



Develop your marketing plan for

Active Aging Week 2007

Choose an active life
Monday, September 24 to Monday,
October 1

Active Aging Week is an annual event held the last week of September (culminating on October 1, International Day of Older Persons) with the goal of giving as many older adults as possible the means to experience activities and exercise in a safe, friendly and fun atmosphere. During the week, host organizations provide a variety of free activities, such as classes, educational seminars, access to fitness facilities, health fairs and community walks. Free support materials are available at www.icaa.cc/activeagingweek/campaignsupportnew.htm.

Create a marketing plan to outline how you will meet the goal of encouraging people to choose a more active life during Active Aging Week, and beyond

by Patricia Ryan, MS

Why would an older person want to attend an Active Aging Week event? And why your event? Now that you've started planning activities for the week, it's time to sit back and think about how you will let people know about them.

Since the goal of any special event that promotes a healthy lifestyle—walk, class or presentation—is to encourage people to try the activity, your marketing plan is

an important step. If people do not attend, they can't try the activity!

The marketing plan outlines the methods you will use for telling people about your Active Aging Week activities, and why these activities are important to them. The time you spend in thinking through and writing down the plan is time well invested for several reasons.

First, you can use the marketing plan to solidify who you will invite to participate, and the messages you will send to reach those groups. That's important because everyone connected with the event—planning committee, volunteers, staff, presenters—needs to know who those people will be and how to phrase the messages to recruit them. Consistent



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messages not only aid recruitment, they also give presenters a “hook” to guide their programs.

Second, you can focus on the marketing methods that will bring you the most participation. Are those press releases, announcements in classes, newsletters, online schedules, posters? You may choose to prepare many types of media, but focus on the few likely to attract the most people. That’s a wise use of both your budget and your volunteer and staff effort.

Third, you can copy and paste elements of the plan into materials about Active Aging Week events you distribute to colleagues. That way, you don’t have to prepare extra materials for staff meetings or memos.

Fourth, you can use the plan to track results. You probably will ask for feedback by requesting a show of hands after a presentation, or distributing a very short “How did you like it?” survey. After the week is over, participants may well offer feedback when they see you in the hallway or by sending an email. Ask people how they heard about the event and keep track of their answers.

Elements of a marketing plan

Have you heard the advice to keep it simple? That’s good advice to follow when writing your marketing plan. The term “social marketing” means borrowing the techniques used by traditional for-profit companies and applying them to promote socially important causes, such as increasing physical activity or

eating more healthfully.¹ While a plan can be very complex, it can also be effective with just the basics. These include:

- purpose
- target audience
- messages
- internal marketing methods
- external marketing methods
- budget

Purpose

What do you want to achieve at the Active Aging Week event? You can also state the purpose as your goals and objectives, which is a format senior managers understand. However, you may find that a single purpose is easier to communicate to your team.

For example:

- The purpose of our Active Aging Week event(s) is to introduce the benefits of physical activity to our clients/residents who do not usually exercise.
- The purpose of our Active Aging Week event(s) is to attract people to our wellness center and explain how we can help them age successfully.
- Active Aging Week goal: to increase participation in wellness center programs.

Objectives:

- Current participants try at least one new activity.
- Center attracts 25 new visitors who have never participated in the wellness activity before.

Target audience

Who is it that you want to invite? Those people are your target audience, or target market. The overriding goals of Active Aging Week are to encourage older adults who have never participated in

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wellness activities to try one, and to inspire people who do participate to maintain or increase their levels of activity.

The target audience may include:

- all current participants in classes and wellness programs, such as field trips
- people in assisted living who do not usually visit the wellness center
- people over age 50 who live or work within five miles of your location
- people with a specific health concern, such as diabetes management or obesity
- people enrolled in a health plan that subsidizes physical activity programs, who work or live within five miles of your location
- Senior Olympics athletes
- families and friends of the “regulars”
- residents of a community who have never tried the wellness program
- people who visit your location, but have not tried the wellness program (e.g., those who eat their meals at the seniors center, or visit a health club but haven’t tried the gentle yoga classes)

You can expand this list depending on your goals. Last year, Active Aging Week host sites offered activities that appealed to many functional levels. For example, one location offered a shorter, barrier-free walk that allowed people and their families to walk or push wheelchairs and strollers, along with longer, more challenging walks for those who were more mobile.

