

## **Chapter 13: Marketing and Public Relations**

### **Sec. 1 Marketing Your SWCD**

Marketing is an element of any successful business, organization, agency or group. It is no different for districts. Marketing is critical to gaining visibility and credibility. SWCDs cannot grow, flourish without marketing. Once you understand how to market effectively, you'll enhance your chances for name recognition, be viewed as an expert source for information and/or direct assistance in the field of conservation.

For many of us, marketing is a real mystery. We don't know exactly how it works. We're not sure what will be most effective for us and we may have no idea where to start. The good news is that the process of developing and implementing a marketing plan for your SWCD is not nearly as difficult as it may seem. The core of marketing is very simple: It's about communicating the value of what you offer to those who can benefit the most.

You can greatly improve the impact of marketing by using multiple marketing channels. Prospects will likely become supporters and participants if they, for example: read about your services in the newspaper, attend a seminar, take home a brochure, and visit the county SWCD web site. The further you can "stretch your marketing dollars" to reach your target market in multiple channels, the higher the impact of your marketing message.

Let's take a look at some basic Marketing Principles you should consider:

- Marketing is repetitious. To create impact, build rapport and establish relationships with your prospects, repetitious marketing works best. Your audience may need to hear your name or message 5-7 times before you can anticipate a response.
- Marketing must be performed continuously, not infrequently. Avoid marketing in spurts.
- Marketing creates impact gradually – not immediately.
- Marketing sells solutions. People are more interested in what SWCDs can do for them to help solve a problem.
- Marketing involves targeting specific individuals or groups of people.

Let's now take a look at various Marketing Strategies you could utilize. It is not critical that you incorporate all these into your marketing plan. As a board, discuss these options and decide where you want to put your efforts. You may also need to change your approach after a few years if your efforts do not seem to produce the necessary results.

#### **Physical Office**

- Outdoor signage and indoor directional signs (if needed).
- Welcoming entrance.
- Staff easily seen from the entrance to greet visitors

- Guest waiting area.
- Brochures and pamphlets displayed for easy access
- Accessible walkways (at least 32” wide) for physically challenged individuals.
- Answering machine for when the office is closed or staff is not available.

### **Office Operations**

- Consistent way of answering the telephone
- Consistent local SWCD letterheads for letters, FAX cover sheets, envelopes, etc.
- Business cards for staff
- Informational brochures and pamphlets
- Telephone system – voice mail, directional tree, etc.
- Name tags for staff
- Shirts with local SWCD name and/or logo
- Effective use of e-mail among staff and supervisors

### **Networking and Event Participation**

- High quality booth or display at 4-H Fair, Flower & Patio Show, field days, trade shows, Ag. Days, lake association gatherings, Chamber of Commerce events, annual meetings (Extension Service, Co-op, seed and fertilizer dealers, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Farm Credit Services, etc.)
- Attend and/or serve on various community committees – Chamber of Commerce Natural Resources Committee, Extension Service Agriculture Committee, lake association boards, river watch, tree planting, community clean-up, drainage board, etc.
- Offer to give presentations for service clubs and organizations
- Sponsor or co-sponsor events, seminars and training programs on appropriate SWCD topics

### **Direct Mail**

- Newsletters, special promotion letters, flyers, etc.
- Obtain information (name, address, phone number, and e-mail address) from every person who attends any of your programs. Keep an excel spreadsheet on your computer with specific columns for each event so you can track participation. A sample template is located on the Division of Soil Conservation website. You can e-mail/mail information to the individuals on the spreadsheet.
- Utilizing a mail service, SWCDs can send out information to a specific group of individuals based on location, homeowner vs. tenant, recent home purchaser, etc.
- If your clients are agreeable, consider using e-mail rather than regular mail. This will greatly reduce postage costs.

### **Website**

- An effective site can help build awareness and credibility for your SWCD
- Keep it updated and change the information periodically
- Develop an easy to remember URL or Domain Name
- Remember, older computers may not download detailed pictures

- Include the office phone number, address, FAX number, and an e-mail address on your home page.
- Include links of other related agencies and organizations and ask others to include your SWCD link on their site. Examples include: surveyor, NRCS, Extension Service, drainage board, builders associations, FSA, Farm Credit Services, local Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever, etc.
- Keep it simple to use with easy access back to the home page
- Use your site to promote District programs and activities.

## **Media**

- Developing a working relationship with key contacts is critical
- Television and Radio
  - Public service announcements
  - When interviewed, provide background information and a possible list of questions to the reporter that he/she can ask you
  - Consider giving reporters some free items (trees, meal tickets, etc.) to give away to listeners when they mention your event
  - When interviewed, it is critical to give accurate information and advice, which will help you become known as an expert
- Phone Book
  - Determine the best location(s) to list your district
  - Work with county officials to try to get multiple listings
- Newspaper and Magazine
  - An article and press release with a photograph gains more attention than a paid advertisement. Information printed under the photograph is the most often read part of the article or press release
  - Send information to a specific person (not just to the editor, for example)
  - Try to include something periodically (bi-weekly, monthly, etc.)
  - Submit articles for other business and organization newsletters
  - Give accurate information and advice, which will help you become known as an expert
- Road Signs and Billboards
  - Review all county signage policies
  - Big letters and numbers are critical, especially if vehicles travel the route at a high rate of speed.
  - Keep the information as simple as possible to convey the message

## **Give Away Advertising**

- Everyone likes to receive free items, so if you plan to purchase these for distribution, make sure you include the SWCD name, office phone number, and/or web site address, if appropriate
- Examples of items are: pencils, pens, refrigerator magnets, flyers, buttons, stickers, hats, shirts, mugs, date books, fly swatters, rulers, yard sticks, etc.

