

ADVENTURE RACE MARKETING PLAN TEMPLATE

Develop a marketing strategy and tactics plan for your adventure/navigation race(s) or more broadly for your race organization.

1. Goals

Outline the key goals of your organization and/or race. Are you focused on profitability, a healthy balance of time invested and racer participation, growth of the sport even if it's not a profitable venture or race, etc. Are you focused on introducing new racers to the sport or testing experienced racers? How many participants would be considered a successful event?

2. Market Research

Perform a scan of your "market" to understand whether there's a demand for an outdoor adventure event. How many adventure races are currently held in the area where your race will be held? Do they cater to your target audience or to another target audience (e.g., sprint vs. expedition)? How many other outdoor events somewhat similar to an adventure race (mountain bike, trail running, paddling, or other navigation event) are in that area? If there's saturation, should you consider holding the race in a different area? Or at a different time? Or just promote your race as a new challenge to try?

3. Target Audiences

Describe the people you want to attract to your event. Identify your primary target audiences and your secondary target audience. Will your races target new racers or experienced racers or both? Will you have different durations to appeal to these different audiences? Are you targeting racers from your local area, a broader area around your race, state wide, regional, national, international?

Describe your audiences – e.g. age, gender, where they are from, what activities and sports they currently enjoy, etc. How can you best reach each audience? Use these demographics in your marketing tactics, e.g., Facebook ads which can be customized to these demographics. Be careful not to have too narrow of a target audience. Adventure racing has a broader appeal than a sport like triathlon. It attracts both casual and intense people, families, couples, friends, singles; intellectuals (strong mental aspect) and weekend warriors, and anyone who loves to be active in the outdoors.

4. Strategies & Marketing Mix

4.1 Consider length, timing, location, etc. to appeal to target audiences

If you are a race director who has done a lot of endurance-level and overnight races, your inclination might be to put on races of a similar format and length. If the race is a labor of love, that may be fine but if you want to create a race that's profitable and sustainable over the long term, consider ways to make the race more approachable and accessible.

- A. *Length & Difficulty.* Consider the audience you are trying to get to do the event and how the duration and difficulty of the course affects who will likely sign up for it. Are you considering a shorter race(s) so that more new racers will be drawn to it? As racers get more experience, consider lengthening the race or offer both a shorter and longer race to appeal to as many as possible.

- B. *Timing.* In which season of the race do you plan to hold the race? Is it a spring “warm-up” race that may be a shorter distance or later in the year when more people will be in better shape? Is it in the hot summer or winter and what effect should that have on distance and how it’s marketed?
- C. *Competition.* Ideally, your race(s) can be scheduled so that racers don’t have to choose between your race and another nearby adventure race. Consider working with other AR directors so that everyone knows when each other’s events will be held. Even better, consider creating a series in your area, state or region. You should also keep in mind that you are competing against other sporting events and popular events for athletes and outdoor active folk. Research when these events take place and how much of an impact they may have on your race’s registrations. Consider things like people on summer vacation, holidays and kids going back to school. Obviously permits will play a large factor in your race date too.
- D. *Location.* Will your race be in wilderness, semi-wilderness, a mix of urban and wild areas or a mostly urban race? If you are looking to draw more first-time racers, consider holding the race in or near a large urban area. By locating near a large population, you eliminate the need for most racers to find lodging before and/or after the race. Urban and semi-urban settings are also less intimidating for newer racers. Work with city and county officials to get access to nearby natural areas so you can still offer orienteering.
- E. *Pricing.* While you should factor in unusual expenses (e.g., extremely high permit fees, post-race meal, etc.), generally you’ll want your entry fees to be in the ballpark of other similar events and adventure races. When promoting a race, make sure your audience understands the value of the race in both the gear, prizes, food, entertainment per hour, etc. they will receive but more importantly, the intrinsic value of the experience, the memories, the bonds they will form with teammates. Use racer testimonials, photos, and videos to help convey this.
- F. *Special Challenges.* If you are putting on a sprint/beginner-focused race, look for ways to give the race a fun vibe and uniqueness. One tried and true method is to offer special challenges while still maintaining the core elements of AR. Challenges may have a mental or physical component or both (e.g., run around searching for word puzzles or riddles on trees in a defined area, solve x of them to get a bonus checkpoint). Need ideas? Contact Michigan Adventure Racing for a list of 80 challenges that they’ve used over the years.
- G. *Alternatives to Adventure Racing.* Consider offering simpler on-foot navigation events (orienteering meets and rogaines) for those who do not own a mountain bike or are not yet comfortable racing on technical terrain. Consider positioning these events as “adventure runs” or “capture the flag trail runs” (orienteering is a fairly unknown term to the general public).

4.2 Reduce barriers to entry

Getting into adventure racing can be a timely and costly challenge. Consider making the decision to try your race as easy as possible, especially if it’s a race designed to appeal to newer racers.

