

ESSENTIALS OF MARKETING FOR AN ACADEMIC RESEARCH LABORATORY: THE MARKETING MIX

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LAYING THE GROUNDWORK:

Medical and basic science researchers are some of the most highly educated people with multiple advanced degrees. These highly motivated professionals master a variety of technical skills in their chosen area of interest. They constantly read, learn new skills and are at the forefronts of efforts to generate new knowledge. In addition to their technical prowess, academic researchers also manage laboratory enterprises which include overseeing personnel hiring and termination efforts, mastering interpersonal communications skills and budgetary decisions. Despite this pervasive requirement of management skills, only a handful of researchers ever consider general management training, which would seem very obvious to the business counterpart.

The important concept that researchers need to clearly understand is how their activities fit into a business framework. In a business setting, ‘marketing’ is a very important activity which can make or break your business. Over centuries of trade, business managers have thus honed marketing to a high science. Managers discuss selling a product in terms of a Marketing Mix – a combination of four crucial activities, whether selling soap, aircraft or medical devices. The four elements are 1) *Product*, 2) *Promotion*, 3) *Placement*, and 4) *Price*; and are commonly referred to as the “Four P’s” of marketing (Figure 1). In this brief report, I have redefined the different elements of the marketing mix as it would apply to an academic research laboratory.

PRODUCT:

What is it that we offer?

The *product* of the research lab is ‘knowledge.’ It could be the identification of a novel genetic mutation/marker, development of a new material with altered properties, a surgical technique, identification of the mechanism of disease, markers in the progression of disease, etc. Our *customers* are primarily governmental agencies such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Department of Defense (DoD). An important customer base includes private biomedical research foundations such as the Whitaker Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation. Corporations such as pharmaceutical, medical device and biotech companies routinely support academic research as well. Customers pay for the knowledge with financial grants and other sources of funds.

Our laboratories deliver this knowledge “product” in the form of written publications or oral presentations. Specific details of research are first published in peer-reviewed journals, followed by topical reviews, and subsequently as chapters in books. Research details are also published in written Abstracts or Proceedings of Annual Meetings of National Scientific and Clinical Societies such as the Orthopaedic Research Society, the Society for Biomaterials, Tissue Engineering Society or any other similarly appropriate forum. These societies also provide a form of peer-review of the quality of the science. Oral presentations are made at meetings of these societies, or researchers may be invited to present their findings at Symposia and Workshops. Teaching in the classroom to undergraduate students, graduate students, medical trainee residents and clinical training fellows also represents a delivery of our core product.

PROMOTION:

How do we advertise our products?

As in any business, good products promote themselves. Published articles convey to the reader the necessary medical and scientific details, and also provide a testimonial to the quality of our work, the infrastructure at the institution and the research philosophy of the lead investigator. If the topic and quality meets the approval of the reader, they will seek out other published articles from the same laboratory. Writing reviews and book chapters disseminates our findings to a wider audience and is usually associated with leadership in a niche area of study. Oral presentations at conferences, workshops and symposia also promote our studies. Podium presentations at large national society meetings surely propagate the gener-

Fig 1. Marketing Mix for Academic Research Laboratories

The products that research laboratories deliver is knowledge in the form of publications. Customers who pay for this knowledge are Governmental granting agencies and corporations such as pharmaceutical, device and medical device companies.

Product	Promotion	Placement	Price
What is it that we offer?	How do we advertise our products?	How do we distribute our products?	How do the customers pay for the products?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research knowledge Basic Science Research Clinical Outcomes Publications Books Teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer-review journal articles Reviews Book Chapters Seminars, Workshops Teaching Personal Relations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National International Conferences Invited Seminars Journals Students/Fellows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grants Consulting Gifts Endorsements

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