CHOOSING THE MESSAGE

The **AIDA** formula is an excellent model to follow:

- **Attention** – include colourful text and dramatic graphics
- **Interest** – link to needs; offer a possible solution or a possible reward
- **Desire** – activate a positive thought: 'What is in it for me?'
- **Action** – clear directions: 'Mark your calendar'.

1. **Message content**

How do you appeal to the prospective delegate? Consider the type of appeal that would be relative for this conference:

- **rational appeal** – appeal to the person’s self-interest
- **emotional appeal** – provoke emotions that motivate the person
- **moral appeal** – appeal to the person’s sense of what is right and proper.

2. **Message structure**

How are you going to draw the prospective delegate's attention? The most effective message structure presents the message first to draw the attention of the reader. Begin by focusing on what the conference can offer the reader.

**Copy/text**

Write text for the conference promotional material with the following considerations:

- lead (first paragraph) with a strong message to gain attention
- include details of goals and objects, topics and speakers
- include information on the organisation, if relevant
- write in a clear, concise and lively style
- include a registration form or form to register an interest for further information; make it easy to respond
- allow enough room to gain full database details of the participant
• identify restrictions on text, for example, the size, inclusion of other items (response card) and costs when considering bulk mail-out.

3. **Message design: instructions for the designer**

• What will entice the reader to open the envelope?

• Does the front page grab the attention of the target market?

• Decide on the headline, text, illustrations and colours.

• Does it 'look professional'; for example, does it use white space for easy reading and an image to gain attention quickly?

• Provide information on the organisation’s profile, image and culture.

• Choose paper type and size and design, without losing sight of the budget.

• It may be beneficial to obtain three written bids from designers and printers. Also check references, samples of previous work, and consider their work schedules in relation to the conference lead time.

• Maintain a promotional file with ideas from other events (adapt, don't reinvent the wheel) and keep a thorough record and samples of the current promotional program.

• Most brochures are printed in two colours, as four-colour printing is more expensive, but can be very impressive if you have budgeted for this expense.

• Convention centres and bureaus and airlines may supply 'shells' to print your program. This service is either free or provided at a nominal cost. A 'shell' is a standard brochure (625 mm x 30 mm or 400 mm x 21 mm), which has been pre-printed with a few words and pictures covering the conference destination or airline logo. The remainder of the page is available to print conference information. For more information see the Melbourne Convention and Marketing Bureau site at http://www.mcmb.net.au.

4. **Message format: instructions for the public relations consultant**

Content needs to be written to suit each media format:

• *advertisers* – can use novelty and contrast, eye-catching, pictures and headlines, distinctive formats, message size, position, colour and shape

• *radio* – choose words, sounds and voices

• *TV* – as for radio, but also includes body language, dress, posture and hairstyle.

*The message source*

The use of a celebrity or personality as a spokesperson for the conference attracts greater attention and recall, and may also lend credibility to the
event. A highly credible spokesperson can be very persuasive and may encourage participation through their:

- expertise – a degree of authority
- trustworthiness – objectivity and honesty
- likeability – open, humorous and natural.

Delivery

Promotional material can range from an article in a professional magazine to a bulk mail-out, but there are three elements to consider when formulating a successful promotional strategy:

- distribution – How will the package be distributed: mail, fax, email?
- content – What should be included: covering letter, response card and agenda with names of speakers?
- follow-up – Encourage further communication by telephone, or by follow-up fax to create a relationship and confirm attendance.