

12.3: Promotion

What you'll learn to do: explain how organizations use integrated marketing communication (IMC) to support their marketing strategies

The readings in this section cover seven different marketing communication methods that are commonly used today. This section will help you become familiar with each method, common tools associated with each method, and the advantages and disadvantages of each one.

Learning Objectives

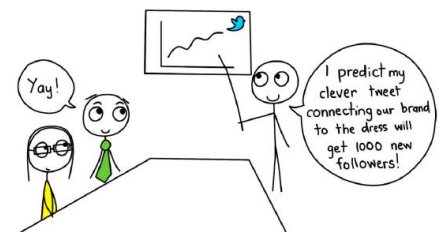
- Explain the promotion mix
- Explain how organizations use IMC to support their marketing strategies

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) Definition

IMC: Making an Impact with Marketing Communication

Having a great product available to your customers at a great price does absolutely nothing for you if your customers don't know about it. That's where promotion enters the picture: it does the job of connecting with your target audiences and communicating what you can offer them.

In today's marketing environment, promotion involves *integrated marketing communication* (IMC). In a nutshell, IMC involves bringing together a variety of different communication tools to deliver a common message and make a desired impact on customers' perceptions and behavior. As an experienced consumer in the English-speaking world, you have almost certainly been the target of IMC activities. (Practically every time you "like" a TV show, article, or a meme on Facebook, you are participating in an IMC effort!)



What Is Marketing Communication?

Defining marketing communication is tricky because, in a real sense, everything an organization does has communication potential. The price placed on a product communicates something very specific about the product. A company that chooses to distribute its products strictly through discount stores sends a distinct message to the market. Marketing communication refers to activities deliberately focused on promoting an offering among target audiences. The following definition helps to clarify this term:

Marketing communication includes all the messages, media, and activities used by an organization to communicate with the market and help persuade target audiences to accept its messages and take action accordingly.

Integrated marketing communication is the the process of coordinating all this activity across different communication methods. Note that a central theme of this definition is persuasion: persuading people to believe something, to desire something, and/or to do something. Effective marketing communication is goal directed, and it is aligned with an organization's marketing strategy. It aims to deliver a particular message to a specific audience with a targeted purpose of altering perceptions and/or behavior. Integrated marketing communication (IMC) makes this marketing activity more efficient and effective because it relies on multiple communication methods and customer touch points to deliver a consistent message in more ways and in more compelling ways.

The Promotion Mix: Marketing Communication Methods

The **promotion mix** refers to how marketers combine a range of marketing communication methods to execute their marketing activities. Different methods of marketing communication have distinct advantages and complexities, and it requires skill and experience to deploy them effectively. Not surprisingly, marketing communication methods evolve over time as new communication tools and capabilities become available to marketers and the people they target.



Seven common methods of marketing communication are described below:

- **Advertising:** Any paid form of presenting ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor. Historically, advertising messages have been tailored to a group and employ mass media such as radio, television, newspaper, and magazines. Advertising may also target individuals according to their profile characteristics or behavior; examples are the weekly ads mailed by supermarkets to local residents or online banner ads targeted to individuals based on the sites they visit or their Internet search terms.
- **Public relations (PR):** The purpose of public relations is to create goodwill between an organization (or the things it promotes) and the “public” or target segments it is trying to reach. This happens through unpaid or earned promotional opportunities: articles, press and media coverage, winning awards, giving presentations at conferences and events, and otherwise getting favorable attention through vehicles not paid for by the sponsor. Although organizations earn rather than pay for the PR attention they receive, they may spend significant resources on the activities, events, and people who generate this attention.
- **Personal selling:** Personal selling uses people to develop relationships with target audiences for the purpose of selling products and services. Personal selling puts an emphasis on face-to-face interaction, understanding the customer’s needs, and demonstrating how the product or service provides value.
- **Sales promotion:** Sales promotions are marketing activities that aim to temporarily boost sales of a product or service by adding to the basic value offered, such as “buy one get one free” offers to consumers or “buy twelve cases and get a 10 percent discount” to wholesalers, retailers, or distributors.
- **Direct marketing:** This method aims to sell products or services directly to consumers rather than going through retailer. Catalogs, telemarketing, mailed brochures, or promotional materials and television home shopping channels are all common traditional direct marketing tools. Email and mobile marketing are two next-generation direct marketing channels.
- **Digital marketing:** Digital marketing covers a lot of ground, from Web sites to search-engine, content, and social media marketing. Digital marketing tools and techniques evolve rapidly with technological advances, but this umbrella term covers all of the ways in which digital technologies are used to market and sell organizations, products, services, ideas, and experiences.
- **Guerrilla marketing:** This newer category of marketing communication involves unconventional, innovative, and usually low-cost marketing tactics to engage consumers in the marketing activity, generate attention and achieve maximum exposure for an organization, its products, and/or services. Generally guerrilla marketing is experiential: it creates a novel situation or memorable experience consumers connect to a product or brand.

