



TRANSIT TIDBITS

Issue 119

December 2021

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH DECEMBER 2021

My goal is not to be better than anyone else, but to be better than I used to be.

Marketing for Dummies

Terry Hoffman, Co-Director
CTWSI
Watertown, SD

Marketing is a business practice which involves identifying predicting and meeting customer needs.

“It’s not a magic wand, but more like a crowbar,” said Jess Marlow.

Marlow is the Media and Communications Coordinator at River Cities Public Transit. Before relocating to Pierre S.D., he spent most of his career as a Director of Sales and Marketing in the entertainment and hospitality industries.

He addressed the Dakota Transit Conference attendees in Fargo, ND in September regarding how to design a marketing program

to advertise transit and the services we offer. During his presentation, Marlow shared his approach for marketing a transit agency and how others can start a program quickly and with relative ease.

Who are you marketing to and one size does not fit all are two statements stressed by Marlow. Providers should identify funders, the communities you serve, the Board of Directors, your riders, your prospective donors, potential sponsors, city, state and federal stakeholders as well as team members/employees.

All marketing can be grouped into two categories – Online and Offline. Both can be equally effective if you work them properly. Networking, public speaking, meetings, trade shows are among the offline activities and all require active participation. Online will allow your program to reach hundreds if not thousands of your targets quickly and with less effort than offline marketing.

Online marketing is easier to track the results of your effort and you don’t need to be physically present to make it effective,” said Marlow.

Radio, television, social media and a company website are all excellent outlets for marketing your agency. Social media, specifically Facebook, is an excellent tool and one of the easiest ways to reach and audience. Websites communicate your agency’s information.

Cindy Terwilliger
Region 8 Regional Administrator
Kathy Holman, Co-Director
CTWSI
Sisseton, SD

“Facebook should be the default social media platform you are using to market,” said Marlow. “It allows you to interact in near real time with customers and your messages grow exponentially through the sharing process.”

Websites, he stressed need to be kept current to achieve the maximum results. The website should also provide links to your Facebook page and contain analytical software to track page views. The website needs to render well across desktops, tablets and mobile devices. Video and email marketing can also be effective but offer some challenges.

Community involvement is yet another valuable tool for transit providers. Participating in community events to tell the transit story, offering free or discounted service in the right situations, delivering home meals are but a few of the platforms for getting your message to the masses.

“There are countless ways to get exposure,” Marlow said. “All television and radio stations are required to give some time away to non-profit organizations. This can lead to free advertising.”

Marlow also left the audience with a list of options to assist transit providers with building their marketing departments.

“With all we discussed, the number one marketing tool will always be customer service,” said Marlow. “Provide the rider with a good experience and they will do much of the marketing for you by word of mouth.”

The changing times and challenges faced by transit administrators in the past, present and future. Those topics were the focus of the message presented by Cindy Terwilliger to those in attendance at the Dakota Transit Association Annual Fall conference in Fargo, ND in September.

Ms. Terwilliger, the Federal Transportation Administration Region 8 Administrator, has spent more than 20 years working in the public transportation industry and has an in-depth knowledge of federal transit programs, the transit industry, and management of organizations. She began working at FTA in 1991.

The world is experiencing an expanding outbreak of respiratory illness caused by COVID-19 said Terwilliger. FTA encourages transit agencies to be informed and prepared. She discussed the options available to Rural providers to assist in combating the pandemic and methods for transit to carry on their mission of providing transportation in difficult times.

Battling back from the effects of the pandemic and looking to the future at what may become "new normal" was part of her presentation. She outlined ways the FTA is prepared to assist transit providers in their plight. Included among those possibilities discussed was the 2.2 billion dollars being made available to transit systems

demonstrating additional assistance is needed to cover operating expenses related to maintaining day-to-day operations, cleaning and sanitization, combating the spread of pathogens on transit systems and maintaining critical staffing levels.

The Region 8 office of the FTA has experienced a myriad of changes of their own in recent months making for more adjustments by state agencies in how their operations are performed. Those changes of course trickle down to the state DOT's and eventually the individual agencies.

“Keeping the lines of communication open and adjusting to what could become new normal situations in the transportation world will be a challenge for us all,” said Terwilliger. “We must recognize the changes and adapt as necessary.”

Fare Collection 101

Terry Hoffman, Co-Director
CTWS
Watertown, SD

How do you collect your bus fares and why use the method you are using? While many are taking the leap to using automatic fare collection systems, many are still using what are fast becoming antiquated systems of fare collection.

