

# CHAPTER 10:

## Marketing a HS/HT Program

Conduct a Google or Amazon search, or take a trip to your local library or bookstore, and you'll find an overwhelming selection of books and other materials on the subject of marketing. Most of these resources offer excellent information about marketing methods and tools; however, none will offer advice directly applicable to marketing a HS/HT program. Consequently, this chapter presents information on basic marketing principles and offers ideas for strategies that are particularly applicable to marketing a HS/HT program.

### What Is Marketing?

The American Marketing Association defines marketing as “the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives.” As this definition suggests, marketing involves a variety of interrelated, ongoing activities that permeate an organization’s operations. Marketing activities range from creating a service or product that meets your target markets’ needs, to promoting the product, to making sure that your customers are satisfied.

People sometimes mistakenly equate marketing with its individual components, such as advertising, sales, or public relations. Although these components may be important in an overall marketing effort, strategic marketing takes a much broader view. It involves designing services or products that meet a specific

market’s needs and then getting those services or products to the target market or customer.

### Why Market Your Program?

While establishing a HS/HT program is an important accomplishment to celebrate, strategic marketing of the program is critically important to a program’s long-term sustainability. Whether your program already exists or is just getting underway, planning and implementing a strategic marketing strategy will help it to flourish and make a real difference in the lives of participating youth.

Before you can decide how to market your HS/HT program, you need to think about why you want to market the program and to whom you want to market the program. In the HS/HT context, your ultimate marketing goals might be to

- **increase** the program’s visibility among youth with disabilities and their families, employers, educational staff, and potential funding sources, as well as staff at One-Stop Career Centers, Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, and other community-based organizations;
- **persuade** youth and prospective stakeholders to participate, get involved, and/or “invest” in the program;
- **establish** and convey a clear identity for your program;

- **inform** high-tech employers and other stakeholders about the benefits they will reap by participating in your program; and
- **educate** people in business and industry about the untapped resource that people with disabilities represent and the advantages of employing persons with disabilities, including youth with disabilities.

Although the prospect of doing “strategic marketing” may sound intimidating at first, keep in mind that effectively marketing your HS/HT program does not require a degree in business or decades of marketing experience. Rather, it requires enthusiasm, resourcefulness, persistence, thoughtful planning, and the ability to persuade others to become part of the program. Also, keep in mind that marketing is as much art as science. Each situation is unique and each target audience may require a different approach. Consequently, there is no right or wrong approach to marketing—only more effective or less effective marketing!

### Become a Strategic Marketer

Corporate giants spend billions of dollars to market their products and services. Even mid-sized companies dedicate as much as 10 percent of their revenues to packaging and advertising their wares. Fortunately, the task of marketing a HS/HT program requires more ingenuity than monetary outlay.

The next section provides an example of a step-by-step process for planning and implementing a HS/HT marketing strategy. As you move through the process, you may find that some of the suggested steps overlap and may be conducted at the same time. You may also find that you need to revisit some of the steps as you gather information and gain experience.

The information you gather and develop as you proceed through these steps should be compiled into a detailed, written strategic marketing plan. Remember, your plan can be as simple or complex as you wish; however, it must be realistic and achievable. Since you will be gathering additional information and gaining more experience with HS/HT as you move forward with program implementation, your marketing plan should not be set in stone, but rather should change as your program and marketing needs evolve.

### A strategic marketing plan typically includes

- **an introduction** that states the program’s mission, describes the rationale for marketing the program, and summarizes the goals of your marketing strategy;
- **a situation analysis** that describes internal and external environmental factors that may impact your marketing efforts;
- **the identification of target market(s)** that specifies your target audience(s);
- **marketing goals and objectives** that state what you hope to achieve in terms of broad marketing goals and more specific objectives;
- **an action plan** that specifies the marketing strategies and tactics you will use to achieve each goal and objective, sets target start and finish dates, and identifies who will be responsible for and involved in each activity; and
- **an evaluation plan** that describes how you will evaluate the success of your marketing efforts (Tilson, 1999).

### Five Steps to Marketing a HS/HT Program

#### Step 1—Analyze Your Situation

Before you dive into marketing your HS/HT program, it is important to analyze your current situation. By gathering information from a variety of sources, you will better understand the environment in which you are working and your program’s marketing challenges and opportunities. For example, to market your program effectively to local employers, it is helpful to understand your community’s economic situation, become familiar with employment trends, and be aware of your community’s leading, new, and growing high-tech businesses. It is also useful to understand the hiring, retention, and competition challenges that local employers face.

Understanding your internal and external environments will also make you more credible when speaking with colleagues, employers, or others about the value of your HS/HT program. Your “situation analysis” should focus on both the strengths and weaknesses of

your internal (or organizational) situation and resources, and the aspects of the external environment that may influence your marketing and your program design. Be sure to take notes as you gather information and then compile the notes into a written analysis.

