

The 7 Ms of Marketing: How to Communicate Your Agency's Value



By Pat Lynch Ph.D

Introduction

Contrary to what you may have heard, marketing is NOT about selling something. It's about offering great value that people are free to accept or decline. In the case of public safety agencies, the purpose of marketing is to increase your ability to keep your communities safe, healthy, and economically viable. To do that, you must identify the value your agency provides to the community, articulate that value clearly, and communicate it widely in ways that your stakeholders can understand easily and appreciate.

The seven steps identified and described in this special report outline a marketing plan that can help you achieve that purpose. Although each step is an integral part of the process, developing the right mindset (step #1) is critical to your ability to communicate your agency's value effectively. The order of the steps is important, as each one builds upon the one before it.



Step 1: Mindset: Focus your approach

- The context must be the “big picture” of public safety that represents a common goal – e.g., “Create a safe, healthy, economically viable community.”
- Focus relentlessly on the big picture: always begin with that end in mind.
- Identify your value by articulating the impact of your actions on the public safety big picture.
- Discover what’s important to your stakeholders by putting yourself in their shoes.
- Ask your community members how they have benefitted from your services: their answers will highlight your value in ways you may not recognize on your own.
- Don’t forget to address your economic impact – e.g., revenue to the city, safe environment, jobs for residents.
- Educate your members about the value they provide by helping them “connect the dots” between their actions and the big picture.
- Help your members take ownership of that value.
- Teach your members how to articulate that value to others.
- Marketing is a process, not an event; it must be built into your daily activities and integrated into your culture.



Step 2: Message: Identify who and what

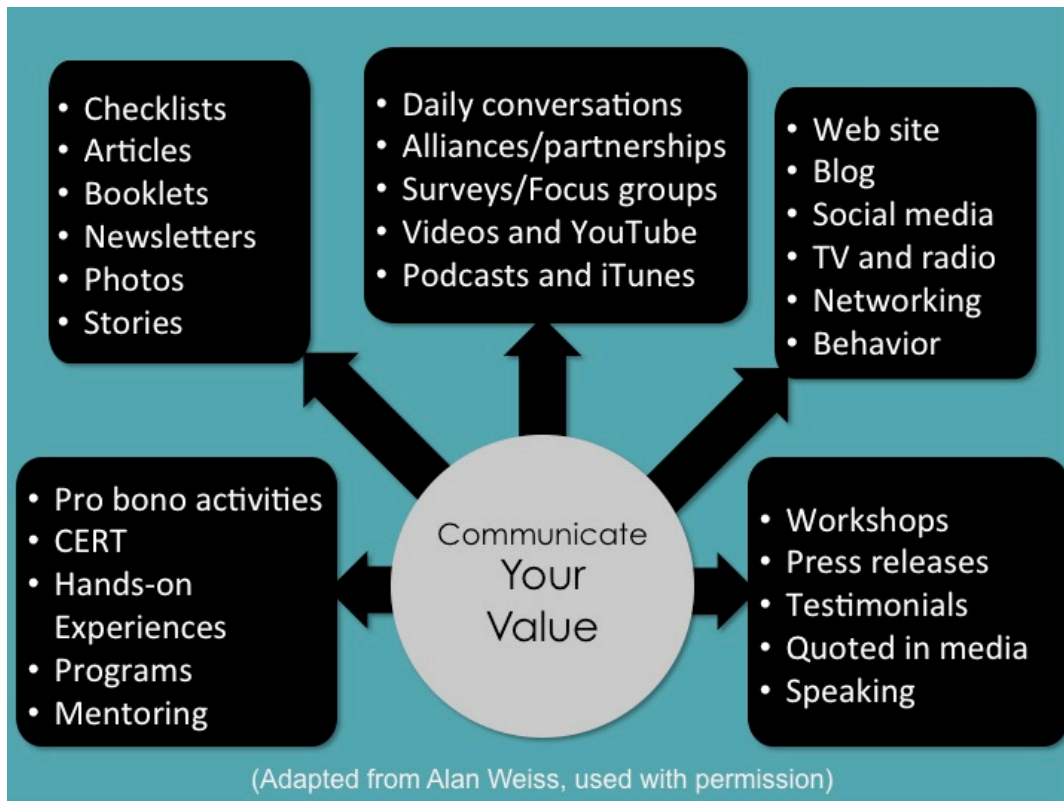
- Identify each specific message's "mission" – i.e., ensure the message has a clear purpose, such as educating the audience or persuading people to take Action.
- Conduct an audience size-up: specify your target audience and identify their interest(s) in the big picture. For example:
 - Residents want a safe, healthy environment.
 - New business owners want to open as quickly as possible.
 - Municipal or provincial administrators want to attract visitors and new businesses.
 - Politicians want voters to see them as effective.
- Limit each message to one clearly stated point.
- Focus relentlessly on how the things you do, or do not do, affect the big picture by leading with results (the big picture), not with activities or methodology.
- "Connect the dots" for your audience between your actions and the big picture. Don't assume they will recognize the value on their own.
- Watch your language! For example:
 - Choose your words carefully: speak of "investment" rather than "cost."
 - Focus on outcomes rather than on activities or methodologies.
 - Use words and terms familiar to your audience and avoid technical terms or jargon.
- Make it easy for people to understand your message. For example:
 - Write in a conversational tone.
 - Use analogies or metaphors familiar to your audience (family analogies work well).
 - Tell a story that paints the audience into the picture.
- Use framing skills effectively to re- direct the public conversation to the big picture. For example:
 - Rather than answer the question, "How much will we cut the public safety budget?" ask instead, "What level of public safety do you choose to provide to our community?"



