Imagine the following scenario:

Patrick Maloney has just been hired as Director of Marketing for SCORE, a national youth sports organization in Australia. SCORE runs youth football programs across the country, and for years, has been a very popular choice for parents looking to involve their kids in sports. However, over the past five years, the organization has seen participation drop dramatically, and after an organizational audit, several additional personnel members were hired to help the organization reinvigorate its marketing efforts. Patrick has previously worked for amateur and professional sports organizations in Australia and is excited for this new opportunity. In his previous positions, Patrick has revised marketing strategy and plans. Additionally, he has a personal connection to the organization as he played youth football growing up and two of his children play football through the organization.

Patrick begins his first day of work and meets with his supervisor, Georgianna Strudler, and asks to see the organization's marketing plan. Georgianna responds that the organization does not have a marketing plan document. She responds that they have just relied on television, radio, and billboard advertising as *that has worked in the past*. Patrick is a bit surprised that a national organization would not have a written document to help guide their marketing efforts. Patrick then asks what the vision for the marketing plan is and Georgianna responds that the goal is to *get kids signed up to play*. Patrick then asks if the organization has done any research to investigate why there has been a decrease in participation. Georgianna replies that they have not, and tells Patrick *that's something you need to find out*. Patrick, again, seems a bit disillusioned that an organization of this caliber has not considered reasons why they have seen a decrease in participation.

Patrick then asks to what extent the organization is evaluating their marketing efforts, and Georgianna informs him that the organization *doesn't really do that* as they don't *understand all those statistics* and Patrick then tells her he plans on developing evaluation benchmarks as part of the new marketing efforts. Georgianna tells Patrick that is a great goal, but she also tells him the organization is slow to respond to change and Patrick would be better off not trying to change things too quickly.

After the meeting ends, Patrick walks back to his office and is a bit puzzled by his meeting with Georgianna, as it was made clear to him during his interview process that the organization needed to enhance its marketing efforts. Patrick decides to rely on his experiences during the interview and get to work. He calls Susan Buschoff, the organization's Marketing Manager, and asks her to come into his office so they can get to work.

During the meeting, Patrick and Susan decide that the first thing they need to do in building a marketing plan is to identify a vision for the organization and then build goals and objectives from that vision. Patrick and Susan decide to take a holistic approach to this process and speak to both internal employees and customers of the organization to get input that will help them identify a vision. Patrick picks up his phone and starts to call some people in the community who have their children play football through the organization. As he waits for the call to be picked up, he wonders if he has made the right decision in joining SCORE.

4.1 Sports Marketing Plan Foundations

Sports marketing, like many organizational functions, must have a written plan to succeed. Without a written plan, sports marketing personnel may lack direction in their efforts and thus, resources may be expended towards projects or tasks that do not help the organization achieve its objectives. Additionally, without a plan, it is very difficult to measure results and determine if marketing efforts are working, as there is not baseline for comparison. Consequently, it is imperative that a written marketing plan be in place. In constructing a written marketing plan, there are several important elements to consider. First, the sports organization must identify a vision – or said differently, what is it that the organization wants to achieve through its marketing efforts? Keep in mind that goals in this area should be compatible with other organizational objectives. For example, if one of the goals for marketing is to increase season-ticket sales by 25% a year for a three-year period, then the marketing plan should consider what other organizational areas will be helpful in achieving this objective. For instance, sports marketing professionals can work with the organization's public relations staff to promote positive stories within the organization that can help to drive interest in season tickets. Additionally, marketing staff could also work with the organization's social media and communications staff to tell stories about season-ticket holders to illustrate the benefits that come from being a season ticket holder. One useful step to take here is a Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis, which is a process wherein the organization would assess what it is doing well, what can be improved as well as industry and marketplace opportunities and threats that could hinder success (Mullin, Hardy & Sutton, 2014). Within this process, a sports marketing plan must also consider current trends and how future developments might affect the organization's marketing efforts. For example, sports organizations must look at digital

and mobile technology and consider how their marketing efforts can implement consumer preferences in this area. Thus, a sports organization may integrate a digital ticketing option through its app as part of the marketing plan.