Sources of information for your internal and external situation analysis may include

- members of your advisory body;
- co-workers;
- youth with disabilities and their families;
- teachers and school administrators;
- current employer contacts;
- the business sections of local newspapers;
- the Yellow Pages or other telephone directories;
- local Chamber of Commerce and other business organizations (e.g., the Rotary Club);
- contacts at career/technical schools, community colleges, colleges and universities;
- the reference section of your public library;
- state and local professional and trade associations;
- faith-based and community organizations, including those serving persons with disabilities;
- employment service agencies (e.g., the local Vocational Rehabilitation agency and the local One-Stop Career Center);
- other local, state, and federal government agencies (e.g., the U.S. Census Bureau); and
- the Internet.

As part of your situation analysis, be sure to visit high-tech employers in your community. Develop a contact database and plan to conduct site visits with known or new personal and professional contacts. Let the employers know you are with HS/HT and that your work involves assisting youth with disabilities in exploring career opportunities in high-tech industries. Initially, your focus should be on learning about a particular industry, although such visits also offer

opportunities to get to know employer representatives, and for them to get to know you.

### Developing a Contact Database

A contact database can help you take an inventory, keep track of current and prospective contacts, and serve as a useful organizational tool as you plan and implement your marketing strategy and your program activities. The following suggestions will assist you in developing such a database.

- Begin by compiling a list of individual contacts you have in companies, government agencies, employment service agencies, funding groups, and other relevant organizations. Also include the names of current and former HS/HT participants who may help market the program or serve as speakers or mentors.
- Brainstorm the types of STEM industries and high-tech occupations which may be of interest to HS/HT students (e.g., graphic design, website design, computer repair, telecommunications, engineering, biotechnology, software engineering, etc.).
- Ask your colleagues to help you identify local high-tech companies and prospective funding sources. Using both personal and professional contacts, try to identify contact people within those organizations.
- Compile all of the information into a contact database that, at a minimum, includes each company's name, at least one contact person's name and position, mailing address, telephone, fax number, e-mail address, website, date of the most recent contact, name of the program staff person who made the contact, and the outcome of the discussion (for example, "discussed internship opportunities").
- If possible, use database software to create a searchable, electronic database.
- Build and update the database as your program evolves and your marketing activities progress.

### Step 2—Define Your Marketing Goals and Objectives

Before choosing your marketing strategies, it is important to determine what you hope to achieve. Use

the information gathered through the situation analysis to define your goals and objectives. For example, if you learned that most youth with disabilities in your area are aware of or already participate in your program, but that few high-tech employers are familiar with the program, it would be best to focus your efforts on employers, not youth.

Your marketing goals should define the overall changes you hope to accomplish in the process of marketing your program. For example, do you hope to

1. increase the number of youth with disabilities who participate in the program?
2. build parents' awareness and support of the program?
3. recruit teachers to serve as local HS/HT coordinators?
4. convince school administrators to let you establish HS/HT sites in their schools?
5. recruit people to serve on your state/local advisory body?
6. obtain a grant or other funding to support the program's operations?
7. increase the number of industry representatives willing to serve as guest speakers?
8. increase the number of industry tours or site visits offered to youth with disabilities?
9. identify host organizations for job shadowing experiences?
10. increase the number of internships available to participating youth?
11. recruit professionals in high-tech industries to serve as mentors to HS/HT students?

After you have defined your overall marketing goals, write down objectives that describe the steps that must be taken to achieve each goal. Unlike goals, which are broad statements about what you hope to achieve, marketing objectives should be measurable and time-specific. For example, one of your marketing goals might be to establish new internship opportunities for HS/HT participants. Associated objectives might be to

1. increase the number of internships at XYZ Corporation to three within the next year, and
2. establish at least five summer internship opportunities at new genetics research firms in the community by April.

### Step 3—Identify Your Target Market

In order to define your marketing goals and objectives, you must also clearly define your "target market." To define your target market, think first about the broad "universe" of "customers" (e.g., youth with disabilities, family members, school staff, employers, foundations, employment service agencies, etc.), and then divide the universe into narrower market "segments" (e.g., teachers, transition coordinators, scientists at biomedical research labs or human resource officers in the software development companies). Refer to your situation analysis and your marketing goals and objectives to help define your target markets.

If your resources and time are limited, you may want to focus initially only on the one or two market segments that will give your HS/HT program the greatest benefit. Channeling your efforts to reach only those segments that will provide the greatest benefit will help focus your efforts and ensure that you can achieve your goals with the resources available. You can later expand your efforts to other target markets as you gain experience and your program grows.

### Features to Benefits

Because HS/HT programs rely on a variety of partners, it is important for marketing efforts to be targeted. This is achieved by translating your program features into customer benefits. Features are defined in terms of products or services. A car, for example, may feature a manual transmission and power accessories such as windows, door locks, and radio antenna.

The customer, on the other hand, defines benefits. Depending on the customer, the benefits of a manual transmission may be in handling and responsiveness or in improved gas mileage. Power accessories may represent luxury or may simply be elements of convenience. Again, the benefits are determined by the customer. Think about express mail. Most people would think companies dealing with express mail are

in the shipping business, but in essence they are in the reliability business. Many of its customers are businesses that want the absolute, positive assurance that their valued shipments will be delivered the next day or even the same day. These customers are so motivated by reliability that they will pay a substantial premium over other shippers.

