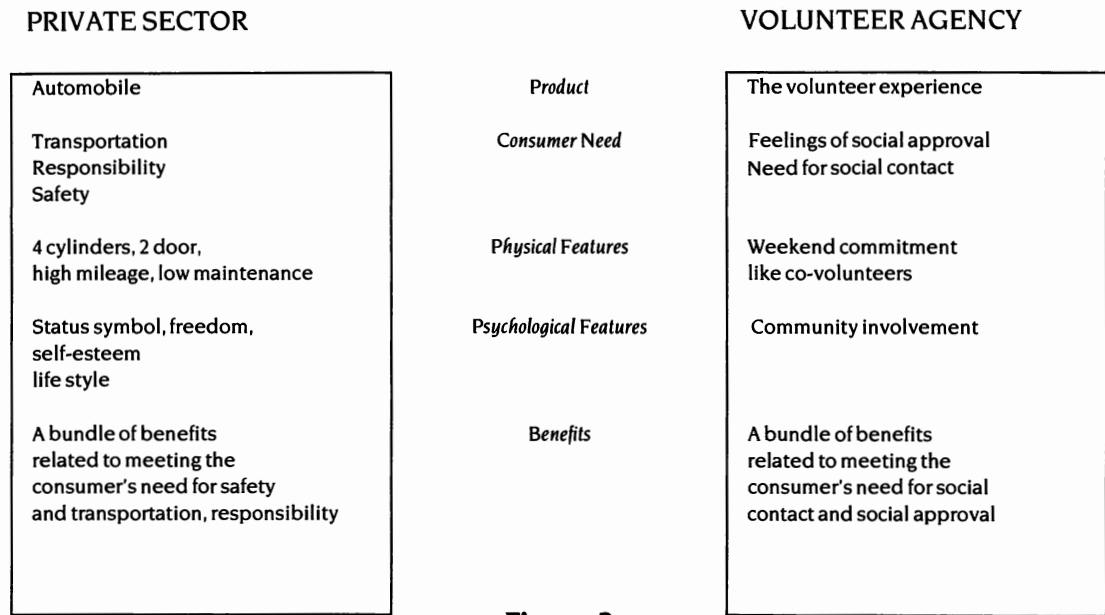


Figure 3
Volunteerism: A Total Product Concept

"products" in relation to the needs of your market segments. The product is a combination of benefits, both tangible and intangible attributes. In discussing products, the critical concept to the marketing of volunteerism is translating product features to product benefits.

People purchase a product, volunteer or engage in activities in the expectation of reward. They usually base decisions to buy on the benefits perceived associated with the product. The features of product—these attributes that answer the question, what is it?—have little impact on the consumer. Successful marketers recognize the need to emphasize the benefits associated with the product. That is anything which provides the consumer with a personal advantage or gain. Benefits are sought in response to felt needs. Figure 3 suggests what a total product approach to volunteerism might look like. The benefits are a direct result of the features.

Product Placement

There are two key concepts in determining placement strategy: location and channels of distribution.

Marketers can select from many different placement strategies. *USA Today* employs an intensive distribution effort. That is, it is readily available whenever and wherever the traveler is. By contrast, auto dealerships are carefully located by geographic and population measures. The question is of access to the product. How accessible is your volunteer program? Do the volunteers have to come to your physical location, or are there creative alternatives? When are volunteer opportunities available? More volunteers might be attracted with evening and weekend options available to them.

The second concept of interest is what marketers refer to as "channels of distribution." This is a system of community-based organizations established to assist you in accessing your market segments. The channel answers two questions: first, through whom can I market my program, and, second, whom can I get to do some of this work for me? Figure 4 presents a channel of distribution for two volunteer agency market segments adapted from

Seymour Fine (1981).

Note that eight community-based organizations have been identified for two market segments: individual volunteers and businesses. This process assumes a goal-oriented approach to marketing. From business, the goal is financial support; and in exchange, the volunteer agency is providing the benefits of public social approval and civic involvement. Jerry Lewis and his Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) efforts over the years has been very successful at this. The goal with respect to volunteers is to develop new recruits. For each segment, the community-based organizations can provide publicity or people: in short, direct access to the two segments. In addition, because of mission, specific programs, or on-going activities, each chief business officer can assist the volunteer administrator in identifying business donors or recruits; communicate to them about the volunteer agency and the benefits of volunteering; or directly provide volunteers for the volunteer agency.

