

Effective Marketing for Campus Recreation

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Literature Review

It is important to promote a healthy lifestyle in students because the decisions they make now will have an impact on their overall wellbeing for years to come. Post secondary education settings generally offer an environment for students to be physically active when it is convenient for them to do so (Leslie et al., 2001). Programmers need to position themselves in such a way to attract non-users into their programs and services

(Hurd & Forrester, 2006). Hurd and Forrester's study (2006) found that through marketing and successful programming they can reach out to non-users and create a more diverse and larger clientele.

Having access to the right information regarding the benefits of campus recreation allows students to make educated decisions. Leslie et al., (2001) states that "our understanding of the natural history of exercise behaviours in today's tertiary education population is incomplete," which would explain why more students choose not to participate in campus recreation. Understanding effective ways to market campus recreation is an element that has yet to be mastered. At this point in time, there has not been a great deal of research conducted that lays out how to effectively promote and recruit students for campus-based physical activity (Leslie et al., 2001).

In order for campus recreation to be successful, it is imperative that the student body is informed about the different activities that are offered. In a study conducted by Reed (2007), results show that significant percentages of the student body were unaware physical activity facilities on campus. In regards to marketing, there are many different approaches to take to increase participation. While being in close proximity to a facility is an underlying factor, another stimulus includes witnessing other individuals engaging in physical activity (Reed, 2007). In addition, knowing what facilities are in existence could also encourage an individual to participate in regular physical activities such as campus recreation (Reed, 2007). Campus recreation directors need to serve as advocates for the students (Little & Guse, 1988). These programmers need to recognize the specialized needs of the students to help create the greatest opportunities and activities for their time spent in post secondary education (Little & Guse, 1988).

Visual cues of any type of media are an effective method of marketing. Studies have shown that motivational signage as well as e-mail reminders regarding health benefits increased physical activity levels (Ford and Torok, 2008). With technology today, methods such as email are both time and cost effective. Cues could encourage readiness to take action and are also utilized in a variety of health behaviour models (Ford and Torok, 2008). Since post secondary education is considered to be a significant time for weight gain in both sexes, motivational signage may be the key to change the behavioural patterns relating to healthy choices. (Ford and Torok, 2008).

New marketing methods have developed through technology that allow for cost effective and efficient promotion. According to Espino (2008), there are 5 ways to balance marketing. They include: a person approach, people-based, location-based, broad advertising and new media. New media, which consists of using online resources such as Facebook and YouTube, is the most cost effective approach to marketing (Espino, 2008). Each target market will be different from the next, so it is important to “strike a balance between ‘classic’ and new media marketing techniques” (Espino, 2008).

Recreation agencies should utilize a systematic process to help plan, develop, and communicate recreation opportunities and their benefits (Bright, 2000). Adopting technologies from marketing is one process that recreation managers are often hesitant to try (Bright, 2000). ‘Social marketing’ was produced in the private sector as a means to ‘market’ social ideas and behaviours in order to benefit individuals and society as a whole (Bright, 2000). Social marketing was developed because the recreation sector often lacks time, money and staff to adopt traditional marketing techniques (Bright, 2000). Bright (2000), states the seven components of social marketing as: the bottom line of

social marketing is behaviour change, programs must be cost effective, strategies should be customer-focused, strategies designed to effect behaviour change and comprise all four elements of traditional marketing mix (product, place, price and promotion), use market research techniques to design, -pre-test, and evaluate programs, use market segmentation techniques and compete with alternative behaviour choices. Social marketing is a promising tool for recreation services in that it provides the framework for planning, development, promotion and administration of programs (Bright, 2000).

Program directors are pressured with minimal financial resources and increasing demand for services (Bauch, 1999). SERVQUAL is a service quality measurement tool that can be used to measure the strengths and weaknesses of the services provided (Bauch, 1999). Evaluated by the clientele, SERVQUAL breaks customer satisfaction into five components: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Bauch, 1999). Information collected from the survey can provide new direction in staff training, equipment purchasing, facility design and much more to increase potential customer satisfaction (Bauch, 1999).

Recommendations

Effective marketing of campus recreation directly correlates with how successful the programs are going to be. There are a variety of steps that staff members could follow to ensure that the student body is well aware of the different activities that are offered on campus. It is important to evaluate the marketing methods that are being used to ensure that they are reaching the greater part of the student population. The following paper will examine a wide array of different marketing tools that campuses currently use and how they could be improved to attract the most students as possible.

