

**INITIATING A MARKETING PLANNING PROCESS  
IN THE NORFOLK DEPARTMENT OF FIRE AND PARAMEDICAL SERVICES**

**EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT**

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## **Abstract**

Today's fire departments are increasingly threatened by intergovernmental competition, consolidation, and privatization. If a municipal fire department is to survive during uncertain political and economic times, a comprehensive marketing plan must be employed to improve public image and build community support. The problem was the Norfolk Department of Fire and Paramedical Services (NFPS) did not have a comprehensive marketing plan.

The purpose of this research project was to explore the meaning and benefits of fire department marketing, and identify the steps that should be taken by the NFPS to develop and implement a marketing plan. Historical and descriptive research methodologies were used to answer the following questions:

1. What is marketing, and how does it apply to the fire service?
2. What are the benefits of fire department marketing programs?
3. What are the elements of an effective marketing plan?
4. What strategies can be employed to market the services of a municipal fire department?

The procedures used to complete this research included a literature review of fire service journals and marketing textbooks, a semi-structured interview process with local marketing professionals, and a fire department marketing survey of NFPS chief officers.

The results of this research presented distinct implications for the NFPS including the use of a marketing plan to improve public image and build community support, potential pitfalls of a marketing campaign in relation to other municipal departments, and the need to incorporate customer service as an organizational value.

Recommendations were made to guide the NFPS in the development and implementation of a marketing plan. These recommendations included changing to a customer service philosophy, developing a strategic plan, assigning marketing responsibilities to one individual, forming a committee to develop a marketing plan, ensuring management support for the plan, and evaluating the plan after implementation.

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## Introduction

Fire departments historically have been viewed by citizens as a vital public safety component in any community, consisting of dedicated and highly trained individuals who willingly risk their lives to protect those whom they serve (Coleman, 1990). Because of this positive image, fire chiefs have encountered minimal opposition at the budget table in years passed. However, in recent years this trend has been affected by changing public perception of government, and intergovernmental competition for financial resources during uncertain political and economic times.

Taxpayers have become prudent and demanding consumers of government services. The introduction of tax reform legislation and campaigns to reinvent government, reflect the general dissatisfaction of taxpayers across the nation and the perception that government services are too costly and produce few benefits. As a result, taxpayers no longer willingly accept tax increases in support of any government agency's budget, without sufficient justification.

Along with the change in public perception of government overall, the image of the fire service appears to have changed as well. Public opinion polls assessing the quality of life in communities for example, seldom uncover concerns about fire safety or the existence of dependable emergency services (Granito, 1992). Furthermore, letters to editors citing examples of poor fire department performance at emergency scenes and unproductive activities of firefighters between alarms, are no longer uncommon in local newspapers (Lavoie, 1995).

The widespread efforts to privatize many municipal services throughout the country should send a signal to fire departments that they are not immune from this threat. Private corporations proposing

the delivery of fire protection and other emergency services at a lower cost than the existing municipal fire department, will undoubtedly capture the interest of fiscally conservative politicians and citizens' groups (Coleman, 1990). Furthermore, municipal departments providing services similar in nature to those of other departments, may be at risk for consolidation to achieve greater economic efficiency of government expenditures (St. John, 1994).

Fire departments have experienced increased competition with other municipal departments for often scarce financial resources. Municipal departments with a good public image and strong roots in the community, typically receive a higher funding priority and are better protected from budget reductions. Those departments with a poor image or minimal community support often suffer in the funding process (Coleman, 1990).

If a municipal fire department is to survive in an often volatile political and economic environment, a comprehensive marketing plan must be employed to improve public perception and build community support. An effective marketing plan informs citizens, politicians, and municipal leaders about fire department services, and helps each to understand the support necessary for continued service delivery (Lavoie, 1995).

The problem that prompted this research project was that the Norfolk Department of Fire and Paramedical Services did not have a comprehensive marketing plan. Although the department had appointed a public information officer and regularly participated in various community safety programs, there was no concerted effort to develop and implement a plan to market the department's services.

The purpose of this research project was to examine the meaning of marketing and how it applies to the fire service, explore the benefits of marketing fire department services, and identify the steps that should be taken by the Norfolk Department of Fire and Paramedical Services to develop and implement a comprehensive marketing plan. This research project employed historical and descriptive research methodologies to answer the following questions:

1. What is marketing, and how does it apply to the fire service?
2. What are the benefits of fire department marketing programs?
3. What are the elements of an effective marketing plan?
4. What strategies can be employed to market the services of a municipal fire department?

### **Background and Significance**

The Norfolk Department of Fire and Paramedical Services (NFPS) was formed in April 1991, by the merger of the Norfolk Fire Department (NFD) and the Bureau of Paramedical Rescue Services (BPRS). This merger was the result of a two-year study to find the most cost effective alternative for increasing the existing emergency medical service's resources, in response to a 19% increase in emergency medical calls during the previous five years. The goal of the merger was to increase the number of trained personnel for emergency medical duties, without creating a financial burden on the city, nor reducing fire protection (Fire and Emergency Medical Steering Committee, 1990).

In 1993, NFPS administrators tried unsuccessfully to gain the support of city management for the implementation of a multi-year fire apparatus replacement program. The average age of first-line fire

apparatus in the NFPS fleet had increased to 14.5 years. Thirty percent of the fleet was more than 20 years of age, with some apparatus ranging five to ten years beyond the maximum service life recommended by the National Fire Protection Association for first-line fire apparatus. Many firefighters complained that firefighting equipment had become unreliable, and cited examples of equipment failures during emergency incidents. Furthermore, the city's fleet manager reported increasing maintenance costs due to the age of the fleet, and difficulty in finding replacement parts for those vehicles more than 20 years of age (NFPS, 1993). Troubled by the deteriorating condition of the department's fire apparatus, and an apparent lack of political and financial support for an apparatus replacement program, members of the Norfolk Professional Firefighters Association (NPFf), Local 68 of the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF), decided to take their case to the citizens of Norfolk.

Based on the success of previous campaigns to build public support for the department, NPFf members knew that many citizens would likely pressure their city council representatives to replace aging fire apparatus if they understood the problems facing firefighters. With the assistance of a local media company, a key group of NPFf members developed a presentation to be delivered to civic organizations that illustrated the need for new fire apparatus. The presentation focused not on the need for a tax increase, but the need to redirect funding from other city projects. The presentation was crafted to raise citizen awareness of the condition of the fire apparatus that served each neighborhood.

Within days of the first presentations, city council members were flooded with calls from citizens demanding their support for an apparatus replacement program. When the presentations continued, NPFf leaders were approached by a representative of the city manager and asked what it would take



to get them to stop their campaign. According to D. K. Thomas, NPPF 3rd District Vice President, the union leadership replied “provide the funding for the replacement of aging fire apparatus.” Because of the positive citizens’ response from the apparatus campaign, the NPPF leadership decided to develop and deliver an expanded program to promote the many services of the NFPS, and help citizens understand the support firefighters need to continue providing these services.

Members of the NPPF consider their public awareness campaigns a success, and cite several examples of how building community support has benefited the NFPS. First, during 1994, less than one year after the NPPF public awareness campaigns were introduced, city management committed to a multi-year fire apparatus replacement program that will lower the average age of first-line apparatus to an acceptable level by the year 2000. Second, during 1995, 1996, and 1997, many city departments suffered personnel reductions ranging between 1/2% and 3%. During the same period however, the NFPS did not suffer any budget cuts, and in fact gained personnel in several divisions of the department (D. K. Thomas, personal contact, September 14, 1997).

The image of the NFPS has not always been positively portrayed to the community. During recent years, the department’s public image has been tarnished by negative media publicity. In one instance in 1995, a series of investigative news reports was aired by the local ABC news affiliate, concerning an alleged misappropriation of Virginia Fire Programs funds used to purchase emergency medical equipment and ambulances. In another case, local television networks covered the story of a former NFPS employee who touted himself as the “unapager,” and was arrested and charged for sending a series of harassing messages to the alpha numeric pagers of department and city

administrators. In September 1997, the *Virginian Pilot* newspaper published a story about fire code violations at one of the department's fire stations. This story was distributed by the Associated Press, and published by newspapers across the country. The story was even featured by Paul Harvey on his daily radio program. The newspaper editorials following the story, strongly criticized firefighters for not setting a good fire safety example in the community.

The public awareness campaign of the Norfolk Professional Firefighters Association, and the recent incidences of bad publicity, clearly signify the need for a comprehensive marketing plan for the Norfolk Department of Fire and Paramedical Services. Many firefighters agree the public awareness campaign had a direct impact on the decisions of city management to fund personnel and equipment requests. Most NFPS administrators however, are concerned the long term relationship between the department and city leaders has been harmed. Members from all ranks agree that the public's image of the department has been negatively affected by the recent incidences of bad media publicity. Therefore, the department must take charge of its public relations and aggressively market itself to both the community and local government, if a positive image is to be restored and the department is to receive the support it needs.