Needs are hypothetical entities. They are inferred by observing the behavior of people. The inference process can be tricky.

Needs can be induced by features of the environment. In this case environment refers to the context in which behavior occurs—certain facets of these contexts, such as opportunities for growth and affiliation, may activate or arouse needs which otherwise are not imperative.

Needs can be either strong or weak, either momentary or enduring. Pinder (1985, pp. 31-58) observed that different people are motivated to respond to satisfy different needs, at different times and in different circumstances. Moreover, the needs that account for the behaviors of a particular person at one point in time may not be as important as other needs for that same person at other times.

Needs are inherent characteristics of individuals, goals are end-states or objectives people pursue for the sake of meeting their needs. Needs arouse and direct behavior. Needs must be met to some extent in order for an individual to become or remain healthy.

Needs are not necessarily conscious, so they can instigate and direct human behavior without our awareness, making it difficult to determine precisely what

needs motivate someone. If a person is asked what motivates him or her to do some volunteer work, the answers received usually reflect goals and/or values;

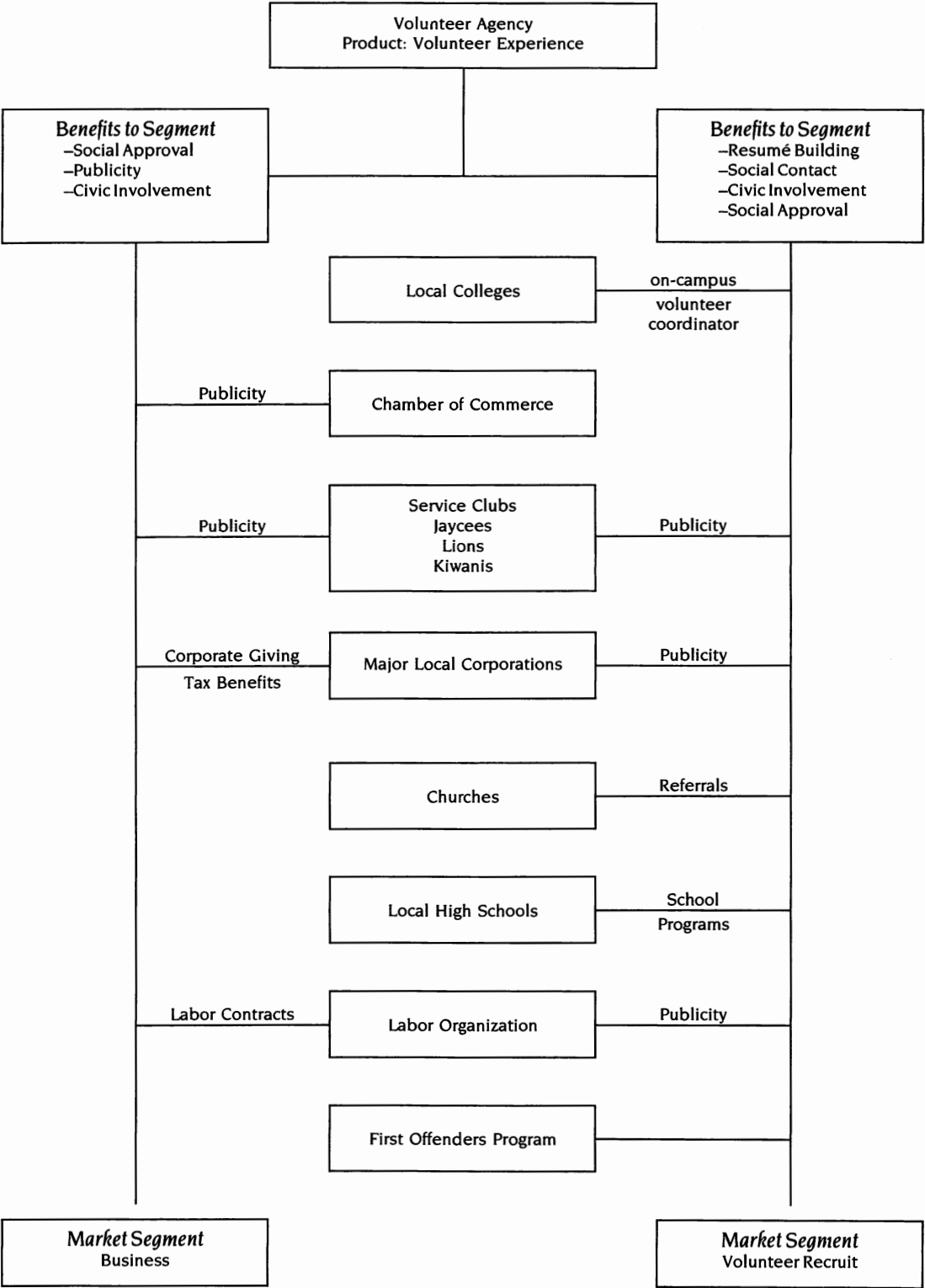


Figure 4
 A Channel of Distribution for Two Market Segments

they rarely reflect an accurate view of the fundamental need profiles that can explain why different goals increase and/or decrease in value for the individual over time (Smith, 1981, pp. 21-26). Nevertheless, the things a person values are naturally influenced heavily by the nature of her/his needs.

The following list of needs were derived from responses given by social service volunteers to the question, "What benefits have you received from your volunteer work this month?"

- (1) *Need for Experience*—promote personal growth, get into the job market, try out different skills, a new learning experience.
- (2) *Feelings of social responsibility*—concern for others, caring, wanting to get involved, relieving feelings of guilt about one's good life as compared to others.
- (3) *Need for social contact*—to make new friends, to get out of the house, to justify existence and feel needed, sense of belonging, alleviate loneliness.
- (4) *Responding to the expectations of others*—required by my employers, school, church, social club, service group; pressured by spouse, friend, or peer.
- (5) *Need for social approval*—want to be appreciated, thanked, praised, respected; to get recognition, someone to be proud of you, social esteem or social approval.
- (6) *Expectation of future rewards*—someday I may need help, having others in your debt, fear of punishment or being judged, helping others we may avert being in need ourselves, that our behavior returns to us.
