

Demand responsive transportation marketing strategy

Demand-Responsive
Transport to ensure
accessibility, availability
and reliability of rural
public transport



DEMAND RESPONSIVE TRANSPORTATION MARKETING STRATEGY

The theoretical marketing strategy presents a universal way of disseminating information and knowledge about the demand-responsive services in order to increase the overall use of public transport. The marketing strategy aims to create institutionalised capacity on how to communicate service availability and options to different end-user target groups.

The marketing strategy is created based on the lessons learnt from implementing demand-responsive transportation pilots in Norway, Sweden, and Estonia in the framework of the RESPONSE project.

This marketing strategy provides several steps for planning the marketing activities when promoting a DRT service and answers the following questions:

- How to define the service you are going to promote and the goals for marketing?
- How to map out your target groups?
- Which communication channels to utilise for better outreach to potential service users?
- What are the potential messages to use when communicating DRT services?



1) Define the service you are going to promote and the goals for marketing.

Customers need to understand the features, advantages, and benefits that the service offers. When thinking about a particular service, consider the key features, benefits, and needs and wants of customers.

- **Service Summary.** Describe your organisation and the DRT service
- **SWOT Analysis.** Marketing strategy supports the brand lean into what it does well, improve what it doesn't, capitalise on what it can do, and defend against what could challenge it. SWOT Analysis is one of the tools that can help identify these aspects.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
What we're good at. What's working. What our customers like about us.	What we want to fix. What we want to strengthen. What we want to become more efficient at.	What the transportation sector might soon want. What we think we'll be good at. What will be our differentiator?	What we think could hinder our growth. What/who we think could take our customers.

- **Goals.** First, identify the overall goal of your service/company. Secondly, identify the SMART goals for marketing. All marketing activities should help to achieve the overarching goal. SMART goals are

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Relevant
- Time-bound



2) Target groups and channels

Every new demand-responsive service is tackling some challenge or a customer's need. Marketing will only be effective if you know who you want to reach and why. To engage with the customers and encourage them to use demand-responsive services, you need to know and understand their needs.

- Describe your target group. A target group is everyone you want to reach and whose problem the DRT service will solve.

The customers within a target group won't always have the same needs, making it challenging to maximise the impact of marketing campaigns. Although you can never really fully know your potential customers, it can be beneficial to divide your target group into personas (the profile of your potential/ideal client), using target group segmentation. A service user persona can be created by drawing on the findings from market research, customer interviews, or surveys.

Personas will enable to specifically address the different service users' on the relevant channels, take into account their individual needs and preferences, and ultimately be much more effective in your marketing.

- Build the detailed personas, including information about the demographics, age, location, employment status, interests, passions, pain points, lifestyle, and use of media. The more detail you can include in your target market research, the better you will understand and communicate with your audience.

Example of creating a persona:

[Service user persona] is [age range] years old. S/he is [job title/student/retired] and spends his/her free time [describe lifestyle, hobbies]. S/he wants to use public transportation for getting to [which institution or location] approximately [how often, which times]. Ultimately, [Service user persona] wants [personal or professional challenge(s) that your service will try to solve].

After defining the profiles that may benefit from the service, the next step is to map out the channels for how to reach him/her.



3) Marketing Channels

With a complete overview of your service and your targeted audience, it should be easier to define the best marketing channels to use and potential partners to contact.

- Consider where your customers already spend their time for the optimal marketing locations.

The experiences from the RESPONSE project pilots showed that it's effective to reach out to clients through the partners and their channels. It is essential to recognise the actors who are close to citizens in their daily lives. This can mean cooperating with schools when targeting students instead of reaching out to children and their parents directly or contacting people from health centres, local municipalities, sports clubs, and senior clubs to reach out to potential service users.

- Choose the channels for marketing.

Different target groups might prefer different channels and platforms. RESPONSE pilots demonstrated that the elderly often tend to prefer offline communication platforms while youth are more easily reached online.

Based on the RESPONSE project pilots' experiences, the following potential channels for marketing DRT were identified:

Digital marketing:

- Create a **website** and ensure that the travellers can find all the relevant information (timetables, route maps, tickets, booking information etc.) about the service on one page.
- Reach potential customers through **e-mails or social media**
- Use the **search engine optimisation**
- Ensure that the service information is available on the **partners' online channels** (e.g. local municipality website etc.)

Traditional marketing:

- Add information to the info-screens in the regular public transportation
- Contact local newspapers, radio, TV and reach out to potential customers through media etc.
- Organise public events to build trust towards the service and to share information, and create personal contacts
- Place the printed brochures and posters in the public areas
Use the regular and demand-responsive public transportation vehicles as moving billboards

4) Messages

Think about how your service will solve the challenges described in your service user persona description(s)? Think about what makes this product different from the other transportation options that your target group has available?

Potential messages:

- DRT has many benefits, including high flexibility, cost-efficient connections for large rural areas, support for citizens with limited mobility, environmental benefits through the reduction of private vehicles on the road.
- DRT provides a way to improve your quality of life in rural areas and offers solutions to limited mobility.
- Using DRT is cost-efficient as it improves mobility in rural areas and eliminates the need to maintain private cars.
- DRT provides high flexibility – it increases your mobility, picks you up from your desired location, and brings you to the desired destination.
- DRT has environmental benefits by reducing private vehicles on the road and reducing the amount of emissions.
- Using DRT helps your children to get around safely, increase their independence and improve social skills.
- You can live in a rural area and still access work and leisure activities in the closest community centre.
- DRT supports independent living, providing elderly and people with disabilities convenient ways to get around.
- DRT creates new possibilities and brings transport back to rural areas using new methods. This will encourage more businesses, tourism enterprises and families to stay or return to sparsely populated areas.
- DRT service accommodates a small number of users on time, making it a safe transportation alternative during the virus season.

5) Monitoring and reflection

RESPONSE pilots have demonstrated that it takes time before people start testing new transportation services and that feedback is crucial for developing value for the customers. Every DRT service is unique, and therefore it is essential to tailor a marketing strategy that meets best the needs of your service.

- Ask the customers where they received information and learn from this feedback when planning new marketing activities. After the service has been launched, the process will be evaluated continuously, according to the feedback.

There are several methods to receive customers' feedback:

- Email feedback. You can send surveys via email.
- In-app feedback. Collecting feedback from customers who are already using your products.
- Website feedback. You can strategically place live chat, pop up surveys on the website.
- Customer interviews.
- Market research.
- Focus groups.
- Social media monitoring.

Share the feedback publicly

Collecting user feedback via different methods is crucial for all service providers because it is giving insights into the satisfaction or dissatisfaction your customers experience with the current service. It is a guiding resource to improve the loopholes and address the customer needs.

It is found that customers with negative experiences share their experience with more people than the ones with positive feedback. Therefore, collecting feedback (both positive and negative) and presenting it, is a valuable tool to increase legitimacy in the eyes of potential customers of the service and build trust.

Example of sharing a customer's feedback.
The social media layouts are available on
<http://response-project.eu/>



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