This research project was completed according to the applied research requirements of the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. The problem addressed by this research project related specifically to Unit 8 of the Executive Development course, titled "Marketing in the Public Sector." This unit of instruction stressed the importance of marketing the services of public sector organizations to improve service quality, promote a positive image, build community and financial

support, and change public behavior. It was anticipated that the recommendations formulated to guide the development of a marketing plan for the Norfolk Department of Fire and Paramedical Services, would also be useful to other municipal fire departments.

### **Literature Review**

A literature review was performed to identify existing research on the subjects of fire service marketing, marketing plan development and implementation, and marketing strategies for municipal fire departments. The literature review involved a search of fire service trade journals and magazines, and college textbooks on the subjects of marketing planning and marketing public sector and nonprofit organizations. Those sources relevant to this research project, were summarized and grouped according to the applicable research questions.

#### **The Concept of Marketing**

##### **Marketing defined.**

The literature review did not uncover a single, concise definition of marketing that was universally accepted by marketing professionals. The American Marketing Association defined marketing as “the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfies individual and organizational objectives” (Fine, 1992, p. 1). Wilson and Sackmary (1988) defined marketing as “activities directed toward identifying and satisfying customer wants and needs” (p. 57). Forsyth (1993) described marketing as “a system that links the market [customers and potential customers] with the company, and attempts to

reconcile the conflict between the two” (p. 3). In rudimentary terms, marketing was defined as “finding out what products and services consumers need, and then delivering them” (“Marketing: The Basis of Your Business,” 1988, p. 4).

Many authors (“Marketing: The Basis of Your Business,” 1988; Fine, 1992; Forsyth, 1993; Keefe, 1984; Schumacher & Quinsey, 1990) referred to the elements of marketing as the four P’s: product, price, place, and promotion. Products include all things designed and produced to meet the needs and desires of consumers. Price is the value that consumers place on a given product in time, money, effort, change in lifestyle, and opportunity costs. Place refers to the degree of consumer accessibility to the products produced by an organization. Promotion involves communicating with consumers to increase their awareness of a given product and encourage consumption.

Besides the four P’s, Forsyth (1993) proposed the five C’s of marketing: customer, continuous, coordinated, creative, and culture. Customer refers to the ideology that the customer is at the center of all marketing efforts of an organization. Continuous refers to the fact that marketing must be a continual focus of management and personnel. Coordinated refers to the fact that all functional areas of an organization must work together effectively if a product or service is to meet consumer demands. Creative means marketing efforts must catch the attention of consumers and distinguish the organization’s product from the competition. Finally, culture refers to the fact that effective marketing is heavily dependent upon the value placed by everyone in the organization on customer service.

### **Applying the concept of marketing to the fire service.**

Several authors of fire service literature (Buckman, 1995; Keefe, 1984; Shumacher & Quinsey, 1990; Templeton, 1996) recognized that fire departments are different from private sector businesses because they do not produce and sell tangible products. Despite these differences, the authors showed how fire department services and service delivery modes can be framed in the context of the four P's of marketing.

Keefe (1984) identified the products of a fire department as the services provided to the community including (a) fire protection, (b) emergency medical care, (c) fire prevention, (d) technical rescue, (e) hazardous materials response, (f) loss prevention, (g) disaster preparedness, and (h) public education. Buckman (1995) grouped the products of fire departments into the categories of expected product, augmented product, and potential product. An expected product or service meets the minimum standards of customers and addresses their current demands. An augmented product refers to adding value to the customer's experience when delivering the product or service. A potential product is one that is not yet provided by the department, but may be in the near or distant future.

Keefe (1984) explained that price consists of a fire department's operating expenses. These expenses are typically funded by municipal property taxes, public donations, contractual agreements, or user fees. Templeton (1996) stressed that despite the source of funding, citizens demand value for their out of pocket expenses, and will readily scrutinize high operating costs and the inefficient management of public funds or donations.

Keefe (1984) described place as the area or community in which the fire department provides services. Schumacher and Quinsey (1990) proposed that place of access is an area where fire departments often excel above businesses in the private sector. Typically, fire stations are strategically positioned throughout a community, prompting a faster response time in meeting citizen needs. In addition, fire departments often take valuable services out into the community. These services include CPR classes, fire safety lectures, and public demonstrations.

Keefe (1984) regarded promotion as the ability of a fire department to communicate effectively with consumers, and impress upon them the benefits of the services provided. Promoting the fire department is something firefighters do every day, sometimes unconsciously. A fire department is often judged by the public according to the condition of fire apparatus, the grooming and appearance of firefighters, and the way firefighters conduct themselves in public. Schumacher and Quinsey (1990) further added that firefighters are routinely visible in any community as they respond to and return from alarms on fire apparatus. Promoting services beyond emergency response has become increasingly important to nullify negative public perceptions that when firefighters are not answering emergency calls, they are doing nothing at all.

### **Benefits of Fire Department Marketing**

Several authors (Coleman, 1990; Granito, 1992) considered the improvement of a fire department's image an extremely important benefit of effective marketing. A fire department that actively markets its services by identifying customers and meeting or exceeding their needs and expectations, can create a truly positive public image. A positive public image often means the

difference between funding support and rejection (Coleman, 1990). Shumacher and Quinsey (1990) suggested that effective marketing programs can change negative public perceptions by illustrating the value taxpayers receive in the form of multiple fire department services. M. H. Estep and N. L. Estep (1987) addressed the cyclical effect that a good public image has on improving firefighter pride and morale, which in turn fosters good customer service.

Another important benefit of marketing identified in the fire service literature, was the establishment of a good community support base. Granito (1992) noted that if a fire department has a good public image and its services to the community are viewed as efficient, effective and essential, it will likely receive a high level of community support. Several authors (Coleman, 1990; St. John, 1994) stressed that community support is important as today's fire departments are faced with three primary threats to their continued survival: (a) increased competition with other municipal departments for often scarce financial resources, (b) the consolidation of municipal departments that provide similar services, to achieve greater economic efficiency, and (c) the privatization of government services to reduce operating expenses, and lower taxes. Those departments with a good public image and a strong community support base are typically better protected from these threats.

Effective marketing can also build positive relationships between public sector agencies (Fine, 1992). For example, if a fire department successfully markets and delivers services to other municipal departments in their time of need, the result will likely be an increase in intergovernmental support.

In one article in the fire service literature, Schumacher and Quinsey (1990) suggested that effective fire department marketing can even have a positive impact on economic development. When

choosing the location for a new business, corporate leaders may evaluate the services provided by the local fire department to determine if they meet the needs of their company. The emergency services many corporate leaders find desirable include (a) quality emergency medical care for employees and their families, (b) sufficient fire suppression resources to protect commercial property, (c) the ability to perform prompt and effective salvage operations to protect merchandise and valuable records, and (d) prompt response to automatic fire alarms that does not draw undue public attention to a commercial facility.

It was further noted that an effective marketing campaign can enhance firefighter recruitment efforts.

### **Elements of a Marketing Plan**

#### **Strategic planning.**

The works of several authors addressed the need to perform effective strategic planning before initiating a comprehensive marketing planning process. Luther (1982) suggested that without a strategic plan, planners will have no direction for which to develop a marketing plan. Forsyth (1993) noted that a functional strategic plan will include a mission statement and concrete goals and objectives to guide an organization into the future, and will facilitate the development and implementation of a marketing plan. According to Luther (1982), strategic planning involves the following activities: (a) defining the mission of the organization, (b) analyzing the organization's current environment, (c) developing short range and



long range organizational strategies, and (d) applying management controls to evaluate and adjust the strategic planning process as needed.

### **Market research.**

Besides a strategic plan, several authors (Forsyth, 1993; Kotler and Andreason, 1987) noted that an organization must also perform thorough market research before developing a marketing plan. Market research was defined by Kotler and Andreason (1987) as “the planned acquisition and analysis of data measuring some aspect or aspects of the marketing system for improving an organization’s marketing decisions” (p. 205). Young (1985) stressed that market research is important because there must be a sound understanding of the consumer’s needs before an effective marketing strategy can be chosen. Furthermore, Forsyth (1993) concluded that market research is essential in reducing the number of unknown variables in the planning process, and monitoring the implementation and management of an organization’s marketing plan.

When performing market research, researchers often analyze existing data and employ data collection methods such as sampling, questionnaires, personal interviews, and telephone surveys (Forsyth, 1993). The resulting data can be classified according to (a) quantitative data--demographic characteristics, frequency of consumption and other related statistical information; and (b) qualitative data--consumer knowledge, consumer attitudes and perceptions, and consumer behavior (Downing, 1988).

