



Energy & Water  
Ombudsman NSW

# The role of industry and government in promoting Ombudsman offices

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# Who should do the 'promotion'?

- Should we rely on government or industry to promote the scheme?
- How far does an Ombudsman office go in promoting its own service?
- Should an Ombudsman office be out 'banging the drum' in the community?
- Is promotion another word for an Ombudsman 'soliciting' complaints?

# Survey of promotional activities

- To find out what promotion was currently undertaken, we surveyed ANZOA members.
- 13 schemes from Australia and New Zealand responded

## **PARLIAMENTARY OMBUDSMAN**

**SOUTH AUSTRALIA OMBUDSMAN • OMBUDSMAN WESTERN AUSTRALIA • OMBUDSMAN VICTORIA • OMBUDSMAN TASMANIA (INCLUDING ENERGY OMBUDSMAN TASMANIA) • OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMEN NEW ZEALAND • COMMONWEALTH OMBUDSMAN**

## **INDUSTRY/INDUSTRY RELATED OMBUDSMAN**

**ENERGY AND WATER OMBUDSMAN (VICTORIA) • ENERGY & WATER OMBUDSMAN NSW • ENERGY OMBUDSMAN WESTERN AUSTRALIA • ENERGY OMBUDSMAN QUEENSLAND • OFFICE OF THE BANKING OMBUDSMAN, NEW ZEALAND • PUBLIC TRANSPORT OMBUDSMAN VICTORIA • OFFICE OF THE WORKCOVER OMBUDSMAN (SOUTH AUSTRALIA)**

# Do we need legislation?

- **We asked if the Ombudsmen were required to promote their services:**
  - **6 schemes** said they are required to undertake public promotion, either by their founding documents or legislation
  - **7 schemes** are not. Of these:
    - 2 schemes consider it unnecessary or inappropriate for legislation to contain a reference to promotion.
    - 2 schemes said a formal requirement would be useful if it resulted in allocated funding or a dedicated budget

# Government or industry promotion?

- We asked if the schemes' members or agencies they oversight are required to promote their service:
  - **12 of the 13 Ombudsmen answered 'yes'**- their members or the agencies they oversight have a responsibility to promote information about dispute resolution to citizens or customers

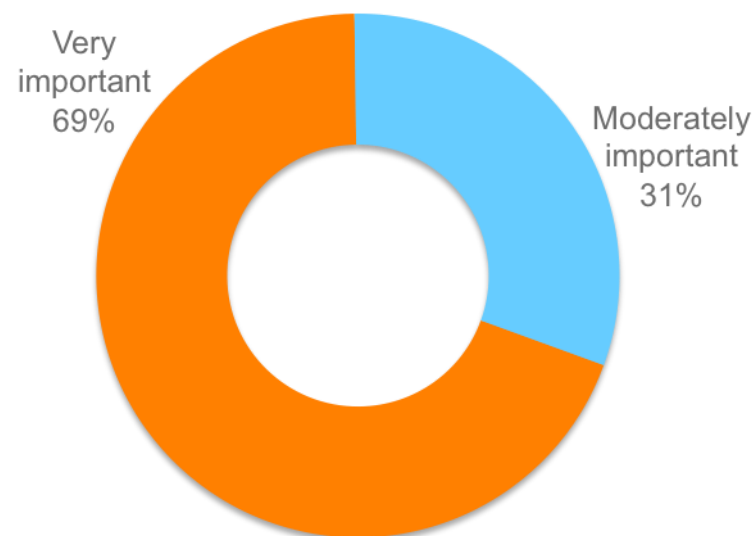
“Our office works consistently through training, stakeholder engagement... to create a commitment to ‘best-practice in complaint-handling’, including provision of information about the role of [our Ombudsman service]”

*Response to EWON/ANZOA survey, April 2010*

# The importance of promotion

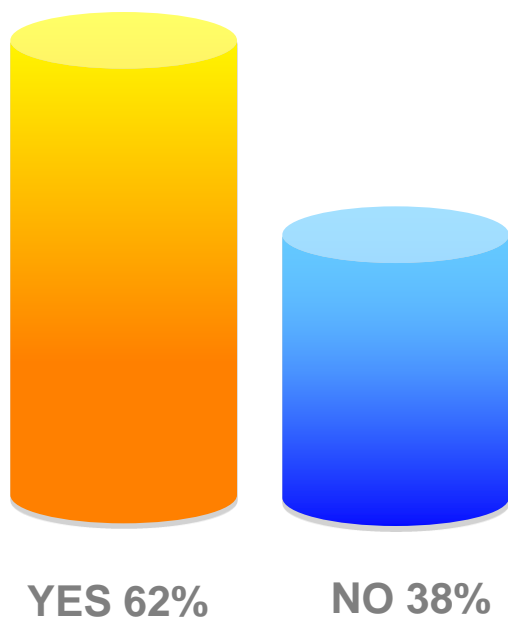
- Whether they are required to do so or not, **all 13 schemes** promote their service
  - 9 schemes consider it 'very important' and critical to their work
  - 4 schemes consider it 'moderately important' and complementary to their core work and critical for brand maintenance

IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTING THE SERVICE



# Resources for promotion

## SCHEMES WITH STAFF DEDICATED TO PROMOTION



- 8 schemes have dedicated staff who undertake a range of promotional activities:
  - community and agency liaison
  - awareness, accessibility, education, engagement, outreach and training
  - communications, media liaison and issues management
  - publications, writing, editing
  - event management, advertising
  - learning and development
  - Aboriginal outreach

# Resources for promotion

- 6 schemes do not have dedicated staff. Of these
  - 4 schemes said promotions work is undertaken by conciliation staff and/or the Ombudsman, and/or their policy team
- The percentage of the Ombudsman budget spent on promotions ranges from 0.02% up to 8% (including salary costs)



# Activities comparison

PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITY	YES	NO	VERY IMPORTANT	MODERATELY IMPORTANT	NEUTRAL	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT
<b>Website maintenance</b>	<b>13</b>		<b>13</b>				
<b>Annual report</b>	<b>13</b>		<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>			
<b>Brochures about your service</b>	<b>13</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>			
<b>Presentations to community groups</b>	<b>13</b>		<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>		
Joint activities with other ombudsmen	12	1	9	3			1
In language information	10	3	7	3			1
Joint activities with members/agencies	10	3	7	3	1		
Editorial coverage	10	3	5	4	2	1	1
Attendance at stalls and community events	10	3	3	4	1		1
Community forums	8	5	5	4	2		1
Other, eg videos, interactive TV	3	3	2	1			
Paid advertising (radio, TV, print, online)	3	10	1	1	4	2	
Social media presence (Twitter, Facebook)	3	10		2	4	1	1

# Activities comparison

- All 13 schemes maintain a website, produce an annual report and brochures about their service, and present to community groups
- While all schemes present to community groups, only 8 schemes consider it to be 'very important'
- 10 schemes have in-language material and of these, only 7 consider it to be 'very important'
- 10 schemes receive editorial coverage but only 5 schemes consider editorial coverage to be 'very important'
- 3 schemes conduct paid advertising but only 1 scheme considers it to be 'very important'

# Preferred promotional methods

- There was only one question where all Ombudsmen responded unanimously:
  - All 13 respondents have a website, and
  - all 13 respondents consider a **website** to be “very important”
- While 13 Ombudsmen have **brochures** about their service, only 9 consider them to be ‘very important’ while 4 consider them to be ‘moderately important’

# Evaluation of promotional activities

- 10 schemes evaluate their promotional activities through a range of methods including:
  - consumer awareness and stakeholder surveys
  - customer satisfaction surveys
  - feedback from participants at presentations, forums, events
  - media monitoring and evaluation of coverage
  - web traffic analysis, tracking responses to email campaigns

# Comments from Ombudsman schemes

“I do not have the staff or financial resources to do as much promotion as I would like.”

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“I believe public promotion of an Ombudsman’s service is an important aspect of maintaining accessibility, transparency and public confidence in the service.”

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“Importance of balancing the needs of ALL stakeholders (that is, balancing the need for public awareness against the responsible use of funds).”

# Comments from Ombudsman schemes

“Public promotion is critical for building and maintaining customer perception of the service, and important for the perception of the scheme by member companies.”

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“It reduces the need for community workers to refer complaints to the service as they are better able to negotiate directly with the company.”

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“It builds credibility in the community thereby strengthening the integrity of our complaint handling.”

# Limitations on promotional activities

“Lots of other things to do at the moment.”

“Time, creativity and opportunity.”

“Vast geographical distances.”

“Budgeting constraints.”

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“Lack of dedicated communications staff... means investigations officers are pulled ‘offline’ to conduct outreach; the greater the success of the outreach, the greater their case work.”

# If there were no limitations

“I would advertise our services more widely and more often than we have. I would also explore more frequent opportunities for presentations and public appearances.”

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“Accessible information on the website and in written form. A well developed public relations program including re-branding.”