Once the organization has determined its vision or goals for the marketing plan, the plan can then start being developed. Essentially, what steps will the organization take to achieve the vision it has for its marketing efforts? Here, the organization can develop goals and objectives. Mullin et al. (2014) note that while goals and objectives are often used synonymously, goals are often broad and qualitative, whereas objectives are often more specific and quantitative in nature. They also note that developing goals and objectives is an ongoing process and one that the sports organization is continually analyzing and refining. Once the organization has identified the goals and objectives it will implement to reach its vision, the plan must be implemented. This step involves communicating the plan to all relevant personnel and fostering organizational buy-in. Here, personnel responsibilities should be clear and measurable. For example, the sports organization will need to determine things like: who has oversight for the plan? How will the plan be assessed and measured? Remember that sports marketing plans must be ongoing and flexible. While sports organizations should be patient in the time period they allot for data and feedback to be measured, if a suitable period of time has passed and objectives have not been met, sports organizations must be willing to adapt and revise the marketing plan. A plan is not much good if an organization is not willing to honestly assess results. While this can be unpleasant, it is necessary to ensure the organization's sustainability.

4.1.1 Developing a Marketing Plan and Vision

A sports marketing plan will not succeed if the organization does not have a vision for what it wants to achieve. Identifying a vision for the sports organization involves visualizing the organization's image (Mullin et al., 2014). In other words, what is it that people should think of when they think about the organization? What is the organization *about*? What are the goals of the organization? These answers are certain to vary with each sports organization. For example, a National Football League (NFL) franchise is likely to have different goals than an athletic department of a small liberal arts college in the United States, yet each organization has unique elements to it and things that it is trying to accomplish and these things help comprise the vision of the organization. Thus, marketing efforts should be designed to help the organization accomplish its vision.

To help you understand this concept, complete the following table for your own organization and identify elements or factors in the organization's vision and how marketing could help accomplish these goals:

Table 1: Organizational Vision and Marketing

Organizational Vision and Marketing	
Organizational Goal or Vision	Ways that Marketing Could Achieve Goal or Vision

Source: prepared by the author

Certainly, identifying a vision and developing a marketing plan cannot begin until the organization has identified its current position in the industry, and here a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis is useful. In developing a SWOT, sports organizations must think broadly and involve key stakeholders and internal employees (Mullin et al., 2014). SWOT analyses must be honest. Sports organizations must be willing to take a hard look at strengths and weaknesses. While this can be difficult to do, not doing so can set the organization up to fail as its weaknesses are not identified, and thus, personnel are not working to mitigate the weakness, which allows them to fester and grow. Sports organizations must also survey the current landscape both within and without sport to identify consumer trends and ensure the organization is adapting to these. This step does not necessarily require sports organizations to predict the future, but it should involve looking at societal trends and movements and how sports organizations can benefit, but also be negatively impacted. For example, sports organizations may want to consider consumer shifts in convenience and customization and how their marketing efforts could benefit and guard against these trends. Thus, a sports organization may decide to configure its mobile app to allow fans to purchase tickets (convenience) and give them the ability to purchase ticket packages to games that allow them to mix and match games of their choice (customization). Once a sports organization has completed its SWOT analysis, the marketing plan can be built from this information. Keep in mind that sports organizations will

certainly need to adjust their strategy, but they should be careful not to deviate too much from their vision (Mullin et al., 2014). That is, sports organizations must be true to who they are and make sure that their marketing efforts are consistent with their vision. For example, a sports organization may value promoting a family-friendly atmosphere at its venue and that core value might determine what kinds of corporate sponsors seeks.