Larry Chefalo, of Genfare, a producer of automatic fare collection systems, presented “Fare Collection 101” on Tuesday afternoon at the 2021 Dakota Transit Association’s Fall Conference in Fargo, ND in September. The

session focused on new technologies in fare collection and payment - everything for the procurement of new technology to the impact of its implementation. Chefalo on how various fare collection technologies affect a transit agency – from agency operations to ridership.

Mr. Chefalo has more than 30 years of experience in public transportation with experience in system integration, communications and information technology. He has worked on the development of a significant number of fare collection industry products and services, and continually focuses on applying state-of-the-art technology to meet transit agency needs.

“Fare collection systems have a lot of moving parts and keeping them running smoothly requires a non-stop commitment on our part to back up our transit agency partners and the riders they serve,” said Chefalo. “Customers are the cornerstone of our business and we care about the health and well-being of each,”

In the fare management ecosystem, the climate is changing and new technologies are impacting rider experience. Chefalo’s company Genfare is just one of many who can be considered major players in fare management solutions. All claim to have the hardware and software systems to guide your fare collection system into the future.

The primary rule in developing a strategic plan for investment in a fare collection system is: never let technology dictate an agency’s objectives.

**TRAINING UPDATE
Contact Information**

Linda Freeman 701-848-6480

e-mail: lindaafreeman1@gmail.com

We had a good year with our classes in spite of the pandemic. A big thank you to all who hosted or taught classes during 2021!

As of now, we have no classes scheduled, but please contact me via phone or email (see contact information above) if you would like to host a class during 2022. Thank You! Keep in mind that your PASS certifications are now only good for two years rather than three years.

CTAA has been sending everything digitally since the beginning of the pandemic, which has changed how we handle some of our paperwork. The student manual is sent out to agencies sending people to the classes in digital format for them to print or pass on to their people attending the class in digital format. The certificates are also sent digitally so that agencies can just print and post. There are still classroom books for the defensive driving class.

I hope you all have a wonderful holiday season.

2021 Rural Mobility Champion Award

*Brenda Schweitzer, Executive Director
Brookings Area Transit Authority, Inc.*

Robbie Saries drafted this nomination, **2021 Rural Mobility Champion Award**, which was later awarded. National RTAP is encouraging all to share this with our teams (they won't know about the award unless we get the news out!). It's a long read. Dare you to read it without tears!



2021 Mobility
Champion Award - Fro



National RTAP has these buttons available for everyone's staff. They can be ordered. I'd encourage projects to do so and make a point of sharing this nomination letter with those that have earned it!



The Dakota Transit Board of Directors and Executive Director want to wish each and every one a healthy, safe and wonderful Christmas.



**Rural and Intercity Bus Transit Conference Committee
2021 RURAL MOBILITY CHAMPION AWARD
NOMINATION**

Submitted By: Robbie Sarles, President, RLS & Associates, Inc.

No nominee is more deserving than this year's Award Winner, who has done more to not only accentuate the critical role that rural transit plays in the viability of rural America, but also to bring awareness, support and appreciation, than any other.

This year's Award Winner is being recognized for exceptional bravery, commitment and self-sacrifice demonstrated while in the throes of an unprecedented pandemic that has shaken the world and, yes, rural America, to its very core.

In March of 2020 we could not have dreamed what was about to happen or how it would forever change our lives. Pre-Covid, this Award Winner routinely went to work every day striving to meet the mobility needs of her passengers in an unselfish, caring way. This person was a personal hero of the passengers that otherwise may not have been able to get to needed medical appointments, grocery stores, jobs and other trips that were essential to the quality of life in their rural community. The essential nature of this Winner's role in providing transportation services to the community, however, was, for the most part, unrecognized.

And then, the unthinkable happened. The world stopped. At least most of the world stopped, quarantined and retreated to the safety of their homes. But not this Award Winner. This Winner showed up for work because he knew that if he didn't, essential services would not be provided, people would not be able to get to life-critical medical appointments and treatments, and workers would not be able to get to essential jobs. This Winner understood that she was part of a critical response to this crisis and was needed to be there to answer the call and meet her community's needs, whatever that looked like. She needed to be there for the most vulnerable of populations—she was their life-line.

Faced with chaos, uncertainty, conflicting information and what seemed like a never-ending onslaught of tests, this Winner showed up to meet the challenge. He worked with others on his team to creatively solve problems as they became apparent. In the early days, this was done with little, if any, guidance or support. No one knew what to do or how to do it, but yet, this Winner came to work every day and did his best to come up with workable solutions—some of which were unique and, yes, even unconventional. He didn't know what to expect and didn't know or understand the danger of the

invisible enemy he was facing. He only knew he had to be there, to do his job, because his passengers, his community, were counting on him.

While others stayed at home in their secure cocoons, this Winner came to work.

