Marketing to schools

What is marketing?

Marketing is often confused with advertising or publicising. As one very famous definition puts it, marketing is:

“The right product, in the right place, at the right time, at the right price.” (Adcock)

Central to this idea of marketing is knowing your audience. Promoting your service to audiences also needs to follow the same rule. So your promotional materials need to be the right format, in the right place, at the right time.

What’s different about marketing to schools?

Marketing to schools involves just the same process as any other marketing. It relies on in-depth and up-to-date knowledge of your customers. It breaks down into:

• market research
• product or service development
• promotion or publicity

Market research

The key way to find out what teachers want and need is to listen to them.

• direct listening includes chatting informally to teachers you know, getting yourself invited to a staff meeting at a local school, getting involved in local subject networks, running a focus group, setting up a Teacher Advisory Group and using evaluation forms
• indirect listening involves tuning into the same channels as teachers, e.g. the TES, Teachers TV, Teachernet, SSAT networks
• desk research can provide a lot of useful information. Many museums and arts organisations have asked teachers about the service they are looking for, their patterns of planning, ways of contacting them etc.
• connecting to the curriculum and other formal learning initiatives means that you not only offer schools content they need but can make the benefits of a museum clear in a language they understand

Product development

Working directly with experienced, inspirational teachers is the best way to produce high quality school services. Learning Links funding has enabled many museums to work in this way and developed a pool of experience to tap into. If this intensive relationship is not possible, then piloting new resources or activities with local schools will quickly highlight learning value and any practical issues. Piloting can inform what supporting information you should provide for teachers to maximise the learning in a visit and can be helpful in identifying key messages to use in promoting your service.
Promotion or publicity

**The right time** for teachers to receive information is when they are planning. Primary and secondary schools generally plan their academic year in the summer term. Although they may retain some flexibility in each term to add things like visits, themes will already be set. Adding your information to other sources such as a Local Authority mail out can be cost effective, although runs a risk of your information being overlooked. Try to separate promotional materials from detailed information. Less can be more.

**The right place** is in teacher’s hands or under their noses. If mailing out try to have a named teacher to send to and make sure any flier or even envelope looks intriguing. A primary Head, Head of Department or subject coordinator is more likely to pass information on than a classroom teacher. Better still get your museum and your web address mentioned where they are already looking: their notice board, subject specialist organisation, the TES, even your local paper.

Why not:
- Register details of your museum free with Culture 24 and keep them up to date. This is a vital first step as we will be encouraging teachers to search the Culture 24 for details of services for school offered by museums.
- Ask schools if they would like to receive a newsletter by email with updates on resources and exhibitions. This is a very low cost option after initial enquiries.
- Use your website pages. There is no cost if you already have a website of your own, but make sure that you keep it updated.

**The right format** is one that makes the benefits of visiting stand out. Be specific about Key Stages. Teachers see themselves as e.g. a Year 2 teacher, and then a Key Stage 1 teacher, not just a primary teacher. Secondary teachers tend to define themselves by their subject. Offer positive information that addresses likely barriers in their minds, e.g. easy parking for coaches, all weather lunchroom.

Providing a brochure of your schools’ offer is a good idea, but think about how teachers access it. Is it the most appropriate first thing for all teachers? A flier that signs teachers to a website may be better. Here detailed information can be offered and it can be kept up-to-date. Many teachers use email more than post so consider emailing a mail out. Although there is no easy way to communicate with teachers, the phone is always extremely difficult. Making a friend of the school administrator can be a useful tactic.

Maximise the publicity potential of newsletters and flyers by:
- Displaying copies in your museum, nearby museums, local TICs and libraries.
- Exploring the idea of a joint publication with other museums.
- Taking them to schools or conferences when you go.
- Inserting with booking details sent to schools.

Finally guerrilla marketing can be effective. Providing teacher and school staff incentives such as free exhibition tickets, free cups of tea etc. can encourage them to come to open evenings/days or on planning visits. Having a museum “stall” at the school fair or parents’ evenings can raise awareness. A brief slot in an INSET day can also help plant seeds. Never under estimate the power of word of mouth. If a teacher has a good experience at your museum he/she will tell others about it.