- A. *Gut the mandatory gear list.* Remove everything except critical safety gear and equipment needed (e.g., bike, compass, hydration, phone, whistle). This is especially true for sprint races or any race near urban populations where the first step in a medical emergency is likely calling 911 and flagging down help. There is nothing in a first aid kit that is at all life saving (except maybe Benadryl for allergic reactions to bee stings).
- B. *Allow personal canoes and kayaks.* Bargain with canoe liveries or pay extra for them to handle personal boats. One team may have an advantage over another with a speedy canoe or kayak, but that’s true with \$6,000 mountain bikes

- compared to Craigslist specials too. It's more important to get more people racing. Set stricter parameters in the longer races.
- C. *Reduce or eliminate lodging costs.* If your race is 10 hours or under, try to fit it in during a single day so racers don't have to spend money on lodging. Overnight racing is sweet, but better for 16+ hour races or in situations where lodging is available at the race site for low or no cost (but be wary of the time factor of a mandatory overnight stay).
 - D. *Offer a free clinic before the race to alleviate fears.* The clinic should help potential and registered racers understand how the race will work and teach basic navigation and compass use along with 201 level strategies (e.g., attack points, catching and collecting features, handrails, aiming off, relocation). Consider partnering with a locally owned or national retailer to hold the clinic in their store, which benefits them as well. If possible, videotape the event and post it on your website for those that missed it, or at least post a PowerPoint or other document of the "classroom" portion of the clinic for ongoing reference.
 - E. *Provide discounts to first-time racers.* Also consider creating a division of teams that have at least one first-time adventure racer or recognizing the top all-rookie teams with awards.

5. Messages and Brand

Identify your event branding and the key messages you will use consistently across your marketing campaign. The brand is the visual image or identity you project to your key target markets. Messages include both motivational (why people should attend) and informational. Hire a graphic designer to help you create a strong logo to represent your brand.

Message Examples:

- Date and venue
- Specific messages that related to new, experienced, other racers
- Capture testimonials and quotations from past events if applicable
- Utilize photographs and video from past events if applicable
- Focus on a message and visuals that will draw attention, quickly convey the benefits and excitement of AR, and share the basics of the race with a link to more information. With limited resources, you're looking for broad reach to broad audiences.

6. Marketing Support and Partnerships

Outline your marketing support and any marketing or media partners. Examples may include other race organizations that will promote your race as you promote theirs, website designers, social media experts, race sponsors, media sponsors, printing suppliers etc.

7. Key Stakeholder - Communication Plan

Identify all your key stakeholders (those impacted or likely to impact your event). Identify how, what, when and who will you communicate with them.

Stakeholder	What/Message	How	When	Who
Permit Holder	Obtain permits.			
Sponsors	Share benefits/package			
Affected residents and businesses	Notify of road closures and traffic impacts.			

Local Tourism	Event dates – asap.			
Add stakeholders relevant to your event				

8. Marketing Activities

Decide which marketing tools you will use to promote your event. Below are examples of the primary marketing tools. Select only the tools that will most effectively reach your target audiences, taking into consideration your expertise, time, resources and budget. Identify the timeframes, budget and expertise needed to implement each activity.

8.1 Website

Spend the time and money to create a website that is attractive and informative and can ideally be edited by you (e.g., WordPress platform), not the website person. Hire a good website designer. Buy low-cost stock photos or borrow other race organization pics if necessary until you accumulate race photos, using a good photographer. Select a good registration company to partner with.

Identify the key additions and changes to your website as you get closer to the event. Consider using your website to share race photo albums, past results, maps and education on how to be a successful adventure racer. Make sure your website has a way to collect emails for your master email list for communicating by email (e.g., newsletters on upcoming events).

8.2 Social Media Plan

Outline your existing social media reach, how to build it and how to promote your event, work with your event partners etc.

With limited budgets and time, Facebook ads will very likely provide the biggest bang for the buck. If you're on a tight budget, consider trying \$50 if you want to test it out (or spend a few dollars to boost some of your key Facebook posts). You can narrow the audience by geography, age, and interests (adventure racing, orienteering, trail running, paddling, etc.) to get the ads in front of people most likely to be interested. Timing wise, think about how much time it normally takes for a team to gather teammates (especially a new team), train, and acquire gear. Work back from the race date and create your start and end time for your ads accordingly. Most events should have Facebook ads launching several months before the race. Consider using Instagram, Twitter, etc. to further reach audiences depending on your time, photos, audience, etc.

Social Media Plan:

Date	Channel	Title	Content	Who
	Facebook	Ad	Announce race, create several iterations of same ad, especially different photos	
	Facebook	Ad 2 (optional)	Reminder, entry fee increase	
	Facebook	Ad 3 (optional)	Final reminder	

8.3 Email Marketing

How will you structure, grow and communicate with your database. Make sure that your website has an email signup area prominently displayed. Remember to always move all your racer emails into your master email racer list. Do the same for volunteers and a master volunteer list.

