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**Change Your Police Agencies' Image:  
A Modern Marketing Solution**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Police agencies have failed to recognize and take advantage of an opportunity to shape their public image into a positive one. A positive image can solve difficult problems police agencies face such as recruiting, retention, morale, public support and many others. Traditionally, police agencies have had very limited ability to effectively and accurately tell their story, thereby allowing others do it for them. Media reports, television and movie depictions of police are usually unfavorable, unrealistic and tend to portray police in a negative way. Yet, every day, police agencies are filled with positive upbeat stories of the good works police officers do which citizens never hear about.

Any agencies' image can be shaped with modern marketing. Now the opportunity exists to market a police agency using the many free communications platforms existing on the internet and numerous other methods. This researcher has discovered from reviewing articles, Internet sites, periodicals, and journals a positive image can be created by developing and executing a modern marketing plan consistently which can have a positive impact on many problem areas of the agency.

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## INTRODUCTION

Today's modern police agency faces many difficult challenges above and beyond criminal enforcement such as recruitment, retention and overall morale of the agency. One significant challenge which affects every aspect of a law enforcement agency is the ability to create and maintain a positive public image. This image can, in turn, have a significant effect on recruitment, retention and morale of the police agency. Many agencies tend to overlook an obvious solution which has the potential to solve these problems. A solution the private sector uses with success. The solution is marketing. All Police agencies should have a marketing plan, use modern marketing techniques and execute the plan consistently.

Marketing is delivering a message or story to the public and hopefully gaining a positive response. Sometimes, marketing is seen as public relations, media relations or active promotion of an agency. One of the most important components of a profitable private business should be marketing. Business success or failure can be tied to a successful marketing campaign (Parker, 2011).

Many of today's marketing resources are Web based and easily available to police agencies. Social networking websites, web based sites, blogs and video websites are numerous and user friendly. Some of the more popular websites used for online marketing are Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. Traditional media now makes up a very small part of the many ways to communicate a message to the public. The Web continues to grow creating even more opportunities at communicating to the public (Weber, 2009). Knowing how to use these resources can help a police agency change the public's perception of police, shaping it to a positive perspective. Police agencies

who do not make an effort at defining their image run the risk of having it defined for them (Orrick, 2008). Marketing has long been a mainstay of the private sector. As the private sector regularly uses marketing strategies to shape how a company is viewed and as a way to promote and sell a product or service. Police agencies can also use the same marketing strategies to market services as it relates to public safety.

Police agencies show a reluctance to use marketing strategies for several reasons. Police tend to resist change in general and believe if crime exists police will be needed. While most private companies have competition for a product or service, police falsely believe a police agency has no product. Economou (n.d.) stated, "In law enforcement the only difference is the terminology, but we are still in the business of marketing. Our customers are our residents, our products are the services we offer, and our profit is keeping the city safe" (para. 1). A citizen cannot decide to use another police agency when it is believed the service being delivered is not desirable (Weinblatt, 2005).

Negative views of marketing by a police agency are simply made due to a misunderstanding of the fundamental roles of a police agency and the citizen's the agency serves. Public trust is at the heart of the law enforcement profession. Marketing can create a relationship of trust, loyalty and a life long bond between the consumer and a company (McEwen, 2005). This same type of relationship between citizens and a police agency is needed for public trust to exist. This paper will clearly show the negative view points are unjustified. Police agencies who fail to use marketing will also fail to recognize the full potential of the agency.

Police agencies should take full advantage of all marketing techniques and strategies currently available to them. This research paper will show how beneficial marketing a police agency can be, turning around many problem areas within the agency. Marketing can give a police agency control of how the agencies' image is shaped in the community. No longer will a police agencies' image be shaped by entities outside the agency such as the traditional news media and Hollywood.

## **POSITION**

Utilizing modern marketing techniques can change the publics' perception or image of a police agency. This change in public perception can have a positive impact on other elements of the agency. This paper's first position will look at changing the image of the agency using a marketing technique called branding. The paper will then address using branding to help market the agency externally through recruiting and internally through retention. Finally, the paper will address the effect branding and marketing can have on morale. Private businesses use a marketing technique of such as regularly looking to their customers for feedback in order to examine ways to increase productivity, profits, service, etc. Police agencies do not normally use these same methods although they are used with success by private business (Witte, 2004).

A study of the public image of police by Gallagher, Maguire, Mastrofski, & Reisig (2001) revealed most of the public gains their information about police from mass media sources. These sources do not paint an accurate picture of police agencies and police work. News media sources tend to show the police agencies lack of success at locating and catching criminals. The entertainment media sources often portray police officers

as rogue cops. News media has leaned toward tabloid style reporting which is mostly unfavorable to police agencies.

