COMMUNICATION TRENDS TO NON-PROFITS

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Abstract

Communication is an important element in devising, disseminating and pursuing the organisational goals for all organisations (Jones et al, 2004). It involves informing target audiences about frequent, timely and relevant information to members; listening about needs and what motivates those who fund these organisations; and staff interactions, who are responsive, knowledgeable and passionate about the organisation (MacMillan et al. 2005). Surveys were sent to sporting organisations as a way of interpreting their communication strategies between citizens, administration and non-profit associations. Not surprisingly, our findings suggest that many organisations think of communication as an after-thought. We believe that Internet and mobile phone technology will be most important for the growth of communication for many NFPs over the next decade.

Introduction

During the last century, communication under went many rapid changes, but the last ten years have seen a remarkable growth in communication technology, markedly the Internet. Four major trends that have emerged over the past decade are digitisation, consolidation, deregulation and globalization. In addition, the state of continual change and of economic pressures mean that all organisations need to keep up with these trends because the communication process of creating and reflecting new structures, processes and relationships is changing (Hamelink, 2004; Jones et al, 2004; Quay, 1998). The changes in electronic formats of recent times such as blogging, VOIP and wireless networks promotes the trend towards deregulated environments as well as reinforces the trend towards globalization (Hamelink, 2004). Nevertheless, are all organisations able to adopt these communication trends, and more importantly do Not For Profits (NFPs) have the resources to utilize the advancements in communication effectively?

NFPs operate in a highly competitive environment. Many NFPs need to rely on strong communication with their key stakeholders particularly as the number of NFPs has increased, this has resulted in higher competition to gain the limited amount of funds available. To survive and prosper within this environment, key issues relating to communication may hold the key to gain future success.

This study investigates how the communication trends of digitisation, consolidation, deregulation and globalisation effect NFPs and whether non profit organisations are able to adopt these changes while using them effectively. This study concentrates on State Sporting Organisations within Australia and their ability to effectively integrate the communication tools available to them. We also suggest strategies that may help improve communication between the NFPs and key stakeholders.

Marketing communication should not exist in isolation. When it comes to organisational communication, effectiveness and integration between all communication tools is important. Further, a consistent message helps the development of the NFPs or brand over long periods of time, as brand values

increase and build loyalty by avoiding message conflict. Marketers can create a feel of consistency by increasing message synergy via differing vehicles (Duncan 2002, Eagle and Kitchen 2000). And further, improving communication can offer NFPs a way to improve trust (MacMillan et al. 2005). Specifically, this research was undertaken to answer the following research questions:

- Firstly, how have communication trends of digitisation, consolidation, deregulation and globalisation effected NFPs?
- Secondly, can NFPs adapt to these changes?

We are concentrating on digitisation of communication in our research as this is the main communication impact on sporting organisations. As the majority of products of most sporting organisations can not be global and deregulations of markets would not ultimately impact on these organisations. However, technological integration promotes the trend towards deregulated environments and reinforces globalisation (Hamelink 2004).

This paper reports on the findings of the research that relate specifically to the relationships that exist between State Sporting Organisations and communication trends. Specifically within this paper, we review relevant literature regarding NFPs customer orientation, new technology growth and digitisation including Internet, mobile phones and Databases. We then explore the ever changing marketplace with regard to deregulation of NFPs. Underpinning our research is integrated marketing communication (IMC) which is discussed within our contextual framework. In doing this the paper is broken into three sections being, the overview of the growth and use of communication technologies, then an investigation into what is known about how NFPs use these technologies, with the final section outlining communication implications for NFPs.

Literature Review

Traditional marketing theorists favour planning and control, however an emerging view recognises the rapidly changing world that has become increasingly multifaceted and uncertain (Fillis 2002). Traditionally NFPs are seen as organisations that contribute something to society, and not driven by the pursuit of money. However, NFPs can generate profits over and above their costs. NFPs do not distribute any surpluses to stakeholders, but re-invest in the organisation through lower-priced products, improved service or as we find in our research improved communication.

Communication should be strategic with clear cut goals and actions with measurable results. In addition collaboration has become essential for NFPs so that they can cut costs and ensure their communication is effective while affordable. In doing so, searching for new communication tools and software that increases speed, productivity and convenience has become imperative for the harried members as they require the communication to be quick and easy to fit into their lifestyles (Muehrcke 1999).