Now, think about the services provided by a HS/HT program. How could these “features” be thought of as “benefits” to your target audience? This becomes your marketing “script.” It will be different for different target audiences. For example, when approaching employers about making internships available to HS/HT students you will likely want to point out the following things:

- Interns provide assistance for permanent staff on projects.
- Interns often undertake projects postponed for lack of time and/or staff resources.
- Employees working with HS/HT interns develop an awareness of the potential for youth with disabilities to be successful, productive workers.
- Engaging interns with disabilities can increase the organization’s overall comfort with persons with disabilities and has the potential to improve the organization’s understanding of reasonable accommodations in the workplace.
- Engaging interns with disabilities enhances an organization’s community responsibility role.
- Interns create a natural pipeline for new permanent employees.

When talking to youth about the benefits of participating in internships, you might point out the following:

- Internships provide opportunities for youth to obtain direct exposure to different careers in a structured setting.
- Through internships, youth see a variety of applications of what is being taught in school.
- Youth who participate in internships discover more

about their talents, skills and interests—information that can be used in formulating initial career choices.

- Youth who participate in internships have the opportunity to develop the soft skills associated with work, i.e., what it takes to be a successful employee.

#### **Step 4—Develop and Implement a Marketing Action Plan**

A carefully designed and written action plan will serve as a road map for your marketing efforts. The methods and techniques you choose to include will depend on many factors, including your program vision, your existing relationships with employers and representatives of other target audiences, the size of your program and of your target audiences, and the fiscal and human resources available to your program.

Your written marketing action plan should provide clear, concise direction for your marketing efforts and include methods for measuring the success of your efforts. The action plan should

- state the broad marketing strategies (e.g., personal contact or media relations) and tactics (i.e., specific activities selected to implement the strategies) you plan to use,
- establish target dates for each activity,
- assign responsibilities and define the involvement of different individuals, and
- specify how your marketing efforts will be evaluated (see suggestions below).

As you begin to develop an action plan, think carefully about your marketing goals and objectives, and carefully choose strategies and tactics that will help you achieve them. Sometimes, a targeted approach aimed at reaching specific types of employers (government agencies or small graphic arts firms) and involving only one or two strategies and a few tactics will suffice. In other situations, a broader approach that involves several strategies and tactics will be more effective. As you draft your action plan, be sure to solicit input from your advisory body, interested stakeholders, and trusted representatives of your target audiences.

## Marketing Strategies and Tactics

There are at least eight primary strategies for marketing your HS/HT program and reaching your target audiences:

1. personal and professional contacts,
2. print communications,
3. electronic communications,
4. media relations,
5. public service advertising  
(see Exhibit 10.4 for a PSA Template),
6. paid advertising,
7. specialty advertising, and
8. special events sponsorship.

Exhibit 10.1 provides a detailed explanation of the marketing strategies and tactics as well as the advantages and disadvantages for different target audiences.

Don't forget that HS/HT participants are your best advertisement. Involve them whenever possible in special events, personal contacts, and presentations. There is nothing like a personal success story to get people listening. You will also want to involve them in determining the design and content of ads, articles, promotional material, and websites. This will provide them with another opportunity for work-based experiences.

### Step 5—Evaluate Your Marketing Activities

While Chapter 9 deals with overall program evaluation, this section focuses on evaluating your marketing efforts. People who succeed in business know the importance of tracking the results of their marketing efforts. Building evaluation plans into your strategic marketing plan from the beginning will help you measure your results. It will also provide the information you need to further refine your marketing efforts and gain ongoing support for your HS/HT program. Two types of evaluation are useful: process evaluation and outcome evaluation.

**Process evaluation** provides data about the administrative and organizational aspects of your marketing efforts. This type of evaluation might result in a report that documents, for a specified time period, the number of telephone calls made to or received from prospective employer partners, meetings held with employers to discuss opportunities for involvement in the program, quarterly employer satisfaction survey results, news stories that were published in local newspapers, materials (i.e., coffee mugs, pens, etc.) distributed, and hits on your website. Process evaluation data should be gathered continuously and analyzed periodically.

Outcome evaluation focuses on the actual results of your marketing efforts. Outcome evaluation measures might include, for example, an increase in

- the number of students enrolling in HS/HT;
- the number of site visits, job shadowing opportunities, and internships created as a result of your marketing efforts;
- the number of employers expressing an interest in participating in your HS/HT program; and/or
- the amount of funding received from different sources to support your program.

When analyzing both process and outcome evaluation data, you will want to look at both the positive and negative impacts of your marketing efforts. You should consider the return on investment for your marketing efforts. Which marketing strategy had the highest response rate? What was the cost per response? Be willing to improve or eliminate the weak areas, make the most of your marketing program's strengths, and adopt new marketing strategies and tactics as you gain experience and gather more information as your program evolves.



## Making Your HS/HT Program Business-Friendly

Solid relationships with employers are essential to any HS/HT program. Your success as a program operator depends in large part on how well you interact with employers in your community. As you market your HS/HT program and develop relationships with employers, think about how “business-friendly” you and your program are.

