



Within Reach



Integrated Marketing Communications: A Holistic Approach to Government Communications

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Over the past few years I have noticed both as a consultant working with government clients and as a professor teaching students who attend our [Professional Certificate Programs](#) at Carleton's Sprott School of Business, that there is an inclination on the part of public sector marketers to separate advertising from other marketing communications tactics. I believe there are a number of reasons for this phenomenon; some are bureaucratic and others can be explained by a lack of knowledge and understanding of marketing communications and advertising. Hopefully this article will convince you to re-assess the marketing communication strategies in your organization.

"There is nothing as powerful as an idea whose time has come."

-Victor Hugo

First, a little history: About twenty years ago, marketing departments created silos for each of the various marketing communications functions; planning and managing them separately with different budgets, views of the target market, goals and objectives. In many cases, there were separate units or divisions within the same organization managing various marketing communications functions.

Then, companies began to change their operations to embrace the concept of *integrated marketing communications (IMC)* which involved coordinating the various marketing communications elements along with other marketing activities that were communicating with the organization's target audience(s).

In 1993, a task force from the American Association of Advertising Agencies (4As) developed one of the first definitions of Integrated Marketing Communications: *"A concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines—for example, general advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations- and combine these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum communications impact"*.¹

¹ Belch George E., Belch, Michael A, Guolla, Michael A., *Advertising & Promotion: An Integrated Marketing Communications Perspective*. 2nd Cdn. Edition, Toronto, On: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 2005.)

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Experts in the field of marketing communications found that IMC serves to emphasize the benefits of harnessing synergy across the promotional tactics in order to build brand equity of products and services. The central tenet of IMC that distinguishes it from conventional advertising is that each medium enhances the contributions of all other media. In other words, the combined impact of multiple elements (e.g., television, print, radio, Internet, direct response, public relations etc.) can be much greater than the sum total of their individual effects. ([Prasad and Kalyan](#))

As IMC became popular, companies set more strategic objectives with their advertising agencies and their own internal functions to ensure better coordination of the use of a variety of marketing communications tools to achieve their goals rather than relying primarily upon mass media advertising.

In the traditional advertising agency world, many responded by acquiring or setting up public relations, sales promotion, direct marketing, and interactive expertise and touting their capability to meet all of their clients' IMC needs. In addition, companies began looking beyond one-stop advertising agencies to other types of marketing communications specialists to develop and implement various components of their plans. Today it is not unusual for organizations to outsource their requirements to a number of different types of specialized communication agencies.

So why did organizations, including government most recently, move to the practice of IMC? A key reason for this paradigm shift was that marketers recognized the value of strategically integrating the various communication functions rather than having them operate in silos. The move to IMC also reflects an adaptation by marketers to a changing environment, particularly with respect to demographics, psychographics, lifestyles, and the influx of new media opportunities.

Although it can be said there are a number of reasons for the important shift to integrated marketing communications, the following are some of the major catalysts of note for the public sector:

- By coordinating marketing communication efforts, organizations can avoid duplication, take advantage of synergy across communication tools, and develop more efficient and effective marketing communication programs.
- The shift of marketing communication dollars from media advertising to other forms of promotion.
- The movement away from relying on advertising-focused approaches, which emphasize mass media such as network television and national newspapers and magazines, to solve communication problems.
- The fragmentation of media markets, which has resulted in less emphasis on mass media and more attention to smaller, targeted media alternatives.
- The rapid growth and development of database marketing which has prompted many marketers to target consumers through direct mail, direct response advertising etc.
- The growth of the Internet especially digital/on-line marketing, which has changed the very nature of the way organizations communicate and interact with target audiences.

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- Demands for greater accountability from advertising agencies and changes in the way they are compensated which motivated agencies to consider a variety of marketing communications tools and less expensive alternatives to mass media advertising.
- Movement to social marketing in the public and non-profit sectors, which requires marketers to exploit all marketing media, channels and techniques to achieve specific behavioural goals for a social issue. For more information check out the [E-Learning tool](#) at Health Canada or the [social marketing planning work book](#) at the Centre of Excellence for Public Sector Marketing.

The key point is IMC has become vital in the public sector because organizations can no longer be tied to a specific promotional communications tool like advertising; rather they need to use whatever communications vehicle offers the best method of delivering the message to their target audiences and recognize the interdependence of the chosen tactics. This strategic approach takes into consideration today's public sector priorities: Value for money and accountability.