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“I believe the brand of Ombudsman is well known, so promotional activities would target specific groups rather than general awareness.”

# If there were no limitations

“Provide a more intensive regional outreach service by acquiring more staff.”

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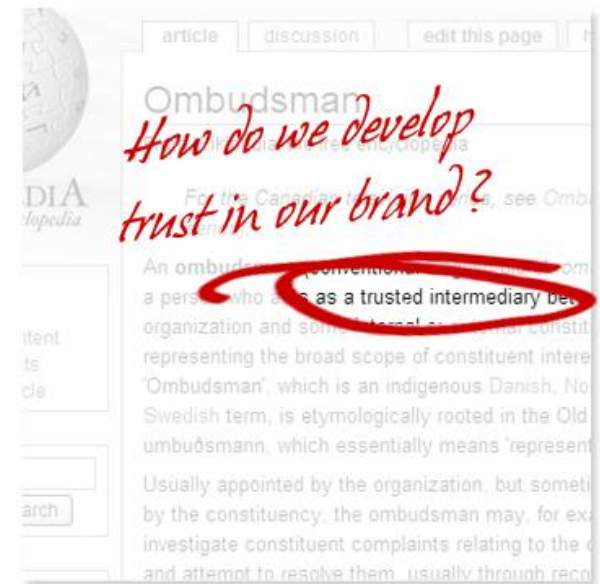
“Social marketing research into cultural attitudes to ‘complaining about government’ among Aboriginal people and diverse communities... to ensure our information and service is both linguistically meaningful and culturally accessible.”

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“Undertake paid advertising on mainstream media (eg television) to increase brand awareness and create a better understanding of our jurisdiction.”

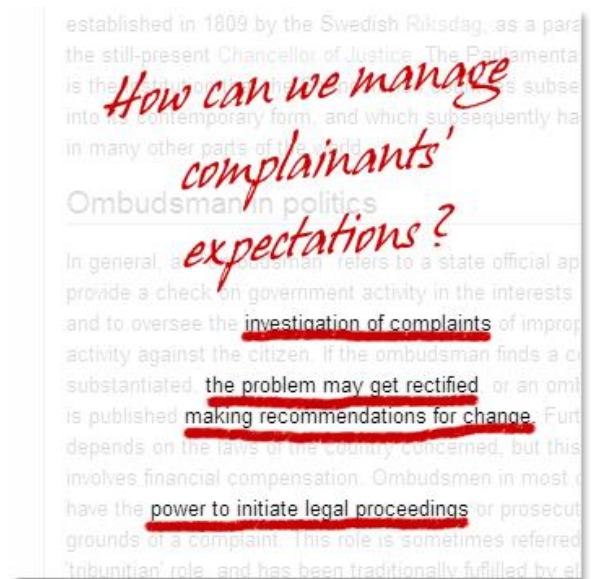
# Why promote?

- Citizens and consumers
  - need to be able to find us to use our service
  - need to trust that we will give them “a fair go”
- If we don't promote our service and users can't find us easily, what does that say about our willingness to listen and resolve their complaints?



# Managing complainant expectations

- Actively publicising our service – its message, aims, jurisdiction, what it can and can't do – helps to manage complainants' expectations
- It shows members/agencies we oversight that we are trying to direct appropriate complaints to our services (*our message is usually – contact the provider/agency first*)



# Bad publicity goes away, right?

- Social media (blogs, Facebook, Twitter) has created an environment where anyone can be an author (and is encouraged to be)
- How will this development affect our promotional strategy?

APRIL 2010

Comment posted online in response to a newspaper article:

**... (the company) get away with this garbage because the ombudsman is as useless as them. Its hard to believe that (the Ombudsman) is not on their payroll**

*What if this comment was about your service?*

# Is a website enough?

“The best website in the world is worthless without an audience...

Without strong, regularly updated content, your traffic will be short-lived.”

*Author: Stuart Swineford, iMedia, April 2010*

- If our website is our primary promotional tool, what resources do we have to maintain the information?
- Are we relying on our website to take the place of our printed material?

# Working with members/agencies

- We need to work with members/agencies and government to ensure citizens/consumers have access to dispute resolution when they need it.
- We need to review our promotional work to ensure it is appropriate and current for our target groups.

# Forward promotion

Benchmark 1 for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution Schemes:

**Accessibility-** *The scheme makes itself readily available to customers by promoting knowledge of its existence, being easy to use and having no cost barriers.*

How do we make sure we measure up to this benchmark in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century when ways of ‘promoting knowledge’ are changing so dramatically and rapidly?



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