Consider using an email distribution service such as MailChimp or Constant Contact which provide design templates and send emails in a way that limits them from getting relegated to spam folders. They are usually free to get started and won't charge you until you hit a large enough mail list.

Because email lists go to audiences that know you, you can usually spend more time focused on the details of a specific race rather than explaining adventure racing. Use email to announce open registration, for reminders as the race gets closer, to recruit volunteers, send race recaps and ask racers for feedback.

Email Marketing Campaign

Date	Campaign	Database/Who
	Announce race	Master
	Reminder about race, fee increase	Master
	Final reminder, registration closes date	Master
	Race updates	Registered racers
	Race recap, survey	Registered racers

8.4 Printed Collateral

Determine and distribute printed collateral such as posters, fliers, newsletters etc. In this online world, consider using print only for the most targeted, highest value opportunities if any. Examples include posting in local outdoor gear and running stores, at high traffic businesses (e.g., Starbucks, Jimmy Johns and Panera Bread almost always have community boards for local events) at clinics you hold and at races. In general, shift printer costs to Facebook/social media buys.

8.5 Media Plan

Outline your media plan. Consider interesting angles, racer stories of triumph, local connections, photo opportunities, etc. If your race includes some unique aspect (e.g. Amazing Race-like challenges, rappel off a downtown building, rafting down a river, hunting for checkpoints inside a well-known building), it will generate even more attention. The media loves these kind of stories.

Write your release. Your goal with a release will likely be to get the media outlet to do one or more of the following:

1. Announce your race to one or more of its channels (news story or article)
2. Invite you to their studio to be interviewed for a taped or live broadcast
3. Interview you in person or over the phone about an upcoming race
4. Interview one of your registered racers as more of a human interest
5. Cover the race with a crew (often a photography or videographer to capture the action) or report on it after the fact.

There are many examples of media releases online that you can use to write yours. The basic framework should be to first give the basic What, Who, When and Where information as briefly as possible. Then include the Why and expand on the other categories, especially the format of the race as this will be unfamiliar to the media and viewers/readers. Include a quote from yourself or even better from a local racer who has signed up or who did a previous race. Provide a link to photos (e.g., house your race photos on Flickr or similar site) or video (e.g., YouTube channel) but unless you know the media person, don't attach photos. One page maximum.

Include in the body of your email, not as a PDF, Word document, etc. Use an email marketing platform/sending service like MailChimp to send out to better ensure it won't end up in a spam folder.

Create a list of local, state, and regional media contacts gathered from their websites. Gather general newsroom emails as well as those of on-air media people and reporters.

Consider sending the release out when registration opens for the race and again one to three weeks before the race when media would consider making one last appeal to racers to sign up, sending a reporter or camera crew to cover the race, and/or asking for photos from the race. Gather media email addresses from their website and set up an email list in your email marketing platform.

8.6 Marketing Partners Plan

Outline who else will promote your event and how this will happen. Show partners how the race will bring racers into the area, generate revenue for local businesses including hotels and restaurants, and in the long term, add another "reason to live here".

Date	Marketing	Who	Information to be included
	Local businesses, hotels, tourism bureaus, landowners (state DNR, county and state parks, etc.) to send out event details to their email database		
	Other race organizations to promote event on their social networks, in exchange for you promoting their event		
	Sponsors to promote event on social networks and via email to their clients.		

8.7 Race Calendar Listings

Develop a list of sites you'll add your races to. Note that many non-adventure race sites will allow adventure races as events. Examples below. Tailor the list to suit your event.

Website	When	Who
Adventure Racing Cooperative (www.arcooperative.org)		
AttackPoint.org		
Running, triathlon, bike, outdoor, tourism, local and regional event websites		

9. Marketing Evaluation Plan

Outline how you will evaluate whether your plan has been successful. Identify any tools you will need to measure what worked and what didn't work. The most important feedback will come from your racers. Create a free survey in Survey Monkey or similar survey tool and ask racers what they liked about your race and suggestions they have. Analyze the feedback shortly after the race while fresh in your mind and develop a list of changes you'll make next time. Email the racers back and let them know as a group (or individually if you received individual feedback) that you heard them and how you'll improve... or why you may not be changing certain things (due to safety, cost, etc.). If you received feedback from just one person about a problem they had but no one else mentioned it, it may have just been a "one off" experience and not worth

investing effort to fix. Each comment should be considered on its own and in light of the benefit, cost and time to improve.

10. Marketing Budget

Depending on how important it is to track costs and greater ensure profitability, identify all income and expenses associated with your Marketing Plan. Create an excel spreadsheet. Include your cash and in-kind income and expenditure. Ideally, many marketing efforts should have a way to measure results to determine if the benefits exceeded the costs. Sometimes you won't receive benefits in the short-run but broader awareness over a longer period of time will make an investment worth it.

Template: THA Consulting, www.thaconsulting.com.au