

StartupConnection
BUSINESS RESOURCE LIBRARY

How to Write a Successful Marketing Plan

Bert Shlensky, PhD

**Part of the
Startup
Connection
Business
Library**



Startup Connection
Business Resource Library

How to Write A Successful Marketing Plan

By Bert Shlensky, PhD

Part of the Startup Connection Business Library

Copyright © 2014 by Bert Shlensky, PhD

All Rights Reserved.



Marketing Plan Template

With adequate planning, testing, measuring and rolling out your marketing strategy, you stand a great chance to succeed and reduce the risk of failure.

Like a law of Nature, Marketing is always changing, and even the segments within marketing are in a state of constant evolution. What drives this change? Many elements:

- New technologies for communicating your message
- Changing demographics and trends
- Competition

Fortunately, human nature remains constant, and people are still looking for good value in the products and services they purchase.

Goals

Many marketing advocates make a fundamental mistake right out of the box--they focus mainly on the of their business rather than on the real questions customers have beyond the "What". These include:

- **How and Why is your product better and different?**
- **Are you communicating to me (the customer) in a way I respond to?**
- **Do I really care about what you have to sell?**

In addition to addressing these often underlying questions by customers, you need to build other goals and parameters into your marketing plan if it is to succeed. These include:

- How important are factors like price, image, quality, service etc.?

- What are your long term volume and image expectations?
- Are you building sales just for today or are you seeking long term customers?
- What are your organizational and financial resources?
- Who is your target market?
- What is your competitive positioning?

These can all change as part of the marketing strategy process, but the answers will dramatically affect your program as you begin to execute your program in the real world.

One of the critical dimensions to understand is segmentation. While geography, price, style, product and demographics are the key factors, there are others. You also need to balance the tradeoffs of trying to be all things to all people and selecting a niche that is so small there are no customers.

Market Research

Defining and researching your target market consumers and competition are an essential requirement for developing your plan. I grow weary of hearing of how entrepreneurs will succeed simply through using social media programs. They often have little concept of how they will develop traffic, what social media vehicles, how long it takes, what the content will be, etc.

The first segment of your marketing plan is defining your market, its size and its characteristics the next segment is defining your customers within that market

The next segment is defining and understanding your competition

Strategy:

Based on your goals, resources and market, you can now develop a strategy to market in a positive manner. A key component of a good marketing strategy is to establish budgets and profit goals. Ask: How much money you can realistically invest in marketing and when and how will you achieve profitability? Set both your short-term and long-terms goals. For example are you simply trying to make a living in a year or planning to go public in 3-5 years and make a zillion dollars?

The marketing plan:

Based on your goals, research and strategy you can begin to develop the actual components of your marketing plan. While the specifics are critical to your success, there are some underlying considerations and enveloping each element:

- Unless you are already generating sales, plan on an initial period of startup expenses with no revenue, and build this into a realistic budget with room for contingencies
- After you initiate your marketing program, plan a minimum of 3-6 months before you see the beginning of a meaningful revenue stream. The good news is that this early stage gives you time to develop, improve and refine your plan, correcting inevitable early mistakes
- Even if you have huge plans for sales and profits, it is best to start small and execute well. Testing and evaluating early programs, and keeping overhead at a minimum will

give you a better chance of survival than investing significant sums in efforts you may not need or can't afford

- You should expect to spend at least 10-20% of your overall budget on marketing and related outlays in the first year, and recognize that this level of commitment does not decrease exponentially as you grow. Investors, partners and suppliers are especially wary of startup programs with little or no marketing expense in their financial plans, and they know this from experience.

Advertising and Promotion

There are many ways to promote your business or product, more now than ever before in fact. The important thing to remember is that you can accomplish many of these without spending a large amount of money. The general approaches to effective advertising and promotion can be divided into the following categories:

Customer Retention

Before you think that global internet or advertising marketing is an end-all of strategies, satisfied customers and retention are the best, cheapest, and most profitable ways to grow a business.

Traditional Advertising

While firms generally are spending less money on traditional media these days it can still an important component of good marketing, especially if your products and services lend themselves to such media. As a minimum you still need business cards, a brochure, and a web site. However traditional advertising can also include local mailings, newspapers and TV. For example local cable T.V. can sometimes be very targeted, affordable and productive. .

Internet Marketing

Having given traditional approaches to marketing their fair share of attention, planning your internet efforts are a critical part of any marketing plan. One of the favorable aspects of internet marketing is that it is easy to test especially given its low cost.

Customer Service

Customer service is frequently overlooked as a marketing tool. Response time, cleanliness, return policies, product knowledge, etc., are all factors that can increase sales and insure repeat customers.

Price and Promotions

Let's face it—price is one of the most powerful elements of good marketing. . **Promote what your customer wants to buy.** Customers want the solution to a problem or benefit your service provides.

Distribution

Where, who and how are you selling your products or services? Traditions and trends in distribution are changing rapidly and dramatically today, and your process needs to be in sync with the times. For example automation and customer service are replacing the direct salesperson. There can be huge economies in eliminating traditional channels and substituting

them with efforts such as direct shipping. The internet can allow you to manage to be in stock with volume styles and sizes but ship odd ones in 1-2 days from a central location

Integration

Ultimately, the key to an excellent marketing plan is to employ all of the tools you consider relevant and affordable, and to develop a targeted plan with clear action steps and benchmarks. First-and-foremost--the plan must fit your goals, your targets and your budget. It is then critical to measure your results and adjust tools to maximize your goals and profit. It's hard to know where to draw the line with people who keep asking questions without any indication they plan to make a purchase.