With the current rise in obesity rates, it is crucial to stress the importance of leading a healthy active lifestyle. Living a healthy lifestyle requires a person to both eat healthy and be physically active on a regular basis. Not only is appearance important to many young adults, diabetes and other diseases are currently on the rise which could lead to other health problems later on in life. Weight gain is also a common trend that occurs to students living away from home which can be turned into an effective marketing tool in attracting participants. For example, a first year student who is overweight may be intimidated by the idea of going to workout at the gym and would probably feel more inclined to participate in a group or team activity.

In some cases, a campus recreation department may have a difficult time in recruiting staff and students for the designated activities. One of the first steps that a department should take is to ensure that information regarding the activities offered is easily accessible. Having knowledgeable staff available to assist people with any questions sends a positive message to those who are inquiring. If staff are unable to answer questions immediately, it is important that the inquiring person is aware that the staff member will get back to them with an answer. Brochures, posters and other print ads

are also very effective methods of reaching out to possible participants. Setting up different displays and interactive booths also catch people's attention. Having student employees of campus recreation run the booth may make it more approachable for other students. Ensuring the student employees are friendly and interactive with new students will make them feel more comfortable in coming back to sign up for various activities. New media, such as Facebook and Twitter, are becoming the most efficient and helpful forms of marketing because they receive a lot of traffic at no cost. These social networks are accessed by people of all ages and can offer instant notifications that can even reach out to user's cell phones. Those students who are a part of either of these networks and rarely check the school website or school email would now still be connected with information about campus recreation. Students can then reach out to other students via these networks to get involved.

A simple tool that is often overlooked is the value of a survey. Surveys allow the campus recreation staff to be fully aware of what programs and activities that the staff and student body want to participate in. It is not uncommon to see activities get cancelled because of a lack of interest which, in turn, becomes a great deal of time and effort wasted that cannot be regained. A survey decreases the chances of this happening because if there is not a lot of interest in a certain activity it will not be offered. Along with surveys, having a comment box at the recreation desk and encouraging students, faculty and others to leave their comments and concerns about the programs and facilities will help to build the campus recreation department. Growing concerns about issues with programming, activities or facilities often go unseen or are overlooked by employees of

the department. Having outside perspectives, from the users, helps to find issues that can be taken care of over time.

A campus recreation department's primary focus is to cater to its clientele. Being a customer oriented group requires you to be knowledgeable about your potential participants. For the most part, students have very limited access to disposable income. They are generally required to take out a loan and spend it very wisely. This has to be taken into account when marketing to this target group because the more expensive sports that require equipment or facility rentals may not be feasible. It is also important to know what activities are popular and what trends currently exist. An example of this would be the Nintendo Wii console; a fun, interactive way to get participants engaged while being active at the same time. Reaching out to a variety of different user groups can be done by providing programs associated with such trends. As well, creating themed game days, aside from the regular scheduled leagues may help to bring out a wider variety of clients. These game days can veer away from traditional sport and incorporate fun activities that any individual could be a part of. Inclusivity is of major importance when trying to achieve mass participation.

SERVQUAL is also utilized by participants to rate the quality of the services provided by the campus recreation department. SERVQUAL, which stands for service quality, is a management tool that helps the department improve on all aspects and is based on participant feedback. It is essentially a survey, but instead of being offered prior to activities, it is handed out after to evaluate a specific service. From this, campus

recreation can determine where changes can be made to better serve the clientele; anywhere from the hiring or firing of staff to the times that the program is offered.

The key factor in providing easy access through the use of websites is to make them user friendly with an abundance of information about the facilities, programs and services provided. The documents found on various post secondary websites all had a variety of layouts. Though these documents did provide much information, in some cases it was difficult to find. There should be a link provided on the school homepage to connect to the campus recreation site, instead of starting a search or clicking multiple links to get there. Information should be provided on the different facilities available to the clientele and what programs and services are available within those facilities. Information on different programs should be separate or grouped on a page with like activities. A run on page of the entire list and description of activities may be confusing or difficult to find a specific activity. When promoting the use of the school website to get information, a major factor is keeping the site up to date.

Many schools are effective in providing the information about their specific campus recreation programs. A suggestion for effectively drawing in participants would be to have an online registration. This option may be available for certain programs but could be made available to students for intramural programs. Some programs fill up quickly and not everyone has the availability to sign up. Providing an online registration where they can sign up a team or as an individual and pay the fees by credit card or through their student account would be very beneficial.

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