

# Make your Marketing P-P-P-P-P-Perfect

With more individuals choosing their care and a growing uptake of individual budgets it is important that you can compete in your market. Irving Stackpole and Elizabeth Ziembra explore the five P's of marketing your organisation.



With the growing emphasis on choice and individual budgets, the services consumers and families select will be influenced more by customer perceptions than by suggestions from commissioners and local authorities. This changing landscape is creating competitive pressures on care homes to fill beds with appropriate

residents. Understanding the basics of marketing will enable you to position your business with the right messages to the right audiences, providing a competitive edge.

The five P's of marketing – product, price, place, position and promotion – are the variables that managers must thoroughly ►

### MAKING YOUR MARKETING P-P-P-P-P-PERFECT

► understand to satisfy customers best in their marketplaces. A clear knowledge of how the five P's apply to your organisation will allow you to define your market and identify the features that appeal to that market.

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#### Product

The product is the physical thing or service offered to the consumer and defines why your organisation is perfect for a specific type of client. Care homes have two distinct products, the physical building and grounds as well as the care and services provided by its staff. Take a fresh assessment of the grounds and the outside and inside of the building from the perspective of your customer. Are the grounds and building well maintained with strong first impressions or tired and in need of repair? With tight

budgets, costly repairs might not be possible but a neat and tidy home demonstrates attention to detail and pride of place. If the property is brand new or refurbished to high standards, then this factor is a strong selling point that will appeal to a certain type of customer while an older style may appeal to others.

The saying goes that you have only one chance to make a good first impression. What does your potential customer experience when walking through the front door? Is there a bin with smelly cigarette butts at the front door? Does the air inside smell fresh and clean? Are there cut flowers from the garden? Visitors' senses should be pleasantly greeted rather than assaulted on first

acquaintance to create the positive initial experience of being welcomed to your care home. Colour, lighting and aroma are all easily managed on a shoestring budget to positive effect.

The second product to be marketed is the staff's services and the quality of care being delivered. If you were a stranger walking into your care home, what would you see in terms of the interactions between and among staff, residents, and guests? Would those interactions be warm, friendly and attentive or is staffing a problem that spills over into visibly negative body language? If your staff members have received NVQs or the home

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has earned other awards for superior service, make sure these are visible in your lobby. Use these distinctions to differentiate your organisation from others.

**Price**

The price is not only the amount of money charged for your product but is also the customer's perceived value for the benefits of receiving that product. Customers' expectations are tightly tied to the price paid and define whether or not the benefit is matched to the price. For example, you expect a higher quality of food and service if you eat at The Ritz as opposed to McDonald's. If you dine at The Ritz but receive McDonald's quality food and service, you have not received the perceived value. Failing to meet customers' perceived value for price can result in negative word of mouth marketing from disappointed residents, staff and family. The price/value disconnection can result in potential residents choosing another care home or local authorities squeezing the rate for services.

While care homes operate with restrictions as to the price they can charge, there is increasing room in the market to move from being paid the basic rate set by local authorities to the set rate plus a top-up to private pay beds, to private pay with a waiting list. Where can you add value to your product to generate top-ups or private pay residents? Can you expand the services offered? Can



you include optional services at an additional cost? Can you bundle services for increased economic efficiencies?

**Place**

The third P of marketing, place or placement, is the point at which consumers access your service or, in other words, your

"the best combination of system and price"



