

The Marketing Plan

The most important part of a business plan is the Marketing Plan. To keep one's business on course this plan must be geared toward the business's mission—its product and service lines, its markets, its financial situation and marketing/sales tactics.

- ◆ The business must be aware of its strengths and weaknesses through internal and external analysis and look for market opportunities.
- ◆ The business must analyze its products and services from the viewpoint of the customer—outside-in thinking. What is the customer looking for and what does the customer want (benefits)? The business must gain knowledge of the marketplace from its customers.
- ◆ The business must analyze its target markets. What other additional markets can the business tap into and are there additional products or services the business can add?
- ◆ The business must know its competition, current and potential. By identifying the competitor's strengths and weaknesses the business can improve its position in the marketplace.
- ◆ The business must make decisions on how to apply its resources to the target market(s).
- ◆ The business must utilize the information it has gathered about itself, its customers, its markets, and its competition by developing a written Marketing Plan that provides measurable goals. The business must select marketing/sales tactics that will allow it to achieve or surpass its goals.
- ◆ The business must implement the plan (within an established budget) and then measure its success in terms of whether or not the goals were met (or the extent to which they were). The Marketing Plan is an ongoing tool designed to help the business compete in the market for customers. It should be re-visited, re-worked, and re-created often.

MARKETING PLAN OUTLINE

There is no single "right" way to approach a marketing plan. Your marketing plan should be part of an ongoing self-evaluation process and unique to your business.

A. Mission Statement

1. State the purpose of the marketing plan.
2. Review business goals and objectives as well as specific strategies to reach them.

Everything your company does should be guided by and consistent with your Mission Statement. This is a short (one or two paragraph) statement of the fundamental nature of your business, answering the questions: "What business are we in?" and "Who do we serve?"

The mission statement is the one place you can be general, rather than specific. This is your vision of the business: it's philosophy, and what makes it different from any other business.

If you don't already have a mission statement, write one down. Refer to it often as you develop your marketing plan. An opportunity that takes you away from your business mission is not a good opportunity for you. A strategy or tactic that does not carry the business towards fulfilling its mission is faulty and should be revised.

B. Diagnosis: Where are you right now?

In order to determine how to get where you want to be, you need an accurate, objective picture of where you are now.

Write a brief statement assessing the current state of the business:

C. Product/Service

1. Identify each product or service in terms of name, trademark, color, shape or other characteristic, including packaging and labeling.

2. What is your competitive advantage? How does your product or service differ from the competition in terms of exclusive processes or superior ingredients, or other features.

3. What are your strengths versus your competition's?

4. What are your weaknesses versus your competition's?

5. Determine the cost of each product or service.

6. Determine the price you charge for each product.

7. What is your product's/service's personality?

D. Market

1. Identify your customers - include all demographic and lifestyle information

2. Who are your customers?

- Male or female?
- How old?
- What education level?
- What type of work? Profession?
- What level of income?
- How knowledgeable about your product or service?
- What factors (e.g., price, availability, service, etc.) influence this customer's purchase decisions?
- What other people (if any) influence the purchase decision?
- How would you describe your customers' personality?
- Is there anything else unique about your customer?

Exercise: Think about the 20% of your customers who generate or will generate 80% of your business. Write one-paragraph description of this typical customer.

Example: Lane Medical Systems

Sample Customer: A forty-five year old female office manager of a group medical practice. High school graduate with some specialized office skills. She feels overworked. Has very little knowledge of software and is slow to accept new systems. Decisions influenced by (1) ease of product use, (2) reliability of after-sale service, and (3) price. Other people influencing decisions: Doctors/dentists in practice (very price-conscious); other office staff (level of comfort with computer systems).

3. Do you have a large, homogenous customer base, or several smaller market segments?

If segments: Describe each segment's customers according to section D # 2 above.

4. Meeting customer needs:

[A] What are your customer's real needs?

[B] What are your customers perceived needs?

[C] Are you meeting either or both of these?

[D] If not, where do you fall short?

[E] What resistances do people have to buying your product or service?

Identify location of customers (local, regional, national or international).

