Marketing and Strategic Communications

Lesson Objective: This lesson seeks to help leaders understand marketing and strategic communications in Civil Air Patrol.

Desired Learning Outcomes (DLO):

1. Understand the importance of and challenges of marketing and strategic communications to CAP.
2. Understand the depth of marketing and strategic communications efforts in CAP.
3. Understand the leader's role in helping CAP accomplish its goals in MAC.

Reading: Student Guide, CAP National website

Scheduled Lesson Time: 60 minutes

Introduction

We often say that CAP is, "a best kept secret." Our diligent public affairs teammates have long tried to help spread the word about the good work and opportunities CAP provides.

1. Understand the importance of and challenge of marketing and strategic communications to CAP.

Marketing and Strategic Communications (MAC) is critical to the success of Civil Air Patrol. This vital area touches not only recruiting but also has an impact on our relationships with partners and agencies.

CAP completes against other volunteer organizations for members. Marketing is an ongoing challenge because we cannot outspend other organizations in this area. We have great programs. How do we get the word out? In many instances, we use word of mouth and it is not the most efficient method. As a result, Marketing and Strategic Communications has to be innovative to stretch our marketing dollars and using our partnerships to extend our reach.

In the past, CAP narrowly focused on Public Affairs (PA). Recently, the organization has invested in modernizing and has started to move toward Marketing and Strategic Communications. These efforts will require time and energy but will benefit the organization greatly. Accomplishing the goals we will have in MAC will require region and national level leaders to buy-in and support the organization's efforts.

2. Understand the depth of marketing and strategic communications efforts in CAP.

If you have not visited this area of gocivilairpatrol.com before, check out the resources available at https://www.gocivilairpatrol.com/members/cap-national-hq/public-affairs-about . You will begin to see the transformation from PA to MAC. We will outline some key information and a few efforts in this lesson. The first aspect of efforts we will discuss here is marketing. Marketing

efforts might focus on the following: website(s), collateral material, direct marketing, advertising, trade shows, and strategic partnerships.

Prospective members have options for volunteering. How do they decide what organization to support? Much of it is based on how an organization markets itself. Did you know that pilots who want to volunteer and Google it will find more than 75 organizations they can choose from for volunteering? Pilots are not alone in having options. Young people who might serve as our cadets also have many options. Marketing Civil Air Patrol effectively is an important investment in the organization.

Strategic Communications includes a broad range of print and digital communications channels which could also be considered general marketing. Efforts in this area include public affairs, social media, print and digital communications. How can we ensure our message gets through to our members and prospective members when there is so much information available? We can focus on our efforts on messages that are strategic, attractive, concise, and cohesive. In order to do this, we have to choose the right channel to communicate and deliver it with the right mechanism as well as focus on the message. No matter what method we choose, we have to ensure our message is factual. Messaging impacts expectations and expectations impact retention.

Another part of marketing is brand management. Organizations may wish for a certain brand but the brand exists in the minds of consumers. CAP struggles with brand management. We have 1375 units, 52 wings, and 8 regions and they all employ the brand a little differently. That doesn't take into consideration the individual members who make small modifications in how they use the brand. Organizations build brands through consistency. Everything from recruiting material to the personal interaction with representatives must be consistent, memorable, positive, and professional. As a result, efforts to create and manage our brand are an ongoing challenge. The current approach in this area is to provide members with more tools so they can use items that build the prestige, honor, effectiveness, legacy, and awareness of the Civil Air Patrol brand to help create an emotional attachment between potential members and the Civil Air Patrol experience. Emotional attachments drive engagement with consumers and create loyalty. We often say we are One CAP and we have made progress in this area in the last few years but we also have to look and sound like One CAP. There is much work to be done in this area. CAP is also considering modernizing its brand. This is important for organizations. If you think about it, you have probably noticed several brands have changed over time including the USAF.

Websites are an area where more tools have been provided but more work needs to be done. For most organizations today prospective members will often find opportunities on the internet. In this regard, our websites are critical. Currently, we have wide variety in website and many contact points (squadrons, wings, regions, activities, national). The information found on the web is not always updated and it is not always appealing. Websites are often hard to navigate and have a lot of information geared toward current members rather than prospective members. Ideally, a national website would be the first thing a prospective member find when searching for CAP on the web. How do we get the national site to serve as our front door for CAP? We use search engine optimization to ensure it appears first when searching. This involves using key

words and other design standards. We also have to have fresh content that is compelling. IT has to focus on explaining CAP's purpose and mission. WE need fewer pages, better organization, and simplified organization to optimize our web presence. Ideally, gocivilairpatrol.com would be compelling, easy to navigate, attractive, and informative.