Messages

What is the benefit of participating in Active Aging Week? How will it help the participant? The messages you send about the upcoming activities, both verbal and visual, are keys to increasing attendance.

The message or messages you use must appeal to your target audience to be

effective. For example, for current participants, you may want to send messages about having fun, trying something new, and bringing a friend for free. To attract people who have not tried your program, you may want to send messages about having fun, feeling better, meeting new people and maintaining their lifestyle.

This year, Active Aging Week has a theme: Choose an active life. This theme can serve as an umbrella over messages targeted to your particular population. Keep in mind that negative messages warning about danger do not work as well as positive messages that state what people can do.² Start with the Active Aging Week theme, and the two messages that hallmark this event:

- Try an activity free of charge.
- Yes, you can be more active.

Additional issues to address are found in a review of physical activity promotional materials posted on the University of South Carolina’s Arnold School of Public Health website.³ These include that a person can:

- have fun and enjoy themselves during physical activity
- start slow and easy, and progress from there
- try a variety of different activities
- be more active

Once again, keep it simple. Make sure your message is clear, you note only a few key points, and your target market can immediately grasp what you are saying.

Internal marketing methods

Internal marketing is directed at the people already in your sphere. For example, the residents in a retirement community or apartment complex, the visitors to a seniors or community center, or the participants in the active older adults program at a health club.

The allies you gathered during the planning stages are a great source of internal marketing. Who in your organization can encourage people to attend? Think about the dining staff, activities and fitness directors, nursing staff, chaplain, social workers, physical and occupational therapists, and aides. Consider the power of word of mouth, where past participants tell others about the week. Testimonials and articles or presentations by older adults themselves could be very effective.

You could send your messages through:

- posters
- flyers
- written announcements on bulletin boards, internal websites, television stations
- verbal announcements during all classes and activities
- word of mouth, when clients and residents tell one another about the upcoming activities
- staff recommendations to participate
- incentive promotions, such as handing out coupons to be redeemed at the event
- cross promotion, such as placing tent cards announcing the week’s events on dining tables and posting flyers in all common rooms, not just the wellness center or activity room
- presentations at the team meetings of other departments

External marketing methods

Outside your internal audience, who should know about the event? External marketing tells people who may not know your organization about the activities. When you think about external marketing, think about your target audience from a different perspective. Who can get the word out to the older adults you want to attract? Depending on the

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Active Aging Week marketing matrix

Purpose: _____

Target audience	Message(s)	Internal methods	External audiences	External methods
<i>Example:</i> People with a specific health concern, such as diabetes management or obesity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have fun ✓ Feel better ✓ Safe ✓ Simple, not hard ✓ Free 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Staff referrals ✓ Written announcements ✓ Current participants invite individuals with condition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Physicians, dentists and therapists ✓ Outreach coordinators at community clinics and hospitals ✓ Social workers ✓ Health plan managers ✓ Health reporters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Letters to local physicians and other medical providers, reporters ✓ Presentations ✓ Flyers ✓ Articles in newspapers ✓ Calendar listings
<i>Example:</i> All current participants in classes and wellness programs, such as field trips.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have fun ✓ Try something new ✓ Bring a friend for free 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Posters ✓ Flyers ✓ Written and verbal announcements ✓ Word of mouth ✓ Incentive coupons ✓ Cross promotion 		

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external audiences you want to reach, you might want to contact:

- newspaper and city magazine reporters and calendar editors (often different people)
- television station health reporters
- local cable television stations that feature local activities
- outreach coordinators at community clinics and hospitals who can refer people
- social workers
- health plan managers
- local corporations that outsource their fitness programs
- physicians, dentists, and physical or occupational therapists with nearby offices (could one of the medical staff provide a presentation?)