Guerrilla marketing: a lamppost transformed into a McDonald’s coffeepot. Source: <http://janjan-design.blogspot.com/20...loving-it.html>

Most marketing initiatives today incorporate multiple methods: hence the need for IMC. Each of these marketing communication methods will be discussed in further detail later in this module.

The Objectives of Marketing Communication

The basic objectives of all marketing communication methods are (1) to communicate, (2) to compete, and (3) to convince. In order to be effective, organizations should ensure that whatever information they communicate is clear, accurate, truthful, and useful to the stakeholders involved. In fact, being truthful and accurate in marketing communications is more than a matter of integrity; it’s also a matter of legality, since fraudulent marketing communications can end in lawsuits and even the criminal justice system.

Marketing communication is key to competing effectively, particularly in markets where competitors sell essentially the same product at the same price in the same outlets. Only through marketing communications may an organization find ways to appeal to certain segments, differentiate its product, and create enduring brand loyalty. Remaining more appealing or convincing than competitors' messages is an ongoing challenge.

Ideally, marketing communication is convincing: it should present ideas, products, or services in such a compelling way that target segments are led to take a desired action. The ability to persuade and convince is essential to winning new business, but it may also be necessary to reconvince and retain many consumers and customers. Just because a customer buys a particular brand once or a dozen times, or even for a dozen years, there is no guarantee that the person will stick with the original product. That is why marketers want to make sure he or she is constantly reminded of the product's unique benefits.

Common Marketing Communication Methods

In a successfully operated campaign, all activities will be well coordinated to build on one another and increase the overall impact. For example, a single campaign might include:

- **Advertising:** A series of related, well-timed, carefully placed television ads coupled with print advertising in selected magazines and newspapers
- **Direct marketing:** Direct-to-consumer mail pieces sent to target segments in selected geographic areas, reinforcing the messages from the ads
- **Personal selling:** Preparation for customer sales representatives about the campaign to equip them to explain and demonstrate the product benefits stressed in advertising
- **Sales promotions:** In-store display materials reflecting the same messages and design as the ads, emphasizing point-of-sale impact
- **Digital marketing:** Promotional information on the organization's Web site that reflects the same messages, design, and offers reflected in the ads; ads themselves may be posted on the Website, YouTube, Facebook, and shared in other social media
- **Public relations:** A press release announcing something newsworthy in connection to the campaign focus, objectives, and target segment(s)

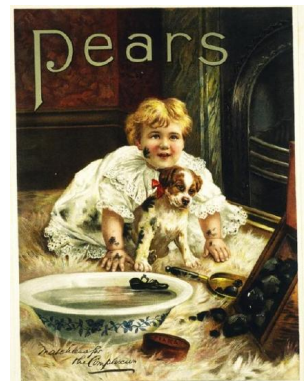
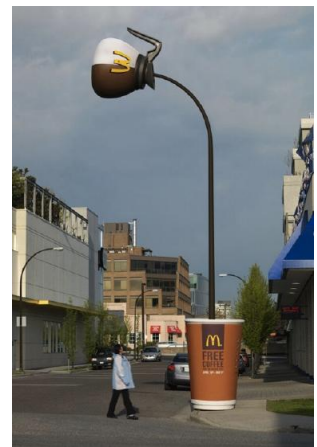
Advertising

Advertising is probably the first thing you think of when you think of marketing. Advertising is any paid form of communication from an identified sponsor or source that draws attention to ideas, goods, services or the sponsor itself: essentially commercials and ads (whether digital or print). Most advertising is directed toward groups rather than individuals, and advertising is usually delivered through media such as television, radio, newspapers and, increasingly, the internet. Ads are often measured in *impressions* (the number of times a consumer is exposed to an advertisement).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Advertising

As a method of marketing communication, advertising has both advantages and disadvantages. In terms of advantages, advertising creates a sense of credibility or legitimacy when an organization invests in presenting itself and its products in a public forum. Ads can convey a sense of quality and permanence, the idea that a company isn't some fly-by-night venture. Advertising allows marketers to repeat a message at intervals selected strategically. Repetition makes it more likely that the target audience will see and recall a message, which improves awareness-building results. Advertising can generate drama and human interest by featuring people and situations that are exciting or engaging. Finally, advertising is an excellent vehicle for brand building, as it can create rational and emotional connections with a company or offering that translate into goodwill.