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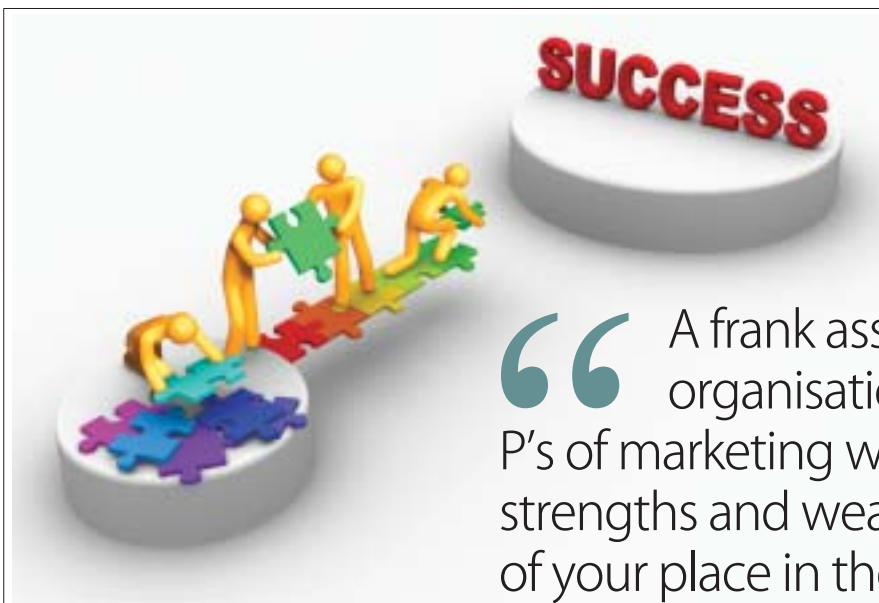
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## MAKING YOUR MARKETING P-P-P-P-P-P-PERFECT



“ A frank assessment of your organisation using the five P’s of marketing will identify the strengths and weaknesses of your place in the market. ”

► **physical location.** Geography is an important factor in assessing your care home’s placement in the market. Is it accessible by public transport and near local conveniences or it is set in a peaceful, scenic rural area where transport must be provided? Are your services specialised so that consumers are willing to travel great distances to your location? What logistical challenges are presented to the potential buyers of your services? If purchasing or building a care home, placement is key to determining who will be interested in using your product. A clear understanding of your care home’s placement and the benefits and drawbacks of it will further define the characteristics of the customer who will be interested in your residence.

### Position

Position is how your target market defines you in relation to your competitors. What makes your care home unique and how is this a benefit to your market? Understanding your competitive advantage is essential to establishing your positioning and marketing messages. Is your care home low cost and modest quality or high cost and exceptional quality? Does it offer unique services? Is it located in an urban area with good access to additional health services? Identifying your care home’s attributes and benefits in comparison to your competitor’s will assist you in understanding your position in the market.

How can you be sure your perception of your care home’s position is the same as that of your current and prospective customers? Ask your staff, residents, families and guests as well as the local authorities their opinion about your product, price, placement and position through formal surveys, informal conversations and group discussion to glean important information to refine or change your thinking about your position.

### Promotion

Promotion is what people most often associate with marketing but it is only one piece of the marketing puzzle. Before any decisions about promotion should be made, it is essential to understand your product, price, placement and position to create the right messages and deliver them to the right audience.

Promotion is the specific mix of advertising, personal selling, sales promotion and public relations which serve as the means for

getting your product to the right segment of the market. It relates to every communication about your care home including the message on your answering machine, web site, advertisements, brochures, events, educational programmes and more.

What messages or statements best describe your product, price and place in words and images that will appeal to the people best suited for your care home? Care home owners often seek outside assistance or utilise in-house marketing capacity to develop the components of promotion to ensure consistent messaging with the right visual appeal being delivered in the correct format for a particular market. Given that precious pounds are spent on promotional activities, careful planning and a thorough understanding of marketing basics plus some marketing expertise can ensure that the money is well spent with the desired return on investment.

### Analysing the five P’s

A frank assessment of your organisation using the five P’s of marketing will identify the strengths and weaknesses of your place in the market. The strengths are the basis for differentiating yourself from your competitors. The weaknesses are the areas for improvement for management to address or are areas of trade-off when compared to your strengths.

The increasingly competitive care market requires owners to take a pro-active approach to marketing their residences to customers and consumers who are increasingly aware. By understanding, analysing and applying the five P’s of marketing, owners can create messages for the right markets which differentiate their care homes from the competition to ensure that they are delivering value for service that meets expectations and that money spent on promotion generates a solid return on investment.

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## THE FIVE P’S OF MARKETING

• Product • Price • Place • Position • Promotion •