Taking steps to be business-friendly is important for several reasons:

- Your HS/HT program needs employers for speakers, job shadowing, site visits, and internships.
- Business people expect to work with others who present themselves as professionals.
- Employers want to know that their relationship with HS/HT will benefit them and that they will receive a personal or business return on their investment.

When working with employers, be sure to do the following:

- Conduct business in a professional, respectful manner (e.g., by arriving on time for appointments, dressing appropriately, being prepared, replying promptly to telephone and e-mail messages, sending thank you notes, and following up as

appropriate). Encourage participating youth to do the same.

- Think of employers as customers. Talk their language. Listen to their needs and take extra steps to meet those needs. For example, could an employer’s workforce benefit from disability awareness training? Does the employer need advice on workplace accommodations?
- Work to build a relationship rather than “make a sale.”
- Look for ways to make your HS/HT program convenient and understandable to employers. Employers may not have experience working with youth or with people with disabilities. They may not have been involved in providing internships, job-shadowing opportunities, work-study programs, or other programs for high school students in the past.
- After you begin working with an employer, continuously assess the employer’s satisfaction with the relationship and make improvements as needed. Resolve problems immediately and make it clear that you are interested in helping them to achieve their business goals.

*Adapted from ODEP’s 2002 Customized Employment Strategies Training Manual.*

## Think Outside the Box

In identifying target audiences for your marketing efforts, think about ways to get political leaders at the state and local levels involved. For example, consider asking the governor or mayor to support a proclamation stating their support of the HS/HT program or asking them to establish a Youth Achievement Day where the accomplishments of individual HS/HT students can be recognized. Send members of the state legislature and your state’s representatives to the U.S. Congress copies of your newsletters or a letter providing information about HS/HT students in their districts who were successful

in getting a job or securing a summer internship. Ask them to send letters of congratulations to those students. This will remind them of HS/HT on a regular basis and it will be a real thrill for your HS/HT students and their parents.

Remember, all politics are local. When approaching mayors, members of the state legislature and members of Congress, you should try to identify current and past participants in HS/HT who live in their jurisdictions, and either invite them to accompany you to meetings or ask if you can share their stories when talking with politicians.

## Working with the Media

*Note: The information in this section was adapted from the Florida HS/HT Public Relations Toolkit sponsored by The Able Trust, Florida Governor's Alliance for the Employment of Citizens with Disabilities.*

HS/HT offers tremendous media potential! It combines

- a story of national impact with activities taking place in states and localities throughout the country,
- local human interest stories well-suited to local coverage,
- great facts and statistics about improved post-school outcomes for HS/HT graduates, and
- the opportunity to highlight an untapped source of labor (i.e., youth and adults with disabilities).

However, achieving media coverage will take time. The ability to attract coverage will grow with increases in the number of HS/HT sites and increased participation from students and employers. Over time, forming good relationships with local media will aid in securing more and better coverage.

### Media Coverage

The more exclusive characteristics you add to your event, the more likely it is to attract media coverage. Try to arrange for a local VIP or public figure to speak or attend the event. Consider partnering with a well-known organization or planning your event in conjunction with a special day that is already being celebrated. Remember, reporters are looking for certain “news value” when deciding what stories to cover, including timeliness, importance, proximity, significance, unusualness, human interest, and newness.

While the state coordinator for HS/HT may take the lead on securing media coverage, local coordinators also have a role. Local coordinators may be better equipped to craft a locally-focused media advisory, develop a local press list, call local reporters to pitch the importance of HS/HT, and prepare a targeted press release for the day of the event. A local coordinator

may want to approach a local public relations firm of a media relations department at a university or corporation to see if they would be willing to provide assistance on a pro bono basis as a local sponsor of HS/HT.

### Writing a News Release

The news release is often viewed as the public relations professional's bread and butter. However, since reporters receive hundreds of news releases every day, you must make sure yours stands out. A news release highlights the essence of your story and is written to heighten the editor's interest. Reporters' most common criticism about news releases is that they lack news. Consequently, you should ask yourself the following questions before drafting a news release:

- Is this newsworthy?
- What are the important points?
- Is there any new data or statistics to substantiate the claim?
- Is new information being presented?
- Are well-known experts involved who might be willing to provide a quote that would reinforce the main message being communicated?

(See Exhibit 10.2 for a Sample News Release Template.)

### Media Advisory or Media Alert?

A media advisory, also known as a media alert, is a variation of a news release. It notifies assignment editors of a press conference or any other event that you believe will generate news for the media to cover. It is always one page, brief but compelling, and sufficiently informative to arouse interest, usually (but not necessarily) without giving away the story. Make it clear that there are visual opportunities on a newsworthy topic for cameras and print photographers. Since timing is critically important, a media advisory or media alert must be distributed far enough in advance to get the media to the event. (Exhibit 10.3 contains a Sample Media Advisory Template.)

## The Release Is Written, Now What?

Once a news release and/or media advisory has been written, proofread, and approved, the next step is to send it out. Since reporters are not working for you, it is up to you to sell your story or event to them.