6. Identify market trends - include information about market studies and test marketing.

7. List factors that affect purchasing such as:

- Seasonal
- Obsolescence
- Tax considerations
- Price
- Availability
- Convenience
- Service
- Emotional considerations; e.g., prestige, status, fear, pleasure, etc.
- Gift
- Any other factors you can think of

Write a brief paragraph that synthesizes all the factors that affect the purchase of your product:

E. Distribution

1. Identify the most effective methods for getting products/services to customers in the target market.

- Do customers come to you?
- Do you go to the customer?
- Do you use dispensers, racks, etc?
- Do you mail out samples, use trial offers, or premiums?
- Do you use the internet?

2. Do you make it easy for customers or potential customers to get to your product/service?

3. Have you made it easy for customers or potential customers to get more information about your product(s) or service(s)?

Identify the need for warehousing of products and distribution channels (for example internet) if not sold direct to buyer.

F. Promotional Strategy

1. What is your current image in the marketplace?

- How are you perceived by your customers?
- Is this accurate?

What would you like your image to be in the workplace?

3. Will everything in your organization consistently represent the image you want to project?

- Employee behavior
- Place of business atmosphere
- Printed communication

4. What type of customers are you targeting with current marketing efforts?

5. How are your leads followed up?

6. Where/how do you get new business?

7. Where/how do you get repeat business?

8. What is the source of your most productive referrals? Are you doing everything you can to manage that source(s)?

9. Review the Message:

Is your message written in terms of what the customer needs and wants to hear, or in terms of what you want to say about your business, product, service?

Your Promotional Strategy consists of blending and using each of the following components to the same end — that is, with the same message.

- Advertising
- Personal Sales
- Sales Promotion

Publicity and Public Relations: Does your advertising message follow the AIDA model? That is, does it:

- Attract Attention?
- Create Interest?
- Arouse Desire?
- Call for Action?

10. List the promotional activities you are currently using:

A. Advertising

B. Personal Selling

C. Sales Promotion (coupons, freebies, name recognition, etc.)

D. Publicity and Public Relations

11. Are the benefits you offer being communicated effectively? (Indicate yes or no for each of the activities listed above)

12. Review of Advertising: Does the audience for the media selected match your target market profile?

13. Review public relations activities -

- What are your plans?
 - Can you generate any product publicity? How?
 - Special programs
-
-
-
-
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G. Competition (Direct and Indirect)

A. Identify competitors by divisions, product lines and markets.

B. Compare your marketing techniques with those of your competitors.

H. Pricing

1. Review product/service costs for accuracy, including all variable and fixed expenses.
2. Be sure all products/services carry their share of overhead expenses plus provide for profit.
3. Compare prices for your products/services with similar products/services in the industry.

[A] If your prices are higher, do they provide the necessary "added value" to justify the higher price?

[B] If your prices are lower, do you know why they are, and is the lower price part of your marketing strategy?

4. How price sensitive is your market -- in other words, how much change occurs in buying behavior when prices rise or fall?

5. Do your prices position you as "top of the line" or "bargain basement?" Are you happy with your position?

6. Does your current marketing strategy support this price position?

I. Action Plan

1. Goals

Identify your goal(s) for each segment or market. Your goals and objectives should be concrete, measurable and realistic.

- To increase sales volume by X% or Y\$ within existing customer base.
- To increase sales volume by X% or Y\$ generating new customers.
- To increase sales volume by X% or Y\$ getting customers to use the product/service more often
- To enhance image, name recognition, reputation.
- To introduce a new product or service (same area, new area).

2. Strategy

A strategy is the general approach you will take to achieve a goal. The following list of common marketing strategies may help your thinking:

- Personal sales calls
- New logo, letterhead package, company brochure
- Direct mail
- Newsletters
- Print advertising (newspapers, consumer magazines, trade journals)
- Media advertising (radio, television)
- Trade show exhibits
- Public relations (trade press, speechmaking, feature articles, community relations/community activities)
- Networking
- Discounts for large volume customers

Don't try to implement all possible strategies at once. Choose one or two strategies to achieve each of your goals. In your selection, consider what you know about your product, competitors and customers, based on your information above. Also keep in mind your resources of time, budget and staff. For example, although a major television campaign might increase visibility for your business, can you afford the production and airtime costs? Is television the most cost efficient way to target your customers?

Develop a tactical plan for each goal:

Goal I:

Strategy A:

Strategy B:

Budget & Timing:

Goal II:

Strategy A:

Strategy B:

Budget & Timing:

Goal III:

Strategy A:

Strategy B:

Budget & Timing:
