IMARK

**Module
Investing in Information for Development**

Information Dissemination

Lesson 1: Audiences and Markets

Learner Notes

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This lesson is part of the IMARK Module on "Investing in Information for Development". The Module contains six units. The unit on "Information Dissemination" comprises three lessons:

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This course is available in self-paced e-learning format on CD-ROM and the Internet (www.imarkgroup.org).

Learning objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- identify the necessary components to develop an effective information dissemination plan;
- be aware of how to analyse your audience(s) and their needs, your competitors and your "comparative advantage".

Introduction

Most organizations produce and disseminate information in several forms:
a research institute may publish a document (reporting on results), or it may release a new product (in which those results are applied), or it may offer a service (to support use of that product). In any of these cases, the raw material is often information.

Many organizations, however, do not invest enough in making sure that the information they produce is disseminated effectively and efficiently.

Why does this happen? Three constraints are particularly common in organizations:

1. Organizations do not undertake systematic market research on their audience(s) and clients.
2. They do not have procedures for continual analysis of their products, services and dissemination mechanisms.
3. They do not plan ahead for the introduction of new information technologies, new methodologies, new audiences, new media and new types of products and services.

Does your organization face any of these constraints? If so, what can you do?
A good starting point can be the development of an information dissemination plan.

Dissemination plans

A dissemination plan is a document that should include descriptions of the following elements:

1. Audience(s);

2. Products and **services**; and

3. Resources (of the organization involved in dissemination of products and services).

It is important to ensure that any information dissemination plans are compatible with the organization's strategy, if the latter already exists.

A dissemination plan needs to be defined at least annually, and should ideally be revisited at least every three months to check whether adjustments need to be made.

The plan should define the products and services to be offered by the organization.
For each product and service, the plan will need to describe the following aspects:

PRODUCTION: Process, Frequency, Schedule

AUDIENCE: Size; Location

OUTPUTS: Content, Medium, Format, Packaging

CHANNELS: Frequency, Agents/Partners

MARKETING: Promotion, Advertising

FINANCIAL ASPECTS: Income from public funds, sales, and/or sponsorships;
Expenditure from costs of production, marketing and dissemination.

In the development of a dissemination plan, several preparatory tasks must be completed:

Task	Type of factor addressed
1) Identification and analysis of your existing and potential **audiences**.	EXTERNAL
2) Assessment of your information **competitors** and your "comparative advantage".	EXTERNAL
3) Description of information **products and services** that you offer now.	INTERNAL
4) Evaluation of your current and future **capacities** for effective information dissemination.	INTERNAL

Your audience(s) profiles

Let's consider the first component of your dissemination plan: the identification of your existing and potential audience(s).

- **Who** are they?
- **Where** are they?
- **What** types of information products and services do they need?
- **How** will they gain access to these products and services?

Two considerations will be particularly important as you answer these questions. First, you will need to set priorities between different types of audience(s) and products. And second, you will need to think beyond current audience(s) and products to desirable changes over the next three to five years.

What are the main tools that you might use for this "market research"?

- o **Questionnaires** sent to existing and potential audience(s);
- o **Interviews** with existing and potential audience(s); and
- o **Statistics** on current and projected demand for information.

Here are some more key questions that may help you in analysing your audience(s):

- **What types of people make up your audiences?**

  They could be farmers, extension workers, scientists, academics, economists, managers, policymakers, etc. Where are they located?

- **What types of organizations make up your audiences?**

  For instance, governmental organizations (research, extension, education, libraries), non-governmental organizations, media (TV, radio, newspaper, magazine), farmers' organizations (cooperatives, associations, unions), private sector (suppliers, traders, exporters, processors, etc.). Where are they located?

- **What is their level of expertise and capacity?**

  What is/are their level(s) of literacy? What facilities for accessing information are available to them? Do they have access to information and communication technologies or the Internet? These will be crucial when deciding on a most appropriate dissemination medium technology.

- **Is the information being used directly by the audiences?**

  Are they the recipients or are they (also) acting as intermediaries and passing the information on to others associated /secondary groups? What do they use the information for?