As each sports organization is unique, there are some common elements that underpin most sports marketing plans. Greenwell and Thorn (2012) identified these areas as follows:

- **Introduction** – in the introduction section, a short rationale is often provided that outlines the necessity of the plan and reinforces the organization's vision. This section often includes an overview of other sections of the plan.
- **Data and Analysis** – sports organizations have a variety of sources from which they can obtain data to analyze marketing efforts. These include internal resources such as CRM data, along with external data such as economic figures and social media data (e.g., number of followers on the organization's Twitter account).
- **Goals and Objectives** – goals and objectives provide direction for the marketing plan. Objectives are created for each goal and represent measurable data to assess goal achievement.
- **Target Markets** – here, a sports organization outlines the audiences it is trying to reach through its marketing efforts. The organization can examine current efforts to reach their target markets as well as identify potentially under-served markets who may be interested in what the sports organization offers.
- **Marketing Strategy** – the marketing strategy illustrates the methods or tactics the sports organizations will use to execute the goals and objectives it has outlined.
- **Implementation** – in this section, the sports organization outlines how the strategies it has identified will be executed.
- **Evaluation** – here, the sports organization discusses how the success of the plan will be evaluated. In other words, how will it be determined that goals and objectives are being met? Keep in mind, that evaluation is a continually ongoing process.
- **Summary** - this section provides a summation of key elements of the plan, essentially, a snapshot of what the plan is about. .

4.1.2 Developing Strategic Goals and Objectives

Once the organization has identified its vision, the marketing plan must then involve creating goals and objectives. Each sports organization has unique goals it is trying to achieve, although there are likely to be commonalities among sports organizations in certain outcomes, such as engaging stakeholders and generating positive media attention. Additionally, goals must be consistent with the vision of the organization; otherwise goals are likely to prove ineffective. Greenwell and Thorn (2012) outlined some common goals for sports organizations, including:

- Increasing attendance
- Increasing market share
- Increasing sales
- Increasing membership
- Increasing participation
- Increasing profitability
- Creating value for sponsors
- Enhancing public image
- Strengthening customer service

Once goals have been developed, objectives for each goal should be created to help relevant personnel understand how the goal is to be achieved. Here, a specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely (SMART) approach is helpful, by developing objectives that are:

- **Specific** – objectives must have specificity. For example, an objective of *increasing customer contact* to meet the goal of increased ticket sales provides no measurable parameters. A better objective for this goal would be *to increase customer contact via e-mail by 10 %, in-person visits by 25 %, and phone calls by 30 %.*
- **Measurable** – like specificity, objectives must be measurable or there is little chance of enforcing accountability. Thus, the more measurable an objective is, the more the organization can evaluate whether the goal has been achieved or not. For instance, the objective *to increase concessions sales* is not measurable, but the same objective written as, *to increase concession sales by 10% over previous year* is measurable.
- **Achievable** – while it is important to have lofty goals, goals must be attainable and realistic to achieve. If personnel are given unreachable goals, morale is likely to suffer and the organization will not reach its goals. Objectives must be seen as being achievable and here is where the diversity of each sports organization must be considered. What is achievable for an

organization like the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and a minor league hockey team is much different.

- **Relevant** - objectives should be pertinent to the goal and make sense. That is, sports organizations should ensure that there is a clear connection and association between the goal and the objective. Uncertainty and ambiguity can be problematic here.
- **Timely** – objectives should outline a timeline for completion, as this helps the organization in its evaluation efforts.

Marketing goals and objectives must be strategic, that is, connected to the larger vision of the organization. This necessity is one reason why a written document is so important as it allows the sports organization to articulate its vision and connect the marketing goals and objectives, which promotes consistency among personnel responsible for executing various elements of the plan.

To better help you understand this concept, complete the following table and identify marketing goals and objectives for your organization:

Table 2: Marketing Goals and Objectives

Marketing Goals and Objectives	
Marketing Goals	Objective (apply SMART criteria)

Source: prepared by the author.