The primary disadvantage of advertising is cost. Marketers question whether this communication method is really cost-effective at reaching large groups. Of course, costs vary depending on the medium, with television ads being very expensive to produce and place. In contrast, print and digital ads tend to be much less expensive. Along with cost is the question of how many people an advertisement actually reaches. Ads are easily tuned out in today's crowded media marketplace. Even ads that initially grab attention can grow stale over time. Because



advertising is a one-way medium, there is usually little direct opportunity for consumer feedback and interaction, particularly from consumers who often feel overwhelmed by competing market messages.

Direct Marketing

Direct marketing activities bypass any intermediaries and communicate directly with the individual consumer. Direct mail is personalized to the individual consumer, based on whatever a company knows about that person's needs, interests, behaviors, and preferences. Traditional direct marketing activities include mail, catalogs, and telemarketing. The thousands of "junk mail" offers from credit card companies, bankers, and charitable organizations that flood mailboxes every year are artifacts of direct marketing. Telemarketing contacts prospective customers via the telephone to pitch offers and collect information. Today, direct marketing overlaps heavily with digital marketing, as marketers rely on email and, increasingly, mobile communications to reach and interact with consumers.



If you've ever paid off an auto loan, you may have noticed a torrent of mail offers from car dealerships right around the five-year mark. They know, from your credit history, that you're nearly done paying off your car and you've had the vehicle for several years, so you might be interested in trading up for a newer model. Based on your geography and any voter registration information, you may be targeted during election season to participate via telephone in political polls and to receive "robocalls" from candidates and parties stumping for your vote. Moving into the digital world, virtually any time you share an email address with an organization, it becomes part of a database to be used for future marketing.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Direct Marketing

Direct marketing can offer significant value to consumers by tailoring their experience in the market to things that most align with their needs and interests. If you're going to have a baby (and you don't mind people knowing about it), wouldn't you rather have Target send you special offers on baby products than on men's shoes or home improvement goods? Additionally, direct marketing can be a powerful tool for anticipating and predicting customer needs and behaviors. Over time, as companies use consumer data to understand their target audiences and market dynamics, they can develop more effective campaigns and offers.

Among the leading disadvantages of direct marketing are, not surprisingly, customer concerns about privacy and information security. Data-driven direct marketing might seem a little creepy or even nefarious, and certainly it can be when marketers are insensitive or unethical in their use of consumer data. Direct marketing also takes place in a crowded, saturated market in which people are only too willing to toss junk mail and unsolicited email into trash bins without a second glance. Electronic spam filters screen out many email messages, so people may never even see email messages from many of the organizations that send them.

Heavy reliance on data also leads to the challenge of keeping databases and contact information up to date and complete, a perennial problem for many organizations. Finally, direct marketing implies a direct-to-customer business model that inevitably requires companies to provide an acceptable level of customer service and interaction to win new customers and retain their business.

Personal Selling

Personal selling uses in-person interaction to sell products and services. This type of communication is carried out by sales representatives, who are the personal connection between a buyer and a company or a company's products or services. In addition to enhancing customer relationships, this type of marketing communications tool can be a powerful source of customer feedback, as well.

Effective personal selling addresses the buyer's needs and preferences without making him or her feel pressured. Good salespeople offer advice, information, and recommendations, and they can help buyers save money and time during the decision process. The seller should give honest responses to any questions or objections the buyer has and show that the company cares more about meeting the buyer's needs than making the sale. Attending to these aspects of personal selling contributes to a strong, trusting relationship between buyer and seller.^[1]



Advantages and Disadvantages of Personal Selling

The most significant strength of personal selling is its flexibility. Salespeople can tailor their presentations to fit the needs, motives, and behavior of individual customers. A salesperson can gauge the customer's reaction to a sales approach and immediately adjust

the message to facilitate better understanding. A salesperson is also in an excellent position to encourage the customer to act. The one-on-one interaction of personal selling means that a salesperson can effectively respond to and overcome objections—e.g., concerns or reservations about the product—so that the customer is more likely to buy. Salespeople can also offer many customized reasons that might spur a customer to buy, whereas an advertisement offers a limited set of reasons that may not persuade everyone in the target audience.