Recognizing how public perception or image is formed by most of the public, a police agency can take action through marketing and change the image to a positive one. Sprafka (2004) pointed out the need for police departments to actively inform the public of the Department's many accomplishments in order to shape a positive reputation in the community. Departments should always make every effort at using marketing methods. If this is not done it will be left to "others (such as the makers of television shows and movies and the writers of newspaper headlines) to shape public perception, and these perceptions may not be accurate" (Sprafka, 2004, para. 2).

Police agencies have many marketing tools available in order to positively influence an agencies' public image. One primary tool often used by private business is known as branding. Branding is the process deciding what image an agency wants to have and then the agency consistently promotes or markets this image to the public. This process of branding is proven and can be seen by looking at major brands such as Coca Cola, Apple, Nike, and Glock. When a person hears these names, these names are instantly associated with a quality product and/or service (Orrick, 2008).

Branding can have many benefits for the police agency. Branding is not just for reshaping the agencies' image. Branding creates strong community support. This support can translate into strong public support during crisis situations. Branding can also help with budget needs. A police agency with strong community support is more likely to receive needed equipment and manpower. Branding has multiple benefits and

can have a constructive effect on recruitment, retention and morale of officers (Orrick, 2008).

Recruitment and Retention continues to be a prominent problem for many police agencies across the country. Hiring and retaining quality police officers is no longer an easy task for law enforcement agencies. Quality applicants are few and far between and competition between police agencies and the private sector is continually growing (Skinner, 2010).

Using marketing techniques such as branding can help an agency attract quality applicants. With many agencies all competing for the same quality applicants, branding will cause an agency to stand out from others as a great place to work. Police agencies that have a strong brand can better resist losing officers to other police agencies.

Branding is also a morale builder which results in retention (Orrick, 2008).

Part of marketing is having a story to tell. The public and police applicants have many misconceptions of police work. Police agencies should develop a positive story which frankly depicts police work and the service and sacrifices police make. This story then can be marketed using previously mentioned online websites. By creating these stories and marketing them to possible police applicants, the applicants will be emotionally drawn to police work and the police agency (Pearsall & Kohlhepp, 2010).

Another marketing technique is using emotion to create market position. Most agencies offer similar opportunities so a decision to go to work for one over the other may come down to emotion. Marketing aimed at an emotional response can prove successful (Skinner, 2010). Skinner (2010) observed, "If an officer, regardless of



experience level, has several choices of employment that are technically the same, the choice that “feels better” rises to the top’ (p. 2).

Effective marketing can change a police agencies’ image and in doing so morale inside the department can be raised. During a marketing campaign, positive information will be released to the public and the image of the agency will be enhanced. The member of the department will see the public approval and take pride in them as members of the department. Marketing is not only an external process but also an internal one. Police agencies put forth positive information about the agency such as a vision statement, mission statement and core values. Also information is released detailing the hard work each member of the agency puts does along with community programs. All of the agencies’ officers should be involved in the marketing process (Parker, 2010).

Both recruitment and retention can occur at the same time with effective marketing techniques. Marketing can affect you agency both internally and externally. Sharing positive stories creates pride in officers of the agency. By recognizing these positive stories about officers, they will become dedicated to the agency. This will help the officer feel successful and an important part of the agency. The result is the officer is more likely to stay with the agency (Orrick, 2008). In turn, they will share these feelings of pride with other’s outside the agency. The one’s being shared with could be potential future recruits for the agency (Parker, 2011).

Many other marking techniques exist outside of the usual methods. Police agencies, depending on the target audience, should consider all of them. Examples of marketing are free local newsletters/papers from various groups, civic clubs, citizen

police academies, educational programs, city newsletters or annual reports, leaflets in utility bills, public service channels, partnering a message with other groups, brochures, posters, items such as mugs or patches, a department newsletter, payroll stuffers, award and promotion ceremonies etc. These are a few examples but many more ways exists to marketing the police agency. Departments should use the methods and remember not to just market the sensational stories but all the positive stories which exist in a police agency.

## **COUNTER POSITION**

A primary argument against marketing a police agency is cost in both money and human resources. This is especially true in small and mid-size police agencies. The researcher will examine each of these arguments and demonstrate how each argument can be overcome. When compared to private businesses that launch expensive marketing campaigns, it does not seem wise to do the same for a police agency using taxpayers' money and other agency resources. What is missed is the reasoning behind private businesses spending money for marketing. The reason being it is successful for the business (Orrick, 2008). Fortunately, today a police agency does not need to spend a lot of money and use a lot of resources to effectively market the agency.

Traditional marketing with traditional media can be expensive. Traditional marketing is usually seen as television, radio, and newspaper. Television commercials, radio airtime, and even newspaper advertisements all cost money. Most police agencies face shrinking budgets and human resources.

With online resources, such as websites and social media sites, a police agency can spend relatively little monies and resources to help build an effective marketing

campaign. Video sites such as YouTube attract millions of viewers. Online video can be effective as a television commercial and can be created very inexpensively. Social networking sites are also free, readily accessible and can reach just about any community or sections of the public a department wishes (Weber, 2009).