- **How are these audiences changing?**

  Are their numbers stable, increasing, decreasing? Is their socio-economic profile changing? You will need to consider socio-economic trends such as migration and changes in livelihoods patterns, etc.

Once you know your audience(s) and their main characteristics, you can move to a more detailed analysis of their needs. This step is paramount, because the needs of the audience determine both the content to deliver and the medium used for dissemination. (For instance, it may be better to send farmers an information pamphlet in a local language, rather than in the national language. Also, an informative web-site will only be used frequently by audience(s) with easy and dependable internet access). The analysis also includes priority setting between audiences as well as an analysis of competitors.

Audience needs analysis

Content

To start your analysis, you should find out the current use and impact of your present products and services. These data will allow you to build a matrix indicating the type of content per type of audience, with the corresponding degree of use.

In order to identify what kind of content is relevant to what kind of audience:

- Start by considering the different types of content needed by your audience(s).
- Then find out, for each audience, the degree of use of each kind of content.
- Then assess the importance of each kind of content for each kind of audience, preferably by asking the audience.

Medium

Once you have identified the needs of your audience(s) in terms of content, you can then identify what kind of medium is more useful to each audience. This aspect is vital: too often information dissemination plans are designed without considering which media are really important to the audience(s), and as a consequence they are ineffective.

To help you identify the most appropriate kind of medium for each audience, you may build a matrix as follows. Please note that the elements appearing in the example are not the same for all organizations, since they vary according to the different environments, objectives, etc. of each organization.

Medium of service/product delivery	Type of audience			
	Researcher	Extension worker	Journalist	Farmer
Leaflets	x	xxx	X	Xxx
Books/Hardcopies	xx	xxx		X
Websites	xxx	x	Xx	
Digital documents	xxx	xx	X	X

xxx= *most useful*; xx= *useful*; x= *not so useful*

Charts like this are tools to help you sort out the complex relationship between:
1) your audience(s) (users); 2) their needs (content); and 3) appropriate dissemination vehicles (media).

Priority setting

One important issue that your needs analysis is likely to reveal is that **potential audiences are often very diverse**. Such diversity may be reflected in a broad range of "needs" that require distinct information products and services. The temptation is to create and disseminate products and/or services that aim to serve a wide range of audiences but in fact do not serve any particular audience well. Therefore, it is important to set priorities.

Setting priorities does not necessarily limit your flexibility. The priorities that you set this year need not be the same ones that you will set for next year. Information dissemination is such a rapidly changing field that you will always be discovering new audiences, new types of content, and new media.

In order to set priorities, **three criteria** are most important:

> 1. Which audience(s) is most central to the mandate of your organization?
> 2. Which audience(s) can you reach most effectively?
> 3. On which audience(s) are your products/services likely to have the greatest impact?

You can also look again at your **organization's strategy** and consider:

- o its goals and objectives;
- o its relationship with audiences and partners;
- o your audience's access to other sources of information;
- o your audience's ability to reproduce, distribute or apply the information;
- o the possibility for audience(s) to pay/contribute.

You should then list your audience(s) and their features, and allocate a relative "score" for each criterion. This market analysis of audiences will reveal the opportunities available and gaps that need to be filled by your new dissemination plan. You can identify the audience(s) which are currently well served, and which ones need greater support.

You can also define the top priority groups (perhaps three or four) that are most important to your objectives. Initially, you should focus only on them; later you may be able to add a few more to the list.

The competitors

To conclude your analysis, you should examine the market trends and environment affecting the demand for your information products and services.
Such a market-based approach will ensure that you disseminate your information in the most effective way.