Strategic communications includes public relations, social media, print publications, digital communications and more. In the past, CAP had public affairs. This is only one aspect of MAC. Public affairs leaders are responsible for digital strategy, social media, trade relations, and general press. Public Affairs Officers play a role in the success of the organization. In the past, the premier training event for PAOs was the Public Affairs Academy. This is a tool that can be used to share roles and responsibilities, new plans, and new efforts with a team that can help implement them across the country. NHQ provides templates and tool kits to help PAOs with varying levels of experience complete their work.

Social media is a great tool we can use to help CAP grow and succeed; however, without oversight it may not provide the benefit we need. One tool that could benefit CAP is Facebook. We often hear Facebook is not where young people go for information now. Fortunately, a lot of people between the ages of 25-34 do visit Facebook and they would be potential volunteers. If we are to succeed using Facebook, then unit level pages should be private groups and the national presence has to be what members find when they search. Facebook has over 175 million users. Another option is LinkedIn. LinkedIn has over 150 million users. We could use it to reach potential senior members. However, without regulation it is not a viable resource. There is great variety in what is posted and how others view CAP. A third option is Instagram. Instagram has more than 100 million users. This is another example of a tool that would have to be regulated to better serve CAP interests. Twitter has more than 50 million users and is another social media tool we can use to attract members to CAP. Like other platforms, we have to ensure our brand is being represented correctly and that national content is followed. Confusion can be the result of poorly managed social media. YouTube is another social media opportunity for CAP. Videos are popular and this can be an effective way to show CAP is engaging and unique among service options. Social media options change all the time. This is an area where MAC will have to continue to focus. CAP will have to embrace new social media options that become popular and use them effectively. In 2020, CAP added a Social Media Coordinator at the national level to provide guidance in this area.

Print media is another tool we can use in MAC. The Volunteer Magazine is a great example of print media and is undergoing small changes over time to make it more effective. We also use our Report to Congress as a print resource. It has been revised in recent years to increase effectiveness. The magazines that wings and regions publish fall into this category and can impact national efforts.

Digital media efforts in MAC include things like PROPS. This weekly newsletter is a popular way to share information with the members. Related, MAC has created tools like From the Desk of the National Commander to get messages from different sources to the membership.

There are many other areas that impact MAC from business cards to email signature blocks. Everything we put the logo on impacts our brand and how CAP is perceived. If we want a more

consistent image and we want to use tools most effectively, we will need to regulate use more and focus on the efforts that do the most good. As a volunteer organization and a non-profit, our resources will always be limited. Fortunately, we have a history of doing great things as an organization. While this initiative will take effort, it will pay dividends.

3. Understand the leader's role in helping CAP accomplish its goals in MAC.

As leaders, we want to see CAP succeed. We believe in the organization. Supporting the efforts of Marketing and Strategic Communication will help CAP achieve its goals. In order to help CAP control its brand and market itself more effectively, members need to give up a little control an be a part of the One CAP team. If we do this, we can benefit from the results. As a leader, you can support this effort by supporting the efforts of MAC, following published guidelines, and using the tools provided by MAC instead of creating your own. If materials are not available, you should correspond with MAC to work on materials and gain approval.

Not all leaders come from a marketing background. If you would like to learn more about this topic in general, can visit these sites:

https://www.viktorwithak.com/marketing-communications-strategy/

https://www.smartinsights.com/managing-digital-marketing/planning-budgeting/marketing-cdommunications-planning-using-pasta-model/

https://monle95.wordpress.com/2018/10/02/701/

Lesson Summary and Closure

Marketing and strategic communications is a critical focus for CAP as we move forward as an organization. We must find innovative ways to expand our reach with limited means. Luckily, this is a hallmark of our organization and of our members!

EXERCISE:

1. Review the CAP Strategic Plan. What goals did you see that are related to MAC?
2. Reflect on what you have seen in the last few months that is the efforts of MAC to unify the organization and effective market it. Bring your list of items to class to discuss.
3. Think about the content of this lesson. What aspects of these efforts have you supported as a leader and what aspects have you not supported? For example, does your website use the new CMS? Do your materials use the right logos and follow the guidance? Where can you improve your support of MAC's efforts?