

RESOLVE TO MARKET MORE EFFECTIVELY

By **Bill Smith, APR**

It's a new year, which means it's time for resolutions. Have you thought about a resolution for your business? If not, I have one for you: commit to marketing your parking organization more effectively.

Many parking organizations struggle with marketing. Some view it as a luxury they can't afford. Others have only a vague understanding of how to market and assume that basic outreach and word of mouth are sufficient. Still others mistakenly think their old-school strategies are still working and that their marketing programs are already successful. But are they?

It's a problem that extends throughout the parking industry, and the implications can be far-reaching. Municipalities that don't communicate with key constituencies about their parking programs, telling them why policies and procedures have been implemented and how the community will benefit, often undermine those very programs. Technology and other parking product providers that fail to demonstrate the benefits of their products and services and differentiate themselves from the competition lose out to that competition. Consultants who are unable to position themselves in the marketplace hinder their ability to generate new business and attract strategic partners. Your marketing program is your means for communicating with key audiences, and it's essential to the success of any organization.

Fixing It

Ineffective (or non-existent) marketing is one of the most common maladies facing parking organizations and the companies that serve the parking industry. The good news is it's a challenge that can be overcome.

Here are some basic best practices for improving your organization's marketing:

Commit to marketing. This seems obvious, but every organization should have a marketing plan in place. Unfortunately, many don't. The first step, then, is to make marketing an organizational priority.



Effective marketing is always strategic. If you've read this column before, you know this is a constant theme for me. It doesn't matter whether you are communicating to clients and prospective clients, strategic partners, parkers and downtown business owners, or employees, every element of an organization's communications program should have a strategic purpose. Effective communication doesn't happen in a

vacuum—it is designed specifically to help an organization achieve its long- and short-term strategic goals. Those goals must be front and center when creating a marketing program.

Marketing should be led by organizational leaders. Too many organizations entrust their marketing to junior staff. These organizations have support staff or entry-level marketers put together proposals or create e-blasts and call that a marketing program. Marketing needs to be an integral part of an organization's operations, and an organization's marketing leader should be part of the leadership team. Your marketing professionals—whether in-house staff or on-call consultants—can bring a unique skill set and knowledge base to the table. They are familiar with industry and market trends, they know how to make initiatives more marketable, and—most importantly—they understand how your strategic initiatives will affect and be affected by your corporate brand. The fresh perspective your marketing team can bring can help move your organization's planning process in new, productive directions.

One of the industry's mantras is that parking is too often treated as an afterthought, and it's time to get a seat at the table. That's how you should think about marketing in your organization—it's time to pull out a chair and invite those professionals to take a seat. **P**



BILL SMITH, APR is principal of Smith Phillips Strategic Communications and contributing editor to *The Parking Professional*. He can be reached at bsmith@smith-phillips.com or 603.491.4280.