**Timeliness on sending out news releases and media advisories is critically important.** The following general guidelines will help you generate news coverage for your HS/HT program.

### The News Release

**When**—If the news release is telling about an event, you typically want to send it out a couple of days before the event is taking place. You can always put the date of the event as the release date, but send it to the reporter a day or two early. However, it is just as important not to send it too early. If the event is too far into the future (to a reporter a week is too early), the release will get lost and your event will not get covered. If you are writing a release about one of your HS/HT students, timeliness isn't as much of an issue as relevance to the community.

**How**—Releases can be sent to reporters through standard mail, fax, or e-mail. However, many reporters prefer e-mail. Faxes are also common, but many times the fax machine can get overloaded and your release could get lost. Do some research to determine the name of the reporter that would be most likely to cover the topic, e.g., by checking their website or calling their office.

At the event, it is a good idea to have several copies of the news release available for the media representatives who are present.

### The Media Advisory

**When**—A media advisory should only be given out for an event you want the press to attend. You should send it out 24 hours prior to the event. If it is on the weekend or on a Monday, it is best to send it out on Friday. If it is on a Monday, it is advisable to send it again on Monday morning.

**How**—Media advisories should only be sent through fax or e-mail because of time constraints. You will also

want to distribute advisories at events where media representatives are likely to be present.

## Media Etiquette

Demonstrating respect for the media is critically important to getting your story covered. The following are some things to consider when interacting with the media:

- When calling reporters about your story, make sure you reiterate why the story should be covered, rather than merely asking whether they got your news release or advisory;
- Stick to the facts when writing your release or advisory. Many people use opinions that cannot be included in a media report. Make sure you can provide evidence of your program's excellence, e.g., using facts, statistics, or personal experiences of past participants;
- Don't use a release which sounds like an advertisement;
- Target specific media outlets. Don't send your release to just anybody. Do your research and determine where it should go and who it should go to;
- Proofread! Make sure you check for spelling or grammatical errors. Errors will turn off reporters and your release may end up in the garbage; and
- KISS! Keep It Short and Simple.

## Other Written Public Relations Tools

### Media Kit

Media kits are used by organizations to provide basic information about the organization, special events, news conferences and crises to the media. The shell for media kits is usually a basic folder that has the name and logo of the organization or program. In all cases, the kit should have a letter attached or enclosed addressed to the person who is going to use the information. The letter should explain why the kit is being sent, identify its contents, and list important dates and contacts (see "Pitch Letters"). Media kits are often distributed at press conferences and events.

A basic media kit generally includes the following:

- a fact sheet giving information about the organization, program, or event;
- biographical information on the principals/officers of the organization. In the case of HS/HT, this would likely be biographical information on members of the advisory body;
- a backgrounder that tells something about the character of the organization/program and the nature of what it does;
- photocopies of articles printed about the organization, program, or event in publications such as daily newspapers or monthly magazines;
- selected copies of any position papers prepared by the organization/program;
- selected copies of any serial publications such as newsletters or magazines produced by the organization/program;
- an annual report or informational brochure if available;
- logo in electronic or other formats; and
- optional items, including black and white glossy photographs (print media only), sound bytes on compact disk (electronic media only), and B-roll video footage (television media only).

### Pitch Letters

A pitch letter should accompany every media kit sent. It is designed to illicit help from an editor, reporter or producer to provide coverage on your organization, program, or event. A pitch letter is a standard business letter (about four to five paragraphs with a maximum of one page) that includes the following information:

- why you are writing them—for example, you are announcing an event, new service or program, accomplishment, or news conference;
- why they should read through the media kit;
- why the organization, program or event is interesting and/or important;

- a brief statement describing the organization or program and what it does;
- as appropriate, a brief statement describing the event or issue;
- information on what the media kit contains;
- a plea for support or explanation of what you would like them to do; and
- contact information.

### Fact Sheets

Standard fact sheets present the fundamental facts about the organization, program, or event in an easy to read, bulleted format. Fact sheets should not be any longer than one page, and may include:

- names of officers or of the leadership of the HS/HT advisory body;
- office location(s) with address, phone number, fax numbers and appropriate e-mail addresses;
- description of what the organization, program, or event is and/or does;
- historical milestones in the organization's/program's/event's history (e.g., when and where it was founded, when and where activities began, etc.);
- major accomplishments;
- interesting facts and statistics; and
- programs/services offered.

For fact sheets on events, you should also include:

- where and when the event is being held;
- any cost associated with the event, if applicable;
- past benefits offered as a result of the event and who benefited;
- name of participants or type of people participating;
- goals of the event; and
- names of the people and organizations sponsoring the event.

## Backgrounder

Backgrounders provide a more comprehensive overview of an organization, program, event or issue than a fact sheet. Backgrounders are longer and give more in-depth content than a news release. For example, a two-page release announcing the merger of two organizations may not permit much description of the companies involved. A four or five-page background paper would provide more detailed information on the make-up, activities, and history of the companies that are merging. Representatives of the media seldom use all of the information provided in a background paper; rather they excerpt selected information. A background paper needs to include the latest research and information on outcomes (if available) in order to be effective.