Personal selling also minimizes wasted effort. Advertisers can spend a lot of time and money on a mass-marketing message that reaches many people outside the target market (but doesn't result in additional sales). In personal selling, the sales force pinpoints the target market, makes a contact, and focuses effort that has a strong probability of leading to a sale.

High cost is the primary disadvantage of personal selling. With increased competition, higher travel and lodging costs, and higher salaries, the cost per sales contract continues to rise. Many companies try to control sales costs by compensating sales representatives through commissions or by using complementary techniques, such as telemarketing, direct mail, toll-free numbers for interested customers, and online communication with qualified prospects. Another weakness of personal selling is message inconsistency. Many salespeople view themselves as independent from the organization, so they design their own sales techniques, use their own message strategies, and engage in questionable ploys to generate sales. (You'll recall our discussion in the ethics module about the unique challenges that B2B salespeople face.) As a result, it can be difficult to find a unified company or product message within a sales force or between the sales force and the rest of the marketing mix.

Sales Promotions

Sales promotions are a marketing communication tool for stimulating revenue or providing incentives or extra value to distributors, sales staff, or customers over a short time period. Sales promotion activities include special offers, displays, demonstrations, and other nonrecurring selling efforts that aren't part of the ordinary routine. As an additional incentive to buy, these tools can be directed at consumers, retailers and other distribution partners, or the manufacturer's own sales force.

Companies use many different forms of media to communicate about sales promotions, such as printed materials like posters, coupons, direct mail pieces and billboards; radio and television ads; digital media like text messages, email, websites and social media, and so forth.

Most consumers are familiar with common sales promotion techniques including samples, coupons, point-of-purchase displays, premiums, contents, loyalty programs, and rebates.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Sales Promotions^[2]

In addition to their primary purpose of boosting sales in the near term, companies can use consumer sales promotions to help them understand price sensitivity. Coupons and rebates provide useful information about how pricing influences consumers' buying behavior. Sales promotions can also be a valuable—and sometimes sneaky—way to acquire contact information for current and prospective customers. Many of these offers require consumers to provide their names and other information in order to participate. Electronically-scanned coupons can be linked to other purchasing data, to inform organizations about buying habits. All this information can be used for future marketing research, campaigns and outreach.

Consumer sales promotions can generate loyalty and enthusiasm for a brand, product, or service. Frequent flyer programs, for example, motivate travelers to fly on a preferred airline even if the ticket prices are somewhat higher. If sales have slowed, a promotion such as a sweepstakes or contest can spur customer excitement and (re)new interest in the company's offering. Sales promotions are a good way of energizing and inspiring customer action.

Trade promotions offer distribution channel partners financial incentives that encourage them to support and promote a company's products. Offering incentives like prime shelf space at a retailer's store in exchange for discounts on products has the potential to build and enhance business relationships with important distributors or businesses. Improving these relationships can lead to higher sales, stocking of other product lines, preferred business terms and other benefits.

Sales promotions can be a two-edged sword: if a company is continually handing out product samples and coupons, it can risk tarnishing the company's brand. Offering too many freebies can signal to customers that they are not purchasing a prestigious or "limited" product. Another risk with too-frequent promotions is that savvy customers will hold off purchasing until the next promotion, thus depressing sales.

Often businesses rush to grow quickly by offering sales promotions, only to see these promotions fail to reach their sales goals and target customers. The temporary boost in short term sales may be attributed to highly price-sensitive consumers looking for a deal, rather than the long-term loyal customers a company wants to cultivate. Sales promotions need to be thought through, designed and

promoted carefully. They also need to align well with the company's larger business strategy. Failure to do so can be costly in terms of dollars, profitability and reputation.

If businesses become overly reliant on sales growth through promotions, they can get trapped in short-term marketing thinking and forget to focus on long-term goals. If, after each sales dip, a business offers another sales promotion, it can be damaging to the long-term value of its brand.

Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is an umbrella term for using a digital tools to promote and market products, services, organizations and brands. As consumers and businesses become more reliant on digital communications, the power and importance of digital marketing have increased. There are several essential tools in the digital marketing tool kit: email, mobile marketing, websites, content marketing and search-engine optimization (SEO), and social media marketing. For now, we'll focus on websites and social media.

Websites represent an all-in-one storefront, a display counter, and a megaphone for organizations to communicate in the digital world. For digital and bricks-and-mortar businesses, websites are a primary channel for communicating with current and prospective customers as well as other audiences. A good website provides evidence that an organization is real, credible, and legitimate.

Social media are distinctive for their networking capabilities: they allow people to reach and interact with one another through interconnected networks. This "social" phenomenon changes the power dynamic in marketing: no longer is the marketer the central gatekeeper for all communication about a product, service, brand, or organization. Social media allows for organic dialogue and activity to happen directly between individuals, unmediated by a company. Companies can (and should) listen, learn, and find ways to participate authentically.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Digital Marketing

Websites have so many advantages that there is almost no excuse for a business not to have one. Effective website marketing declares to the world that an organization exists, what value it offers, and how to do business. Websites can be an engine for generating customer data and new business leads. An electronic storefront is often dramatically less expensive than a physical storefront, and it can serve customers virtually anywhere in the world with internet access. Websites are very flexible and easy to alter. Organizations can try out new strategies, content and tactics at relatively low cost to see what works and where the changes pay off.

The advantages and benefits of social media marketing focus heavily on the two-way and even multidirectional communication between customers, prospects, and advocates for your company or brand. By listening and engaging in social media, organizations are better equipped to understand and respond to market sentiment. Social media helps organizations identify and cultivate advocates for its products, services, and brand, including the emergence of customers who can become highly credible, trusted voices to help you sell.

At the same time, digital marketing strategies carry costs and risks. Websites require some investment of time and money to set up and maintain. Organizations should make wise, well-researched decisions about information infrastructure and website hosting, to ensure their sites remain operational with good performance and uptime. Companies that capture and maintain customer data through their websites must be vigilant about information security to prevent hackers from stealing sensitive customer data.

Social media also carry a number of inherent challenges. Social media are dynamic environments that requires significant effort to monitor and stay current on. It is also difficult to continually create "share-worthy" content. The variety of social media tools makes it a challenge to understand which platforms to use for which target audiences and calls to action. Crisis communications can be difficult, too, particularly in the public environment of social media, in which it is difficult to contain or control communication. This means it can be difficult to mitigate the impact of a crisis on the brand. One of the biggest challenges facing organizations is determining who in the organization should "own" the social media platforms for the organization. Too few hands to help means the burden of content creation is high on a single individual. However, too many people often results in duplication of efforts or conflicting content.

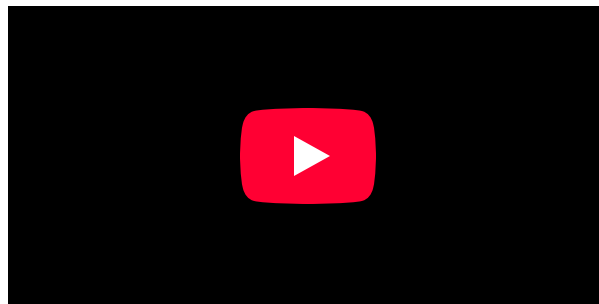
Public Relations

Public relations (PR) is the process of maintaining a favorable image and building beneficial relationships between an organization and the public communities, groups, and people it serves. Unlike advertising, which tries to create favorable impressions through paid messages, public relations does not pay for attention and publicity. Instead, PR strives to earn a favorable image by drawing

attention to newsworthy and attention-worthy activities of the organization and its customers. For this reason, PR is often referred to as “free advertising.”

In fact, PR is not a costless form of promotion. It requires salaries to be paid to people who oversee and execute PR strategy. It also involves expenses associated with events, sponsorships and other PR-related activities.

The following video, about Tyson Foods’ “Meals That Matter” program, shows how one company cooked up an idea that is equal parts public relations and corporate social responsibility (CSR). The video covers the Tyson disaster-relief team delivering food to the residents of Moore, Oklahoma, shortly after tornados struck the area on May 20, 2013. The company received favorable publicity following the inauguration of the program in 2012. (You can read one of the articles here: “Tyson Foods Unveils Disaster Relief Mobile Feeding Unit.”)



