

Reaching More for Less:

Improving the Distribution of Information

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INTRODUCTION

This guide provides a list of pertinent questions that can help you identify potential improvement opportunities in your distribution networks. This document has been written under the following assumptions:

- You are an NGO or non-profit organization
- You currently distribute a publication or information
- Your goal is to improve your distribution of that publication or information
- Your publication or information is distributed in a recurring fashion
- Your organization is mission-oriented
- You are in a resource-constrained setting

This guide has been divided into five main categories: distribution, feedback, content, demand, and cost. Each section poses questions that are relevant to improve the overall effectiveness of your distribution. The questions are designed to ensure that all improvement possibilities are being considered. By analyzing your answers to the questions in this tool, you can identify strengths and areas for improvement within your distribution network.

While each category is important, they are interconnected and thus some improvements may be made that can affect multiple areas. These categories were selected to address five key characteristics of any distribution network:

- Demand: How many members of your target audience want to access your information?
- Content: What information is presented and how?
- Distribution: How does your target audience get access to your information?
- Feedback: How do you know your information is reaching its distribution points?
- Cost: How much does it cost to achieve accessibility?

There is a Summary Checklist included in this module to help guide you through the process of thinking about your distribution network improvements. In addition, following the questions is an example of how to use the questions to discover opportunities for improvement.

SUMMARY CHECKLIST

After reading through the in-depth questions, you can fill in this summary checklist. Have you considered all of the following when improving your distribution network?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Distribution
<input type="checkbox"/>	Current Mapping
<input type="checkbox"/>	Effectiveness
<input type="checkbox"/>	Type of Network
<input type="checkbox"/>	Expansion Opportunities through Leveraging Others' Distribution Networks
<input type="checkbox"/>	Feedback
<input type="checkbox"/>	Current Mapping
<input type="checkbox"/>	Effectiveness
<input type="checkbox"/>	Type of Feedback Network
<input type="checkbox"/>	Content
<input type="checkbox"/>	Demand
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cost
<input type="checkbox"/>	Opportunities to Reduce Cost
<input type="checkbox"/>	Opportunities to Increase Revenue

DISTRIBUTION – The process of moving information through the network

Current Mapping

What are the nodes of your distribution network? How do they connect?

If you have excess capacity additional product can be distributed through your current network.

Who are the stakeholders in your network?

Who is responsible for the overall success of your distribution network?

Identifying key stakeholders and achieving their support is critical for making changes in your distribution network.

What is the capacity of your current distribution network? Is your current network constrained?

What is the anticipated future size of your network?

Having one person responsible for distribution is critical to avoid displacement of responsibility and passing the buck.

Effectiveness

What are the current strengths and weaknesses of the network?

It is critical to first understand your current distribution before identifying opportunities for improvement.

Is material being delivered on-time? How much leakage exists?

Are there redundancies in your network?

Type of Network

How secure is your network? How secure does your network need to be?

Shorter shelf-life will require a more responsive distribution network with shorter lead times.

How important is consistency?

What is the shelf-life of your product?

Expansion Opportunities through Leveraging Others' Distribution Networks

Are other organizations delivering content to similar audiences? Can you partner or learn from these organizations?

Partnering can reduce costs, increase reach, and capitalize on other synergies between two organizations.

Is there a conflict between the goals of the partner organization and the information you would be delivering?

Partnering with an organization that does not share the same mission or audience can lead to

Do the goals and mission of the two organizations align?	<i>disappointment for both parties.</i>
Does the partner organization have someone who will champion working with you and keep the partnership strong?	<i>Partnerships should benefit both parties and should not be one way relationships, in order to create more stable partnerships.</i>
Does the frequency of distributions of the partner company align with the frequency of distribution of your organization?	
Is the partner organization reputable?	
Are the costs of the partnership prohibitive? If so, can you alter the scale of your relationship?	
What benefits do you provide the partner to help strengthen the relationship?	

FEEDBACK – The process for ensuring the distribution network is functioning

Current Mapping

Who is currently providing feedback within your network? Customers? Stakeholders?	<i>Feedback is critical for ensuring information is reaching your target audience. Feedback must not only be collected, but also analyzed and acted on. It is critical to have an individual responsible for this process.</i>
How is the feedback collected? How is the data being stored?	
How is the feedback analyzed once it is collected? How frequently is the feedback being reviewed?	
Who is responsible for the overall success of the feedback system?	

Effectiveness

Is there a method of delivery for everyone who wants to provide feedback?	<i>Self-reported feedback may reflect what people want you to hear and not the reality of the situation. Confirming the accuracy of this feedback is critical.</i>
Are multiple feedback methods available in case one option does not work for a given population?	
Is all feedback being collected without leakage?	
Have you thought about any potential biases in self-reported feedback? Is there a way to reduce any biases	

and make it more objective? Auditing?

Type of Feedback Network

Can feedback be provided through the internet?
Intranet? SMS? Phone Applications? Letters? Email?

How secure is your collection system for feedback? Is information provided in the system confidential?

Methods for collecting feedback should be appropriate for your target audience. For example, ensure your audience has connectivity become asking for feedback online.

CONTENT – Format and extent of information presented

Who is your target audience?

Who is your end user?

What format is your information in (website, blog, email, publication, newsletter, book, etc.)?

If you opt for an internet format, does your target audience access the internet?

Does your target audience need to access the information frequently?

Is your content age-, region-, or demographic-appropriate for your audience in the format it is in?

Is your content narrowly focused or does it cover a wide range of material? Could you attract a greater audience or a more targeted audience by changing the scope of your content?

Is your content reaching as large an audience as you wish? Is it too disbursed? Too confined?

