

How do organisations in the sport and active leisure industry develop and market their businesses?

Activity 3 of the Unit 22 BTEC Sport (Investigating Business in Sport and the Active Leisure Industry) external assessment requires students to make recommendations about how the case study business could develop and market itself.

So how can we, as teachers, help our students with this?

We are going to look at traditional and digital marketing and ways in which businesses in the competitive marketplace of the sport and active leisure industry (SAL) might use different marketing approaches in order to enhance brand, product or service awareness.

The types of marketing strategies and tactics adopted depend upon the type, size, scope, age and intention of the business and its competition. This in turn would inform the different types of marketing strategies that are used. A sole trader, partnership, or small business such as a personal fitness trainer (e.g. [10 Years Younger](#)) is unlikely to adopt the same approaches to their marketing campaign as a national or multinational organisation (e.g. [David LLoyd's](#)).

Businesses of all types and sizes need to consider the cost implications of marketing, whether their message will hit their target market, and how effective their message will be in terms of return on investment through increased sales, membership, customers, revenue, etc.

Pearson, the exam board for BTEC Sport, defines marketing as “the process that SAL businesses use to market their products to reach their customers and meet their needs and expectations.”

What are some of the ways that SAL businesses might do that?

Traditional marketing versus digital marketing.

What is traditional marketing?

Traditional marketing includes promoting the SAL using television, radio and the printed press such as newspapers, magazines, posters and flyers. There are advantages and disadvantages to using these traditional marketing approaches.

Marketing using television has the advantage of reaching an extremely large audience. National and local radio also has the advantage of having a potentially large audience and is less expensive than television. Featured articles in specialist newspapers and magazines are less expensive than television and radio and also have the potential of reaching a large readership. Posters in the local community have the advantage of being seen by a large number of the general public, and flyers, which are pamphlets posted directly into peoples' houses, are relatively cheap and also provide a potentially large coverage of the business's message.

One of the main disadvantages of using traditional marketing methods is expense. Advertising on television can be extremely expensive and is usually prohibitively so for small and medium sized businesses which are local or even national. Radio advertising can also be costly although not as expensive as advertising on TV. The disadvantage of articles in newspapers and magazines is that there is often a long lead time from creating the content to having it edited and then published, which means that businesses may miss out on 'striking while the iron is hot' and not responding quickly to trends in the industry and meeting customers' needs and expectations.

Added to these disadvantages, traditional marketing is often unable to focus on the specific target market of the SAL with this more generalized approach. This means that the marketing approach may not be as effective in comparison to newer types of marketing. Although posters and flyers may have a wide reach, they also may not speak directly to the intended target audience or demographic, which again can lead to an ineffective marketing approach.

What is digital marketing?

Digital marketing includes marketing activity that takes place online, for example on a business's website, on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, LinkedIn, TikTok, in blogs and by email.

What are the advantages of digital marketing over traditional marketing?

There is still a place for traditional marketing for some large national or multinational businesses, e.g. see [David Lloyd's TV ad here](#). However, digital marketing has two main benefits over traditional marketing.

1. It allows the SAL business to reach its target market with a greater degree of accuracy. SAL businesses can position themselves according to the online behaviours of their demographic. For example, if a female personal fitness trainer who specialises in fitness classes for new mums wants to attract new clients, she could create content and have an online presence where new mums spend their time online, on Facebook or Instagram for example. If the SAL business has the email of current and potential clients, direct email marketing can be also extremely effective.
2. As well as being cheap (sometimes free), it is relatively quick and easy for an SAL business to create content and publish to its target market. This means that information about promotions, sales, forthcoming and recent activities and events can be conveyed in 'real time' allowing businesses to respond to changing trends in the industry or perhaps even to become trend setters as well as acting quickly to meet the needs and expectations of their customers.

Is there a difference between content marketing and paid marketing in the digital space?

Paid marketing is where a business pays an organisation such as Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube or Google to advertise their products or services in the online space. Whilst businesses may be better able to reach their specific target audience with paid advertising, there is still a cost implication here which may be prohibitive to many small, local businesses.

The alternative is content marketing, sometimes referred to as organic marketing.

Organic marketing is marketing which is free or costs very little money. It consists of content that businesses create themselves and which they publish in the digital space, for example blogs and articles on their website, posts on Twitter, Instagram and other social media platforms, videos uploaded on YouTube and podcasts on platforms such as Spotify, etc.

One of the main purposes of organic marketing is not only to increase awareness of the business but also to increase awareness of its services or products through gaining exposure via growth online, (think retweets and readers liking and sharing posts, videos and blogs with their friends, family or colleagues). It can also be a very effective way to retain current customers and attract new ones.

Perhaps the biggest advantage of organic marketing is that, provided small and medium sized businesses have the time and know how to create and publish their content, satisfied customers do the work for them - talking about their positive experiences through the digital version of 'word of mouth', thus enhancing a business's reputation and helping it to grow or perhaps even become the market leader.

Coupled with this, one of the best ways to promote a SAL business is through testimonials and social proof.

This means that customers leave a starred rating and write a positive review about their experience. It is important for the SAL business to encourage customers to leave reviews if they have had a positive experience and would recommend the service to others. Testimonials and evidence of a strong track record, whether that might be excellent customer service or offering fabulous value for money, develops trust and confidence in the market place and with potential new customers.

Businesses could offer incentives for satisfied customers to leave positive reviews on social media by offering to put them into a prize draw or to have a discounted price the next time they use their service.

What about market research?

Market research is also really important. This means that organisations obtain information from customers about specific areas of their business with tailored questions. This could be to find

out the satisfaction of the current business provision or it could be to discover what customers would like to see improved or any new offerings that the business could make.

It is important to listen to the needs and expectations of the customer and to identify any frustrations and concerns they have about the business. Once businesses know about these, they can solve those issues, improve on them as well as introduce new ideas that customers have suggested. The importance of market research should not be underestimated.

In summary

- There is still a place for traditional marketing for some SAL businesses. It can reach wide audiences, but can be expensive and does not always speak to the SAL's target market.
- Digital marketing has the potential to reach the SAL's target market and demographic more effectively. It is less expensive, if not free.
- Content or organic marketing is an effective way to increase awareness of the SAL business as well as its products and services. This is a good option for small and medium sized businesses.
- Testimonials and social proof are among the very best ways for SAL organisations to promote and develop their businesses.
- Market research allows the SAL business to meet the needs and expectations of the customer.