

Fast Track to a Certification Marketing Plan

Workshop for the
National Organization for Competency Assurance

Marketing plan: Step-by-step

- Identify and understand the target market
- Conduct a situational analysis
- Develop positioning and marketing strategies
- Identify marketing tactics and objectives
- Create an implementation plan
- Keep the marketing plan alive

Role of workshop in marketing plan development

- Gain an understanding of how to develop a marketing plan
- Begin to draft each section of the plan
- Determine what additional information or activities are needed to complete the plan
- Conduct research, collect data and obtain input
- Finalize the plan with the assistance of volunteers and staff

Target market defined

- A target market is a group of customers that share similar needs and characteristics and which are the focus of marketing efforts

Identify target market

- Keep in mind that:
 - Not all eligible candidates will be equally likely to pursue certification
 - Not all customers are candidates

Identify target market: Types of segmentation

- Demographic (e.g., age, years in profession, work setting)
- Behavioral (attitudes, knowledge, motivations, patterns of response to the credential)
- Geographic (e.g., states, countries)

Select target segment

- What value do we provide to the segment?
- What is the size and growth potential of the segment?
- What is the level of competition within the segment?
- Does the segment fit with our mission?
- Do we have the resources and capabilities to serve the segment over the long term?

Select target segment: Established programs

- Are the segments we've been targeting still the most desirable?
- Have any target segments been relatively unresponsive?
- Are there any other segments to which we should direct our efforts?

Understand market: Candidate/Certificant profile

- Age
- Type of training/education
- Years in profession
- Primary professional functions or specialization
- Work setting
- Other credentials/professional affiliations
- Geographic region

Understand market: Candidate/Certificant profile

- Reasons for seeking/maintaining certification
- Reasons for NOT seeking/maintaining certification
- Most valued aspects of credential (as perceived by the segment)
- Most important products/services/features (as perceived by the segment)

Understand market: Motivational factors for candidates/certificants

- Knowledge acquisition
- Sense of achievement/verification of knowledge
- Desire to challenge oneself
- Enhanced self-image
- Acceptance by peers/colleagues
- Pressure from employer/colleagues
- Competitive edge when seeking a job
- Higher compensation
- Job promotion/job security

Understand market: Employer profile

- Number of employees
- Annual revenue
- Market sector within which business operates
- Type of customer served
- Number of customers served annually

Understand market: Employer profile

- Reasons for encouraging employees to seek/maintain certification
- Reasons for NOT encouraging employees to seek/maintain certification
- Most valued aspects of credential (as perceived by the segment)
- Most important products/services/features (as perceived by the segment)

Understand market: Motivational factors for employers

- Improved quality of products/services
- Improved corporate image
- Gain/retain competitive advantage
- Greater operating efficiency
- Increased employee productivity
- Increased profitability
- Avoidance of regulation
- Decreased risk exposure/lower insurance rates

Conduct situational analysis

- What are the program's strengths and weaknesses?
- What environmental factors impact (or might impact) the success of the program?
- Is the program able capitalize on opportunities? Can it minimize threats?

Conduct situational analysis: Internal strengths & weaknesses

- Visibility
- Credibility
- Branding
- Status within profession/industry
- Organizational changes
- Staff and volunteers (number, knowledge/skills)
- Relationships with suppliers
- Relationships with stakeholders/partners
- Financial resources

Conduct situational analysis: Opportunities and threats

- What marketing opportunities/threats are present in the external environment?
 - Social
 - Political/Governmental
 - Economic
 - Technological
 - Competitive

Positioning defined

- The position of a product/service is the way it is defined by customers on important attributes -- the place it occupies in their minds relative to competing products (Philip Kotler)

Types of positioning strategies

- Program features
- Benefits offered
- Role in professional development
- Distinctiveness vis a vis a competitor
- Product class

Guess the positioning strategy

- “The Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA®) designation. A measure of excellence among investment practitioners. Proof of a career-long commitment to the highest standards of professionalism and ethics. By earning the right to use the coveted CFA initials, charterholders join an elite corps of leaders in the investment community.”
(CFA Institute)

Select a positioning strategy

- What makes the program distinctive and of value?
- How do the program's distinctive and unique features meet the needs of the target market?
- How does the program provide greater value than its competitors?

