

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Marketing Guidelines

Marketing and public relations are important to Minnesota State Colleges and Universities in building public awareness, visibility and support for our institutions and programs. Well-integrated and well thought-out marketing and public relations strategies can enhance the perception and reputation of Minnesota State Colleges and Universities among prospective students, key stakeholders and the public.

The Public Affairs Office at Minnesota State Colleges and Universities oversees marketing and public relations activities for the system office. The following step-by-step guidelines are intended to assist divisions or departments within MnSCU plan and execute marketing and public relations strategies.

1. Your first step should be to contact the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Public Affairs Office. They can help you identify your target audience and plan your strategies and tactics. The earlier the Public Affairs Office is informed and involved in your project, the better. All MnSCU advertising, marketing communications, external publications and communications with the media must go through the MnSCU Public Affairs Office for approval. This applies to all projects that are initiated or coordinated through the system office. Even if the project is funded from a separate budget, the Public Affairs Office needs to be involved to make sure that the content and quality of MnSCU messages are consistent.

2. Schedule a preliminary planning meeting. The planning meeting is an important first step. It is a chance for all parties to clarify the target audience, the key messages, and the strategies and tactics you will use to reach that audience. Decisions made at this meeting will guide future steps in the process, so it critical that all key players are present. At a minimum, attendees should include all who will have an important role in the project. The “client” — the person or group for whom the project is being undertaken — is key, along with the people who will be responsible for carrying out the project. If you know at this point that you will need to bring in outside help, such as an advertising or public relations agency, invite them to the meeting as well. Be sure to include a representative from the MnSCU Public Affairs Office.

The preliminary planning meeting should take place before any decisions are made. Someone in the group should be designated to record decisions. Here are the basic questions that need to be answered:

Who, exactly, is the target audience? Be as specific as possible. The broader the audience, the less effective the marketing strategies and tactics are likely to be.

What do you know about your target audience? Do you know of any market research or other research that would help you better understand your audience? If not, you may want to consider conducting some basic research first, such as interviews with people in your target audience, or small informal focus groups. You need to know how your audience prefers to

receive information and what influences their decisions.

What are the key messages you want the target audience to receive? Again, be as specific as you can. Do you want to increase awareness of a product or service among your target audience? Do you want to inform or persuade them of a concept or idea? Do you want them to take an action?

What is best way to deliver the key messages? Describe the strategies and tactics that will reach your audience to achieve your purpose. As much as possible, base these decisions on market research or your own knowledge of your target audience. Don't discount strategies that are low cost or practically free, such as seeking newspaper coverage or pursuing other public relations tactics.

What is the available budget? This may dictate, to some extent, the type of marketing you will be able to do effectively.

How will you measure the effectiveness of your marketing efforts? Think of ways to track how many members of your target audience see or hear your message, and how many responses you get.

You may need to have a series of meetings to gather all the information you need and make these decisions. Once you have answered these questions, consider the best way to approach your project. Are resources available in-house to refine the key messages and implement the strategies and tactics, or will you need to bring in outside experts such as an advertising or public relations agency?

3. Make a plan. Once you have answered the planning questions, draw up a marketing plan. Be as clear as possible about your goals, and state how you will measure whether or not your goals have been reached. If you are working with outside experts, they will assist you in planning and implementing your marketing strategies (and they will charge you for this service.) Draw up timelines for the project.

4. Work with the MnSCU Public Affairs Office and your in-house or outside experts to carry out your marketing plan. The Public Affairs Office can help you coordinate your project with other projects that may be underway or in planning stages, so that you can get more bang for your advertising or marketing buck.

5. Evaluate your results. Once your plan has been implemented, hold a debriefing meeting to discuss what worked and what didn't. Invite the people who attended the original planning meetings. What lessons can you learn that will help you next time?