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Canada's Finest: Marketing Law Enforcement Agencies through Targeted Communications
Strategies

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are many similarities between marketing a police agency and marketing tangible products (goods or services) produced by profit-oriented firms. Police agencies must rely on targeted communication strategies in order to gain acceptance of the public and the citizens they serve. They not only represent their individual agency but the law enforcement industry as a whole.

It is therefore important that police agencies have strategies in place and it has become increasingly popular for many agencies to deal with issues in their community and take a proactive approach to crime prevention and problem solving before they get out of hand. Equally important is the communication of these programs to the public.

The following tools and strategies are used to identify issues in the community and the resources needed to mitigate potential problems:

- Geographic accountability and the deployment of officers to identify emerging problems in specific areas of the city;
- Problem-oriented Policing which uses concepts similar to the marketing process to solve specific problems in the community;
- School Resource Officers to work with students in the schools and to deal with issues that may lead to potentially larger problems.

Alternative crime reporting is becoming increasingly popular. People are now able to report non-emergency crimes by the use of email, online forms, fax, and telephone. This makes it logistically easier for people who are unable to make it down to the police station or who are afraid of reporting certain crimes for fear of retaliation. Technological advances have also helped police agencies regarding the type and amount of information that is able to

be provided to the public. People are now able to access crime statistics online as well as various programs and services available to them on agency websites.

Though media and public opinion seem to shape a lot of people's perceptions of the police, they are increasingly able to control the information that is being communicated.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Police agencies across North America are constantly trying to improve or maintain a positive image when it comes to public relations. Yet a number of them typically do not think of incorporating business principles when developing programs and initiatives. This paper will explore some of the programs and strategies already used by police agencies and how they relate to traditional marketing concepts. A simple shift in focus and adaptation of these concepts may assist many agencies in achieving their objectives.

2.0 BRANDING THE SERVICE

2.1 The Importance of Marketing

Why marketing? What are we selling? These are common questions that arise from law enforcement agencies. Unlike many other organizations, police services are not in the business of making money from the production of goods or services, rather, they provide a service to the public in the form of a certain quality of life.

The local police service is a monopoly, so there seems to be little reason why they would spend time, money, and effort in developing and implementing a marketing campaign; right? Wrong. The fact is the local police service is everybody's business. It is the citizens who they are accountable too. The citizens vote to approve the budgets, they call the police when they witness a crime, and they obey the laws as upstanding members of society. And, it is important that the service earns the confidence and support of the community so that they can effectively achieve its objectives.

A community develops and holds an image of its police department. This image defines the standing of the police department and its employees in the community's esteem. It also affects the department's recruitment and retention, its budget, and the support it receives from the community. (Police Chief Magazine, 2004)

In most cases corporations aren't selling the tangible product that people buy, but the satisfaction they get from it.

For the past 50 years, the Walt Disney Company, for instance, hasn't sold the public its amusement parks and movies; instead, it has sold the public their childhoods. Disney sells memories, happy times, and youth. It sells innocence, love, fantasies, and romance. As a result, the public buys Disney movies and makes the pilgrimage to the Disney amusement parks. Volvo isn't selling a car; it's selling the safety of families. L.L.Bean isn't selling shirts, shoes, and camping equipment; it's selling us a piece of the outdoors and a relationship with the environment. (Police Chief Magazine, 2004)

This is the same idea with police services. They aren't selling crime statistics or clearance rates, but rather public safety, security, and peace of mind.

2.2 The Strategic Plan

The success of any organization is determined by the development and implementation of a strategic plan. This is the guiding document by which the vision of the organization is communicated and how that vision will be carried out. It is therefore crucial that this vision is communicated from the chief executive all the way down through the rank-and-file. It is equally important that this vision has a buy-in from all members of the service, both sworn and civilian, because these are individuals who will be implementing the plan.

The Saskatoon Police Service recently underwent a branding process and development of a new Business Plan. The new Chief of Police sought to take the department into a new direction and made it clear that a new vision was to be created by the department and it was important that, in order for this to occur, there had to be open lines of communication both internally and externally.