Select a positioning strategy

- Feasibility
 - Do your strengths/weaknesses support the implementation of the strategy?
 - Can the strategy be sustained profitably over time?
- Ability to compel
- Effectiveness vis a vis competitors

Select marketing strategies

- Identify strategies that capitalize on opportunities and minimize threats
- Assess feasibility of the strategies, given internal strengths and weaknesses

Identify marketing tactics

- Product/service tactics
 - Features/benefits
 - Pricing
 - Packaging

Identify marketing tactics

- Key issues for product/service tactics:
 - Are the features/benefits distinctive, important to customers and feasible to develop?
 - Does the pricing strategy strike the right balance between volume and revenue?
 - Does the packaging create awareness, motivate customers to take the desired action, and establish and support the desired image of the credential?

Identify marketing tactics

■ Communication tactics

- Advertising
- Public appearances
- Publicity
- Direct mail

Identify marketing tactics

- Key issues for communication tactics:
 - What vehicles will be most effective?
 - What message/image should be conveyed through each vehicle?
 - How should the delivery of the message be timed?

Identify marketing tactics

■ Distribution tactics

A distribution channel is a network of related organizations that assist in promotion and/or expansion of customers' access to products/services

- Gather market intelligence
- Promote credential/identify prospects
- Process applications/administer exams
- Obtain funding

Identify marketing tactics

- Key issues for distribution tactics:
 - What incentives are provided to channel members?
 - What information, tools and/or training do channel members require?
 - How are activities of the channel members coordinated and monitored?

Set marketing objectives

- Positioning objectives
 - Level of awareness of credential
 - Understanding of positioning and perception of believability
 - Image of credential
 - Perceptions of benefits and the value of these benefits

Set marketing objectives

■ Overall marketing objectives

- Candidate volumes
- Proportion of target market credentialed
- Proportion of industry employers participating in program
- Proportion of entire profession credentialed
- Percentage of certificants participating in certification renewal

Create implementation plan

- Outline activities necessary to implement marketing tactics
- Set dates by which activities must be completed
- Specify individual(s) responsible for the activities
- Estimate the cost of the activities

Putting it all together

- Use marketing plan checklist as a guide to organizing the worksheet data
- Develop narrative text, as needed (e.g., to explain rationale for selecting a target segment)
- Present most of the plan in bullets, tables, and diagrams
- Don't turn it into a dissertation!

Keeping the plan alive

- Create a standing marketing committee
- Make staff be responsible for monitoring and implementing plan on a day-to-day basis
- Utilize volunteers to oversee implementation, ensure that all activities are consistent with positioning/branding, and assess the plan's effectiveness
- Evaluate the plan's effectiveness at least annually

Create value: Candidates

- Assist candidates in preparing for the credentialing process
- Provide a process through which candidates can assess their professional strengths and weaknesses

Create value: Certificants

- Ensure that the credential is recognized and respected within profession/industry
- Encourage employers to reward/recognize certificants through salary increases, preferences in hiring and promotion, etc.
- Assist certificants' in furthering their professional development (be a professional development partner vs. a credential pusher)

Create value: Employers

- Assist employers in identifying and locating qualified employees
- Enhance employers' ability to capitalize on the knowledge and skills that certificants bring to the workplace

Create value: Educators

- Enable educators to develop curricula that adequately prepare students for their professional roles
- Assist educators in evaluating the effectiveness of the training they provide
- Provide educators with resources about the profession and the credential that can be shared with students

Create value: Public

- Provide information about the profession and the services performed
- Help the public to identify when the services of certificant may be needed
- Assist the public in locating certificants