Every year it is important that the SWCD board reviews the marketing efforts for the past twelve months to see what worked and what may need to be changed. As mentioned earlier, it takes time to develop name-recognition and to see positive results. It will not happen overnight, so be patient. Marketing is critical to all corporations, agencies, and organizations, make certain it is part of your yearly strategic planning.

## **Sec. 2 Leveraging Spreadsheet**

Marketing to local government officials about your district's accomplishments and the specific goals for the future is critical for continued financial support. These public officials must be made aware of everything the district is accomplishing to promote soil and water conservation in their county. They also need to realize the value of the district and staff to the community. Ideally, communicating with government officials should be a year-round process, and not just at budget time.

Indiana's SWCDs receive financial, technical and educational support from a number of federal and state agencies in addition to county government. They also receive direct or in-kind operational support from other public and private organizations that support the mission of soil and water conservation districts. County government support is vital to district operations to carry out district programs. Too often county councils and/or commissioners are reluctant to extend additional funding to districts because they are not aware of the significant federal and state dollars, as well as private funding, that a district brings into their respective county to support the local economy, improve the soil, water and related natural resources of the county and, in turn, improve the quality of life for its citizens.

Utilizing the state SWCD leveraging spreadsheet (available on the ISDA Division of Soil Conservation Web site at <http://www.in.gov/isda/2372.htm> ) is a valuable tool to demonstrate the significant amount of non-county financial support that comes into their respective county through the network of partners working with and through their district. Districts are encouraged to carefully complete the spreadsheet and use it to present their local officials with a "bigger picture" of how their district impacts their local economy and the quality of life in the community.

Completion of the SWCD spreadsheet is relatively simple for those experienced with Microsoft Excel software. Items or programs are simply entered under the appropriate heading with the correct dollar amount to the far right, and the spreadsheet calculates most subtotals and totals, as well as the leveraged impact of the SWCD on the local community. For best results, SWCD supervisors and staff should discuss individual programs, practices, and funding amounts *as a group* to best represent total conservation efforts in your county.

Once the spreadsheet is completed, the marketing begins! The spreadsheet is designed as a tool to assist SWCD supervisors and staff in one-on-one discussions with County Councilmen, Commissioners, and other appropriate local officials. *However*, under no circumstances should the spreadsheet be printed and mailed to these individuals. It is best

to hand deliver the spreadsheet and explain the information in person. Local leaders will not see the true value of what your District brings to the county without a detailed explanation. Without an explanation by someone in your District, officials may regard some figures as highly inflated. They need to know that even though the district doesn't control some of the non-county dollars, they do however *influence* these dollars coming into the county. They also need to know that some other non-county appropriated dollars shown (i.e. 319 grants, the state grant for operations) are in the direct control of the district.

Once the spreadsheet is complete and desired handouts are created, there are several items of budgetary significance that SWCD Supervisors and support staff should discuss with local officials:

- 1) Explain to your local official how your District is the local governmental agency responsible for determining *their* constituents' needs and for setting local conservation policies carried out by various agencies and organizations. Assisting the SWCD with increased funding allows for better-trained and equipped SWCD staff to better meet the soil and water quality needs in the county.
- 2) Discuss how establishing specific agricultural and/or urban practices aids in controlling erosion and run-off, while reducing expenses to other county agencies by solving problems like ditches filled with sediment, decreased property values, poor water quality at water treatment plants, animal waste run-off, urban sedimentation in city streets, or any number of other challenges that your SWCD helps the county address or prevent.
- 3) When speaking with local officials, discuss facts such as how many dollars from outside sources are matched for each dollar invested by the county (many competing county agencies will not have such matches, so demonstrate why it is wise for the County to invest in *your SWCD and its programs*).
- 4) Bring attention to the fact that SWCDs are a key mechanism for federal NRCS assistance to local landowners, meaning that all salaries, office space, equipment, and all technical and financial assistance may not be available to your officials' constituents without your District's continued presence.
- 5) Demonstrate to local officials your District's future plans for addressing county concerns by explaining your SWCD's recent Business Plan (Long Range Plan) and explain how your budget is needed to accomplish your plans. Show your District's goals for solving local challenges as well as your administrative ability to do so!

For additional assistance, your local ISDA - Division of Soil Conservation District Support Specialist and possibly your USDA - NRCS Program Specialist is willing to assist with completing your spreadsheet.