Non-Profit Marketing and Customer Orientation

Even though NFPs think of themselves as customer-focused, often it is a desire rather than reality. Andreason and Kotler (2002) found that NFPs were organisational-centered rather than possessing a customer orientation and that they exhibited all the characteristics of an inward-focused institution. Additionally, Andreason and Kotler (2002) found that if an organisational event failed, it was attributed to customer ignorance or absence of customer motivation, or both. Customer research played a minor role and marketing was classified as promotion. Finally, that NFPs ignored competition and put

into operation a 'best' marketing strategy (Andreasen and Kotler 2002; Kotler and Kotler 1998).

Furthermore, many public sector organisations can be unresponsive to their clients (Andreasen 1982; Bruce 1995; Moyer 1994; Newman and Wallender 1976). Given that integrated marketing communication needs to revolve around their clients, this lack of customer focus understandably causes problems for marketing applications within this sector.

Within Australia at present there are approximately 40,000 NFPs that employ people and another 670, 000 without any employees (Schmidt 2005). Further, in terms of economic influence, they contribute 4.8 percent of GDP (the same as mining) and if volunteer labour is withdrawn, 3.3 percent of GDP, which is larger than the agricultural sector. In addition, over A$7 billion was spent by households on sport, and A$300 million by companies in annual sponsorships, A$430 million in annual exports, and sport in Australia is worth 1 percent of GDP (Australian Sports Commission, 2006). Therefore, sporting organisations in Australia have a major impact on industry, but can they accept the growth in new technologies and digitisation?

The Growth of New Technologies and Digitisation

Through communication, people establish common meaning (Duncan 2005). Communication has changed, and these changes are having a major impact on the way communication plans are designed. Marketing communication purpose is to add value that benefits stakeholders, this includes members, donors and any others who gain value from the NFP organisation.

The focus of the paper deals with digitisation as the main communication trend. Digitisation means that the integration of communication networks not only spreads ideas and concepts around the world, but can lead to speed, flexibility, reliability and lower costs which then benefits the company, stakeholders and customers. These communication networks and methods have vastly changed over the past ten years. Not only with the Internet, but with VOIP, Blogs, SnapMail, Skype, TAGS, podcasts and SMS. However, only a few of these advancements are actually used by sporting organisations or NFPs (Hamelink, 2004; Ezell, 1989).

The Internet It is well known that mass media has become less effective as a communication tool. Coupled with this is that media habits of consumers have become more discerning, and multitasking ie using two media at once is on the increase with our younger generations. The Internet is one way for NFPs to communicate efficiently with their targets, especially the younger generation. What will the next five years bring? Generation Y will be the next target. Sporting organisations can tap into new niche audiences via new technology. The use of the Internet has created electronic global communities as the physical boundaries have been eliminated and electronic access assists in overcoming traditional barriers of time, place and even membership (Quay, 1998). The future will see a heavy focus on technology and new forms of communication, namely the Internet and SMS of which NFPs have to be aware (Meuter et al. 2003) nor have they previously been used (Hamelink, 2004).

Mobile Telephones: No prior research exists on the usage of marketing by mobile telephones for NFPs (Saxton 2001). It is clear that this practice is taking place, and has substantial scope for future research by NFPs.

The Ever Changing Marketplace: The present marketplace has changed significantly from the historical marketplace and the mass production focused environment that we once knew. Marketing was a linear, product driven,

outbound process with the customer seen as a means to an end (Cornelissen and Lock 2000; Hutton 1997). Consumers were constrained by the structure of the market and the single discourse presented by marketers (O'Shaughnessy, 1999). There was no need to focus on integrating communication messages, as messages were simplistic and consumers had no way of accessing additional information to make them more complex.

The 21st century marketplace shifted the balance of power (Nemati & Barko, 2003). Never before have we seen such diverse choice within the market and have information so readily available. Technological development has taken society away from the Industrial Age and moved to the Information Revolution (Schultz, 1996). Consumers have become more educated and experienced than ever before and are not satisfied by marketing campaigns that use persuasion based, one-way communication models (Geissler, 2001). Communication has become global and globalisation has brought about the emergence of global services by global suppliers including NFPs. This change brings with it major impacts on corporate communication (Schultz and Kitchen 2004). The traditional model of top down, one way communication does not exist in today's society. It has been transformed by globalisation, digitisation and social change (Edelman, 2004).