After developing goals and objectives, the sports organization must determine how it will execute the strategies and objectives. Each sports organization has unique elements to it, and therefore, must ensure that their marketing strategies are relevant for their marketing environment (Greenwell, & Thorn, 2012). As sports organizations determine the strategy to execute their goals and objectives, they may want to think about elements outlined by Porter (1980):

- **Differentiation** – how will the sports organization stand out in the industry and against its competitors? What makes the sports organization unique and how can this differentiation be captured in marketing efforts?
- **Focus** – to what extent will the sports organization pinpoint a specific group, or said differently, how might the sports organization promote exclusivity with a particular group or market?
- **Cost-leadership strategy** – here, a sports organization may decide to set a trend by offering a lower price than its competitors.

Once strategies have been developed, sports organizations need to identify the tactics that will be used to execute these strategies and, in doing so, the marketing mix plays an influential role (Greenwell, & Thorn, 2012). Greenwell and Thorn (2012) discussed some key considerations for each element of the marketing mix as follows:

- **Product** – here, the sports organization should consider things such as product development, brand image, influential attributes, benefits and things that can be added to the product to enhance customer's experience.
- **Price** – with pricing, sports organizations will need to consider elements such as purchase pricing, pricingpolicies, discount strategies and payment polices. **Promotion** – in this area, sports organizations must contemplate things such as promotional objectives, promotional budget, message content and media selection
- **Place** – with place, sports organizations need to consider things such as where events will be held, access, timelines, facilities and how inventory, such as tickets, will be managed.

4.1.3 Implementing the Marketing Plan

Once goals and objectives have been developed, target markets have been identified, and the strategies to reach those markets, the organization must determine the methods for how the plan will be implemented. Here, it is important for there to be organizational buy-in (Mullin et al., 2014). Thus, sports marketing professionals need to ensure that the marketing plan has been developed holistically and in accordance with organizational goals. Implementing the plan also involves planning (Mullinet al., 2014). Sports organizations must be

willing to gather feedback from both internal and external stakeholders and make sure that communication about the plan is being coordinated. Greenwell and Thorn (2012) identified the following considerations that must accompany the implantation of marketing strategies associated with goals and objectives: (a) the tasks necessary to implement each tactic; (b) identifying those responsible of implementing those tasks; and (c) the timeframe for each task). As it becomes time for the marketing plan to be implemented, sports marketing professionals transition from a planning role to a leadership or management role (Greenwell, & Thorn, 2012). Keep in mind that implementation of the plan requires coordination with various organizational departments, and thus, sports marketing professionals must ensure they are communicating and working with personnel in other areas such as ticketing, customer service, media relations, and community relations, among others, to make sure there is consistency in the presentation of the marketing strategy to the intended audience.

4.1.4 Evaluating the Marketing Plan

Once a marketing plan has been implemented, sports marketing professionals must ensure that procedures or methods are in place to evaluate the success of the plan. This is an active and ongoing process and, while there are various timetables for each component of the plan, sports marketing professionals cannot sit around and wait to see if the plan was effective (Mullin et al., 2014). There should be periodic assessments that contribute to the overall effectiveness of the plan. Mullin et al. (2014) also observed that plan evaluations require an emphasis on quantitative data and is essentially determined through the perspective of the customer. Specifically, they note, “consumer satisfaction = product benefit – costs” (p. 50). With this perspective in mind, sports marketing professionals should develop criteria that can be used to benchmark the performance of the plan. For example, if one of the goals of the marketing plan is to increase media mentions in particular sports media outlets, sports marketing professionals should identify the number or quantity of media attention they are seeking, outline objectives to achieve that goal, and then determine a timeframe for evaluation.

As sports marketing professionals and others in the organization assess the effectiveness of the marketing plan, it is important to be honest and accurate. Not reaching goals is frustrating, but if sports organizations do not acknowledge that opportunities are missed, it is going to be difficult for the sports organization to improve and, in the long-term, the sports organization is only going to be harmed as they are not connected with the reality of their situation. Evaluation processes are a key part of sports

marketing plans and both short-term (e.g., per game) and long-term (e.g., per season) evaluation measures should be built into the marketing plan. Finally, having a written marketing plan with evaluation procedures helps responsible personnel understand exactly what the organization expects of them and defines their tasks and efforts in a clear manner, which helps promote investment and buy-in.

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