Advantages and Disadvantages of Public Relations

Because PR activity is earned rather than paid, it tends to carry more credibility and weight. For example, when a news story profiles a customer’s successful experience with a company and its products, people tend to view this type of article as less biased (and therefore more credible) than a paid advertisement. The news story comes from an objective reporter who feels the story is worth telling. Meanwhile an advertisement on a similar topic would be viewed with skepticism because it is a paid placement from a biased source: the ad sponsor.

Using IMC to Support Marketing Strategies

Determining which marketing communication methods and tools to use and how best to combine them is a challenge for any marketer planning a promotional strategy. To aid the planning process, marketing managers often use a campaign approach. A *campaign* is a planned, coordinated series of marketing communication efforts built around a single theme or idea and designed to reach a particular goal. For years, the term “campaign” has been used in connection with advertising, and this term applies equally well to the entire IMC program.

Organizations may conduct many types of IMC campaigns, and several may be run concurrently. Geographically, a firm may have a local, regional, or national campaign, depending upon the available funds, objectives, and market scope. One campaign may be aimed at consumers and another at wholesalers and retailers. Different marketing campaigns might target different segments simultaneously, delivering



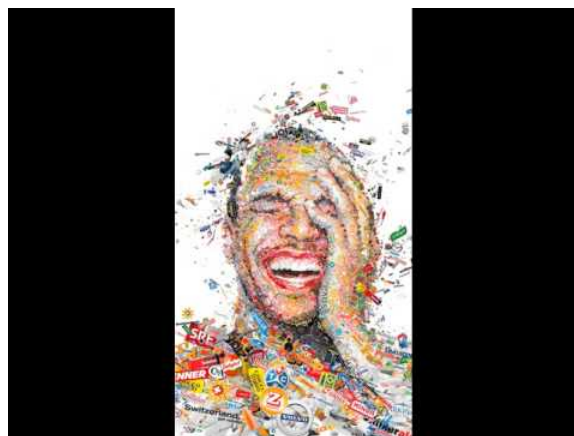
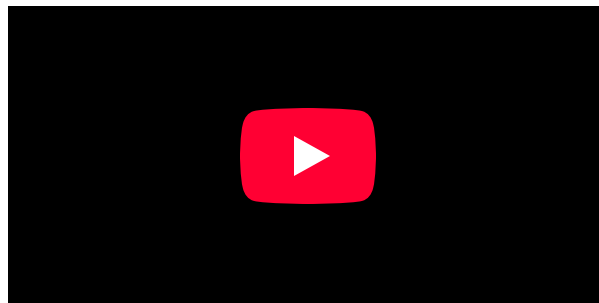
messages and using communication tools tailored to each segment. Marketers use a marketing plan (sometimes called an IMC plan) to track and execute a set of campaigns over a given period of time.

A campaign revolves around a theme, a central idea, focal point, or purpose. This theme permeates all IMC efforts and works to unify the campaign. The theme may refer to the campaign's goals—for example, KCRW “Capital Campaign” launched by the popular Los Angeles-based public radio station KCRW to raise \$48 million to build a new state-of-the-art media facility for its operations. The theme may also refer to the shift in customer attitudes or behavior that a campaign focuses on—such as new-member campaigns launched by numerous member organizations, from professional associations to school parent-teacher organizations. A theme might take the form of a slogan, such as Coca-Cola’s “Taste the Feeling” campaign or DeBeers’ “A diamond is forever.”

Clear Channel is a marketing company that specializes in outdoor advertising. For their latest advertising campaign in Switzerland, they created a slogan-based theme, “Where Brands Meet People,” and asked their clients to participate in dramatizing it. Dozens of Swiss companies gave their logo to be used as individual “tiles” in three colorful mosaic portraits.^[3] These mosaics, two of which are below, appeared on the Web and on the streets of Switzerland. Click here if you want to see a higher-resolution version that reveals all the brands that make up the mosaics.



Some of the billboards appeared in animated form, as below:



Marketing campaigns may also adopt themes that refer to a stage in the product life cycle, such as McDonald's 2015 "All-Day Breakfast" rollout campaign. Some organizations use the same theme for several campaigns; others develop a different theme for each new campaign.

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1. <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/strat...ues-15747.html> ↩
 2. <http://edwardlowe.org/digital-librar...omotional-mix/> ↩
 3. www.behance.net/gallery/2987...ds-meet-people ↩
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