- Encourage discussion rather than a quick decision by providing multiple options that illustrate the impact of each choice on the big picture.
- Stick to the facts: speak directly and truthfully about an issue without dramatizing it. For example, let the audience know the tradeoffs (if any) between effectiveness and efficiency.
- Tell your audience only what they need to know, not everything you know – no data dumping!
- The adage, “A picture is worth 1,000 words” is true. Using photographs appropriately also helps the audience connect to your message and may make it more reader-friendly.
- Provide a call to action that’s relevant to the purpose of your message.

Step 3: Methods: Identify practices and protocols

- How to communicate the message depends on its purpose, audience, content, and urgency. Make sure you address each of those issues BEFORE you select the method(s).
- See the “Communicate Your Value” graphic below for more than two dozen examples of how to convey your message;. Choose a FEW that are best for you and appropriate for your audience.
- Ensure your choices of communication media are relevant to your intended audience.
- Use multiple media to cast the widest net – e.g., some people prefer to read a message, others like to hear or see it.
- Ensure the selected media are appropriate for your message.
- Use pictures where appropriate: they are powerful communication tools because they evoke emotions, which cause people to act, and they tell a story more clearly and succinctly than words.



Step 4: Map: Develop a plan

- Select an active “champion” who makes the marketing plan a priority and who has both the responsibility and the authority - as well as enthusiasm for the project - to ensure success.
- Define “success” and “effectiveness” up front as they relate to the marketing plan.
- Develop a communication strategy for getting the message out about the value your agency provides.
- Create a detailed implementation plan that serves as a “recipe” for moving effectively from strategy to action. For example, specify the following information and include realistic deadlines as well as measures of progress and achievement for each item:
 - Who establishes the message’s purpose and audience
 - Who creates the message
 - Who approves the message
 - How the message will be conveyed (identify multiple methods where possible)
 - When the message will be communicated and by whom
 - How frequently the message will be sent
 - Who assesses the success in achieving the message’s “mission”
 - Who communicates the results and to whom
 - Who determines what changes, if any, are necessary to improve effectiveness
- Include accountability mechanisms for all tasks.
- Build in measures of progress and achievement for the tasks AND for the overall process so you know at any given time whether your marketing efforts are on track.



Step 5: Manage: Implement the plan

- Implement the marketing plan and the communication strategy.
- The marketing plan champion delegates tasks as necessary while retaining overall responsibility.
- Conduct regular assessments of progress and achievement.
- To increase awareness of the marketing plan throughout the agency, communicate its progress and status widely and frequently.
- Incorporate new issues into the communication strategy as they arise.
- Drop issues that have been addressed or outlived their useful lives.
- Regularly question assumptions to ensure they remain accurate; let your stakeholders help you determine their continued relevance.



Step 6: Measure: Assess progress and achievement

- Regularly assess the measures of progress and achievement identified in step 4.
- Report the results of those assessments widely.
- Assess individual messages and methods for effectiveness.
- Evaluate the efficacy of the implementation plan.
- Assess the overall communication strategy.
- Establish a process for adjusting the process as needed. For example, identify:
 - Who is responsible for determining the need for changes
 - How and when to document the relevant issues
 - Who recommends appropriate corrective actions
 - Who approves the recommendations
 - Who implements the changes
 - Who reports the results
- All measures should answer these two questions:
 - “How do we know this message has been successful?”
 - How do we know the marketing plan is demonstrating our value effectively?”



Step 7: *Maintain: Replenish and refresh process*

- Because marketing is a process rather than an event, it must be sustainable over time.
- Build accountability into each step and the overall process.
- Embed your marketing process into your agency's culture: everyone must take ownership of communicating the value they collectively provide.
- Create continuous feedback loops.
- Regularly re-evaluate the effectiveness of the marketing process and the communication strategy.
- Make changes as necessary. For example:
 - If the stated purpose is not being met, find out what adjustments are needed.
 - As issues are addressed, take them off the list.
 - As other issues arise, add them as appropriate within the existing communication strategy.
- Regularly question the assumptions upon which the process and strategy were developed to make sure they remain valid.
- Reinforce desired behaviors related to communicating the agency's value to the community.
- Celebrate your progress and successes!
- Ensure the marketing plan and communication strategy remain aligned with the big picture.



Tips to Increase Your Marketing Effectiveness

- Use your “big picture” as your touchstone for all your communications, internally and externally.
- A critical success factor is having all employees take ownership of the marketing plan. An agency whose members take ownership of the value they provide the community will be much more successful in communicating that value than those who don’t.
- Focus relentless on results. Lead with results consistently. For example, the point of each message should articulate a result. Your sentences should begin with the result(s); activities or methodology may follow but ONLY if necessary.
- Constantly connect the dots between your services and the big picture – for your members as well as for your stakeholders.
- Make your messages and information easy to find and access: most people won’t take the time to conduct a search.
- Present information and (especially) statistics in contexts that your audience can understand easily and appreciate.
- Allow others to tell your story: collect testimonials and use them in your marketing materials.
- Provide a call to action that’s relevant to the purpose of your message.

Conclusion/Summary

For those who argue that they don't have the time or the inclination to develop a marketing plan, or that it's not their job to do so, consider this fact: by failing to communicate the value your agency provides the community, you are harming those you serve unnecessarily. Although people want and need the value you provide, most members of the public have no idea what it takes for you to create and maintain a safe, health, and economically viable environment. Unless you connect the dots for them, they are unlikely to make the decisions and take the actions necessary to provide you with the resources you need to achieve your mission. Their quality of life, and the safety and health of your members, is in your hands. Why not use a marketing plan to help you meet that responsibility?

Pat Lynch, Ph.D., is President of Business Alignment Strategies, Inc., a consulting company that helps first responders maximize performance by removing or mitigating obstacles that prevent them from achieving their mission. [Contact Pat](#) if you would like some help with your marketing plan.

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