- She wore homemade masks in the early days, before masks were provided to transit workers. The fit may not have been good, it may have been hot, glasses may have fogged, the elastic may have hurt her ears; it may have been hard to get used to, but she did what she had to do. And, she still is. Even as others have retired their masks, she has not. She still meets the mandate and protects others by wearing her mask every day.
- He has become expert at smiling with his eyes, welcoming and reassuring all passengers that board his vehicle.
- She learned what it meant to do a deep clean of a vehicle and what it meant to sanitize surfaces. She learned a lot about how viruses can spread, washed her hands more often than she thought possible, and continuously used hand sanitizer sourced from some very unusual places, getting creative when supplies were low.
- Not sure how to implement social distancing practices on a transit vehicle, he figured out how to limit seating and cut the capacity of his transit system in half while still providing critical service. He learned how to focus on the provision of essential trips, encouraging rear entry to vehicles whenever possible.
- He got creative when a barrier/shield was needed. He was resourceful. If Plexiglas was available, it was added to the driver's compartment. If not, a trip to Walmart sourced a clear shower curtain and duct tape that was draped around the driver's compartment.
- This Award Winner volunteered to transport first responders and medical personnel to quarantine sites even if it meant personally quarantining themselves.
- This Winner volunteered to dress in hazmat gear and wear medical grade PPE to transport passengers that were sick, Covid-positive, or needed to get to a testing site.
- This Winner assisted his transit system in providing equitable access to vaccinations by ensuring that everyone had transportation to vaccination sites.
- He delivered meals, groceries, packages, medicine and other essential items to community residents that could not travel to needed stores or service providers.
- She professionally handled the angst, frustration and discontent of disgruntled passengers that didn't want to follow transit system procedures or mask mandates.

No matter the challenge, this Winner came to work prepared to serve. She had to--people were counting on her. She was their lifeline and people in the community noticed. Because of this Winner, the transit system was able to answer its community's call, and for perhaps the first time, the transit service was recognized for its role as an essential service within the rural community it served.

These challenges, however, speak little to the deeply personal sacrifices this Winner made. Sacrifices much greater than any of us could have imagined--the extent to which we are only now beginning to understand.

The dangers and the fear that this Winner faced every day were, and continue to be, very real. Even though her focus was on how to best protect herself, coworkers, passengers, and her family, she faced the fear of knowing she was at increased risk of falling victim to this killer. She also was unsure if the virus would be transmitted on her vehicle. Would she unknowingly bring it back home to her loved ones? How would it impact her family life? Did she need to isolate herself from her family and friends? Every day was and continues to be a risky proposition full of unknowns.

Like most of us, this Winner had to face the psychological loss of normalcy, fractured relationships, isolation, and frustration. But he also had to endure the sorrow of coming to work too often and learning that yet another passenger had fallen victim to the virus. The loss was great among the vulnerable population he served, the missing names on his manifest a constant reminder of this virus' cruel and merciless nature. The loss of family, friends and coworkers was also a reality for many and made the burden almost impossible to bear. The toll on this Award Winner's mental state cannot be overstated nor denied and yet, he still showed up for work every day—people were counting on him.

As the pandemic unfolded and what was initially referred to in terms of weeks, turned into months, a realization that there was no end in sight set in. There were days when this Award Winner was exhausted and didn't think she could go on, but go on she did—people depended on her.

If this person sounds familiar, it should. This person is you.

The 2021 Rural Mobility Champion Award Winner is every rural frontline worker that answered the call of their communities to provide essential transportation services through a pandemic that has shown no mercy; frontline heroes that understood the importance of what they do and unselfishly faced the challenges of the pandemic head on, at great risk to their physical and mental well-being. You proved to be flexible, adaptable, creative, strong, and resilient, day after day.

You understood that if these essential transportation services were not provided, lives could be lost; critical medical treatments would not be received; other essential workers would not be able to perform their jobs; and rural America would be diminished. Our frontline heroes demonstrated to America how essential rural transit is and how integral these services are to the very life and existence of their communities. You demonstrated what we in the industry already knew—our rural frontline workers unselfishly serve the needs of our most vulnerable populations in rural America every single day, not because it is your job, but because you intrinsically want to serve others, even if it means great sacrifice. But even we in the industry did not know the depth to which that commitment went until we faced the greatest crisis of our time, and our frontline heroes stared it down, showed up, and did what it took to get us through.

The definition of a hero is a person who has demonstrated exceptional bravery and self-sacrifice for the benefit of others. You, along with the other rural frontline workers throughout rural America are heroes. I celebrate you. The Rural and Intercity Bus Conference Committee celebrates you. Your communities celebrate you. America celebrates you, and we all thank you.