Considerable attention was given in the literature to the importance of market segmentation (Forsyth, 1993; Kotler & Andreason, 1987). Rarely is there a “mass market” for any product or

service. Because of this, organizations must differentiate their marketing efforts to meet the varied needs of consumers. This is accomplished by grouping together consumers who have similar characteristics, needs, or interests, as a segment. The organization can then target individual segments with products or services that will satisfy their needs. Market segmentation is frequently performed according to geographic location, demographic characteristics, and the frequency of product or service consumption (Kotler & Anderson, 1987).

### **Steps of marketing plan development.**

Forsyth (1993) stressed that a marketing plan should guide the marketing efforts of an organization. The plan should identify both the current and desired positions of the organization, the route the organization proposes to take in achieving the desired position, and the methods the organization will use to determine when the desired position has been achieved. To be effective, a marketing plan must be flexible so that creativity and originality are fostered (Forsyth, 1993).

According to St. John (1994), an effective marketing plan should be considered a good investment that will positively contribute to organizational success.

Several authors (Forsyth, 1993; Kotler and Anderson, 1987) explored eight essential stages of marketing planning: (a) developing strategic direction, goals, and objectives for the marketing process, (b) identifying opportunities to the organization, (c) identifying threats to the organization, (d) evaluating the organization's strengths and weaknesses, (e) developing a marketing strategy, (f) choosing the appropriate marketing mix, (g) communicating with customers, and (h) controlling the marketing process.

The strategic direction, goals and objectives for the marketing process, must be focused on the consumer; not the desire of the organization to produce and market a certain product or service (Forsyth, 1993; Templeton, 1996). The strategic direction of the marketing process should be based on consumer needs and the market segments that can be served by the organization (Forsyth, 1993). Goals and objectives must be clearly stated and prioritized (Fine, 1992). Forsyth (1993) stressed that objectives must also be “SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timed” (p. 37).

When assessing the strengths and weaknesses of an organization, planners should consider several issues: (a) the organizational and administrative ability to meet the needs of customers, (b) the leadership style of administrators, and the culture of the organization as it relates to customer service, (c) the focus on customer follow-up, and prompt resolution of customer grievances, and (d) the ability of the organization to identify new opportunities and develop strategies to meet them.

The identification of opportunities to an organization involves assessing the market potential of the organization, and its products or services. This includes a search of all market segments with a focus on those consumer needs currently not being met.

Identifying threats to an organization involves the assessment of all environments in which the organization operates. Common threats to organizations include loss of revenue, competition from other organizations, and lack of demand for certain products or services.

When completing the first four stages of the marketing planning process, organizations perform what is often called a “SWOT” analysis. The acronym “SWOT” stands for strengths, weaknesses,

opportunities, and internal and external threats. The results of the “SWOT” analysis will provide a clear picture of the marketing strategies that should be pursued.

Organizations must be creative when choosing marketing strategies. Employee involvement and the use of nominal group techniques are useful in developing multiple alternatives. A good marketing strategy will form a basis for the activities an organization should pursue. The following considerations should be given when selecting a specific marketing strategy: (a) definition of the organization’s market--the market or market segment with which the organization wishes to conduct business, (b) the organization’s marketing objectives, and (c) the strategic direction of the organization (Forsyth, 1993). Marketing strategies can be grouped into three categories: (a) undifferentiated marketing--pursuing the entire market in an attempt to attract as many consumers as possible; (b) differentiated marketing--pursuing several segments with an effective combination of marketing strategies for each segment; and (c) concentrated marketing--concentrating on a specific segment and catering to their specific needs and desires (Kotler & Andreason, 1987).

A marketing mix is a blend of marketing strategies used to achieve the organization’s marketing objectives. The marketing mix should cover the elements of product, price, place, and promotion.

Communicating with customers is regarded as the most visible ingredient in the marketing process. This step involves projecting a good image of an organization, and promoting products or services with a mixture of public relations and education campaigns, sales promotions, merchandising, and personal selling efforts (Forsyth, 1993). Carter (1994) defined public relations as “the cultivation of a favorable attitude toward a particular enterprise” (p. 20). Good public relations are not expensive,

but do require the investment of time and resources. Downing (1988) defined public education as an attempt to “train and develop the knowledge of those who are buying goods or services” (p.13). An important personal selling effort often overlooked is word-of-mouth (T. Parker, 1992). Chief A. V. Brunacini of the Phoenix Fire Department remarks “when good service is provided, customers will tell seven people; when bad service is provided, customers will tell twenty people” (customer service seminar, July 21, 1997).

Communication or promotional strategies should be geared toward the language of the consumer and should accomplish the following: (a) help the consumer understand a problem or need, for a particular product or service, (b) relate to the experiences of consumers, and (c) illustrate how the consumer will benefit from an exchange relationship or change in behavior (St. John, 1994). Baun (1992) wrote that promotional techniques must be (a) appealing to the target audience, (b) capable of generating interest in the media, (c) timed to address current and relevant issues in the community, and (d) original. Above all, St. John (1994) stressed that organizations will have a better response from customers if promotional techniques treat them as informed consumers. Forsyth (1993) further added that an organization must be creative and varied in developing promotional strategies.

Controlling the marketing process involves staying focused on the program goals, and reducing the variance between desired and actual outcomes. Fine (1993) noted that marketing programs are typically evaluated according to their effectiveness and efficiency. To measure effectiveness, Forsyth (1993) recommended assessing customer satisfaction by (a) being receptive to unsolicited responses from customers, (b) using telephone surveys, interviews, and questionnaires, and (c) using focus groups.

To evaluate efficiency, a marketing program should be assessed to determine if the intended results were delivered in a cost-effective manner. It was also noted that managers can assess the impact of a marketing plan, by observing the organization from the perspective of the customer in relation to service quality.

The work of Forsyth (1993) addressed the need to formalize the marketing plan by putting it in writing. A written marketing plan is needed to ensure that objectives and activities are clearly related, to channel the marketing efforts of all members of the organization in the same direction, and to facilitate the evaluation and improvement of all marketing activities during the planning period. Several authors (Kotler & Andreason, 1987; T. D. Parker, 1992) recommended the following format for a written marketing plan: (a) executive summary, (b) situational analysis, (c) goals and objectives, (d) marketing strategy, (e) action steps, (f) budgets, and (g) controls. Fine (1992) proposed that a thoroughly prepared marketing plan will enhance successful implementation.

Forsyth (1993) suggested that successful implementation of a marketing plan is dependent upon: (a) the goals and objectives of the plan, (b) the individuals who have the responsibility of managing the plan, (c) the condition of the environments in which the organization operates, (d) the period of time covered by the plan, and (e) the desired outcomes. Kotler and Andreason (1987) identified other controlling factors affecting implementation including: (a) the ability of the organization to provide the products or services as promoted, (b) commitment to the plan by management and employees, (c) the efficacy of the organization's planning systems, and (d) the ability of the organization to adapt the plan in response to market changes.

### **Barriers to marketing plan implementation.**

Much attention was focused in the fire service literature on the barriers fire chiefs often encounter when implementing marketing plans. Several authors (Coleman, 1990; St. John, 1994; Templeton, 1996) considered the resistance of firefighters to marketing efforts, as a significant barrier to the successful implementation of a fire department marketing plan. Firefighters typically regard fire department marketing efforts as unnecessary for the following reasons: (a) fire departments provide essential services that citizens want and need, (b) fire departments are single source providers in their localities, and (c) marketing efforts contradict long standing fire service traditions. Another related barrier to successful marketing plan implementation in the fire service, is poor firefighter attitude. Firefighters who are rude, discourteous, and unprofessional when interacting with the public can severely damage a fire department's image (Schumacher & Quinsey). Furthermore, firefighters who regard citizen visits to fire stations and public demonstrations or displays as an inconvenience, fail to take advantage of a good opportunity to market their fire department and impress the public (Brandewie, 1996). D. K. Thomas (personal interview, September 14, 1997) stressed the need to provide additional firefighter training on customer service, and even to include this training as a unit of instruction in recruit training. Finally, Kottler and Andreason (1987) suggested that fire administrators may avoid marketing programs, in fear of creating negative public perceptions or violating public law. To the average citizen, marketing governmental services may be viewed as unnecessary and wasteful. Dipoli (1995) cautioned that some states may have legal prohibitions against using municipal resources for marketing campaigns.

## **Fire Department Marketing Strategies**

The fire service literature revealed three major goal areas addressed by fire department marketing strategies: improve service, improve public image, and improve outcomes.