### Using a Website to Market Your HS/HT Program

Most HS/HT programs maintain a website which is a powerful tool for marketing the program. A website provides global access to information about the program twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. It can be easily updated to address changes in information and to include new information. A website can be designed to provide basic information about HS/HT with icons and links that lead to more detailed information of interest to different target audiences. A website can be used to post information on upcoming

events, to provide detailed descriptions of past events, and to highlight HS/HT success stories. A website can also be made interactive, providing an easy method of communicating with and getting feedback from HS/HT students, family members, education personnel, employers, etc. Several HS/HT programs use their websites to share information on the *Guideposts for Success* and to disseminate information on resources useful to transition-age youth and the people who work with them.

If your program decides to establish a website, it is important to make it simple to navigate and fully accessible to individuals with disabilities. The Bobby WorldWide Web Accessibility Tool, <<http://webxact.watchfire.com/>>, was designed to aid webmasters in creating standard compliant websites and to increase the accessibility of a website. Bobby tests web pages using the guidelines established by the World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) Web Access Initiative, <<http://www.w3.org/WAI/>>, as well as Section 508 guidelines from the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board) of the U.S. Federal Government. WAI guidelines are widely regarded as the international standard for web accessibility support materials to help understand and implement web accessibility resources, through international collaboration. It is also important to register your website with major search engines so people will be able to find it easily.



## Suggested Marketing Strategies and Tactics

### Personal Contact

- Send personalized letters and your HS/HT business card to selected employers or others in the community to let them know about your program and invite their participation in the program or in a specific event. When sending letters, be sure to follow up with a phone call to confirm receipt and answer any questions.
- Call or send e-mail messages to people with whom you have an existing relationship to let them know about your HS/HT program and invite their participation. Before making contact, know what you want to communicate and what you are going to ask them to do.
- Contact your local Chamber of Commerce to get information on local businesses, particularly those that emphasize the STEM careers and other technology-related professions.
- Make “cold calls” or canvas high-tech employers to learn more about their organizations, let them know about your program, and get a sense of the employer’s potential interest in getting involved with HS/HT. Even though you may be making cold calls, be sure to take a warm approach!
- Ask to speak during regularly scheduled meetings of your local Lion’s Club, Kiwanis Club, etc. Use these opportunities to inform professional members of the business community about HS/HT and explain how they can get involved.
- Educate others at your school or organization about the goals and activities of the HS/HT program.
- Arrange for site visits to help you better understand the operations and business cultures of STEM industries.
- Represent your program at community, business, and professional events as a speaker, host, or exhibitor.
- Network at professional conferences, in classes you may be taking, or through your involvement in church, community events, or volunteer activities.
- Visit the websites of employers, employment service agencies and potential funding sources, or call their offices to obtain e-mail addresses. Send e-mails to targeted individuals to let them know about your HS/HT program.
- Volunteer to serve on boards or committees of stakeholder organizations.
- Arrange for booth space at conferences attended by youth with disabilities or their families, local employers, service providers, and community-based organizations.
- Attend or exhibit at high-tech trade shows to meet and network with employer representatives.
- Invite target market representatives to become a part of your state/local advisory body.
- Ask your current employer partners to tell their colleagues in the business world about HS/HT.
- Follow up after each contact by sending a letter or by calling with additional information.
- Begin by focusing on building long-term mutually beneficial relationships, rather than asking for financial support up front. Such relationships often evolve into financial support.



#### ***Advantages of Personal Contact***

Allows greater control of results, requires few material resources, and allows you to use your interpersonal skills and known contacts.

#### ***Disadvantages of Personal Contact***

Can involve significant time and offers limited reach.

**Print Communications**

- Develop a HS/HT program brochure or fact sheet to mail with letters, disseminate at meetings or workshops, or post in targeted locations such as high schools.
- Create an inexpensive newsletter that periodically updates current and prospective employers and others about your HS/HT program. Include success stories about participating youth. Produce the newsletter in a print format, distribute it by e-mail, and post it on your website.
- Design and print HS/HT business cards and stationery that convey a professional, consistent program image. Be sure that the business card includes your telephone and fax numbers, mailing address, and e-mail and website addresses. Carry business cards with you at all times.
- Develop program progress reports or an annual report to update stakeholders about program activities and accomplishments.
- Make copies of articles that have been published about your HS/HT program and share them with stakeholders and prospective stakeholders.

***Advantages of Print Communications***

Lets you control the messages and timing and allows you to target specific audiences.

***Disadvantages of Print Communications***

Requires funds for reproduction; can involve significant time for writing and layout; and requires lead time to develop materials.

**Electronic Communications**

- Create an accessible website that informs targeted markets about your HS/HT program and provides your contact information. Be sure to keep the website current and add new material to encourage viewers to return to it.
- Register your website with search engines to improve the chances of the site being found when web users conduct a search. Register for free on search engines’ websites (e.g., www.google.com) or pay to use a search engine registration service.
- Disseminate program updates, event invitations, and other information by e-mail and place it on your website.
- Create and send periodic e-mail newsletters.

