

Bringing the Storm to UNK:

An Integrated Marketing Plan for the Tri-City Storm

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Objectives

The integrated marketing communication plan created for the Tri-City Storm and Viaero Center aims to increase the attendance of University Nebraska- Kearney students at Tri-City Storm games. The objectives included in this plan consist of increasing exposure for the Storm within the UNK student body, enticing members of the UNK community to attend Storm games and educate about the Tri-City Storm.

Target Audience

The target audience for this marketing plan is the student body of the University of Nebraska-Kearney. This demographic has been underutilized by the Storm's marketing strategies in the past, which has negatively affected their attendance.

Advertising

The objectives of the advertising communications included in this plan consist of first exposing the target audience to the Tri-City Storm's existence in the community and viability of the Storm as an entertainment option. Second, enticing the UNK student body to attend Storm games by promoting the student discount as well as creating promotions such as 'College Nights' to specifically cater to the UNK student body. Finally, to educate the student body about the Tri-City Storm and overall the sport of hockey to create genuine interest in both the team and the sport which will increase the likelihood of repeat purchases. These objectives will include wording including "deal," "fun," "college," and "student." These words will act as buzzwords, capturing the attention of the target audience. Competition for the Tri-City Storm include Nebraska Husker football games and tailgates, UNK sporting events, UNK social events,

and community events within the Kearney community. These events garner attention from UNK students because they provide entertainment for groups and happen often.

Advertising Tone and Brand Voice

The advertising tone and brand voice for this plan are excited and welcoming. The advertising mediums used in this plan will convey this tone and brand voice through captions on social media platforms and welcoming language on physical schedule posters. Phrases such as “Contact us for information,” “Join us at the next College Night” will be used to entice students to attend Storm games.

Advertising Medium Mix

This plan’s advertising medium mix will include social media, physical posters, and coupon book inserts. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat will be utilized to disperse information and reminders. Physical posters containing the game schedule and contact information for the Storm office will be placed throughout businesses frequented by students, such as Sun Tan City and Cunningham’s, as well as businesses surrounding the UNK campus, such as Barista’s and Nick’s Gyros, with consent from the business prior to placement. The physical poster will target the audience’s frequency while serving as semi-permanent information centers for students.

Mandatory Elements

The mandatory elements to be used within the marketing plan include the Storm team colors: purple, silver, white and black, action shots of star players (for example: former

goaltender Filip Larsson) and the primary Tri-City Storm logo. These elements will be used to inform students of the primary image of the Tri-City Storm immediately.

Target Market Analysis

A target market is defined by Investopedia as, "... the market a company wants to sell its products and services to, and it includes a targeted set of customers for whom it directs its marketing efforts."¹ The target market is an essential piece to any business plan and must be fully evaluated and understood. Part of recognizing one's target market is market segmentation. Market segmentation is the act of dividing a market into distinct groups of customers who might require separate products and/or marketing mixes.²

This analysis is conducted to identify and understand the desired market set by The Viaero Center and Tri-City Storm to create an effective integrated marketing communication plan to increase this market's participation in arena events, most notably the Tri-City Storm hockey games. The Storm, per President of Business Operation Holmes Ghassemi, presently has an older, family-inclusive market attending games. Their average age in attendance is within the 40s. Families comprise a majority of attendees. According to the United States Hockey League's (USHL) Attendance Report, the Storm had a total seasonal attendance of 68,494, placing them eighth out of seventeen. The average attendance per game was 2,283.³ Every USHL team has at least one post-secondary education institution in their city.

¹ Staff, I. (2018, May 29). Target Market. Retrieved June 20, 2018, from <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/t/target-market.asp>

² Shimp, T. A. (2013). Advertising, promotion, and other aspects of integrated marketing communications (9th ed.). Mason, OH: South-Western Cengage Learning.