### **Improve service.**

Several authors stressed the importance of adopting a customer service philosophy to improve fire department services. Brunacini (1996) lists eight essentials of fire department customer service:

(a) our essential mission and number one priority is to deliver the best possible service to our customers; (b) always be nice--treat everyone with respect, kindness, patience, and consideration; (c) always attempt to execute a standard problem solving outcome: quick/effective/skillful/safe/caring/managed; (d) regard everyone as a customer; (e) consider how you and what you are doing looks to others; (f) don't disqualify the customer with your qualifications; (g) basic organizational behavior must become customer-centered; and (h) we must continually improve our customer service performance. (p. iv)

Templeton (1996) stressed that customer service must become a value of the organization, and firefighters must learn to focus on the needs of the community, not simply the tasks or services the fire department is capable of providing. The works of several authors (Forsyth, 1993; Templeton, 1996) further addressed the need for fire department managers to lead by example and instill the principles of good customer service in all of their employees. Forsyth (1993) wrote that the processes and systems of an organization must be geared toward meeting the needs of the customer promptly and continuously. It was also noted that an organization must fulfill customer expectations, or risk losing repeat customers.



Diezel and Anderson (1996) addressed the importance of gaining the understanding and support of firefighters when changing the focus of a fire department to a customer service organization.

Templeton (1996) noted that customer perception of service quality may be shaped by (a) the reliability of a product or service, (b) the responsiveness of the organization in meeting the customer's needs, (c) the competence of employees, (d) the degree of access to products and services (e) the courtesy exhibited by employees when interacting with customers, (f) the ability of the organization to communicate effectively with customers, (g) the credibility of the organization and its employees, (h) the protection of the customer from risk when consuming products or services, (I) the ability of the organization to understand the needs of the customer, and (j) the appearance of walk-in sites, equipment, and employees.

D. K. Thomas (personal interview, September 14, 1997) recommended several non-traditional ways a fire department could improve customer service. First, fire stations could be set up as satellite city halls where citizens could pay their taxes or purchase licenses and permits, thus avoiding the inconvenience of traveling to municipal offices in the downtown area of a city. Second, all fire stations could serve as tourist information centers, where visitors could find out about special events, attractions, and accommodations in the area. Third, company officers should be encouraged to attend the civic league meetings of neighborhoods in their response district, to listen to the problems and needs of citizens.

A related theme to service quality in the fire service literature was improving the welfare of victims who have suffered a tragedy due to a fire or other emergency. Onieal (1994) noted that

firefighters can improve their ability to help victims, simply by viewing a tragedy from the perspective of how they would want to be treated if they were faced with a similar situation. It was also stressed that fire officers should take the time to explain to victims the actions taken by firefighters at an emergency scene, and answer any questions the victims may have. The Austin, Texas Fire Department successfully implemented a “community services” sector as a component of their incident management system. The purpose of this sector is to provide information to victims and the surrounding community during an emergency, seek information from victims concerning the salvage requirements for high value property, escort victims through a fire damaged structure to find missing property, and assist victims in contacting insurance companies and support agencies following an incident (Brandewie, 1996). Onieal (1994) and Coleman (1997) suggested fire departments publish a pamphlet containing information on how to recover from a fire.

The importance of monitoring all fire department service improvement efforts with a feedback system was stressed in the literature. Coleman (1990) recommended a system that allows citizens to rate the quality of services they received from a fire department. Several authors (St. John, 1994; Templeton, 1996) recommended a citizen survey card that can be filled out and mailed to the fire department following an emergency call. Young (1985) recommended calling citizens after services have been delivered to determine their level of satisfaction or need for further assistance.

**Improve image.**

Buckman (1995) identified four methods of improving a fire department's image including advertising, publicity, promotion, and personal selling.

Effective fire service advertising helps citizens, politicians, and municipal leaders understand diverse fire department services and the support needed to continue these services (Leonard, 1993; Wilson & Sackmary, 1988). Fire service advertising also includes informing citizens how to contact the fire department when assistance is needed (Buckman, 1995). To enhance advertising and boost public image, Coleman (1997) recommended that fire departments adopt a slogan or logo that "implies speed, responsiveness, or capability" (p. 38).

A common technique of advertising identified in the fire service literature, was the development and distribution of printed materials. Many authors (Dipoli, 1995; Downing, 1988; St. John, 1994; Wilson & Sackmary, 1988) considered the circulation of a colorful brochure explaining the mission and history of a fire department, to be a useful fire service advertising tool. St. John (1994) and Wilson and Sackmary (1988) further recommended the distribution of refrigerator magnets and telephone stickers, imprinted with the fire department name and contact numbers, to citizens and business in the community. Several authors (Dipoli, 1995; Lavoie, 1995) proposed the circulation of a brief, yet informative annual fire department report that includes a comparison of fire department operating expenses to contractual services and insurance costs. St. John (1994) noted the success of fire department newsletters, and Broughtmire (1992) and Downing (1994) provided examples of informative newspaper columns written

by members of fire departments. Coleman (1990) promoted the use of business cards by all fire department employees, to leave citizens with a point of contact following service delivery.

Another advertising technique found in the fire service literature involved the use of audiovisual material to promote fire department services. M. H. Estep and N. L. Estep (1987) wrote about a successful firefighter recruitment campaign presented in the public school system in Prince George's County, Maryland. The campaign involved the use of multiple slide projectors and music to create an interesting, fast paced, illustration of fire department activities. Keohi (1994) gave examples of fire department newscasts and promotional videos underwritten by local businesses, or produced with the assistance of media professionals from cable television companies, colleges or universities. The newscasts were aired on local cable television channels as public service segments, and the videos were placed in local video stores to be provided at no charge to citizens.

Publicity is extremely cost effective, and has a much greater impact on the image of a fire department than advertising. Publicity attempts to bring favorable attention to a fire department through a carefully managed representation of a department's mission, responsibilities, and performance (Buckman, 1995). Fire department operations often attract a great deal of public attention. Unfortunately, until recently many fire departments did not capitalize on the opportunities presented by emergency operations for good publicity (Baun, 1992).

Much attention was focused in the fire service literature, on the importance of establishing a positive relationship with the media to cultivate good fire department publicity. Rubin (1994) cautioned that when a fire department does not cooperate with the media, reporters will actively seek out alternate

information sources (i.e., witnesses, victims, etc.) who may provide an inaccurate or biased representation of a particular incident or event. Hines (1995) noted that if good media relations are to be established, all fire department employees must first understand the role the media plays in shaping the public's perception and the obligation the fire department has to provide information to the community. Fire department employees must be trained to deal positively with the media, give reporters factual and truthful information, and perform interviews with confidence. Several authors (Baun, 1992; Leonard, 1993) stressed the importance of having a full-time or part-time public information officer (PIO) to coordinate all fire department media activities. Coleman (1997) recommended the use of regular press releases to inform the media of emergency incidents and special events, and to bring safety issues to the public's attention. Leonard (1993) recommended inviting reporters to attend training exercises, to help both the reporters and the public better understand fire department training and logistics needs. The Chesterfield, Virginia Fire Department organized a "media day," where reporters received firefighter skills training and allowed to fight actual fires at the department's training center (Rubin, 1994).

Another important aspect of publicity addressed in the fire service literature, concerned the need for fire departments to learn from the corporate world, and develop procedures to manage a response to internal crises. An internal crisis was defined by a former business leader as "a situation that can escalate in intensity, interfere with normal operations, damage an organization's reputation with the public, and/or invite scrutiny from the press or government investigators" (Bentivoglio, 1995, p. 76).

Buckman (1995) defined promotion as “marketing strategies, other than personal selling, that project your image” (p. 40). The works of several authors (Diezel & Anderson ,1996; Kadow, 1993) addressed the success of several school mentor and reading programs developed and implemented by firefighters in their communities. Coleman (1990) recommended many useful fire department promotional techniques such as (a) using mascots, such as Dalmatians and fire dragons, to promote the department’s message, (b) soliciting the donation of stuffed animals to be given to small children who are victims of fires or accidents, (c) holding regular open houses at fire stations and other department facilities, (d) encouraging fire personnel to participate in speakers bureaus, and (e) ensuring that the fire department’s name is imprinted on all information passed out to the public. Diezel and Anderson (1996) described several successful programs employed by the Virginia Beach, Virginia Fire Department including a Christmas train show at a fire station, and a “monster” fire truck for public demonstrations. Vadnais and Turnbull (1995) described the success of a civilian fire academy.

The use of personal selling techniques is simply word-of-mouth. Buckman (1995) classified personal selling as (a) targeted--personal selling efforts aimed at those who are interested, and (b) spontaneous--the unplanned selling efforts of personnel when interacting with citizens who have requested fire department services. Downing (1988) noted that effective, planned, personal selling can be enhanced by building relationships with community leaders to promote the message of a fire department.