We will now discuss the various changes to communication under the umbrella of integrated marketing communication.

Integrated Marketing Communication

The term IMC fundamentally blends and coordinates different communication functions for a brand (Cornelissen and Lock 2000; Geissler 2001; Schultz 1996; Thorsen and Moore 1996; Wightman 1999). The common three applications are one-voice, integration and co-ordinated marketing communication. Organisations themselves as well as IMC is changing because of the changes in technology (Greif & Millen, 2003; Kitchen & Schultz, 1999).

Effective communication is not occurring within organisations and with those who hold the key to their corporate future (Schultz and Kitchen 2004). Whilst there are different interpretations of IMC, it seems that all agree the "functional, mechanistic, production-oriented model of marketing" (product, price, placement, promotion) is antiquated (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998). This leaves the field open to develop more humanistic and relationship based marketing models that would suit NFPs. (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998). Creative and visionary NFP's must continuously strive to meet the needs of the communities that they serve (Holohena 2002). NFPs in creating this more humanistic relationship should also enhance employee commitment as this can help NFPs organisational performance as well as aid customer/donor experience (Jenkinson 2000; Pech and Slade 2004).

Marketing communication should not exist in isolation. An IMC program requires that more than one communication option type is used with a degree of consistency and harmony to reflect the existence and content of the other communication options (Keller 2001). By enhancing efficient media selection, this will aid cost and reach as well as communication effectiveness (Billett 2002; Jenkinson and Sain 2004).

This is because the features of IMC in terms of integrated marketing tools, consistent messages, target segments and two-way communication are able to achieve the purpose of effective promotion and enhance brand value. Utilising multiple media channels can add communication power through existing synergies (Billett 2002). A consistent message helps the

development of NFPs brands over long periods of time. Because brand values are increasing and building loyalty by avoiding message conflict, marketers can create consistency with increasing message synergy via differing vehicles (Duncan 2002, Eagle and Kitchen 2000).

Methodology

In order to determine if NFPs were communicating with their stakeholders, a 21 question survey was administered via an email invitation asking respondents to visit an electronic survey on a website. We sent emails to the sporting organisations listed on the website of The Australian Sports Commissions, Sport and Recreation Queensland and Equestrian Queensland. The equestrian clubs were used for convenience and accessibility. We received 90 respondents. Our intention was to contribute to empirical development in relation to the NFP sector.

Results

The Growth of New Technologies within NFPS

The previous section overviewed the growth and use of communication technologies, and this section looks at what is known about how NFPs use these technologies. The final section outlines communication implications for NFPs. A previous study conducted in 2000 and repeated in 2001 (nfpSynergy, 2006) found that the use of the Internet was in its infancy within NFPs. Among its findings were that the most popular Internet applications were news and information, regular updates and email enquiry services. Only 31 percent had searchable databases with only six percent developing interactivity on the Internet. A myth that exists is that a website grows traffic.

This research attempts to find out communication mechanisms within NFPs. Our research question specifically explores: *Communication trends in non-profit organisations.*

To answer this question, 90 online surveys were completed by sporting organisations that were emailed a web link. The questionnaire utilized both qualitative and quantitative responses in order to gauge a more valid indication of the organization and their communication methods. The first section asked about the communication methods and awareness of the organisation of varying methods. Section two explored the demographic details of the organisation.

Results were analysed using SPSS Version 11. Overall frequencies, t-tests, ANOVAs and cross tabs were performed.

Findings

In total, 90 responses were collected. The level of sporting organisations was represented by 42 from Queensland, 13 at a Club level and 25 from a National sporting organization and ten did not indicate their level of sporting structure. Of those 90 responses, sixty two percent believed that it was important to very important to keep up to date in advances in communication technologies.

Within the club, state and national level, we wanted to explore whether there was a person whose role it was to solely look after communication. All levels indicated that the majority of cases there was **not** one specific person. Specifically at a National level (76 percent), State (66.7 percent) and Club (61.5 percent) did not have a specific person. Interestingly, the club level had the highest indicator for having someone to look after communication (38.5 percent). Statistically, no significant differences exist between organization levels on whether they have an employee to solely look after communication, χ^2 (2, N = 80) = 1.011, p = .603.

