

White Paper

How To Build A Marketing Plan

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What Marketing Means?

Knowing, defining, understanding and communicating with the customer. Marketing is about the customers, their brains, hearts and desires. Both future and existing customers.

Traditionally marketing meant product, positioning, pricing and promotions. While these are elements of classical marketing, marketing has and continues to evolve. That it means, as stated above, the perception by our customers, the market and ourselves of the product or service. The outer shell of an organization. What is the message, the feeling, the perception of the products and services of an organization? It is the spoken, written and creative realization of a company? Marketing helps define this and brings it forward to the market. It generates qualified leads that fill the pipeline, it learns from existing customers, it improves the close ratio of new business.

It is about fun, creativity, collaboration of an organization. It is an interactive exchange between all the areas of a business – working together to say and define “how do we grow, why do we grow, what do we believe, what does the market believe?” Marketing is fluid, it is changing. It needs to address the here and now, while always having an eye forward.

Where To Start On A Marketing Plan

Before pen to paper, before the process begins it is important to interact with all the areas of the business to gain insight, guidance and understanding of what their requirements and desired outcomes would be and what their overall impression of a marketing plan are. Based on this you would generate a plan to develop the plan, including time lines, major buckets of activities and what cross functional efforts and support would be needed.

The next stage of developing any plan, including a marketing plan, is to round up any and all available information, reports, old plans, brochures, etc. The second stage is interviewing key players on the team, at all levels within the organization on the business, the markets, the competition, what has worked, what has not, why, strengths, weaknesses, ideas. You need to develop a set group of questions to ask one-on-one.

It is important that a plan, especially a marketing plan, be collaborative in nature. The team needs to feel they have been a part of the development, had input into and worked on the plan. Otherwise, if a marketing plan is just fully realized, pops into existence, the team can and will most likely fight the elements and actions. The core goal within a marketing plan is the unification of an organization, its mission, message and power within existing and targeted markets. This means the team needs to be involved from the start.

You should get in the field, see first hand what is going on. An example is, when I joined Air Products & Chemicals marketing area, the first thing I asked to do was spend a week at a delivery site/ local office and deliver cylinder and bulk gases. My manager thought I was nuts,

but said OK. Those two weeks paid off time and time again. I saw first hand what the customers looked like, how and what was important in the field – not abstract marketing but practical marketing. It was also a chance for the field to see I wasn't some "corporate marketing dandy" and that I could roll a 400 pound cylinder like the best of them.

Sometimes if left to only foundation thinking (the way an organization views it self based just on history, what is the known) and no new, outside thinking is introduced. That no new ideas are introduced – sometimes challenging the paradigm, the business could become blind to weaknesses and needed improvements. That is why you need to also reach out to the industry, the clients, the competition (yes the competition), customers that have left, or lost opportunities. It is important to look at the full picture.

The Elements

A marketing plan is not a business plan. Sometimes there can be confusion around this point. A marketing plan is the outer shell of a business organization. A marketing plan is more about the features, the benefits, and the message of an organization. The "what we want to be in the minds and hearts of the market" and what it will take to move in that direction. A marketing plan is like the casing of a pocket watch, could be sleek, gold and functional. A business plan is the inner workings, the gears of an organization.

Every plan is different based on the business, the individuals and the goals of the organization, but all solid marketing plans have these basic elements. They should start at the highest level of thinking and drill down to tactical execution. Some elements of the marketing plan, while not the complete and final recommendation, the following is a start. Remember that the different goals of an organization and the markets they are in drive different inclusions or changes to a plan.

An example is packaging. All organizations need to have some level of how they package the products and services they offer. In the world of industrial products it might be the tanker trucks or the bidding proposals, while in the world of toys it is the disposable box. Marketing plans can range from three pages to well over 200 pages.

- A. Executive Summary – The whole plan in less than 3 pages.
- B. The Status Of The Industry - Shifts, changes, good and bad of the known universe of that industry.
- C. The Competitive Landscape – Who is playing in the market, this includes a comparison grid with key comparative factors all the players are judged against – including the company writing the plan. This needs to be as influenced as little as possible by the feelings of the organization, as true a picture as possible.
- D. Trends Forward – What the next 3, 5, and 10 years out may hold. It is important to spend time in a world just out of reach, taking shape today and over the years ahead. This

section in some ways has less to do with the specific company, more about the changes taking place within society, business, the government and what it means to the industry. An example is banking. 25 years ago banking was all about real estate. 10 years ago a shift started, and some of us in banking were saying it was about technology, about being where people shop (grocery stores) or on the web. But the established banking players said it was still all about real estate.

- E. The Mission, Vision & Goals – This is critical to the development of the plan, that these points are well understood. That the top priorities of the business are clearly defined and thought through. Include the top 5 priorities of the organization, the laser points that upper management wants the business to keep in focus throughout the year. It is important to think about what is the sustainable competitive advantage the business has, or needs. To define this and anchor on this as the plan is brought to life.
- F. Target Markets & Market Development – This is a look at both the business of today and where does it want to grow into, and most importantly why. This usually includes an in-depth review of what markets a business is in today, and what are target markets for the future. Included in this is usually what the markets are looking for, what is succeeding and maybe what is being under served or missed. This section is important because it begins to define what it will take to bridge from the here and now to a future vision. Include a SWOT analysis grid (Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities & Threats) at this point, for existing and new markets.
- G. Positioning, Features, Benefits – What is the position of the organization within the market, what does it want to grow into, why and the how. What are the issues, the realities and the possibilities. How the organization should be realized in the market. The features and benefits of the service or product being offered.
- H. Pricing – What is the current pricing models, where are the issues or lost opportunities because of pricing.