- (7) *The need to achieve*—sense of power in making things happen, goal oriented, to get feedback, being able to feel proud of a job, good workmanship, seeing an end product, satisfy a creative urge, to see and experience change.

Francies (1985, pp. 171-184) found that those volunteers who were highly matched—their needs were matched with an appropriate volunteer task—were

more likely to become involved to a greater extent and stayed longer than those not well matched to the job. Volunteers who were matched to a high degree to their task were significantly more satisfied.

The individual's needs give rise to consumer attention to ways of satisfying those needs. Marketers recognize that consumers do not attend to product features, but rather to the benefits derived from ownership. A diagram of this exchange as shown below suggests that individuals attend to the benefits promised by a product, but the features of the product actually deliver the desired satisfactions.

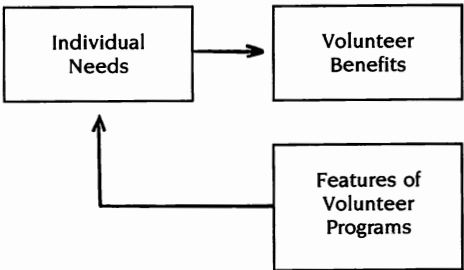


Table 1 highlights the variety of benefits sought by volunteers in response to needs discussed previously.

TABLE I
Benefits of Volunteering

recognition
work experience—documentation of work for future resumé
satisfaction of helping
joy of being able to display a talent
skill building (sharpening old or building new skills)
a letter of appreciation
interpersonal relationships with other volunteers
"shadow wage"—tax savings to volunteer
making new friends
satisfaction of doing a good job
doing something or giving to someone else
repay a debt (e.g. work for an organization that helped out a member of the family at one time: hospice volunteer, Association for Retarded Citizens)

Pricing

The third element of the marketing mix is setting a price for the product. Price is considered by some to be the major factor in the purchase of a product or service. Price is a major contributor to acceptance of a volunteer program. It is related to perceived value, image, and competitive practices.

Now, it is rare that an agency charges volunteers for volunteering, but many volunteer agencies unknowingly create "price" barriers. These barriers may be classified as financial, situational, or personal.

Financial barriers are created when day care is needed but not provided. (Day care could be provided by accessing the local high schools' family living courses for child care class participants.) Transportation for elderly volunteers is often a barrier.

Situational barriers are those created by the context of the volunteer experience. Perhaps the location is inconvenient to the potential volunteer. Alternative volunteer activities might be designed. Businesses may be inundated with requests from other volunteer agencies for support and consequently turn off all agency requests. A coordinated effort with other volunteer agencies may reduce this "cost." More accurate targeting of appropriate businesses may also reduce this overlap.