Furthermore, and not surprisingly considering the results above, there was no significant differences between organization level and whether they thought they would need to hire another staff member to integrate new technologies, χ² (2, N = 80) = 1.689, p = .43.

Organisations at a club level are significantly less likely to believe they could afford to implement new communication methods, χ² (2, N = 80) = 7.527, p = .023. National and State level organisations believed that they could afford to implement new communication methods, with 64 percent respectively.

Findings indicated that 48.9 percent of respondents felt that advancements in communication technologies would make it less time consuming to communicate with members, but 71 percent thought it would make things more efficient to communicate with members. Furthermore, 63.8 percent of respondents used electronic newsletters to send to members, although the majority of Club level organisations did not use electronic newsletters (53.8%). There was no significant differences between organizational levels on the use of electronic newsletters, χ² (2, N = 80) = 4.231, p = .121.

Does every Organisation have a Website?

These findings could have a direct link to only 46.2% of Club level organisations not having a website, compared to all State and National organisations having a website. Club level organisations are significantly less likely to have websites than state and national organisations, $χ^2$ (2, *N* = 80) = 33.43, *p* < .0001.

Updating websites is important, however at a club level, only 66.7% update their websites every now and then. Daily updates are undertaken by 40% of National and 14.3% of State organisations; with 40% and 54.7% updating every couple of days to weekly respectively.

Communication Methods being Utilised

Respondents were asked to list all of the communication methods they used, and respondents were encouraged to list as many as they could, therefore percentages in the following table do not add to 100. The most popular communication methods at the club level were email (69.2%) and telephone (46.2%). At the State level, the most popular methods were email (81%), letters, newsletters and website (47.6% each).

Table 1: Communication methods by Club, State and National levels

	Club		State		National	
	Freq	**%**	**Freq**	**%**	**Freq**	**%**
Email	9	69.2	34	81.0	20	80.0
Fax	0	-	3	7.1	3	12.0
Letters / hard copy / mail / post	4	30.8	20	47.6	8	32.0
Magazine	0	-	4	9.5	2	8.0
Meetings / face to face	3	23.1	8	19.0	5	20.0
Newsletter	4	30.8	20	47.6	3	12.0
Online / electronic / email newsletter	0	-	9	21.4	5	20.0
SMS	0	-	1	2.4	0	-
Telephone	6	46.2	13	31.0	8	32.0
Website	2	15.4	20	47.6	15	60.0
Word of mouth	0	-	2	4.8	0	-
Other	2	15.4	2	4.8	4	16.0
Total	13	100	42	100	25	100

Source: developed for this research

To discover whether NFPs knew of new tools that could improve their communication efficiency at a cost saving, we asked respondents if they had heard of SKYPE, VOIP, and blogs. Among those who had heard of blogs, respondents who had heard of SKYPE were more likely to have heard of VOIP, χ^2 (1, N = 34) = 14.25, p < .0001. Among those who hadn't heard of blogs, respondents who hadn't heard of SKYPE were also less likely to have heard of VOIP, although there was no difference amongst those who had heard of SKYPE in awareness of VOIP, χ^2 (1, N = 40) = 6.935, p < .008.

We wanted to determine an unprompted response to list any new technologies in communication of which organisations were aware. We explored the data at a State level and our findings indicate that SMS is the largest communication technology stated when unprompted in the ACT and Queensland. However, Victoria is more aware of web based communication. Findings can be seen as per State in Table 2. The results are biased towards Queensland due to the Queensland State Sporting Organisations and Queensland clubs being targeted in the invitation to participate. Tasmania, South Australia and Northern Territory were not included as no responses were received from these states.