Is there a way to reduce the cost of your content?

Content that is more relevant to your audience will both increase demand and increase the impact of the information once it is read. Also keep in mind the level of literacy and language of your audience when generating content.

Content should be conveyed in an appropriate medium for your audience to access; websites will not work in areas of limited connectivity.

DEMAND – The market for this information

Is the last node in your network the end user or an intermediary? Who is your customer?

How does the awareness of your information compare

Awareness is not the same as demand. Properly identifying and measuring these is critical to

to the overall market?

How does demand compare to awareness?

Is the information pulled by demand or pushed from the system?

If pushed, could end user demand be created through...

Content changes?

Education on the value/availability of your information?

Other value creation?

Is demand known or uncertain?

Is demand increasing, decreasing or steady?

How could better demand data be found?

How is demand data used?

Would shortening the lead-time of the distribution network enable better demand data?

Is demand higher than, lower than, or at distribution capacity?

Is additional demand desired?

understanding if you need to improve content to increase demand or if you need to increase marketing or promotion to increase awareness.

Demand-generating pull strategies increase the likelihood that once the information reaches your audience it will be read and the information used.

Having accurate information on current demand is critical in determining whether you need to increase distribution to meet demand or increase marketing to increase demand.

COST – The entire cost of the distribution network.

Opportunities to Reduce Cost

Can printing costs be reduced either through a change of printer or change of material printed on?

Is there a cheaper yet equally effective shipping method available (i.e. post vs. courier.)?

Can shipping costs be reduced through consolidating portions of your distribution network?

Can costs be reduced through sourcing at locations closer to the end point of distribution?

Identifying ways to increase delivery time, decrease paper quality or size of publication, or increase sourcing or shipping effectiveness without decreasing quality can lead to considerable cost savings.

Would decreasing the frequency of distribution to lower costs significantly impact the outcome of your operation?

Would decreasing the page count or size of the publication to lower costs significantly impact the outcome of your operation?

Could you save costs by decreasing the speed of distribution (i.e. freight vs. Fed-Ex) without impacting the outcome of your operation?

Opportunities to Increase Revenue

Is the organization open to the idea of selling ads in the publication?

Are there companies who would want to reach your audience through advertisements? Who are they?

Do you have a sense of how much revenue could be generated from selling ad space?

Is there the capacity to seek additional funding either from current partners or new partners?

Do you currently charge for the information distributed?

Could you charge for the information distributed?

How would charging for the information impact demand?

It is dangerous to assume that just because your organization is non-profit no one would be willing to pay for the information you produce. Test this hypothesis before making this assumption.

EXAMPLE: USING THE QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DISTRIBUTION NETWORK IMPROVEMENTS AT LOVELIFE

Pick the most pertinent questions for your organization. Usually these are ones which have contradicting answers or obvious possible improvements.

Here is an example of working through the relevant Distribution questions for loveLife. Once this section is completed, the same should be done for all sections:

DISTRIBUTION

Current Mapping

Who are the stakeholders in your network?

→ Departments of operations and distribution, media, communications, and field operations. *Notice there are many different organizational functions which need to be involved in decisions about the network.*

Who is responsible for the overall success of your distribution network?

→ Uncertain. *This is an area for improvement since responsibility should be clearly stated and accepted in order to motivate people via accountability.*

What is the capacity of your current distribution network? Is your current network constrained?

→ Current capacity is not being fully utilized since production of the magazine is below capacity to distribute. *Another possible area of improvement where the production could be increased without negatively affecting distribution.*

Effectiveness

What are the current strengths and weaknesses of the network?

→ The current distribution model's strengths include: good coverage in urban areas, and small to no distribution costs. The model's weaknesses include: poor rural coverage, high printing costs, and varying distribution schedules. *There are opportunities here to focus on improving rural distribution and to hold a tight magazine release schedule to reduce complications in distribution operations.*

Is material being delivered on-time? How much leakage exists?

→ The material is not being delivered on time, due to delays at various points in the production cycle. Leakage is minimized by delivering via courier with proof of receipt, however, some leakage could be tolerated if loveLife switched to a cheaper post office model of delivery. *loveLife could benefit from experimenting with different delivery methods, and ensuring the magazine is produced in a timely fashion.*

Type of Network

How important is consistency?

→ Many young people rely on having the magazine consistently at the same time every release cycle and are disappointed when they do not receive it on time. *Consumers have come to expect to see the magazine on a certain day of the month. loveLife could avoid frustrating them by delivering the magazine consistently.*

What is the shelf-life of your product?

→ The shelf life of the magazine is two months or more. A new edition is released every two months, but old editions are still valued by the consumer. *One possible improvement would be to allow a longer lead time in the distribution model in order to ensure consistent delivery, even if it is a few days later than it would be using the current model.*

Expansion Opportunities through Leveraging Others' Distribution Networks

Are other organizations delivering content to similar audiences? Can you partner or learn from these organizations?

→ There are a number of organizations such as teachers' unions and NGOs who have similar distribution networks for publications, and similar audiences. *loveLife could partner with such an organization to the mutual benefit of both parties.*

Does the frequency of distributions of the partner company align with the frequency of distribution of your organization?

→ Many potential partners put out information on an annual or ad-hoc basis. *A good opportunity would be for loveLife to find a partner who distributes a publication or other item once every two months.*

What benefits do you provide the partner to help strengthen the relationship?

→ As the largest HIV NGO in South Africa, loveLife lends its expertise and reputation to the partner. loveLife is committed to its mission and would support other organizations with similar missions. *loveLife should seek out partners with similar missions and should ensure that the partnership would benefit both parties.*