**Improve outcomes.**

The outcomes fire departments typically attempt to improve are mortality rates due to fires, accidents, and medical emergencies, and property loss rates due to fires or natural disasters. The strategy most often used to improve these outcomes is public education.

Many fire departments provide fire safety education to children in public elementary schools. Wilson and Sackmary (1988) recommended that fire departments provide follow-up training through high school to reinforce the lessons learned in elementary school programs. Fire safety education has also been provided by fire departments in the form of public demonstrations, and the use of portable fire safety houses (Schumacher & Quinsey, 1990).

Another way fire departments facilitate public education is through the media. Local television stations will often broadcast fire safety presentations as public service announcements (Baun, 1992; Wilson & Sackmary, 1988). The works of several authors (Kottler & Andreason, 1987; T. Parker, 1992; Wilson & Sackmary, 1988) suggested that local television network affiliates and cable television companies, are often required to broadcast public service announcements in accordance with FCC licensure requirements, and franchise agreements. It was noted however, that public service announcements are often aired during “off peak” hours and may not effectively reach target audiences. The Austin Fire Department went one step further with the media and hosted a bimonthly television program to deliver fire safety messages to the community to reduce fire fatalities (Baun, 1992). Another example of sending fire safety messages through the media is the use of the “on-scene” interview to discuss how a given fire could have been prevented or how lives could have been saved (Downing,

1988). Other ways the media can help send fire safety messages include sponsoring a fire safety newspaper column written by a fire department member, and producing documentaries or investigative reports about specific fire safety problems (Wilson & Sackmary, 1988). The San Jose, California Fire Department improved community fire safety awareness following a major apartment fire, by holding a neighborhood meeting to explain how the fire started and the actions taken to extinguish the blaze. The program concluded with a tour of the burned out building to show citizens the damage potential of a fire (Laison, 1993).

The Austin Fire Department was successful in gaining the support of local movie theaters to show fire prevention messages and fire safety trivia on movie screens before and after feature presentations. These messages targeted specific audiences, and included fire safety tips relevant to each season of the year (St. John, 1994). Other examples of how fire departments can send fire safety messages include (a) fire safety tips recorded on fire department phone lines to be played when callers are placed on hold, and (b) a cooperative effort between the fire department and the local library to stock a bookcase with fire safety books or videos (St. John, 1994). Some fire departments have used billboards to send safety messages to motorists (Downing, 1988). A final example involved placing fire safety messages on fire department letterhead and vehicles, and on signs in front of fire stations (Coleman, 1990).

The fire service literature contained examples of other public education programs aimed at saving lives. The King County, Washington Fire Department implemented an aggressive community CPR training program and successfully improved local cardiac-arrest conversion rates (Leonard, 1993).



Wilson and Sackmary (1988) called for citizen education on the subject of when to call 911 for emergency medical services. Other examples of life safety programs include child safety seat inspections, playground safety inspections, and child accident prevention programs (Coleman, 1990; Diezel & Anderson, 1996). Brandewie (1996) noted a successful effort by fire departments to collect and install smoke detectors in low income neighborhoods.

D. K. Thomas (personal interview, September 14, 1997) suggested that firefighters canvas the community and distribute safety information specifically related to the seasons of the year. For example, hurricane preparedness information could be distributed in the spring, drowning prevention information in the summer, and heating equipment safety information in the fall and winter.

### **Literature Review Summary**

The literature review provided key insights into the concept of marketing and how it applies to the fire service. Also revealed were the elements of a marketing plan, and examples of marketing strategies that have been successfully employed by various municipal fire departments.

A notable outcome of the literature review was that no universal definition of marketing could be found. Marketing means different things to different people. Many authors did agree on the elements of marketing: product, price, place, and promotion. Several authors of fire service literature framed fire department services in the context of the four P's. Other notable outcomes included the many benefits of fire department marketing efforts, the potential barriers to the successful implementation of fire department marketing plans, and the creative marketing techniques used by progressive fire departments.

The findings of the authors summarized in the literature review influenced the decision to perform additional research at the local level. The purpose of the additional research was threefold: substantiate the findings of others, add to the body of knowledge on the subject matter, and strengthen the final recommendations of this research project.

### **Procedures**

This research project employed historical and descriptive research methodologies to examine the meaning of marketing, explore the benefits of fire department marketing, and identify the steps that should be taken by the NFPS to develop a comprehensive marketing plan. This research also assessed the relevance of the findings of others to the NFPS. The procedures used to complete this research included a literature review, a series of semi-structured personal interviews, and a survey of NFPS chief officers.

### **Literature Review**

The literature review was initiated at the National Fire Academy's Learning Resource Center during April and May 1997. Subsequent materials were supplied by the Learning Resource Center through the U. S. Postal Service and the Interlibrary Loan Program (ILL). An additional literature review was conducted between June and August 1997 at the Virginia Beach Fire Department Training Center Library in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and the Old Dominion University Library in Norfolk, Virginia.

The literature review targeted trade journals and magazines that contained articles on fire service marketing, and college textbooks on the subjects of marketing planning and marketing public sector and nonprofit organizations. Those sources applicable to the research questions posed in this project, were summarized and included in the literature review section of this report.

### **Interviews**

An interview was conducted with D. K. Thomas, 3rd District Vice President of the NPPF, on September 14, 1997 at NFPS Fire Station 15. The purpose of this interview was to gain background information on past public awareness campaigns of the NPPF, and solicit suggestions for marketing strategies for the NFPS. The interview involved four questions that focused on: the methods and results of past NPPF public awareness campaigns, the impact of these campaigns on community and city management support, suggested fire department marketing strategies, and potential barriers to marketing plan implementation in the NFPS. A copy of the interview questions can be found in Appendix A. The interview lasted approximately one hour. The results of the interview were summarized and included in both the Background and Significance section and the Literature Review section of this report.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five marketing professionals from the Tidewater area, who have experience in marketing either nonprofit or public sector organizations. These professionals included: D. Becker, a marketing manager for Virginia Beach General Hospital--interviewed September 24, 1997; T. Ceniccola, president of TGC Communications--interviewed September 22, 1997; R. Collier, president of Collier and Associates--interviewed September 15, 1997; M. Georges, freelance marketing consultant--interviewed on September 23, 1997; and L. Hall,

MBA, freelance marketing consultant--interviewed September 16, 1997. Each marketing professional was interviewed in his or her office. The purpose of these interviews was to substantiate the findings of the literature review, and obtain additional information and perspectives on marketing and how it can be applied to the NFPS. Each interview involved six questions that focused on (a) the meaning of marketing, (b) how fire department services can be framed in the context of the four P's, (c) the benefits of marketing, (d) the steps involved with developing and implementing a marketing plan, (e) the potential barriers to marketing plan implementation, and (f) suggested marketing strategies for fire departments. Two additional questions were presented to R. Collier, to obtain an estimate of the average costs of media advertising and suggestions for affordable alternatives. Copies of the interview questions can be found in Appendix A. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The results of the interviews were summarized and included in the Results section of this report.

### **Fire Department Marketing Survey**

An opinion survey was developed to assess the importance NFPS chief officers place on the findings of others, regarding the subject of fire department marketing. Chief officers were selected for the survey because they are the key leadership group for the department, and their understanding and support will be necessary before a marketing planning processes can be initiated.

A draft of the survey was first field tested by several captains who frequently act in the capacity of a battalion chief. Ambiguous terms and redundant items were identified and corrected, and the survey was prepared for delivery. The finished survey consisted of four questions. The first question

asked respondents to give their opinion of the need to market the services of the NFPS. Each subsequent question asked respondents to rank a series of five choices in the order of importance to the NFPS concerning marketing benefits, barriers to marketing plan implementation, and marketing strategies. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix B.

Surveys were sent through interdepartmental mail during October 1997, to all NFPS chief officers including the fire chief, the deputy chief, three assistant chiefs, and 13 battalion chiefs. The author was excluded from the survey. The return rate for the surveys was 100%.

Because the entire population of NFPS chief officers was surveyed (except the author), descriptive statistics as opposed to inferential statistics were used to analyze the responses. The raw data obtained from the survey were first arranged in a frequency distribution and examined for patterns of dispersion and central tendency (see Table C1). Although it was evident that several choices in each of Questions #2, #3, and #4 were rated either more “important/likely” or “less important/likely” than others, no clear pattern of central tendency for the other choices emerged from the frequency distribution. The next step in the analysis of the survey data, involved computing the arithmetic mean of the rankings given by all respondents for each choice in Questions #2, #3, and #4. The resulting scores were then used to rank the choices for each question to reflect the average response of the NFPS chief officers. Lower scores reflected more important/likely responses, while higher scores reflected less important/likely responses. The results were then summarized and included in the Results section of this report.