Table 2: Unprompted communication technologies by State

	ACT		NSW		QLD		VIC		WA	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
3G	0	-	0	-	1	1.7	1	20.0	0	-
Blogging	0	-	0	-	2	3.3	0	-	0	-
Email	0	-	0	-	7	11.7	0	-	0	-
Fax	0	-	0	-	2	3.3	0	-	0	-
MSN messenger	0	-	0	-	2	3.3	0	-	0	-
Podcasting / iPod technology	0	-	0	-	2	3.3	0	-	0	-
Skype	1	25.0	1	16.7	1	1.7	0	-	1	50.0
SMS	2	50.0	0	-	9	15.0	0	-	0	-
Telephone	0	-	0	-	2	3.3	0	-	0	-
Video conferencing	0	-	1	16.7	1	1.7	1	20.0	0	-
VOIP	2	50.0	1	16.7	6	10.0	0	-	0	-
WAP / other mobile phone technology	2	50.0	0	-	6	10.0	0	-	0	-
Web	0	-	1	16.7	6	10.0	1	20.0	0	-
Wireless broadband	0	-	0	-	3	5.0	1	20.0	0	-
Other	0	-	0	-	3	5.0	0	-	0	-
Don't know / not sure / none	1	25.0	4	66.7	25	41.7	2	40.0	1	50.0
Total	4	100	6	100	60	100	5	100	2	100

Source: developed for this research

Implications and Future Research

It is apparent that in our modern day world, there are still many organisations who consider communication as an after-thought. Our findings indicate at a

Club level many do not have a website, and therefore do not utilize electronic newsletters to communicate with members. While this has large implications on costs and time of current staff or volunteers, the positive benefits would be worthwhile.

Interactivity has a large impact on corporate organisations. Connecting with members and staff through intranets, extranets and other electronic systems is important. Within NFPs, these systems appear to be evolving on an on-going basis. In the 21st century, communication is most important, and inherent is the need to develop relevant communication methods that have impact. In order to accommodate changing environmental conditions relating to the technological environment, sporting NFPs must lead the way with communication. New roles need to be designed for communication specialists within these organisations who know where the business is now and where they want to be in the future if they are to survive and grow.

Use of technology has trebled within the past five years, and within the ever–changing marketplace, NFPs cannot afford to lag behind. Traditional fund-rasing costs such as telephone, mailing, printing and staff support continue to rise. New technology, databases and electronic networks hold the promise of low cost innovation which allows NFPs to maintain lower costs. Embedded with electronic channel usage is the potential to reshape internal communication.

For all of the benefits that new technologies can provide NFPs, many are still not transforming these capabilities (Burt and Taylor 1999; Gordon 1998). Our results indicate that SMS is being under-utilised. In order for NFPs to become more member focused towards a younger, more savvy Generation, the use of this marketing communication tool must be explored.

Searching for new communication tools and software that increases speed, productivity, convenience and cuts costs has become imperative for the harried members as they require the communication to be quick and easy to fit into their lifestyles (Muehrcke 1999).

This paper has illustrated that communication appears to be an afterthought in many sporting NFPs within Australia, although more research is required. A study that includes a broader range of NFPs could determine stronger and more valid results.

Conclusions and Future Research

This paper has outlined the problems associated with the communication trends of digitisation, consolidation, deregulation and globalisation effecting NFPs, specifically sporting organisations within Australia. It is clear from our research that NFPs, specifically sporting organisations, are not able to adapt to new communication technologies mainly due to their limited resources.

Many challenges remain for NFPs. Evidence from our research suggests that new technology has brought about a need for new marketing communication strategies to be implemented. Most marketing communication strategies in use at present are unsophisticated and rely on mass marketing.

The development of new communication technology has brought with it a range of communication channels which require specific planning. We believe that the Internet and mobile phone technology will be most important for the growth of communication for many NFPs over the next decade. One of the key benefits of Internet and SMS marketing is the ability to enable stakeholders to market on behalf of the organisation. Viral marketing is one strategy that NFPs could use to their benefit. NFP marketers will be required

to become more advanced and develop stylish and classy was to persuade people to invest or visit their website or follow their cause.

The potential and opportunity that exists for NFPs is staggering because the rest of the world has been growing with this technology over the past ten years. NFPs are failing to make the most of the power of new technologies to communicate with their stakeholders. Therefore we can hope that NFPs become more proactive and take these findings to the core of the organisation and change marketing strategies. NFPs ignorance of new technology is not bliss.

As evidence from this research shows, the majority of NFPs feel that it is important for them to keep up to date with communication advances. However, our results indicate that it is not being undertaken. Success will be found by thinking smarter, open to and updating knowledge of new technologies, forming clear and creative messages and micro-targeting; and strong alliances by careful and thoughtful networking.

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