Good communication is an important part of committing to excellence; internally and externally. During reorganization we ensured our employees were not only well informed but were part of the decision making process. (SPS Business Plan)

A participative restructuring process was important for the internal environment of the Saskatoon Police Service. It was equally important for the external environment as well; particularly when discussing political and social issues with the First Nations community.

Various research has indicated that satisfied people tell their stories of police contact to at least 3 other people, whereas dissatisfied individuals will tell, on average, 10 others about a negative experience with the police. (FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, The, 2003)

The following 12 steps outline the Collaborative Business Plan Process undertaken by the Saskatoon Police Service:

1. Environmental Scan – identify trends and issues within the community and other municipalities of similar size and demographic make up across North America, and project future growth;
2. Morale Study – internal committee to seek input regarding morale issues within the Service;
3. Community Consultations – three consultations were held in the community to gain input on crime issues;
4. Aboriginal Community Consultation – session held with the Aboriginal community to gain input on crime issues;
5. Youth Forums – two “Hear This” forums were held to gain input from youth on crime issues;
6. Community Planning Session – Persons representing agencies and organizations in Saskatoon met to identify key issues;
7. Internal Interviews – Cross section of police employees were interviewed and provided input on present and future issues;
8. External Survey – Community members were given an opportunity to identify issues via a website survey;
9. Board Planning Session – Board of Police Commissioners provided input and guidance to future needs;
10. Final Plan – Board approved plan for implementation;
11. Implementation – Goals and objectives identified and worked on;
12. Monitoring – Ensure goals and objectives are being met. (SPS Business Plan)

2.3 Working with the Media

Notification of the public consultations and other external communications regarding the restructuring of the Saskatoon Police Service has been made through the local media outlets.

Alyson Edwards, Manager of Media Relations, stresses the importance of seeking out as many

positive news stories with the media as negative ones. (Edwards, 2009) This is often difficult when the media is on the constant look-out for stories that reflect unfavorably on the police service and/or segments of the community as a whole. It is equally important for a department to take proactive steps to communicate the good work done by the service to build or improve their image rather than leave it to the newspapers and television shows to feed off the, often negative, perceptions the public has developed.

Police agencies do not typically have a marketing section and therefore must rely on public relations and their own relationship with the community in order to pass on the correct information.

Public relations, the single most important mass-promotions tool that significantly can impact the department's image, has the ability to create favorable publicity, build on the department's image, and prevent or handle rumors and incorrect information. Therefore, law enforcement agencies must have an excellent working relationship with the local media. Positive media stories are free marketing ads about the department. The more trusting a relationship a department has with reporters, the better it will be able to work with them during times of crisis. (FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, The, 2003)

3.0 TARGETED COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

There are a many ways in which police officers represent their service or department in the community. The main objectives of the law enforcement industry extend beyond crime prevention and the reduction of crime as a statistical measure. Police agencies also work with the community and address the underlying issues and problems that may lead criminal activity.

3.1 CompStat

CompStat is a management strategy developed by the New York Police Department (NYPD) in the mid 1990's to reduce crime at a time when the crime rate was at an all time high.

Short for “Computer Statistics” or “Comparative Statistics”, CompStat was introduced by the NYPD under the leadership of then Police Commissioner William Bratton and his Deputy Commissioner Jack Maple. (Silverman, 1999) It is now used by hundreds of police agencies across North America as an effective crime fighting tool. Weekly and monthly meetings are held, information is shared and criminal activity is scrutinized by the chief and deputy chiefs.

There are many variations of the CompStat model but the basic strategy is comprised of three main parts. The first part deals with statistical analysis and crime mapping using geographic information systems (GIS) technology. Criminal activity is able to be mapped and analyzed up to and including the last 24 hours so that current trends may be identified as they occur and mitigated before they escalate into a larger problem.