Facebook is another viable resource for marketing a police agency. Facebook had 500 Million active users and 100 billion hits per day in 2010 (Johnson, 2010). Facebook is often looked at as a social type-site only, but Weber (2009) found “Facebook is not so much a social network as it is a new communications platform” (p. 208). Facebook does not cost anything and it very simple to use. A police agency can maintain complete control over the page and the possibilities for marketing endless (Weber, 2009).

Twitter, which is a micro blog, is another tool to help market a police agency. Blogging can help an agency control the message it wants to send to the public. It can give specific control of a conversation and direct it to fit the agencies needs. Blogging can give the public more direct access to the the agency (Weber, 2009).

Website 3.0 is another great, cost effective option. In the age of internet and everyone carrying a cellular telephone, the web can reach anyone on a very personal level. The web carries various ways to reach people. The opportunity for feedback is also a positive aspect of the web (Weber, 2009).

Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Web 2.0 are all great examples of cost effective ways to market a police agency. Each represents a better option than traditional media due to having more control over content and the message. An added bonus is each website can feed traffic from one to the other, thus increasing the reach of the message.

Another counterpoint to modern marketing is the traditional ways police agencies have approached marketing believing these methods are adequate and a failure to embrace new marketing ideas. According to Weinblatt (2005), police agencies have a long history of failure in adopting marketing techniques and strategies. This can cause a police agency to fail to recognize the agencies full potential. Weinblatt (2005) stated, "For law enforcement to thrive and serve the community, particularly in the new media world of the Internet, an adoption of the marketing mentality has to take place" (para. 2). Normally a police agency uses a simple method of delivering the agencies' message via the local media as the only outlet. A story develops and the department's public information officer prepares and releases the story to local media outlets. The news media publishes the story. This type of marketing is seen as the traditional method and viewed as being both cost effective in terms of money and with a relative low impact on employee time.

Unfortunately, using this established method police agencies do not always receive the desired results. The media can publish or cover the story or the media can choose not to publish or cover the story. When the media decides not to cover the story the agencies' story goes unnoticed. The media can also choose to make the story unfavorable towards the department. The media is left in control of the story not the police agency (Parker, 2011).

A police agency no longer has to rely on traditional and often a disinterested media. An agency can now choose to simply bypass the media which can filter stories. By reaching out directly to the community via social networking sites, an agencies' image is no longer left in the hands of the media. While the media is still kept informed,

police agencies now have their own voice which gives balance to the message. (Parker, 2011).

Marketing a police agency is easier than ever in today's society. As shown it can be done with very few resources both monetary and human. The opportunities to market a police agency are many. Department's should take full advantage of all modern marketing strategies and techniques in order to define a positive image. A positive image can assist a police agency with recruitment, retention and morale.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

This research paper shows the many benefits of marketing a police department using modern methods such as branding, Facebook, YouTube and World Wide Web. Marketing can have a positive effect on changing a department's image, recruiting and retaining police officers and the overall morale of the department. Many cost effective opportunities are readily available to a police department outside of traditional marketing outlets such as television, radio and newspaper. By using alternative, inexpensive marketing tools, such as Facebook, YouTube and Web 3.0, a police department can maintain control over the message.

Recognizing the many benefits of modern marketing, the researcher recommends all police agencies take the following simple steps in order to develop and execute a marketing plan. A brand development committee is formed to start the process of establishing and developing a brand or image of the agency. The committee will establish the type of police applicants the agency is seeking, what the default brand of the agency is and define the strengths of the agency. The committee will then develop the image or brand the agency wants along with the message. The message

needs to be credible, consistent and visible. Any marketing materials are created and the type of media used to deliver the message is established. Finally, a review of the entire process needs to be completed to determine how successful the marketing effort was (Orrick, 2008).

The researcher would also recommend police agencies take full advantage of all online marketing tools in additions to more traditional methods to deliver the message of the police agency. Online resources exist such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and the Web. Each has no associated cost and is easy to use. These websites also reach out to the public, police applicants, and employees directly with a degree of intimacy.

All members of a police agency should be encouraged to participate in marketing the police agency. The members should understand the brand of the agency and work consistently and diligently to promote the brand to the public and potential police applicants. Orrick (2008) stated, "Encouraging, uplifting, human-interest stories of officers making a positive impact are critical for enhancing departments' image and recruiting employees (p. 97). Marketing an agency must encompass every part of the day and everybody in the agency.

At no time in history has the opportunity existed to have a direct influence on changing a police agencies image. Traditional media outlets and Hollywood no longer have total control in shaping the public perception of police. Now is the time to take control and show the public the great job the men and women of law enforcement do every day. By finally correcting the many misconceptions of police work maintained by the public, the resulting benefits will be many.

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