- Create a video or CD-ROM that explains the goals, activities, and successes of your HS/HT program.
- Participate in online communities such as electronic bulletin boards and listservs used by local high-tech business leaders, workforce development representatives, or disability employment professionals.
- Ask employer partners to include information about HS/HT and their involvement with the program on their websites and in their electronic newsletters.
- Arrange for reciprocal website links with other organizations (e.g., websites of employer partners, One-Stop Career Centers, Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, etc.).
- Include your program contact information and website address on your e-mail address block.

***Advantages of Electronic Communications***

Lets you control the messages and timing; allows instant, low-cost dissemination of messages and information; allows you to target specific audiences as needed (i.e., through targeted e-mails); and facilitates interactive, around-the-clock communications with known contacts.

***Disadvantages of Electronic Communications***

Requires expertise, technology, and time to develop, launch, and maintain a website; and requires staff time to keep the information up-to-date, respond to e-mail inquiries, manage listservs, etc.

**Media Relations**

- Create news by “pitching” story ideas to local media representatives. Suggest interesting angles for covering your HS/HT program, the accomplishments of participating youth, or collaborations with employers.
- Mail, fax, or e-mail news releases or media advisories to reporters, editors, or producers at local newspapers, television stations, and radio stations to inform them of program events and activities. Be sure to use the proper format and always include your telephone number and e-mail address for any questions the recipient might have.
- Write articles about HS/HT activities for placement in local newspapers, trade publications, employers’ in-house or external newsletters, or school system publications. Before writing an article, contact the publication to determine the editor’s interest in a particular story line.

- Use—but don't abuse—any connections you may have with local reporters, editors, or producers.
- Develop and use a database of media contacts.
- Tap into the expertise of media relations experts within your school system or ask your employer partners if their public relations staff can advise you on media relations.
- Invite media representatives to become a part of your state/local advisory body.
- Invite reporters to attend your program events.
- Make yourself and your program participants available for media interviews.
- Talk with representatives at your local public access cable television station about being included in their programming (e.g., in a panel discussion about youth with disabilities and employment).

#### ***Advantages of Media Relations***

Often allows rapid dissemination of messages; involves few or no material costs; and allows you to reach a broad audience.

#### ***Disadvantages of Media Relations***

Provides limited control of messages and timing of message release, takes time to develop a story, requires sustained work to maintain relationships with reporters and other media representatives, and requires time to communicate and follow-up with reporters and others.

### **Public Service Advertising**

- Submit announcements about events, need for volunteers, and need for partner organizations to local newspapers, radio stations, and broadcast and cable television stations.
- Work with program partners (e.g., employers) to develop issue-oriented print or broadcast public services announcements (PSAs).
- Use the proper format for the media outlet you are targeting. Try to limit PSAs for television and radio to 30 seconds and indicate the running time on the announcement.

#### ***Advantages of Public Service Advertising***

Offers free promotion air time or print space and can offer wide reach.

#### ***Disadvantages of Public Service Advertising***

Offers little control over timing and editing of messages and can involve costs to develop print or broadcast ads.

### **Paid Advertising**

- Do a cost benefit analysis for paid advertising, which can be very expensive. Investigate circulation numbers, who the readers/viewers are, and other relevant information. (Which TV channel has the highest viewership among your target audience(s)? Should you run your display ad in the sports section, business section, or near the education columnist in the newspaper? What day of the week would be best from an optimal exposure and impact standpoint?)
- Develop a template or “look” for your print advertisement working with a graphic designer—or with your HS/HT students.
- When looking for employer partners, place paid advertising in local newspapers and on radio, broadcast television, or cable television.
- Place ads in local business magazines, newsletters, and directories.

#### ***Advantages of Paid Advertising***

Lets you control the content of the message, lets you control where and when messages are disseminated, and can offer targeted or wide reach.

#### ***Disadvantages of Paid Advertising***

Involve costs to create and place ads and requires repeated ad placement to achieve the greatest impact.

## Special Event Sponsorship

- Invite representatives of business and industry, employment service agencies, schools, and prospective or current funding organizations to an annual informational meeting or kick-off event.
- Hold an annual employer or funding organization recognition event, or present awards to employers, youth participants, and other stakeholders at an annual conference or program banquet.
- Invite local high-tech employers and representatives of community colleges, colleges and universities to participate in a career fair for people with disabilities.
- Create an annual, issue-oriented awareness event that involves program stakeholders.

### *Advantages of Special Event Sponsorship*

Provides visibility in the community or targeted communities, offers opportunities to recognize and solidify support of program stakeholders, and offers opportunities to make new contacts.

### *Disadvantages of Special Event Sponsorship*

Can require funds to rent event space, produce materials, and provide refreshments; requires significant staff time for planning, logistics, and follow-up; and can be negatively impacted by weather, traffic, and other problems.