This is the point where the plan begins to move from just strategy to tactical in nature.

- I. Sales & Growth Targets – The numbers of the business, where there is growth historically (3 to 5 years) and where they are heading. Many times an organization has one understanding of itself that when the numbers are looked at is not really there. The numbers tell a lot about the business. This section review the customer make up, lost opportunities and why, and gives a good snap shot of the customer base.

The goal of this section is to clearly define the pipeline of planned sales/business, possible new business, retention of accounts, etc. How these goals are going to be reached, when through out the year. Also an account review is usually included, and a review of the performance of sales to date. This section also covers the market development activities, quarter by quarter.

Have a rolling 3 month sales plan, where every 90 days there is a look back on the past 90 days, what worked, what didn't and a rolling forward 90 days and what is changing, will be accomplished, etc.

- J. Database Marketing – It is important to redefine where leads come from, what happens to that data, how existing and future customers are tracked, success rates of programs, materials, activities are. It all starts with a focus on the establishment of and the support of a marketing data base and database marketing activities.
- K. Branding, Marketing Communications & Promotions - This section of the plan defines what the brand means to the marketplace, how it should be perceived, what the elements and message of branding are for the organization (the logos, corporate identity package and treatments of the branding). Branding is all about consistency of message, image and value. That every time the company is seen, heard and known the consistent point and image is driven home. Whether the moniker at the bottom of an email, the template for presentations, to signage. It is important that there are employee focused materials, activities and training to support the goals of the plan. That the brand of most service companies are the people that live the mission and they are an extension of the brand. It is important to have their buy in, awareness and understanding.

From this point out the plan becomes project driven, outlining specific target projects, budgets, etc. This takes the strategy and gives it legs.

Marketing Communications (both internal & external) includes defining what are the tools needed to sell, the market awareness building activities (i.e. direct mail, web, newsletters, customer round tables, sponsored conferences, brochures, etc.) This also includes public relations plans and media developed plans. This also includes employee tools to support the marketing efforts of the business. There needs to define projects, time lines, budgets, etc. Promotions include trade show, conference, speaking activities and anything to fill sales pipeline with qualified leads. Could include customer referral programs, incentives and other promotions.

- L. New Development – This section usually focuses on new relationships, partners or offerings to be developed.

Getting The Vision Shared

Create a PowerPoint version of the plan and use this as an overview. Via brown-bag lunches the plan is introduced, reviewed and discussed with the employee base, allowing everyone to see, hear, talk and think about the marketing mission and activities. That there are no surprises. And there is buy-in from the top all the way through an organization.

Again, this is not the total and final elements of a marketing plan, this is a starting point – based on interactions in a very fast timeframe the actually elements would be established.

Top Five Challenges Around Developing A Marketing Plan

Especially in an organization that has never needed one

I.) The Time Is Now – This is the most difficult challenge of them all. The best time to develop marketing plans and activities is when the business is doing well. To plan for growth and aggressively find those new opportunities, new avenues can be difficult to get an organization to focus on when “everything is going well, why bother?” mentality maybe in play. The challenge will be to get an organization (starting at the top) to see the importance of planning and going after new opportunities. In any business, the call of the now customer beats out the potential new markets and future customers of tomorrow. This can be even harder when a business is doing well. You hear the old saying, “let’s stick to our knitting...” and there is a sense that anything new will lead to failure.

II.) Seeing The Unseen – This means to look where others are not, to try and look at the business differently and bring these new ideas forward. These new opportunities could be obvious, but there is no understanding how to get to them, or only through partnering will it work. This is about building a sense of trust in things new and different. Pushing the thinking beyond the comfortable. Some of my best ideas have come from unexpected places, from the competition, from other industries, from the front lines.

III.) Support Of Upper Management – Some times people just are not into marketing, or into taking business in new directions. This can come out in different ways. They may miss meetings or blow off requests for information. It can be seen in a lack of buy in on the plan and the actions. It all starts with the top management in a business supporting the marketing efforts, from the planning on out. If they say it is important, well it is important. Just getting the time and mind-share of key people can put any efforts off track. Also, marketing (the physical materials part) can be so subjective – some like purple, others like black and white...) The trick is being consistent, having the energy and drive. People get excited about and support marketing when they see others are as well. The same holds true with planning, new development, etc.

IV.) Willingness & Trust To Go In New Directions – Here too many people just do not like getting out of their comfort zones, but this is important to any new developments and new. That people have a hard time is saying OK to just even looking at a new market, new way to deliver or price a business. That people might say, “hey what does this guy know about our business? Why listen?” There is risk in trying anything new. It is important to explore and see what can be, could be or should never be.

V.) Enough Time – A solid plan and successful marketing and new development take time. There is always a desire to make something from nothing – over night. But solid thinking, and creativity take time. There are usually small wins up front, but the bigger success takes time. Through creating short term wins and celebrating these, along with keeping pressure on the bigger, longer-term wins leads to an organization giving marketing and development time to create a win-win.