³ United States Hockey League. (2018, May 24). Attendance Report. Retrieved June 20, 2018, from http://cluster.leaguestat.com/download.php?client_code=ushl&file_path=daily-report/daily-report.html

The Storm has an underutilized market at the University of Nebraska-Kearney (UNK). By gaining a reputation among UNK students as an entertainment option, there is the potential for an increase in attendance. This begins with a marketing communication plan that effectively caters to the student body. The student body of UNK is unique and thus requires a tailored marketing approach. Demographically, UNK is diverse. According to UNK's Headcount Enrollment for Fall 2017, UNK is comprised of 4,843 undergraduate students and 1,801 graduate students. The majority of UNK students are female, however, there is not a wide gender gap. Due to a large number of undergraduate students, the majority of the student body is between the ages of 18-24. Most of UNK's students come from Nebraska. UNK has an international component to its student body as well. The international student body is comprised mainly of Japanese, Chinese, and Korean students.⁴

UNK's student body would best be categorized amongst VALS categories into the Strivers and Experiencers. Strivers are categorized as trendy and fun-loving. The Strivers are limited by money, as are college students. Experiencers are young, impulsive consumers who spend money on events and entertainment. College students enjoy going to events and socializing with friends. However, they are limited by monetary funds.⁵

⁴ University of Nebraska Kearney. (n.d.). UNK Enrollment. Retrieved June 20, 2018, from <http://www.unk.edu/factbook/enrollment.php>

⁵ Shimp, T. A. (2013). Advertising, promotion, and other aspects of integrated marketing communications (9th ed.). Mason, OH: South-Western Cengage Learning.

The typical behaviors of the UNK Student body, our target market, are to socialize on the weekends during planned outings. However, they also will spend time off campus during the weekdays at local coffee shops and businesses for either work, studying, or relaxation. The target market tends to go out in groups for their weekend socializing. They enjoy concerts, sports, and bars. The target market will gravitate toward an item or event that appears to be a good value due to their limited finances.⁶

Solutions to reach this target market involve three parts: exposure, education, and entertainment. Due to the demographics of the target market, prior exposure to hockey is not likely. Introducing Storm Hockey to the students will increase their entertainment options on select weekends. It will also allow those who have prior exposure to become interested and attend games if so compelled. To bring this exposure to the students, place physical advertisements at businesses frequented by college students, such as Barista's, Nick's Gyros, Sun Tan City, Calico Coffee, etc. By inquiring about placing advertisements within these businesses, the opportunity to build business-to-business relationships arises. If a positive business relationship occurs, it will help the effectiveness of the ad. Social media presence is a must with this target market. The presence must have a consistent message, a posted schedule, and valid and timely information. This will allow the students to obtain information about the games and make plans fast.⁷

⁶ Alderton, M. (2017, February 22). Marketing to College Students. Retrieved June 20, 2018, from <https://www.business.com/articles/marketing-to-college-students/>

⁷ Alderton, M. (2017, February 22). Marketing to College Students. Retrieved June 20, 2018, from <https://www.business.com/articles/marketing-to-college-students/>

Education is an integral step because many students have not watched hockey or understand the league itself. Educating them about the sport, league, and team will help create an interest in both the Storm and the sport, increasing the chance of return customers. This education can come from staff and other attendees. By having a knowledgeable crowd and staff, accurate information can be obtained. For example, ensuring that the staff knows the players are not paid can help deter that misconception from becoming more widespread.

Finally, entertainment must be present for the students to feel as if attending a game is worth the cost. This entertainment comes from the game itself. To increase its entertainment value, effective promotions can help. Decade-based themes are common for fraternity and sorority engagements. Promos such as the 70s or 80s nights could attract students because they are interesting and fun. Paired with throwback pricing, it can increase the sense of value for students. Placing a coupon in the Campus Cash booklets distributed on campus will increase exposure and guarantee students a value on Storm tickets.

In conclusion, this IMC plan's target market is the student body of the University of Nebraska-Kearney. Its diverse demographic makeup requires that the Viaero Center and Tri-City Storm use an integrated, calculated approach to effectively advertise to them. Through an exposure, education, and entertainment-centered strategy, UNK students' attendance can increase and help boost Storm game attendance overall.

Situational Analysis

The Tri-City Storm and Viaero Center operate within the performing arts, spectator sports sector. The sector includes those entities that produce or organize live events. These events can include sporting events, live acting performances, and live music performances. The Storm exist in the North American Industry Classification System subsector of Spectator Sports (NAICS 7112).⁸

Consumer behavior toward the Tri-City Storm is varied. Some consumers, such as the season ticket holders, are more likely to attend games repeatedly than occasional attendees. Season ticket holders and frequent attendees are more likely to spend more on merchandise and specialty promotions than the occasional attendee. In our target market – UNK students – students are less likely to spend much on merchandise due to a constrained budget. They are also not likely to buy season ticket packages. However, their venue, Viaero Event Center, however, has less of a positive image within the entire community due to the Jersey Boys incident. That incident has caused a slight backlash toward the hockey team and games, as evidenced by Facebook Reviews on the Viaero Center page. One comment on a review stated, “Good reason to only go to heartland event center. You can't run a event center on hockey and country music...”⁹ This comment does not speak to a majority of people in the community. Still its presence on the Viaero Center page reflects badly on both entities. Overall, consumer behavior varies deeply toward the Storm and the Viaero Center.

⁸ United States Bureau of Labor and Statistics. (2018). About the Performing Arts, Spectator Sports, and Related Industries subsector. Retrieved June 29, 2018, from <https://www.bls.gov/iag/tgs/iag711.htm>

⁹ Facebook (Ed.). (2018, February 8). Viaero Center Reviews. Retrieved June 29, 2018, from <https://www.facebook.com/pg/ViaeroCenter/reviews/>

The Tri-City Storm has many strengths; however, they do have weaknesses as well. The Storm's strengths include being a unique product (hockey games) to offer the community. They also benefit from their season being in the fall and winter. This allows them to become one of a few entertainment options in Kearney in the winter where weather can affect plans.

Weaknesses the Storm faces include limited resources, a rotating staff, and inconsistency in play. The Storm organization has limited resources, as does every business. However, not all resources are being actively and accurately utilized to market effectively. For example, social media is underutilized and inconsistent in its message. Social media consists of free platforms to spread a consistent message to other users and potential customers. When it is not being used to its fullest potential, opportunities for customer outreach are lost. The rotating staff is also an issue the Storm and the Viaero Center face. For the Storm, the frequent coaching changes affect the ability to have a consistent face for the Storm team. Minimizing staffing changes can allow a figurehead, such as the team coach, to be utilized for team-specific announcements and events. Having the coach serve as a figurehead replaces the role of the star, franchise player, which the team lacks due to the league's structure and purpose of development.¹⁰ Inconsistency in product is an unavoidable issue on the ice. The Storm as a team will have good and bad season, months, and streaks. Attendance may fluctuate as a result. However, the product off the ice, such as game atmosphere, can be maintained to a point by outside factors. By providing a fun atmosphere and education on hockey, people can be encouraged to come back even if the game is a loss.

¹⁰ United States Hockey League. (n.d.). About. Retrieved June 29, 2018, from <https://www.ushl.com/page/show/1209054-about-ushl-tier-1-junior-hockey>

Outside of the organization, opportunities and threats are apparent for the Storm.

Opportunities include a lack of entertainment during winter months, being an outing for both visitors and residents of Kearney, and building corporate partnerships with local businesses within the community. The lack of entertainment options aside from restaurants and bars favors the Storm as a winter sporting event. The Storm games also serve as an opportunity for businesses to host employee outings, an entertainment option for travelling vendors, and a destination for visitors. The opportunity to form and rekindle corporate partnerships with local businesses would allow for increased community exposure and the opportunity to gain sponsors and frequent attendees. The partnerships could allow for increased attendees due to the business coming to support the Storm at a game, or a company purchasing a season ticket package as an employee reward.

Threats for the Storm include Kearney High sporting events, University of Nebraska-Lincoln events, University of Nebraska-Kearney events, agricultural seasons, and lack of widespread knowledge about hockey. The local sporting events, such as Kearney High football and UNK basketball, can cause a decrease in attendance due to a crossover in market. Nebraska Huskers football can also create a decrease in attendance due to a conflict in game time.¹¹ Agricultural seasons also decline attendance due to long working hours and short windows of time to complete tasks. However, these threats decrease in frequency or end altogether at certain points throughout the seasons.

¹¹ University of Nebraska Athletics. (n.d.). Schedule 2017-18. Retrieved June 29, 2018, from http://www.huskers.com/SportSelect.dbml?SPSID=3&SPID=22&DB_OEM_ID=100&Q_SEASON=2017

Positioning the Storm in consumers' minds as an entertainment option and an unique sporting event is the best option for an increase in attendance. This strategy can include utilizing various promotional nights to attract attendees to games, using social media to promote the Storm, and increasing overall exposure in the community. Introducing the Storm as a unique sporting event to potential customers would increase interest within new and recurring customers. This would be useful to distinguish the Storm from other events such as football and basketball. Using social media to promote the Storm would also increase its presence overall and increase its positive social media presence. Through these techniques, positioning the Storm in consumers' minds can increase the potential for increased attendance.

Communication Effectiveness
and
Media Plan

My media plan for the Tri-City Storm is to shape a segment of their communications to better reach UNK students, but also to reshape their communications for the overall better. The purpose of this restructuring is to expose, entice, and educate the target audience concerning Storm Hockey. The first goal is to expose the UNK populous to Storm Hockey. This is due to most students not being native to Kearney or experienced with the sport of hockey. The second goal is to entice the UNK population to attend games. This enticement is necessary to garner genuine interest in attending games. The final goal is to educate the UNK populous about Storm Hockey. This education will help to build interest in the Storm and hockey, increasing the likelihood of repeat sales. To reach these goals, this plan will include the creation of a consistent, clear, and modern approach to social media and online presence. Second, an effort to increase physical advertisement around campus will help to increase the initial exposure and heighten the frequency of the ad. Finally, an increase in the quantity and quality interpersonal interactions will allow students to gain information and positive experiences related to the Tri-City Storm.

The media combination that will be included in my integrated marketing communication plan will consist of: social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, the strategic deployment of large printed schedule posters and pocket schedules, and having a table at UNK community engagement events such as Blue and Gold.

The social media part of the IMC plan is intended to get the message to the target audience consistently. The target audience's age group – 18 to 24-year-olds – was found to be the age group that Instagram and Snapchat have the highest popularity with according to a survey

conducted by the Pew Research Center.¹² Since these social media platforms resonate exceptionally with the target audience, their utilization will help to disperse information to the target audience frequently, easily and cost-efficiently.

The deployment of large printed schedule posters and pocket schedules will be utilized to create a semi-permanent fixture in the area immediately around the campus and at businesses frequented by the target audiences. This will be used to get the intended message out because it will give reliable information to interested parties, increase awareness for those in the target audience, and the placement in a high-traffic area will increase the frequency and reach of the ad.

The use of direct interpersonal interaction will be employed to directly communicate with the target audience and give personalized information to those in the target audience who interact with the staff and members of the Tri-City Storm. This will provide those who interact with the staff and members of the Storm a personal experience prior to attending a game. It will also give an opportunity for the message to be delivered in a personalized, physical manner the prior two strategies lack.

Execution through the medium of social media platforms will be through the use of consistent posting, efficient use of graphics, and the application of a consistent visual theme. A consistent posting schedule will help to disperse information and reminders about upcoming games, social events and purchasing in a timely, relevant manner. Posts concerning games and

¹² Smith, A., & Anderson, M. (2018, March 01). Social Media Use in 2018. Retrieved July 14, 2018, from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/>

promotions should be posted at the beginning and middle portions of the week to garner interest while the target audience is interacting with each other on a consistent basis such as during classes or breaks from classes. This will allow for Storm Games to be entertained as a viable weekend entertainment option rather than a last-minute option or no consideration at all. Other information such as team trivia and promotional posts for future games should also be posted consistently to garner attention for them before the week of the game and foster education about the product they are considering consuming. Efficient graphics will allow for the message to be executed clearly. Minimizing the use of additional flair imagery (GIFS, stickers, etc.) will allow the message to be conveyed accurately by the target audience while still drawing their attention. A consistent visual theme, such as the utilization of team colors and the team logo, will allow social media posts to have a consistent look and make them distinguishable from other posts within users' feeds.

In print media, the message's execution will be intended to bring exposure to the Storm and provide information such as social media handles, box office numbers, and the Storm website as well as the entire season schedule. The print media serves as an initial point of contact with the target audience as well as a constant venue for consistent information distribution.

In direct interpersonal interaction, the message will be executed by directly interacting with the target audience and giving them a custom, personalized experience where the target audience member can gain more in-depth information and have any concerns or questions addressed quickly and accurately.

I hope to achieve a reach of about 25% of the target audience and a high frequency within the target audience. A 25% reach within the target audience combined with a high frequency of advertisement interaction will increase the chance of consumption of Storm Hockey games because the spaced repetition will create a better mental recall of the product, akin to its result when used with learning.¹³ This increased mental recall of the product will increase its likelihood to be introduced as an option while planning outings with friends or for groups.

An effective reach for my plan would 25 percent reach with an average frequency of 6. This would yield approximately 150 TRPs.¹⁴ This brand requires a higher level of frequency to achieve effectiveness because of its need for recurring sales. Since the Storm games are individual events, a higher frequency is needed to ensure its relevance in the target audience. Maintaining a higher frequency allows for consistent relevance within the target audience.

Overall, the media plan is crafted to introduce the Tri-City Storm to its UNK target audience through high-frequency exposure among several mediums. The collective goals of this strategy are to increase exposure, entice the target audience to engage with the Tri-City Storm, and educate them about the Storm and the sport of hockey allowing for the opportunity of recurring purchases and increased interest and exposure throughout the UNK student population.

¹³ Kang, S. H. (2016). Spaced Repetition Promotes Efficient and Effective Learning. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 3(1), 12-19. doi:10.1177/2372732215624708

¹⁴ Shimp, T. A. (2013). *Advertising, promotion, and other aspects of integrated marketing communications* (9th ed.). Mason, OH: South-Western Cengage Learning.

Budget

The budget for this plan is approximately \$2,000. This budget is meant to have a surplus of funds to cover the implementation and upkeep of this plan for the duration of the Tri-City Storm season. For the implementation of the physical poster, the allowance from the budget is \$150. Since the poster implementation involves placing posters at businesses around the UNK campus and Kearney, I have estimated the price of the posters for a quantity of 50 posters. From Vistaprint, producing the posters would currently cost \$52.49. This price will increase due to a promotion expiring. The price will rise to \$70. While Vistaprint is used for quoting the posters, I would encourage the Storm to source the posters to a local sponsor, such as LIPS. This would strengthen the partnership, patronize a sponsor, and allow the Storm to support local businesses.

The creation of social media graphics can be completed by a current member of the Storm staff if someone is competent in graphic design.

The inclusion of an ad and coupon within the Campus Cash booklets is dependent on the desired run time since they produce seasonal booklets. I have allocated \$200 to the implementation of the Campus Cash ad. This is considered to be an especially important facet of the plan due to its availability on campus; therefore, its prioritization is rather high.

Overall, this budget is designed to leave plenty of funds for possible upkeep for the physical poster advertisements and replenishment of pocket schedules. Throughout the season, advertisement needs may be directed to certain promotions, such as College Nights. The large allowance of surplus funds allows for specific advertisements to be created throughout the season to continue to entice and intrigue students to attend Storm games.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Social Media Graphic Examples: Instagram Story



The graphics above intend to serve as uploads to the Storm's Instagram Story. The Instagram Story is a temporary post that is visible for 24 hours from the time posted. These stories are pinned to the top of a user's feed, making them instantly visible to the user. Story uploads can also be enabled with location tags, hashtags, swipe up features, etc. These features allow the uploader to integrate more information into their post. Stories are extremely beneficial to those who use Instagram to promote due to their customization and visibility.

Appendix 2: Campus Cash Coupon Mockup

COLLEGE NIGHTS

Come cheer on the Storm with these great deals.

**ON COLLEGE NIGHTS,
Buy One Ticket,
Get One 50% Off**

Use the code UNKBOGO
*Select Games Only. Consult Schedule for Details
*Must Purchase Tickets In Person at Box Office
*Must Present Student ID when purchasing tickets



#BETHESTORM

OTHER GAMES

**Present Your Student
ID for a
Student Discount**

*Must Purchase Tickets In Person at Box Office
*Must Present Student ID when purchasing tickets

The graphic above is a mockup created by myself to represent what an effective ad contains within the Campus Cash booklet. Most ads contain a coupon for a product or service offered by the represented business. For the mockup, I created a ticket deal that would attract students due to its value. The BOGO 50% off deal for College Nights will attract students who do not drink or are not of legal drinking age. The restrictions are listed clearly below the deal code. Presenting a College Night specific promotion alongside the perpetual student discount increases awareness for the student discount while offering UNK students a constant deal. When purchasing tickets for a College Night game, the student discount is inactive. For other games, it is in effect. This allows a constant value to be present for the students, making Storm games an affordable, viable entertainment option.