Of course, analysing the whole range of products and services currently on the market would be too time-consuming and inefficient. You should concentrate your analysis on those products and services that are relevant to your audience(s), their needs and your services.
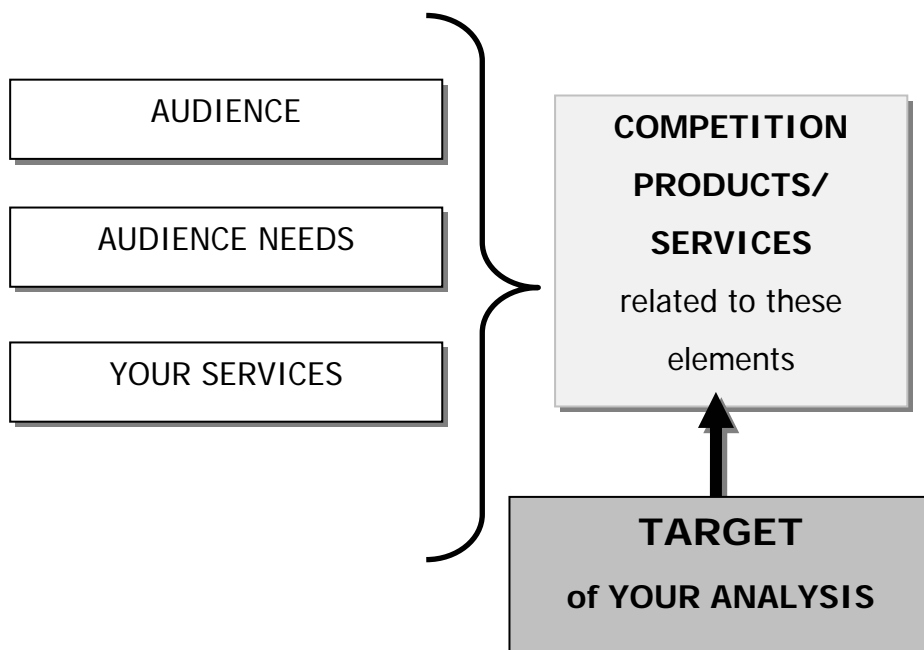
When you analyse your market environment, you should not only look at your competitors, but also for new opportunities of existing, emerging or potential needs as yet unfulfilled by any service provider.

Also, as we have already mentioned, all the issues taken into consideration in your analysis of the present context (audience(s), products, channels of dissemination and so on) are inter-related, and affect one another. This means that the results of analysis you have conducted so far should be kept in mind while analysing your competitors.

If you realize, as a consequence of your analysis, that there are other organizations interacting with your audience(s), and that they are offering information products and services similar to those of your organization, you should further examine:

1) THE **CONTENT** THEY PRODUCE.
- Is it accurate and reliable?
- Is it up to date?
- Does it add value to the original unprocessed content (e.g. crop forecasts, statistics)?
- Are the delivery and access timely (e.g. market prices)?
- Are the search and retrieval mechanisms efficient?
- Is it user-friendly (e.g. use of graphics, availability in local language)?

2) THE VARIETY OF **MEDIA** USED.
- How is the content in competing products/services packaged and distributed?
- Are different or new media and dissemination channels being used by competitors?

3) THE **COSTS** FOR ACCESSING THEIR SERVICES.
- What is the price/cost of accessing competitors' products and services?

4) **WHO** IS PRODUCING THESE SERVICES.
- What type of information providers (i.e. competitors) are offering similar products or services?
- Are the competitors well resourced financially?

To conclude this part of our analysis, we may say that the key issue to consider in facing up to competition is **differentiation** of your products and services from others: you need to find **alternative approaches** to cope with competition.

These are the questions to ask:

- Are you providing unique products or services?
- Have you identified some sub-groups of audiences that are not well serviced?
- Have you avoided certain products and services?
- Are there possibilities of partnerships and collaboration to share both the costs and the benefits?

Summary

What an organization needs is an effective and efficient information dissemination plan that should be carefully planned and implemented, like any other stage in the information strategy.

To facilitate the process of building an information dissemination plan, we need to carry out a needs analysis. We may start the analysis by looking at "external" and "internal" audience(s).

We should consider:
- audiences' **identities and characteristics**;
- their **specific needs**, especially the kind of **content** and **medium** that are useful for them; and
- **how to set priorities** among the various audiences.

We may continue our analysis by examining the **market trends** and **environment** affecting the demand for information products and services. This part of the analysis should take into consideration competitors, but also **new opportunities** of existing, emerging or potential needs.