The second part of CompStat deals with the geographic accountability aspect. The city is divided up into geographic areas (three in Saskatoon) with an inspector or commander in charge of each. This person is accountable for the criminal activity occurring in their area and must answer to the deputy chief regarding steps to be taken to address the problems. This geographic accountability model is beneficial for the internal organization as well as the public as a whole. It acts as a humbling experience for the commanders whose areas experience an increase of criminal activity. The strategy of having one person held accountable (in the end) provides incentive for the commander to motivate his/her team to work that much harder. It also benefits the public in that they have a contact person for specific issues affecting their community. This provides a managerial conduit for police-public relations.

The third part involves the managerial aspect that is transferable to other fields. It acts as an excellent team-building tool as members can share in the success when objectives are met and the various sections or units work together address specific problems that arise.

The CompStat model is much like an ongoing S.W.O.T. Analysis in terms of identifying the agency's strengths and weaknesses within the department and addressing the opportunities and threats outside the department.

3.2 Problem-oriented Policing

Problem-Oriented Policing (POP) is a comprehensive approach to policing and crime prevention that places emphasis on mitigating the underlying issues that lead to criminal activity in an area, neighbourhood, or city. The scope of the problem may be limited to a specific location or to certain behavioral patterns that spread across geographic barriers. "... policing should address the root causes of recurring problems of crime and disorder and then fashion solutions to solve these problems, often in collaboration with community residents." (Griffiths, 2008)

It engages the help of external agencies, businesses, the community, and the private sector at a city wide, neighbourhood/district, or site-specific level. When discussing issues or problems in a city, the violation of the law itself is just the tip of the iceberg. This is often referred to as the "iceberg" or "80/20 rule" in that no matter how big the problem is, most of the problem (or iceberg) lies below the surface. It is, therefore, necessary to attack the 80 percent of the problem that is not visible. This is where other members of the community and stakeholders come in. (Griffiths, 2001)

Problem-Oriented Policing is similar to concepts used in the marketing process in terms of developing a targeted approach to problem solving or product development. The SARA Model is commonly used in problem-oriented policing and includes the following elements of Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment.

The following is a brief summary of the model:

Scanning

- Identifying and prioritizing recurring problems and consequences to the community and police;
- Developing broad goals;
- Determining frequency and duration of the problems; and
- Selecting problems for closer examination.

Analysis

- Identify and understand the events and conditions that preceded the problem;
- Research relevant data to be collected and what is known about the problem type;
- Take inventory of what is currently being done and resources that may be of assistance;
- Develop working hypothesis about why the problem is occurring.

Response

- Brainstorming and search for how other communities addressed similar problems;
- Choose among the alternatives and select a response plan;
- State specific objectives of a response plan and identify responsible parties;
- Carry out the planned activities.

Assessment

- Collect pre- and post-response qualitative and quantitative data;
- Determine whether broad goals and specific objectives were attained;
- Identify new strategies or adjustments needed to the plan;
- Conduct ongoing assessment to ensure continued effectiveness. (www.popcenter.org)

3.3 School Resource Officers

Educators, politicians, and law enforcement agencies continually seek alternative measures to curb young adults from criminal activity. As with many other initiatives to market the image of a police service, taking a proactive approach by placing dedicated officers in high schools not only prevent juvenile delinquency through close contact with students but also provides links between community support that is available and those who need it. School resource officers (SROs) are able to inform students of the diversity of their department as well as promote public safety by strengthening the partnership between the police and schools;

reverberating into the community as a whole. Students are given the opportunity to focus on learning in a safe and productive environment, free from distractions such as robbery theft, bullying and harassment.

The benefits of deploying dedicated officers (literally and figuratively) in high schools span far beyond increasing security in schools. They are a conduit for open communication and promote information sharing among many agencies targeting specific issues in the school. SROs develop a rapport with the students who see the officer, and the police department as a whole, in a positive light rather than a negative one that is often associated with many students' first contact with the police. The duties of the officers involve them as coaches for sports teams and involved with other extra-curricular activities such as music or drama. This builds positive relationships and the students see police officers act in non-traditional police roles.

