



Driving Your Business Forward with Marketing Planning

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Marketing planning isn't a 'nice to have' feature, it is a necessity for every growing business. Built upon your business plans and targets, a marketing plan should support growth and development by helping to build your brand name, to promote your products and services and to introduce buyers to what your business has to offer. When marketing activity is joined up with sales it can be a powerful and effective tool that has the potential to propel your business forward.

Startups and small businesses tend to keep plans fluid so that they can adapt to market conditions and buyer trends. A smaller infrastructure allows them to operate in this nimble, flexible manner whereas larger, more established businesses are often hampered both by their bureaucracy and infrastructure that may have been built up over many years. **When it comes to marketing it is vital to have plans in place** and it is important to allow those plans to be flexible and fluid wherever possible whatever size of business you are.



What is marketing?

Marketing is defined as the action or business of promoting and selling products or services, including market research and advertising. Marketeers generally get involved in a wide range of activities from branding and advertising to campaigns and

websites. Communications is also very closely linked to marketing and some marketers manage both areas internally and externally (including public relations, investor and customer relations). When at the heart of a business, marketing becomes the heartbeat of a company.

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Creating an effective marketing plan

Marketing plans can vary from grand and extensive documents to a simple compilation of activities, but they should all include a timeframe for completing those activities together with metrics for measuring their success. For example, a functional plan will specify a variety of activities that set the direction for how your business is going to market along with details on how it will look and feel to your target audience. The research and effort involved in pulling together a plan together with the considerations that go into agreeing the marketing budget based on the research are both significant. Following a set of agreed tactical activities demonstrates a business-wide commitment, as opposed to taking a scattergun approach and hoping for results. In some cases marketing plans can even be harmed if others in the business continue with their own marketing activities, despite agreeing a central or sector marketing plan as this can make your business look less professional. **Consistent messages and imagery is (and will always) remain important in the marketplace.** That doesn't mean that you cannot adapt your imagery

and messaging for different channels. This can be done but with careful consideration in order to extend or interpret the core messaging, as opposed to carrying out a completely independent, DIY approach.



Marketing metrics

To be successful in marketing or as a marketer you must measure what is working and what is not! While a lot of marketing may be common sense, having a way of analysing the results of your efforts is important both for you and for management so they can see a clear link between marketing activities and results. **Marketing metrics provide a quantifiable way to track performance** and having access to this data allows you to track a campaign's effectiveness. Metrics will vary depending on the activity. For example, if you put on a physical event you would measure its success by looking at the number of attendees, and how many prospective buyers have engaged with your brand and led to a meeting. Comparatively, measuring an online LinkedIn campaign might include recording seminar registrations and how many users were driven to your website as a direct result of following your activity.



How to build a successful marketing plan

1. Create your marketing strategy: what is your plan going to deliver? This will be based on the business plan or mission.
2. Write a mission statement: set out clearly what marketing is going to deliver as a result of your plan with some key highlights that will help to communicate your ideas to the business.
3. Research your market: how and why do your target customers buy the products and services that you are selling?
4. Know your customer: Learn who your customers are and which messages and activities will build an awareness, understanding and appreciation of your brand with them.
5. How can you be different in order to stand out in the market? To achieve this, you need to know who your competitors are and how they approach marketing.



6. Which activities should you use? Consider what makes the most effective blend of activities to promote your message and products/services in the areas you are targeting. The wide range of activities include events (online/face-to-face/hybrid), campaigns, advertising, public relations, influencer marketing, competitions, special offers and direct marketing to name a few.
7. What is the best platform for your marketing activity? Consider creating special offers and free product demos and think about the most effective channels you can use to promote your brand, products and services. In some cases you may be able to run campaigns across different channels with similar messages but adapted for the specific channel.
8. Review your ideas: Once you have a draft plan in place and set of activities that you are happy with, ask peers, colleagues and those in the wider business for feedback and to provide input on your ideas. Where possible, test your ideas with existing customers who you have strong relationships with.
9. Track progress: it is essential to build in metrics for each activity so you can measure success.
10. Prepare a business case for any activity that may be challenged: what will it cost and what benefits will there be for the business? Note down tangible (return on investment) and intangible (brand awareness, introduction of product/service to a new target audience, big upturn in inbound enquiries etc) factors. Where possible use real numbers and percentages so that it offers relatable value.
11. Present your plan: Deliver and measure the results

Don't be afraid to adapt your plan

Even the best plans sometimes fail to deliver to the anticipated level so do be prepared to adapt as you go. For instance, you may find that some of the activities such as digital or social media campaigns are not presenting the leads or sales that you forecast. Always measure first then take action before you spend too much budget. Feedback can be very helpful here alongside the metrics so with some brainstorming you should be able to adapt your campaign and make it work. It does not always mean going back to the drawing board, sometimes it really is a case of making minor tweaks. Be brave and believe in yourself and your ideas!

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Reporting

Once a business invests in a marketing plan it will expect regular reports on the success of the marketing plan activities. These reports should include both the activity data and the feedback that you receive. Being armed with these statistics means that you will be able to demonstrate how your plan is delivering positive results, or to explain why you have adapted or changed a campaign.



Conclusion

A solid marketing plan requires a business plan from the outset. Marketing can then work together with Sales to propel the business forward in a unified approach. In order to be successful, marketers must create innovative activities that promote your brand, products, and/or services to both existing and new customers to build a loyal brand following. **Most importantly, marketing plans should be built upon the targets and goals** of the business in order to show that there is return from any investment in marketing.

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