Retraining Your Staff for an Integrated Marketing Environment

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➢ **Start with the big picture.** Make sure everyone in your office, from the person who answers the phones to the person who takes the pictures, understands what integrated marketing is and why it’s important. Staff can easily lose sight of the big picture when they’re focusing on day-to-day details, so keep the concept in front of them by distributing and discussing your integrated marketing goals several times each year.

➢ **Create generalists.** Identify staff who will be advising the department chair who wants an annual report to raise her U.S. News ranking, the faculty member who says he wants a press conference to announce his grant, the internal auditor who wants a web page to promote her office, and the dean who wants to fill a new graduate program through a national advertising campaign. Regardless of your organizational structure, staff members who deal with these questions on a regular basis—whether they typically write press releases, develop publications or plan special events—need to be equipped to respond and take action from a broad, integrated perspective. They must have a professional understanding of both public relations and marketing as well as the tools of the trades. This means that they need to be trained as generalists even though they may also have more specialized responsibilities.

➢ **Develop a training plan.** A training plan helps you identify and segment your training efforts and gives your staff a sense of direction throughout the process. What does your staff need to know about direct mail and when it’s most (and least) effective? What do they need to know about print vs. broadcast advertising and differences in what works for each audience? How much should they know about the promises and pitfalls of different types of research? The answers will depend upon your organizational structure, of course. But remember that you probably don’t need to create experts who can develop an advertising plan targeted to achieve specific ratings shares; instead, you want to help your staff become comfortable leading a discussion about the pros and cons of advertising vs. direct mail or radio vs. newspaper. Consider clustering training in a series of half-day meetings over several weeks rather than locking the staff away for an extended period of time. This helps them stay fresh and still stay on top of other work. Keep segments short: You should be able to cover the basics of most subjects in an hour or 90 minutes if the handouts are strong and the discussion leaders organized. Make sure all discussions are lively and interactive. See a sample training outline at the end of this handout.
Let staff train each other. Involve staff in the training process and save money by allowing them to share their expertise with their colleagues. Do you have someone in the office (or elsewhere on campus, for that matter) who can talk about what works well on radio? Is there a member of your academic marketing faculty who can discuss market research and audience segmentation? Can a publications staff member discuss the basics of effective design? Remember that even staff who work in close proximity may have little understanding of each other’s roles and responsibilities, so an overview of various functions can be helpful. Help focus your in-house trainers by asking them to develop, for example, handouts outlining the top 10 dos and don’ts in newspaper advertising, the pros and cons of focus groups vs. telephone surveys, and factors that influence printing costs. Encourage information sharing to continue informally after training in order to promote consultation and teamwork.

Use local experts. Is there a local media buyer who might share her insights? A market research firm willing to review the basics? Many nearby professionals are willing to serve as training resources at no cost simply to help you get to know them better.

Take a new look at old subjects. How does media relations fit into an integrated marketing environment? How is it changing in a competitive recruitment market? Have the elements of a good news story changed? Why are we doing publications in a web-influenced world? What is the role of the hometown news release? Your staff may be exceptionally experienced in press relations and publications; building these topics into retraining helps them take a new look at strategies and reminds them that these are only a few of the tools in the toolbox.

Take a new look at other offices. Most staff understand the role of the admissions office or the mission of the development office, but do they understand how fund-raising really works or how the admissions office identifies and tracks prospective students? How does the athletics program market itself, and what is its impact on the greater university? Invite staff from other campus offices—particularly those that will be involved in an integrated marketing effort—to talk about their goals, strategies and challenges as part of your training. Make a special effort to include people who have been critics of your office or have felt left out of the process. The interaction can help break down old barriers in favor of new working relationships.

Include a “people” component. Integrated marketing almost always leads to shifts in staff priorities. Staff members become counselors rather than pure service providers. Initially they may be saying “no” to certain requests more often than in the past—and “yes” to new ones. Spend some time leading a discussion about strategies for guiding headstrong deans accustomed to press releases on demand and events offices advertising in the wrong places. Help your staff feel comfortable being advocates for integrated marketing and seeing themselves as valued consultants with special expertise and skills. Discuss negotiation skills, conflict management and working with challenging personalities. Talk about the importance of on-going, two-way communication with internal constituents. Let them know you’ll support them.
Use case studies to help staff stretch their problem-solving skills. Pick common situations, past issues or case studies from other schools and discuss how they might be addressed differently in an integrated marketing environment. Assign marketing problems and have the staff discuss how they would solve them. For example, what elements would they include in a plan to announce and support a new academic unit? What information would they need to get started? How would they identify target audiences? How would they reach each audience? What offices would need to be involved at what points in the process? Case studies usually lead to lively discussions that promote strategic thinking and teamwork.

Focus on process near the end. While process is involved in nearly every training discussion, try to keep most training focused on information, theory, planning and problem-solving. Leave the details—When do I contact the publications office about a brochure? Who is responsible for signing off on advertising? What if a department wants help with marketing research?—for the end. Consider following your case studies discussion with a session on the processes involved to implement each solution.

Refresh training at least annually. Set aside at least one day each year to review strategies, go over topics that seem particularly challenging for staff, and renew skills.

Seek opportunities for on-going professional staff development. Don’t forget the many programs and publications offered by CASE, the American Marketing Association, admissions-focused organizations, and others. Check out local marketing organizations for training and membership opportunities, encourage staff to audit relevant courses, and circulate highlighted articles and newsletters throughout the year.

Provide tools and support to help staff succeed, but accept that some may not be able to make the conversion. The staff member who still views himself as a news writer, the designer who continues to act on her belief that brand identity inhibits creativity, and the web manager who can’t get past a long-standing territorial dispute with the admissions office may not be able to thrive in an integrated marketing environment. Make your expectations clear up front, move people to their strengths when possible, and be supportive. But be realistic and willing to make tough decisions.

Reward success. Seek opportunities to acknowledge and reward staff members who embrace and learn to be successful in an integrated marketing environment. As job responsibilities change, be sure to change what you evaluate in staff performance. If possible, tie job evaluations and salary increases to staff contributions to integrated marketing goals.
SAMPLE TRAINING PLAN

WEEK ONE: INTEGRATED MARKETING

Monday morning: Integrated marketing and university goals
                Staff members’ roles in an integrated marketing environment
Wednesday morning: Marketing basics
                   Marketing and public relations
                   What we know: Available research, existing strategic plans,
                                 strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats
Friday morning: The marketing mix
                 The role of one-on-one communication

WEEK TWO: PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

Monday morning: Press relations (print and broadcast)
                Special events
                Internal communications
                Speeches and presentations
Wednesday morning: Direct mail
                   Publications
                   Editorial standards, design, photography
Friday morning: Advertising
               Web and other electronic media
               Research

WEEK THREE: THE CAMPUS

Monday morning: Development
                Alumni relations
                Licensing
Wednesday morning: Community relations
                   Government relations
                   Public Broadcasting
Friday morning: Admissions
               Athletics
               Off-campus programs, health sciences initiatives, etc.

WEEK FOUR: PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Monday morning: Case studies
Wednesday morning: Processes
                People skills
Friday morning: Writing a plan
               Celebrate