

Chapter 7

Marketing Plan

INTRODUCTION

The marketing mix includes a combination of product/service, price, and promotion. All of these factors are important components of the overall goals of a marketing program, which are:

1. Attract new and retain existing riders.
2. Increase community awareness and support for FAST.
3. Improve the perception of FAST within the community.
4. Build strategic partnerships.

FAST has been improving service over the past year in a number ways (the “product”), including buying new equipment, upgrading the transfer center, installing additional shelters, refining routes to run on-time, improving safety, training, and employee morale, printing a schedule book, and investing in new technologies.

The recommendations included in this TDP further improve the product by extending the hours and days of service, improving the frequency of service, serving additional areas of the City, and improving bus stop accessibility and passenger comfort.

A fare increase in 2007 initiated the City’s focus on improving services, as riders publicly expressed concerns about the quality of services at a public hearing held to discuss the fare increase. While the base fare was raised at that time, it should be noted

that 75% of the riders who completed a passenger survey for the 2007 MPR were either “satisfied,” or “very satisfied” with the price.

PROMOTION

Promotion includes publicity, advertising, public relations, special events, printed and web-based informational materials, and schedules. The focus of this marketing plan is to develop strategies to further promote FAST services within the community using the general marketing goals as a framework.

Goal 1: Attract New and Retain Existing Riders

Strategy: Consistently Promote Fixed-Route Transit Services to Core Market

- Use all available public service announcement opportunities to deliver advertising messages via local radio, cable TV, web sites, blogs, movie theaters, direct mail (via something like Val-Pak), and print media. Use strategic paid opportunities using these same venues.
- Improve the web-site to provide comprehensive, easy-to-read, up-to-date information. Consider more dynamic improvements such as paying for fare media via the website, communicating with management via the website, and introducing a more sophisticated trip planner.

Strategy: Promote New and Expanded Services to Existing and Potential Riders

- Offer fare-free services for the first week of any new service (including evening services).
- Advertise the new services by creating flyers to post at key new destinations that scheduled to be served.

Strategy: Attract New Riders with Updated Informational Materials

- Implement a marketing campaign targeting new riders- this campaign could be tied to the service improvements recommended within this TDP.
- Design and publish an easy to read system map that portrays all of the routes on one map and includes major street names and landmarks.

- Improve the website by upgrading the graphics to be consistent with the new branding. Ensure that an easy to read system map, and individual route maps and schedules are available on the site.

Strategy: Target Niche Markets with Specialized Campaigns

- Target high school and college students with on-campus events, direct mail, student publications and web-based media.
- Market to and through employers to attract the commuter market.
- Reach senior market through outreach to senior centers and organizations.

Strategy: Improve Customer Communications through Bus Stop Improvements

- Install new signs that include the system's phone number, website, and route, at a minimum.

Strategy: Promote a Customer Service Culture Among Employees

- Include a series of customer service training topics in the periodic staff trainings and meetings.

Strategy: Promote the Affordability of Transit

- Acknowledge the current economic climate and get out a message conveying the affordability of public transportation as compared to owning a car.

Goal 2: Increase Community Awareness and Support for FAST

Strategy: Expand Community Outreach Efforts

- Consider a quarterly newsletter to maintain positive communications with residents and businesses.
- Consider a transit blog.
- Consider a monthly or quarterly "letter from the director," to inform community leaders and decision makers about accomplishments and events.

- Consider the development of an informational video about FAST to be distributed via the web and on DVDs.
- Continue the ongoing dialogue with Fort Bragg and the Cross Creek Mall.
- Engage the local community when considering route changes (i.e., visit the residents of the affected neighborhoods and explain the changes prior to implementation).

Goal 3: Improve the Perception of FAST within the Community

Strategy: Generate Positive Media Coverage

- Generate a minimum of one positive local news story published per month. The arrival of new vehicles and the implementation of new services are perfect opportunities to send out press releases.
- Hold semiannual reporter briefings that serve to educate the local press about how FAST operates and focuses on positive developments.

Strategy: Implement Public Relations Communication Plan

- Deliver key messages to target groups including key stakeholders and the general public.
- Participate in community events with a goal of at least one event per quarter.
- Seek opportunities to do FAST presentations for local service and business organizations.

Strategy: Ensure the Fleet and Facilities are Clean, Comfortable, and Well Maintained

Strategy: Showcase the Environmental Benefits of Transit

- Highlight the benefits of the hybrid electric buses when they arrive.
- Consider free-ride programs on ozone alert days.

Goal 4: Build Strategic Partnerships

Strategy: Develop Prepaid Fare Media Program with Key Major Employers and Educational Facilities in the City

- Partner with schools and colleges to promote student pass sales.
- Partner with large employers to promote bus pass sales.

Strategy: Investigate New Fare Media Options for Future Implementation

- Partner with colleges and universities to develop fee-based program for students.
- Evaluate the development of a “smart card” program.

Strategy: Collaborate/partner with Community and Charity Events

- Offer interior advertising space on the vehicles for community and charity events in exchange for advertising in event programs.
- Work with event planners to promote transit services for event participants, if possible.
- Consider working with major local charity campaigns by using a FAST vehicle as a collection mechanism (i.e., toys for tots, food drives, clothing drives, etc.).

Strategy: Collaborate/partner With Local Businesses

- Develop a program whereby local businesses could advertise on the vehicles in exchange for the riders receiving a discount (by showing a valid transit pass).

FINANCING MARKETING IMPROVEMENTS

The TDP recommended improvements included a \$25,000 line item to improve marketing, starting with the design and publication of a system map. These funds are in addition to the existing marketing funds that are spread out among several line items in the 2010 transit budget, including printing- (\$13,500) and advertising (\$2,500).

Combined, these funds total \$41,000. It should be noted that several of the marketing strategies are low-cost, are funded through other mechanisms (bus stop signage improvements, technology improvements), or involve partnerships/exchanges with community groups. Another portion of FAST's annual operating budget is an indirect allocation to the City for all of the tasks that general City employees do on behalf of FAST (finance, human resources, etc.). The FAST website is one area that should be considered for inclusion under the indirect cost umbrella.