You can alert them through:

- press releases
- personalized invitations (for example, letters to local physicians or newspaper reporters)
- announcements or flyers at locations your intended audience is likely to visit, such as churches, community centers, age-restricted apartment or condo complexes, health clubs, Ys and JCCs
- presentations to public service clubs, such as Kiwanis, or meetings of local healthcare providers, such as physicians or social workers, who often have regular chapter meetings
- letters to the families of your regular clients
- word of mouth, when people who know about the event invite friends and neighbors
- flyers or posters at nearby retail outlets, such as grocery or shoe stores
- paid advertising
- public service announcements, if your organization is not-for-profit
- articles in newspapers, which are read by an older audience (don't forget the small community newspapers)

Before you send information to external audiences, it pays to telephone or visit a website to ensure you are sending your materials to the right person. A form letter sent to a business will likely not get you coverage. You need the name, email and telephone number of the right person.

For media outlets, websites will likely have instructions on sending in press releases, or you can telephone. The telephone is a great tool, because you can find out not only the name of the right person, but also the best way to submit your information (e.g., mail, email, preview copy before sending an entire package).

External audiences also need the right message. Be sure to state:⁴

- how Active Aging Week will benefit their customers
- why the event is timely (especially for press) and relevant to their readers or listeners
- what you want them to do (e.g., post or distribute flyers, list in calendar section)

Keep your information short and to the point.

Budget

Many of the above marketing strategies will help you generate publicity, which means they are essentially free. However, you will have costs associated with printing items such as flyers, posters and tent cards; postage; and paper and envelopes.

By focusing your efforts on the few methods that will most effectively market your events, you can be accurate in printing needs. Once again, the telephone is a help. By talking to your allies and finding out which materials your external audience will use (e.g., flyers, 4" x 6" cards), you will have a better sense of the quantities you need.

Measure the plan's success

When Active Aging Week is over, pull out your marketing plan and note how many participants came from each source. Sit down with the planning committee and brainstorm ways to improve. Which marketing methods worked most effectively? How could you increase the use of the best performers next year? Which messages missed the mark, and which were right on target?

A marketing plan is well worth the time you invest in writing it. This document outlines how you will meet the goal of encouraging people to choose a more active life during Active Aging Week, and beyond. It also allows you to build on what you learn and refine your efforts for future years, so you can improve your marketing effectiveness and event participation. ☺

Patricia Ryan, MS, is the International Council on Active Aging's vice president of education. Ryan has a certificate in marketing from the University of California, San Diego, and has developed marketing and communications plans for nonprofit and for-profit organizations.

References

1. Community Tool Box. Implement a Social Marketing Effort. Retrieved on May 29, 2007, from <http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/implementsocialmarketing/index.jsp>.
2. Yardley, L., Donovan-Hall, M., Francis, K., & Todd, C. (2007). Attitudes and Beliefs That Predict Older People's Intention to Undertake Strength and Balance Training. *Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 62(2), P119–P125.
3. University of South Carolina Arnold School of Public Health. Directory of Reviewed Physical Activity Promotion Materials. Retrieved on May 29, 2007, from <http://prevention.sph.sc.edu/directory/index.htm>.
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Get Ready for Active Aging Week



ICAA and nine chapters of the Arthritis Foundation are partnering to offer arthritis training to ICAA members in the second and third weekends of September.

You can attend an instructor training that will enable you to offer one of the official Arthritis Foundation classes in your local communities and at your host site. ICAA encourages you to participate in the arthritis instructor training workshops in the following locations. A special rate applies for ICAA members:



Participating locations

Atlanta, GA	Randolph Center, VT
Dallas, TX	Richmond, VA
Detroit, MI	Seattle, WA
Medford, OR	Virginia Beach, VA
Phoenix, AZ	Washington, DC
Pittsburgh, PA	

To learn more call **866.335.9777** or visit www.icaa.cc/Activeagingweek/arthritisprogram.htm