Personal barriers are those specific to the individual. Chief among these are self-concept/image barriers. Is it socially acceptable for males to assume volunteer positions, or will their peer group consider that the domain of women? What strategies can be employed to alter the image of volunteering?

The ultimate consumer question is: is the value received greater than the price paid? These economic and non-economic costs of participation along with lost opportunity costs—they could be doing something else with their time—function just like a price sticker on a new car. The volunteer administrator must be cognizant of the price paid for participation as a volunteer.

Promotion

The fourth element of the marketing

mix is what the marketer does to communicate to the various segments or target markets. Effective marketers are effective communicators. This is not an easy task. By selecting the wrong message (not focused on benefits), selecting an inappropriate medium, or crafting a poorly prepared message, the volunteer administrator will not penetrate through the myriad of messages which bombard us daily. It has been estimated that the average American receives over 1700 messages every day. The human mind, as a defensive measure, uses screens to reduce to 76 the number of messages an individual responds to. Of these, only 12 are attended to. Being heard over the clutter of competing messages requires careful crafting of communication.

The following rules are those followed by successful marketers:

1. Target your promotional activities. Understand your markets, their needs and wants, and focus your message on each unique market. This means you will need a separate message for the elderly volunteer, the college student and the business.
2. Set goals. Identify specifically and realistically what response you desire from each market segment.
3. Be systematic. Effective promotion is consistent, systematic and comprehensive. A single ad or one brochure (3 years old) will not work. There should be a theme, "Give the United Way," "Help Jerry's Kids," that is consistently followed in all communication efforts. This repetition of a message builds an image of your program in the customer's mind.
4. Include a variety of communication activities. Include brochures/letters targeted to specific markets, use personal selling, and tie in with special events. Your letterhead, business cards, and other printed material should include your theme and logo where possible. Repetition is the key to consumer recognition. (Remember Mr. Whipple?)
5. Plan at least one public relations or promotional activity each month.

Plan a year in advance. Good planning cannot be over emphasized in the marketing of volunteer programs.

6. Remember to emphasize benefits. Show what the product will do for the consumer.
7. Seriously explore the use of a professional agency—on a volunteer basis, of course—to develop your materials. Volunteer administrators rarely have the expertise, or the time, for this effort.

People

The final element in the marketing mix is perhaps the most important. Peters and Waterman (1982, p. 238) stressed this by declaring that businesses should:

Treat people as adults. Treat them as partners; treat them with respect. Treat them, not capital spending or automation, as the primary source of productivity gains. These are the fundamental lessons from the excellent companies research.

Volunteers working alongside paid staff people should be treated as paid staff. They should be included in staff meetings; their opinions should be sought and valued. In short, treat them as real people.

In a recent study of volunteers, Steele (1986) found that three themes dominated volunteer recommendations:

- (1) Volunteers suggested that agents should *respect volunteers as individuals*.
"I think they think that we have a lot more time to spend than we actually do."
"He should remember that volunteers are just that, and they should be treated with a little more respect, not as employees that are drawing a salary."
"Sometimes they need to remember the Extension volunteers have another job."
"Know what each volunteer's skill is and give credit to those where credit is due."
"People have as much information to give Extension as vice versa—have an open mind."
- (2) Agents should develop *good interpersonal skills*.

"You have to have a heck of a lot of psychology. We all have quirks, and no one person is the same every day."

"Having patience is important."

"Be polite, courteous and cooperative."

"I think listening to the volunteers even when the area is not so pressing, and letting the volunteer take the ideas and run with them."

- (3) Agents should *guide volunteer activities*.

"Give lots of explanations."

"They have to lead, not push."

". . . volunteers are inexperienced and need a lot of handholding at the beginning."

"To give feedback to volunteers as to how the program is going."

"To present us with definitive examples."

CONCLUSION

What the authors sought to present was a comprehensive marketing model and the relationship of that model to volunteer program development. For many, these concepts may be new and possibly a little intimidating. McKay (1975) pointed out the potential problems in implementing a marketing philosophy in non-profit organizations:

It may require drastic and upsetting changes in organization. It usually demands new approaches to planning. It may set in motion a series of appraisals that will disclose surprising weaknesses in performance, distressing needs for modification of operating practices, and unexpected gaps, conflicts, or obsolescence in basic policies. Without doubt, it will call for reorientation of business philosophy and for the reversal of some long established attitudes. These changes will not be easy to implement. Objectives, obstacles, resistance, and deep-rooted habits will have to be overcome.

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