The most successful IMC programs require that an organization find the right combination or "recipe" of promotional vehicles, tools and techniques and coordinate their use. In a public sector organization that has not yet embraced IMC organizationally, it needs to understand that their target audiences do not distinguish between tactics. From their perspective they are receiving a message from the government whether it comes via television, direct mail, the internet or an exhibit at a major event. Integrated marketing communications calls for a coordinated approach to planning marketing and promotion programs. With IMC, all of an organization's communications activities should project a consistent, coordinated and unified message to each target market.

So how do you ensure that your communications are consistent and integrated? First, start by developing an integrated communications plan. Include all of the marketing communications tactics that you hope to use to reach your audience. This will help you coordinate all of the communications directed at your audience so that they receive a consistent, reinforcing message. There is nothing worse in marketing communications than delivering inconsistent or conflicting messages which tends to happen when you do not use an IMC approach.

Steps in Integrated Marketing Communications Planning

Situation Analysis:

- Review the results of secondary and primary research, including findings from internal and stakeholder interviews,
- Review best practices and lessons learned from previous campaigns,
- Consider policies /regulations that may affect the campaign,
- Conduct an Environmental Scan i.e. PEST (political, economic, social cultural, technological),
- Conduct a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats),
- Analyze target audience current behaviour, knowledge, attitudes and values, knowledge gap

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- Positioning (positioning statement)
- Conduct a Competitive Assessment (direct, indirect, potential markets)
- Implementation skills (i.e. how will the execution of the IMC activities be conducted internally and/or externally)

Market Segmentation:

- Geographic: counties, cities, census tracts, neighbourhoods, north, south, climate
- Demographic: age, life-cycle, gender, level of education, nationality, income, cultural background, religion, language, occupation, urban, rural, suburban
- Psychographic: personality, values, attitudes, interests, or lifestyles.

Objectives:

- Objectives must be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and have an assigned a Time duration)
- Objectives should be both short and long-term

Budget Determination:

- How much money will be spent on marketing communication?
- How will the money be allocated across the various IMC tactics?

Messages:

- Brief statements highlighting the bottom-line message to a campaign. Also important to specify the desired action required (call-to-action)
- In some cases you may decide to segment the messages by:
 - Primary and secondary target groups
 - Key Stakeholders and
 - Internal

It is important that the approaches for messaging are pre-tested to ensure that they meet the needs of the audience and to guard against unforeseen negative reactions. In addition, they need to be assessed for their ability to deliver on the strategies and objectives developed in the creative brief.

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IMC Tactics:

The most involved and detailed part of the promotional planning process occurs at this stage as decisions have to be made regarding the role and importance of each IMC tool and how they coordinate with one another.

- Advertising;
- Direct marketing/e-marketing;
- Internet and digital/on-line marketing;
- Public relations and proactive media relations;
- Event marketing and exhibit strategy;
- Publications, print /educational material;
- Strategic alliances/partnerships.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

- Gathering feedback concerning how well the IMC program is working and whether it is meeting its objectives.
- Results of the monitoring and evaluation should be used in subsequent IMC planning and strategy development

Implementation:

- Consider what actions need to be performed,
- Develop a detailed strategy and tactics
- Develop a critical path with time lines, responsibilities and dates for completion
- Develop detailed costs for each activity and
- Plan for hiring contractors, including creative production of products, research and testing

The growth of the integrated marketing communications movement is very likely to continue. Today's consumers are under siege. They are inundated with communications messages from business, government and non-profit organizations. Unless your communication tools work together to consistently position your organization and convey your message, your marketing communications will likely be ineffective.

Many public sector marketers are starting to recognize and appreciate the importance of taking an IMC approach and are becoming advocates of integration. The move to integrated marketing communications also

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reflects an adaptation by marketers to a changing environment, particularly with respect to consumers, technology and media. Major changes are occurring in Canada, particularly with respect to media use. Many Canadians are becoming turned off by traditional advertising which is leading public sector marketers to look for alternative ways to communicate with their target audiences. The continued fragmentation of media markets and rapid growth of interactive media and online services are also creating new ways for reaching Canadians.

It is inevitable, with the focus on accountability and value for dollar that public sector marketers and advertisers who have not yet embraced the IMC approach to marketing communications will move in this direction over the next few years. With any luck, you and your organization have already made the move to this holistic approach.

For more views and opinions from the author visit his blog: www.jimmintz.ca