

## Relationship Marketing: A Strategy for Marketing Programs to Diverse Audiences



A major aspect of marketing is publicizing your name, program and service to your target audience. Relationship marketing is the process of attracting and maintaining an audience through enhanced relationships with key individuals over time. Current research in the field suggests that forming constructive relationships with select target customers is more important for long-term success than acquiring widespread public awareness within a community. Much of Extensions' success comes from the loyalty of highly committed participants, volunteers,

lay leaders and from local elected officials and decision makers. Fostering relationships with core constituencies has been critical to Extensions' success since its inception. Unfortunately, in some cases, these core constituency groups did not include people of color or limited resources audiences. Building truly mutually beneficial relationships with these diverse audiences is increasingly important as demographic shifts occur in Utah populations. Our exploration of the dimensions of diversity is crucial to developing strategies for relationship marketing. Relationship marketing is high-touch – person-to-person communication and it is among the most powerful techniques that can be applied when building a clientele.

**Ask: What might be some of the benefits to establishing strong relationship marketing with diverse audiences? What conditions must exist in order for relationship marketing to be successful?**

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Relationship marketing suggests that once your program takes off, that your intentions are to be there for the audience for the long haul. Unfortunately some audiences have grown used to being programmatically abandoned once community contracts or grants run out. When this occurs many lose confidence in organizations and agencies. Extension must demonstrate to audiences that we are different and that we are committed for the long-term.

**Ask: Are we aware of grants and contracts that have come and gone leaving the community with the feelings of abandonment?**

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Customer Retention Marketing (CRM) is the foundation of relationship marketing. Our goal as Extension faculty and staff is to convert the target audience into loyalists and loyalists into enthusiasts, advocates and donors. Let's consider some steps in the process that will lead to that end.

### **Step 1**

You will need to identify the diverse audience with whom you wish to build a relationship. Then consider these key questions and think about the answers that can provide direction to relationship marketing

- What does the audience know about Extension and/or your programs?
- How does the audience feel about Extension and/or your program (positive/negative)?
- What needs does this audience have that your program can meet?

### **Step 2**

- If the diverse audience you have identified has favorable feelings towards Extension then you will want to maintain a good relationship with them through sharing proposed programs through mailings, newsletters, emails and telephone calls.
- If the clientele has negative or indifferent feelings towards Extension then you will need to change this image and build trust. Keeping the audience informed, engaging them in giving suggestions about the needs they hope to have met by your programs will help to establish this trust.

### **Step 3**

- Identify the assets that individuals or institutions in the diverse audience possess. Use the assets of these individuals and institutions to carry out your programs. Volunteers can have short or long-term assignments. These experiences help to build program ownership and foster participation in your programs.

### **Step 4**

- Actively solicit the increased participation and involvement of community members to develop a sense of loyalty to the Extension program. Community members are more likely to continue participating and maintain active involvement in those programs which meet their needs and provide benefits to them.

### **Step 5**

- Encourage greater support from community members. Loyal individuals are more likely to advocate for the Extension programs and/or donate resources to the program. Each of the steps in this model take time and attention to bring about trust and foster program sustainability.

**Ask: Will relationship marketing be a time-consuming Extension strategy?**



Relationship marketing is a process, not a one-time event; clientele must understand you are committed long-term and that they can depend on you to provide education.

To be effective, you must establish a relationship with the audience you are targeting by making a connection with them over time. Extension needs to be constantly in touch with this audience. By making a connection with

diverse audiences, Extension can build strong community networks that promote the programs we market beyond the scope of the occasional workshops or community meeting provided to such diverse audiences.