The school resource officers constant contact and involvement with students, often in a non-threatening circumstance builds bridges between the police department and the community they serve. They frequently become involved in school activities which extend well beyond the role of police officer such as athletics or social events. (Denver Police Department website)

Schools with SROs are able to offer a learning environment that feels safe. The perception of safety is important as safety itself. As discussed in section 2, police services market intangible products such as public safety and quality of life. When students feel safe they are more inclined to participate in extra-curricular activities, walk home from school, and become more social. Criminal activity such as bullying, violence, graffiti and damage to the school all affect the learning environment and creates unnecessary tension among the student population. These types of activities may be greatly reduced with the presence of a police officer on a daily basis.

4.0 USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Society today is often referred to as the “information age”. People are more informed and seek out information from a variety of sources than 20 or 50 years ago. The invention of the internet in the mid 1990s contributed to this thirst for knowledge. Internet usage has grown from 16 million users in 1995 to over 1.5 billion users in 2005. (www.internetworldstats.com) People are now able to access information, do their banking, shop, pay their bills and watch movies all by the use of their computer. Police services have been able to capitalize on the changes in technology as well, by the use and development of department websites and alternative crime reporting by the use of the telephone and online sources.

4.1 Alternative Crime Reporting

Consumerism in today’s society plays an important role with many public and private organizations, and thus focusing on customer service has been placed higher on the agenda. This is evident with the use of ecommerce technology, online blogs and referring customers to similar products. Police services are no exception. They are always on the look-out for ways in which to make crime reporting easier for the citizens they serve. A large percent of crime (particularly violent crime) goes unreported for a variety of reasons such as lack of convenience and/or fear of retaliation.

Despite the prevalence of sexual assault, few incidences are reported. In the Health Canada study, only 29 per cent of victims reported the incident. The 1993 StatsCan survey noted only six per cent of all sexual assaults are reported to police. (Buchan-Terrell, 2006)

Departments are now exploring the ideas of reporting of non-emergency crimes such as property crimes via online sources (email or web-based form) and/or telephone.

There are many benefits of 'e-policing for the community and the police; such as:

For the community:

- Reporting incidents does not require face-to-face contact with the police;
- Better access for those in rural or remote areas;
- Ability to ask questions and get answers when convenient;
- Ability to exit the process at any time without difficulty or repercussions.

For the police:

- Online forms assure that identical-screening questions are asked;
- Ability to schedule work more evenly through the day;
- Ability to deliver 24/7 police services conveniently and cost effectively without a physical presence – possibly establishing a virtual police station in crime spots and remote areas;
- Improved linkages with local organizations and partners. (LeBeuf, 2006)

4.2 Internet

The use of the internet has increased the marketability of many police departments. One advantage of maintaining a website is that the police service has control over what information is being relayed to the public. Updated news releases, crime prevention information, crime statistics, and recruiting information are all available on police website. Transparency regarding the structure of the police service as well as accurate reporting of criminal activity is an effective tool when selling an image to the public. There are many ways that enable people to access information and give their thoughts as well. The use of online blogs and message groups are just a couple examples of these. When people see that they can access updated information first hand, they may feel more confident that their local police are looking out for their best interests.

Agencies such as the Winnipeg Police Service has an interactive mapping function where you can not only view the crime statistics but it enables you to click on the map in the area you

live and view the locations of various crimes that occurred on the map itself. Confidentiality issues restrict police agencies to disclosing the location information to the 100 block level.

In addition to crime statistics, other civic information such as zoning designations, housing type, park locations, and demographic information such as age, sex, and income can all be shown in various ways on the map as well. This not only helps the police with the strategies mentioned earlier, but having this service available to the public on the website helps explain some of the underlying issues behind the scope and types of crime that happen in various areas of the city. This disclosure of information is only a recent development as technological updates has afforded the ability for police departments to access information distribute it in a timely and accurate manner.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Marketing police agencies is unique in that there isn't a tangible product that is being sold or produced. However, there are many concepts used in the marketing process that are similar to marketing the image of a police service and law enforcement in general that stem beyond the use of the media. Everyday contact with the public through the service's various programs and initiatives contribute to the overall marketing process through brand recognition. Many organizations explore various ways to relay their message to the consumers regarding a good or service. They not only market goods and services but the image, memories, satisfaction, and overall quality of life associated with the product.

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