### **Assumptions**

The procedures used to complete this research project were based on four assumptions. First, it was assumed that all authors included in the literature review, performed objective and unbiased research in the preparation of their work. Second, it was assumed that all marketing professionals who were interviewed, answered the questions honestly and completely to the best of their knowledge. Third, it was assumed that each NFPS survey respondent exercised judgement and objectivity when making his or her selections. Fourth, it was assumed that respondents did not discuss the survey among themselves.

### **Limitations**

The limitations that affected this research project included time, the selection of marketing professionals for the semi-structured interview process, the unfamiliarity of marketing professionals with fire department services, and the size of the population included in the opinion survey.

The six-month time limit imposed by the National Fire Academy for the completion of Executive Fire Officer applied research projects, did not allow a more thorough review of available literature, particularly in the subject areas of marketing planning and marketing public sector and nonprofit organizations. Several potentially useful reference sources relating to public sector marketing were on reserve status at the Old Dominion University Library and unavailable until January 1998. The short time frame also prevented the author from employing an action research methodology where an actual marketing plan could be developed, implemented, and monitored for a sufficient time to allow an objective evaluation of the results.

The marketing professionals who participated in the semi-structured interview process were recommended to the author by personal contacts in both local government and nonprofit organizations. Each marketing professional chosen to participate in the interview process had either nonprofit or public sector marketing experience. Because the sample of respondents was small and the use of random sampling techniques was not employed, the results of the interview process cannot be considered with any degree of certainty, to be representative of the entire population of marketing professionals with similar backgrounds. Nevertheless, the respondents supplied useful, objective information that was essential to this research project.

Several marketing professionals were familiar with the services provided by fire departments, while others were not. To address this problem, those interview questions that referenced potentially unfamiliar aspects of the fire service, were furnished with examples to help the respondents better understand the information being sought. It is conceivable that this effort may have introduced interviewer bias into some responses.

Finally, the opinion survey addressed only a narrow segment of the entire NFPS population. After completion of the chief officer survey, it was decided that time and resources were insufficient for a much broader survey of the total NFPS population. The NFPS has 480 uniformed personnel, and it would have been necessary to randomly select a minimum sample of 214 to assure a 95% confidence level in such a survey (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). However, it was recognized and noted in the Recommendations section of this report, that data obtained from such a survey would be extremely useful in the marketing planning process.

## Results

### 1. What is marketing, and how does it apply to the fire service?

The marketing professionals who participated in the semi-structured interviews, provided varied definitions of marketing. T. Ceniccola (semi-structured interview, September 22, 1997) commented that marketing can mean many things, but is essentially “the promotion of services or products to targeted audiences for education, awareness and sales.” D. Becker (semi-structured interview, September 24, 1997) considered marketing “a process of promoting the goods and services of an organization to various audiences.” M. Georges (semi-structured interview, September 24, 1997) described marketing as “the utilization of advertising and publicity to further the goals and objectives of a business or institution.”

The marketing professionals also provided various insights into how marketing can apply to the fire service. T. Ceniccola (semi-structured interview, September 22, 1997) discussed the differences between “for-profit” and “not-for-profit” organizations, but stressed that despite the type of business an organization is in, marketing strategies and tactics are essentially the same. Although the fire service typically relies more heavily on public awareness and education, these activities still involve marketing.

There were similarities in the responses of the marketing professionals, when asked to frame fire department services in the context of the four P’s of marketing. First, price was referred to as the degree of financial support a fire department receives, and the efficiency in which it operates. Second, product was described as the ability of a fire department to take care of the community by providing quality services. Third, place was considered the fire department points of access such as fire stations



and the various programs delivered in the community. Place was also referred to as the response time of a fire department to emergencies, and the visibility of a department at community and special events. Fourth, promotion was considered the practice of constantly reinforcing a fire department's message through exhibits, seminars, and media events.

Question #1 of the fire department marketing survey asked chief officers if they believed that it is necessary for the NFPS to market its services to the community. All of the survey respondents answered "yes".

## **2. What are the benefits of fire department marketing programs?**

The marketing professionals who were interviewed, furnished similar examples of benefits of nonprofit and public sector marketing programs that could be realized by the fire service. These benefits included (a) increased public awareness of an organization's products or services, (b) increased community support of an organization, which equates to funding, (c) improved public image of an organization, (d) enhanced public education activities, (e) improved relationships with other organizations, and (f) improved employee morale.

Question #2 of the fire department marketing survey asked chief officers to rank the benefits of fire department marketing in the order of importance to the NFPS. As shown in Table C2, the average response of NFPS chief officers ranked fire department marketing benefits as follows: (a) most important--improved employee morale; (b) more important--improved public image; (c) important--increased community support; (d) less important--improved relationships with other municipal departments; and (e) least important--enhanced firefighter recruitment.

### **3. What are the elements of an effective marketing plan?**

In contrast to the works of the various authors summarized in the literature review, the semi-structured interviews revealed a more simplified approach to marketing planning. Similarities were noted between each marketing professional's description of the elements of an effective marketing plan including (a) identify the audience(s) to be targeted by the marketing program, (b) develop goals and objectives for the marketing process, (c) find out what the target audience wants from a product or service, (d) shape the key message to be delivered to the target audience, (e) describe how the message will be delivered, (f) decide when to deliver the message, (g) deliver the message, and (h) evaluate the results. R. Collier (semi-structured interview, September 15, 1997) further simplified this process by taking a common sense approach: decide who to talk to, decide what you will say, and decide when to say it. T. Ceniccola (semi-structured interview, September 22, 1997) added that when developing marketing plans, planners should size-up the competition to see what they are offering.

Similarities were also found in the examples given by those interviewed, of barriers to marketing plan implementation including (a) failure to provide sufficient resources, (b) insufficient support of management for marketing programs, or attempting to implement a plan without first involving the organization's constituency, (c) resistance of employees to marketing efforts, (d) competing organizational priorities, and (e) failure to develop methods for tracking compliance with marketing goals and objectives.

R. Collier (semi-structured interview, September 15, 1997) addressed a potential pitfall of fire department marketing programs. If a fire department becomes too successful in developing community

support and consistently receives a higher funding priority at the expense of other departments, it may result in the alienation of those departments and reduced intergovernmental cooperation. It was also suggested that city management may resist individual marketing efforts to keep all municipal departments on a level playing field, and ensure that one department does not “upstage” another in the eyes of the community.

Question #3 of the fire department marketing survey asked chief officers to rank the likelihood that specific barriers will hinder the implementation of a marketing plan in the NFPS. As shown in Table C3, the average response of NFPS chief officers ranked the barriers to marketing plan implementation as follows: (a) most important--lack of funding for marketing programs; (b) more important--failure of management to support marketing efforts; (c) important--resistance of firefighters to marketing efforts/poor firefighter attitudes; (d) less important--fear of creating negative publicity; and (e) least important--laws against public sector marketing campaigns.

#### **4. What strategies can be employed to market the services of a municipal fire department?**

The semi-structured interviews revealed three areas where marketing strategies can be applied to municipal fire departments: service improvement, service promotion, and public education.

The most important service improvement recommended by all marketing professionals, was the improvement of an organization’s ability to meet the needs of the customer. M. Georges (semi-structured interview, September 23, 1997) added that organizations should strive to improve personnel training programs to focus more closely on customer service, and service delivery.

A series of suggestions was provided by the marketing professionals for improving the promotion of fire department services including (a) developing a relationship with the media, (b) becoming more involved in community events, (c) sponsoring a speaker's bureau, (d) sponsoring open houses at fire stations, and (e) publishing a community newsletter. L. Hall (semi-structured interview, September 16, 1997) recommended the advertising of fire department services through direct mail pieces, and the establishment of web sites. R. Collier (semi-structured interview, September 15, 1997) recommended that fire departments become more involved with businesses in the community and get corporations to sponsor firefighting and public safety equipment. Furthermore, fire departments should focus more closely on how better to protect the records and inventory of a business when a fire occurs.

Every marketing professional who was interviewed, considered the timing of public education efforts to be extremely important. It was recommended that fire departments seize the opportunity to promote smoke detectors and fire safety in a community where a significant fire or fire fatality has occurred. D. Becker (semi-structured interview, September 24, 1997) stressed the need to shape public education campaigns around the seasons of the year. L. Hall (semi-structured interview, September 16, 1997) suggested that promotion strategies should focus on the human side of fire department services. T. Ceniccola (semi-structured interview, September 22, 1997) suggested providing CPR classes and first aid courses in the community, and developing partnerships with alarm companies to promote the installation of fire alarm systems in homes. R. Collier (semi-structured interview, September 15, 1997) stressed the need to reinforce public safety messages to children through high school, citing the success of recycling programs in public schools. M. Georges (semi-

structured interview, September 23, 1997) suggested sponsoring a fire safety month with community education programs and media promotions.

