

Aristotle's Forms of Proof: The Keys to Teaching Recreation Marketing

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Introduction

Aristotle was born in 384 BC in Greece. One of the many writings attributed to Aristotle is *Rhetoric*. In Book I, Section 1356, Aristotle writes of three forms of proof: logos, pathos and ethos (Roberts, 1954). Over 2300 years later, these same tools remain relevant in terms of both spoken and written persuasion (Lucas, 2004). As marketing recreation programs requires persuasion (DeGraaf, Jordan & DeGraaf, 2005), familiarity with the three forms of proof will help you teach students to analyze and create marketing materials for the programs they design and implement.

Logos is an appeal to an individual's rational intellect. One way to persuade people to attend a program is through appealing to their sense of logic. This requires providing the information and specific facts that individuals need to know in order to attend the event. This typically includes: who, what, when, where, why, cost, point of contact and registration information. Consistency, completeness and truth are paramount to logos. For instance, if a quarterly recreation guide advertises a holiday program for \$6.00 per person but, upon trying to register, a patron learns that the price has been changed to \$7.00 but was misprinted, this lack of consistency can cause the patron to terminate the registration process.

Pathos is an appeal to an individual's emotions. Facts and figures alone are generally not enough to encourage recreation participation. Connecting to the audience with pathos entails stirring the feelings of the audience you are trying to persuade. Most commonly, positive emotions are employed in recreation programming marketing materials, with appeals focusing on the excitement, fun and happiness that are derived from a given activity. However, it is not unheard of to employ negative emotions such as guilt. For instance, an advertisement for a youth program that emphasizes parent-child quality time may lead to enrollment of parents who feel guilty about how little time they spend with their children. Pathos is established through word choices that stir emotions and also through the use of graphics and pictures. For example, recreation programming promotional materials often include pictures of smiling individuals participating in the activity being marketed.

Ethos is an appeal to an individual's or group's credibility, and also pertains to the character associated with a person, group or organization. A program may have credibility simply based on where it is held. For instance, venues named after important historical figures, such as The John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, have inherent credibility, and the vast amount of programming for all age levels held at this specific site benefits from the association. Additionally, programs often rely on the word-of-mouth support of others who indicate that an event is worth attending; thus, snippets from positive program reviews given by credible sources are often included on promotional materials. Ethos can also be established based on the credibility of individuals who may be attending or participating in the event. A wellness program that is led by a physician benefits from the title and credentials of the source. Celebrity appeal is another way to establish ethos for a program. For example, the participation of celebrities at recreational events, such as tennis professionals Andy Roddick, Andre Agassi and Steffi Graf at the 2006 Arthur Ashe Kids' Day held during the U.S. Open, helped ensure an excellent turnout for this family program (Sardis, 2006).

As stated by Aristotle, "There are then, these three means of effecting persuasion" (in Roberts, 1954, p. 25). The individual who is to be in command of them must, it is clear, be able to reason logically, be able to excite emotions and understand character in its various forms (in Roberts, 1954).

Description of Learning Activity

Begin the activity with a lecture that differentiates Aristotle's three forms of proof, using the descriptions above as guidance. Then, using the seven questions below, analyze a piece of promotional material for a recreation program that offers an excellent example of the balance between the three forms of proof. Present the example in such a way that all members of the class have ready access and can assist in the analysis; for example, by giving each student a copy of the material or by creating an overhead. Rather than answering the questions for the class, request volunteers to respond to each item.

After going through an excellent example, immediately follow with a second marketing piece that does a poor job with one or more of the forms of proof. For example, it could be a recreation program that is missing a pertinent piece of information, such as the date, time or price. Alternatively, perhaps it contains no graphics, pictures or words to create an emotional appeal or there is no effort to give the program a sense of credibility. Poorly created promotional materials are as easy to find as good examples.

The next step is to have the students form groups of 3 or 4 and give each group a different promotional piece to examine, using the same questions. After a 5-minute analysis period, each group can give a brief presentation. As a final learning stage, create a homework assignment requiring each student to individually locate and critique one sample of hard copy, text-based recreational program promotional material. Encourage them to be creative in locating sources, as they have many media channels from which to choose. They can use the same questions to guide the homework analysis. Request that they hand in a copy of the marketing material with their critiques. Be certain to stress that the sample must pertain to a recreation program, as this same activity could readily apply to other forms of marketing, but the nuances of recreational programming are lost if the materials are not relevant.

Questions:

1. What organization is being promoted? What program is being promoted? Does the program “fit” the organization? Explain.
2. Who is the target group of the marketing material?
3. How is logos addressed in the program marketing material?
4. How is pathos addressed in the program marketing material?
5. How is ethos addressing in the program marketing material?
6. What components of the program marketing material make it most appealing?
7. Which form of proof needs the most improvement? What specifically would you do to enhance the persuasiveness of the proof that needs to be improved?

Outcomes and Recommendations

The lecture and associated activity have a number of positive outcomes. First, the lecture gives students a sense of the historical context of persuasion. While the array of marketing methods has increased vastly since Aristotle’s time, the tenets of

persuasion have remained the same. Second, the forms of proof offer an effective means of distinguishing between the types of content that emerge in almost every piece of recreation program marketing material. Students tend to “get it” quickly and their ability to effectively critique skyrockets when given a structure that helps them know what to look for in the materials. Third, the activity acts as a fun complement to other marketing lecture material. Students genuinely enjoy this segment, and take away fundamental information that they can readily recall and apply.

This activity is recommended for use in a classroom setting, to be followed by a homework assignment. The ideas are also readily testable, as the instructor can select a marketing material for analysis that can be included in a class examination. The material offers an excellent balance to the discussion of the marketing mix, and can be used to assess traditional advertising as well as diverse marketing materials such as publicity, promotional materials and sponsorship copy.

References

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