## Specialty Advertising

- Create t-shirts, mugs, magnets, bookmarks, mouse pads, pens, or other giveaways bearing your HS/HT program's logo or slogan. Distribute these items at events, when you meet employers or have other contact with representatives of your target audiences.
- Include HS/HT participants in the design and creation of products and materials.
- Consider selling specialty advertising items to raise funds for your program.

### *Advantages of Specialty Advertising*

Offers low-cost program visibility, and offers control over product design and distribution.

### *Disadvantages of Specialty Advertising*

Requires funds for product design and production, and requires staff time to oversee item production, distribution, and inventory.



## Sample News Release Template

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Month, Day, Year

CONTACT: CONTACT NAME IN CAPS

NAME OF ORGANIZATION/COMPANY

(if not on letterhead)

PHONE: (XXX) XXX-XXXX or e-mail address

**TITLE OF RELEASE SHOULD SUMMARIZE THE CONTENT OF THE RELEASE  
IN ONE LINE AND SHOULD BE IN CAPS, BOLD AND CENTERED**

**(MONTH, DAY, YEAR—NAME OF CITY IN CAPS AND BOLD)** In the first paragraph of a news release, state the basic who, what, where, when and why information. A release should lead with the most important information and end with the least important. As a general rule, news releases should be no longer than two pages.

Indent all new paragraphs. Paragraphs should consist of approximately 3 – 4 concise sentences. The body of a news release should be double-spaced, whereas the contact information should be single-spaced.

Print news releases on organization or company letterhead if available. Do not use bright colored paper for a news release. Even though you want to get the reporter's attention, use neutral colored paper. Provide at least one-inch margins on each side of the paper if possible.

Use three number marks (###) centered on the bottom of the page to indicate the end of a release. If an additional page is necessary, indicate that the release continues onto the next page using the following centered on the bottom of the first page: -more-. If you must continue your release onto the next page, never break up a sentence.

-more-

**News Release Template**

Simply begin the next page with the entire sentence. Do not indent this sentence unless you are beginning a new paragraph.

“Slugline” and date should be single-spaced. However, the remainder of the release body will be double-spaced.

There is no need to use letterhead for subsequent pages. Plain white paper is fine. The last paragraph should be separate and include your contact information in case the reader wants more information.

For more information, contact \_\_\_\_\_, at  
\_\_\_\_\_. You can include telephone, fax, e-mail or address.

**About your organization/program.** In this paragraph, you may choose to briefly describe your organization/program. What is its mission? When was it established? Why does it exist? Once again, this should be short and to the point. Random facts and information should not be included. It can be single-spaced and a smaller font if needed.

###

*Source: The Able Trust—Florida Governor’s Alliance for the Employment of Citizens with Disabilities.*

## Sample Media Advisory Template

CONTACT: CONTACT NAME IN CAPS  
 NAME OF ORGANIZATION/PROGRAM: IN CAPS  
 PHONE: (XXX) XXX-XXXX  
 FAX: (XXX) XXX-XXXX  
 E-mail Address: XXXXXX@XXX.XXX

### **MEDIA ADVISORY/PHOTO OPPORTUNITY (CENTERED IN BOLD, CAPS AND LARGER FONT SIZE)**

WHO: Name of the organization/program hosting the event  
 WHAT: Name of event that is taking place  
 WHERE: Physical location—provide address  
 WHEN: Date and time of event  
 WHY: Purpose of event

You may choose to provide a brief summary underneath (1-2 paragraphs) with more detailed information on the event. Highlight particular aspects of the event that are newsworthy and not included in the basic who, what, where, when and why, such as dignitaries attending, special awards or honors being presented, activities surrounding the event, or announcements being made.

For more information, contact \_\_\_\_\_ at  
 \_\_\_\_\_.

###

*Source: The Able Trust—Florida Governor's Alliance for the Employment of Citizens with Disabilities.*

## Public Service Announcement Template

TITLE OF PSA SPOT:  
BROADCAST DATES:  
SECOND PSA:  
CONTACT: NAME OF CONTACT IN CAPS  
PHONE: (XXX) XXX-XXXX  
DATES: (MONTH & DAY)  
FAX: (XXX) XXX-XXXX  
E-mail Address: XXXX@XXX.XXX

**ANNOUNCER:** PSA COPY SHOULD BE TYPED ON THE RIGHT-HAND SIDE OF THE SHEET IN CAPITAL LETTERS. **TRIPLE-SPACE THE COPY** TO MAKE IT EASIER FOR THE ANNOUNCER TO READ. BE SURE TO LIST IF THE ANNOUNCEMENT IS A 60, 30 OR 10-SECOND SPOT IN THE TOP LEFT-HAND CORNER OF THE COPY. LIST THE DATES (MONTH, DAY THROUGH MONTH, DAY) YOU WOULD LIKE IT TO RUN. READ YOUR COPY OUT LOUD AND TIME YOURSELF TO ENSURE YOU ARE WITHIN THE APPROPRIATE TIME LIMITS. USE -30- TO INDICATE THE END OF THE COPY.

-30-

*Source: The Able Trust—Florida Governor's Alliance for the Employment of Citizens with Disabilities.*



(Page intentionally left blank.)