In addition to the questions asked of all marketing professionals, R. Collier (semi-structured interview, September 15, 1997) was asked about the costs associated with media advertising. It was estimated that local television and video advertisements can cost as much as \$40,000.00, while cable television promotions are less costly at \$10,000.00, but will reach a much smaller market. Radio advertisement campaigns were estimated at approximately \$18,000.00. Suggested low cost media alternatives for fire departments included having a business underwrite the costs of video or television productions, and seeking the assistance of the local cable television company to produce and broadcast a promotional program as a public safety service. It was noted that public service announcements (PSA's) are no longer mandated under FCC licensure requirements.

Question #4 of the fire department marketing survey asked chief officers to rank fire department marketing strategies in the order of importance to the current needs of the NFPS. As shown in Table C4, the average response of NFPS chief officers ranked the importance of marketing strategies as follows: (a) most important-- adopt a customer service philosophy; (b) more important-- promote fire department services through community programs; (c) important-- educate the public through community programs; (d) less important-- establish a positive relationship with the media; and (e) least important-- advertise department services.

## Discussion

The results of the semi-structured interview process clearly substantiate many findings of others in the literature review, particularly in the following areas: (a) the definition of marketing, (b) the relationship of fire department services to the four P's of marketing, (c) the benefits of fire department marketing programs, (d) the barriers to marketing plan implementation, and (e) the goals and strategies of fire department marketing programs. The marketing professionals who were interviewed provide a more succinct version of the marketing planning process than the works of authors such as Fine, Forsyth, and Luther. Although this shortened version lacks depth in marketing research and the "SWOT" analysis, it is a practical approach that may be more readily adapted to the fire service.

The results of the fire department marketing survey also substantiate the findings of others in many subject areas. However, a divergence of opinions appears to exist between NFPS chief officers and others on the importance of such issues as firefighter morale, funding for marketing activities, and relationships with the media. First, M. H. Estep and N. L. Estep (1987) suggest that improved firefighter morale is often a cyclical benefit resulting from a good public image, and may or may not be directly attributed to a fire department's marketing efforts. In addition, marketing professionals consider improved employee morale as a benefit of marketing, but much less important. In contrast, NFPS chief officers on average, rate improved employee morale as the most important benefit of fire department marketing. Second, the fire service literature stressed the use of creative, original, low cost strategies to market the services of a fire department, as opposed to the establishment of a formal marketing budget. Conversely, chief officers on average, rate the lack of funding as the most likely barrier to marketing

efforts in the NFPS. Marketing professionals concede however, that insufficient resources in the form of staff and funding, are a major barrier to implementing marketing plans in the private sector. Third, much attention was focused by authors and marketing professionals on media relations. Nevertheless, chief officers on average rate the establishment of a positive relationship with the media as a less important marketing strategy for the NFPS.

There are several plausible explanations for the disparity between the results of the fire department marketing survey and the findings of others on the subjects of firefighter morale, funding for marketing activities, and relationships with the media. First, during the past seven years, the NFPS has experienced tremendous organizational change. The consolidation of the fire department and the emergency medical service into a single agency, thrust many members of both departments into an environment fraught with conflict and new challenges, which has affected morale in the organization to varying degrees. Many NFPS chief officers may have recognized this, and considered the improvement of morale as a high priority. Second, like many other municipal fire departments, funding for new equipment and innovative programs is practically nonexistent. A marketing program may have been considered another competing demand for limited financial resources, thereby affecting the choices of many survey respondents. Third, given the history of negative publicity for the NFPS, chief officers may have viewed the media as a necessary evil and responded by ranking this choice lower on the scale of potential marketing strategies.

The results of this research project present several distinct implications for the NFPS. First, marketing can benefit the NFPS by improving public image, increasing community support, enhancing

public education activities, improving relationships with other organizations and municipal departments, and ultimately improving employee morale. Based on the results of the fire department marketing survey, marketing efforts initiated by the NFPS will likely receive the support of chief officers. Second, to ensure channeled marketing efforts, the NFPS will need to develop and implement a marketing plan. There are several barriers that may threaten the implementation of a marketing plan by the NFPS including: the resistance of firefighters and poor firefighter attitudes, insufficient management support, competing priorities, and insufficient resources. In addition, the NFPS may encounter opposition from other city departments and city management if an aggressive marketing campaign is launched. Third, the most significant implication of this research on the NFPS is that the department should strive to incorporate a customer service philosophy into the values of the organization.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the supporting information in the literature review, and the results of the structured interview process and fire department marketing survey, the following recommendations are made to guide the Norfolk Department of Fire and Paramedical Services in the development and implementation of a comprehensive marketing plan:

1. The chief officers of the NFPS must work to change the organizational climate of the department, so that personnel are more readily encouraged to take ownership in the department and actively participate in marketing activities. The department's organizational culture must be shaped from one that reflects the technical side of emergency services, to one that focuses more closely on the human



side of service delivery. To survive in the future, the traditional fire department model followed by the department for many years must be transformed to a model that focuses greater attention on the needs of the community. In addition, the administrative and operational processes must be examined and improved as necessary to promote the delivery of prompt, reliable, customer service, and the resolution of customer grievances. Implementing this recommendation will not be easy, as firefighters are highly resistant to change. Firefighters must receive training throughout their careers on customer service, to better understand the importance and benefits of such a change in organizational philosophy. More important, chief officers and company officers must lead by example and continually reinforce the essentials of good customer service.

2. Before a marketing planning process can be initiated, NFPS chief officers must first develop a strategic plan for the department. The department's mission statement should be shaped to reflect not only the role of the department in Norfolk's public safety, but the focus of the department on customer service as well. The strategic planning process must involve an analysis of past and current events, and a forecast of future trends. From this analysis, a series of short range and long range organizational goals and strategies can be developed to guide the department into the future. Furthermore, management controls must be applied to the strategic planning process to evaluate the progress of the department in meeting organizational goals, and adjust the planning process as needed. A good strategic plan will give direction to the marketing planning process.

3. The fire chief should assign the responsibility of coordinating all marketing activities of the NFPS to one individual in the department. This could involve the creation of a new position, or the

assignment could be given to an existing staff officer or the public information officer. The title of this assignment should be “community relations officer,” reflecting the varied responsibilities this individual will have in interacting with citizens, the media, and others outside the department.

4. The fire chief should select interested NFPS members from all ranks in the department to serve on a marketing committee. Committee membership should also include representation from all employee organizations such as the Employee Relations Committee, the Norfolk Professional Firefighters, the International Association of Black Firefighters, and the NFPS Officers Association. Committee participation encourages personnel to “buy-in” to the process, and promotes the generation of original and creative marketing strategies. The committee must be given direction by the fire chief, and furnished with the parameters within which the committee must operate.

5. After the committee has been established, assignments should be made to initiate market research to identify target markets and their needs. Quantitative information can be found in the department’s incident reporting system data base and the city’s Geographic Information System (GIS), and through the city’s planning department. Qualitative information can be obtained by using citizen satisfaction surveys, fire department personnel opinion surveys, and simply by talking to civic leagues, community groups, and business organizations. Another useful way to solicit qualitative information is by using focus groups. The results of market research should be segmented according to demographics, geographical location, and frequency of service delivery by type and location.

6. Upon completion of the initial market research, the committee should perform a “SWOT” analysis to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the department. Based on the

results of the “SWOT” analysis, the committee should brainstorm ideas about what marketing strategies the department should pursue. The committee should seek useful suggestions from other fire departments with successful marketing programs, and reference the fire department marketing strategies outlined in the Literature Review section of this report. Strategies should be selected on the basis of their ability to improve service, improve public image, and improve outcomes.

7. After marketing strategies have been selected, a formal written marketing plan should be published and distributed throughout the department. The plan should include goals and objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable, and timed.

8. Before the plan is implemented, all personnel must be informed of the goals of the marketing plan. This information can be relayed through meetings or training sessions. Also, if the marketing plan involves the promotion of any new or improved services, personnel must be trained and services must be in place before promotion campaigns are initiated.

9. To ensure complete implementation, the marketing plan must have the full support of all NFPS chief officers and company officers. Furthermore, NFPS personnel should be empowered to take action when opportunities for good publicity arise, provided such action does not violate city and department policies, state and local laws, or ethical standards. Marketing the services of the NFPS should be considered everyone’s business.

10. Once carried out, the marketing plan must be evaluated at regular intervals and adjusted as needed. This can be accomplished using many of the same techniques used in the initial market research such as citizen surveys and focus groups. Improvements in outcomes can also be assessed by

examining incident reporting data. However, it may be difficult to establish a relationship between a marketing strategy and a change in a particular problem area.

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# **Appendix A**

**NATIONAL FIRE ACADEMY  
EXECUTIVE FIRE OFFICER PROGRAM  
APPLIED RESEARCH PROJECT**

**COURSE: Executive Development**

**SUBJECT: Fire Department Marketing**

**Interview Questions --Marketing Professional**

**The purpose of this interview is to obtain opinions and perspectives on the subject of fire department marketing, from professionals who have experience in marketing nonprofit or public sector agencies. The results of this interview will be included in an applied research project for the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. Please answer the following questions:**

1. In your own words, what is marketing?
2. Municipal fire departments provide many services including fire protection, emergency medical care, fire prevention, technical rescue, hazardous materials response, loss prevention, disaster preparedness, and public education. How can these services be framed in the context of the four p's of marketing?
3. How do nonprofit or public sector organizations benefit from marketing? Can similar benefits be realized by a municipal fire department marketing program?
4. What steps should a fire department take in developing a marketing plan?
5. What are the potential barriers to the successful implementation of a marketing plan?
6. Many municipal fire departments have employed marketing strategies with the goals of improving fire department service, improving public image, and improving fire department outcomes. These strategies have involved using such techniques as establishing relationships with the media, holding open houses at fire stations, and using mascots to send fire safety messages. What other marketing strategies or techniques should a municipal fire department consider using?

**NATIONAL FIRE ACADEMY  
EXECUTIVE FIRE OFFICER PROGRAM  
APPLIED RESEARCH PROJECT**

**COURSE: Executive Development**

**SUBJECT MATTER: FIRE/EMS Marketing**

**Interview Questions  
for  
D. K. Thomas, Norfolk Professional Firefighters, IAFF Local 68**

**The purpose of this interview is to obtain background information on the need for a comprehensive marketing plan in the Norfolk Department of Fire and Paramedical Services. This information will be included in an applied research project for the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. Please answer the following questions:**

1. Several years ago, the Norfolk Professional Firefighters launched a campaign to market the needs of firefighters to various civic leagues in the city. Please describe this campaign including goals, target audience, method of development, and method of delivery.
2. What impact do you feel this campaign had on increasing support for the NFPS both in the community and at the budget table?
3. Many municipal fire and emergency medical departments have successfully employed various strategies to market their services. What strategies would you recommend that the NFPS pursue to better market its services?
4. What barriers do you feel could potentially threaten the implementation of a comprehensive marketing plan by the NFPS?

**NATIONAL FIRE ACADEMY  
EXECUTIVE FIRE OFFICER PROGRAM  
APPLIED RESEARCH PROJECT**

**COURSE: Executive Development**

**SUBJECT MATTER: FIRE/EMS Marketing**

**Interview Questions --Media Specialist**

**The purpose of this interview is to obtain opinions and perspectives on the subject of fire department marketing, from professionals who have experience in marketing nonprofit or public sector agencies. The results of this interview will be included in an applied research project for the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. Please answer the following questions:**

1. In your own words, what is marketing?
2. Municipal fire departments provide many services including fire protection, emergency medical care, fire prevention, technical rescue, hazardous materials response, loss prevention, disaster preparedness, and public education. How can these services be framed in the context of the four p's of marketing?
3. How do nonprofit or public sector organizations benefit from marketing? Can similar benefits be realized by a municipal fire department marketing program?
4. What steps should a fire department take in developing a marketing plan?
5. What are the potential barriers to the successful implementation of a marketing plan?
6. Many municipal fire departments have employed marketing strategies with the goals of improving fire department service, improving public image, and improving fire department outcomes. These strategies have involved using such techniques as establishing relationships with the media, holding open houses at fire stations, and using mascots to send fire safety messages. What other marketing strategies or techniques should a municipal fire department consider using?
7. Using media (T.V., radio, newspaper) as a marketing tool can be expensive. What estimates could you provide of the average costs for advertisements placed via the following media: (a) TV/videos, (b) cable TV, (c) radio, (d) newspaper ?
8. What are some low cost media alternatives for a municipal fire department to pursue when marketing its services?

# **Appendix B**

## FIRE DEPARTMENT MARKETING SURVEY

The purpose of this survey is to assess the importance NFPS chief officers place on research findings regarding the subject of fire department marketing. The results of this survey will be included in an applied research project for the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. Your response to this survey will be anonymous. Please answer the following questions:

**Directions:** Answer question #1 by checking either yes or no. Answer questions #2--#4 by ranking the choices listed for each question numerically in the order of importance as they relate to the NFPS. A ranking of "1" will be most important and a ranking of "5" will be least important.

1. Do you believe that it is necessary for the NFPS to market its services to the community?  
       \_\_\_\_\_ Yes       \_\_\_\_\_ No
  
2. Please rank the following benefits of fire department marketing in the order of importance to the NFPS:  
       \_\_\_\_\_ Improved relationships with other municipal departments.  
       \_\_\_\_\_ Enhanced firefighter recruitment.  
       \_\_\_\_\_ Improved public image.  
       \_\_\_\_\_ Improved employee morale.  
       \_\_\_\_\_ Increased community support.
  
3. Please rank the likelihood that the following barriers will hinder the implementation of a marketing plan in the NFPS:  
       \_\_\_\_\_ Lack of funding for marketing programs.  
       \_\_\_\_\_ Fear of creating negative public perceptions that marketing efforts are wasteful.  
       \_\_\_\_\_ Resistance of firefighters to marketing efforts/poor firefighter attitudes.  
       \_\_\_\_\_ Failure of management to support marketing efforts.  
       \_\_\_\_\_ Laws against public sector marketing campaigns.
  
4. Please rank the following strategies in the order of importance to the current needs of the NFPS:  
       \_\_\_\_\_ Promote fire department services through community programs (i.e., open houses in fire stations, "trauma teddy" program, speakers bureau, school mentor and reading programs, etc.).  
       \_\_\_\_\_ Establish a positive relationship with the media.  
       \_\_\_\_\_ Educate the public through community programs (i.e., fire/accident prevention, mascots, portable fire safety houses, CPR classes, etc.).  
       \_\_\_\_\_ Adopt a customer service philosophy.  
       \_\_\_\_\_ Advertise department services (i.e., refrigerator magnets, brochures, published annual reports, 911 stickers for phone, etc.).

# **Appendix C**



Table C1

**Frequency Distribution--Fire Department Marketing Survey**

Survey Questions	Frequency of Responses by Rank				
	1 (Y)	2 (N)	3	4	5
Do you believe NFPS should market?	18	0			
<u>Marketing benefits</u>					
Improved relationships with other dept.'s	1	1	0	9	7
Enhanced firefighter recruitment	1	2	1	5	9
Improved public image	4	6	5	3	0
Improved employee morale	9		8	1	0
Increased community support	3	9	4	0	2
<u>Marketing barriers</u>					
Lack of funding	10	5	1	2	0
Fear of negative public perceptions	1	5	4	3	5
Resistance/attitudes of firefighters	3	3	7	1	4
Failure of management support	4	5	5	3	1

Laws against public marketing	0	0	3	8	7
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Marketing strategies

Promote fire department services	4	4	4	5	1
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Establish relations with media	3	5	3	3	4
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Educate public with community programs	1	7	7	3	0
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Adopt customer service philosophy	9	1	2	3	3
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Advertise department services	1	0	2	4	11
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Note. Ranking scale--“1” is most important/likely and “5” is least important/likely. N=18.

Table C2

**Importance of Marketing Benefits to the NFPS**

Benefit Choices	Mean Score
1. Improved employee morale.	2.06
2. Improved public image.	2.39
3. Increased community support.	3.33
4. Improved relationships with other municipal departments.	4.11
5. Enhanced firefighter recruitment.	4.94

**Table C3****Likelihood of Barriers to Marketing Plan Implementation in the NFPS**

Barrier Choices	Mean Score
1. Lack of funding for marketing programs.	1.72
2. Failure of management to support marketing efforts.	2.56
3. Resistance of firefighters to marketing efforts/poor firefighter attitude.	3.00
4. Fear of negative perceptions that marketing efforts are wasteful.	3.50
5. Laws against public sector marketing campaigns.	4.22

**Table C4****Importance of Marketing Strategies to the NFPS**

Marketing Strategy Choices	Mean Score
1. Adopt a customer service philosophy.	2.44
2. Promote fire department services through community programs.	2.56
3. Educate the public through community programs.	2.67
4. Establish a positive relationship with the media.	3.00
5. Advertise department services.	4.33