
How to write a marketing plan.

One of the fundamental procedures involved in any successful business operation is creating and implementing a marketing plan. A market is a particular group of buyers who needs services. A marketing plan consists of several components, each of which is described below. Before writing a marketing plan, it is necessary to define your target market and to understand its needs. This involves conducting market research, such as transaction log analysis, circulation records, user surveys, focus group interviews, and information interviews to provide insight on what your customers really expect.

1. Prepare a mission statement.

The mission statement clearly and succinctly describes the nature of the business, services offered, and markets served—usually in a few sentences. Sometimes for larger companies it's combined with a vision statement that can be two to three paragraphs in length.

2. List and describe target or niche markets.

In this section, list and describe potential groups of users or clients. After you create the list, identify various segments of a market. Segments can include specific types of people in a company by role—for example, chief executive officer, chief financial officer, or marketing director. For segmenting the consumer market, consider age groups. In addition, niche markets are an integral part of marketing. Within a target market of attorneys, for instance, there may be niche groups such as trial or malpractice attorneys. In some instances, targeting by firm size is an important consideration.

3. Describe your services.

As mentioned above, it's necessary to conduct market research to understand your market and to identify the services they require. At the same time, inventory the services you currently offer and identify new services you wish to provide. Determine what it will take to provide these services in terms of staff, expertise, and costs.

4. Spell out marketing and promotional strategies.

Various strategies work better for different target markets and, therefore, several may be required. The key for successful marketing is understanding what makes someone want to use or buy services and what type of marketing strategy they respond to. This requires you to learn needs, problems, industry trends, and buzzwords. To get up to speed for a particular business market, read trade journals and attend professional conferences to meet prospective users or buyers in person. Become active in various groups whenever possible and form strategic alliances. Find out what works best for the markets you serve.

This is a trial-and-error process that requires testing and interaction with clients or prospective clients, although reading case studies and interviewing and consulting with libraries that have already had marketing achievements is one way to save time.

Basic marketing strategies include the following:

- Network, either in person or electronically, by participating in discussion groups online where your target markets
- Direct marketing involves sending out sales letters, capability brochures, flyers, or special offers on a regular, repeated basis to the same group of prospects. Direct marketing can only work if you speak the language of your target market and contact them regularly.
- Advertise in print media or directories, often with a specific offer to reap the benefit of an immediate response or sales. Advertising lends credibility (image advertising) and, like direct marketing, must be continuous.
- Devise training programs that increase awareness about your services.
- Write articles for local media or professional journals and newsletters that describe the benefits of your services.
- Direct or personal selling is the one-on-one selling, often on site at a prospect's office or company. Direct sales are a particularly costly form of marketing since you only reach one person at a time. However, if you present your services to a group of people at a company, such as people from a particular department or several department heads, direct sales can be beneficial.
- Send out publicity and press releases through local newspapers, radio, and television stations.
- Participate in trade shows at the local or regional level.

When a strategy works, repeat it. But if it fails, and you have done it right, drop it. The ability to develop and implement each of the strategies above requires learning and honing new skills. It will most likely be necessary to read marketing and sales books, attend courses or workshops, or hire consultants and specialists to assist you as necessary.

5. Identify and understand the competition.

As part of the market planning process, you must learn about your competitors and how to position yourself in relation to them. Describe your strengths and what you want to emphasize. Once you identify both direct and indirect competition (for example, the Internet as indirect competition), you can determine how and why your

services are special and benefit users in a particular way. You can compete based on value, price, product, or service, or some combination of these. Your unique position in the marketplace must be touted in your marketing programs and marketing literature.

6. Establish marketing goals that are quantifiable.

Marketing goals can include setting the number of new clients you would like to acquire, the number of people you would like to reach, or the amount of income you would like to generate. Be realistic and practical in establishing your goals. Take a good look at the available skills and resources that you can commit to implement and integrate your goals into your marketing plan effectively. Study the budget requirements for the strategies you select and plan accordingly.

7. Monitor your results carefully.

By monitoring results, you determine which of your marketing strategies are working and which are not. Identify strategies that generate leads and sales. This involves tracking and evaluating customers' responses to each marketing strategy. Survey or interview regular users for comments about why they find a service important. As you get to know your repeat clients better, meet with them for detailed feedback and ask them for ideas and suggestions about how you can introduce your products and services to more prospects who are just like them. Client comments are invaluable for creating or enhancing your market literature, and you can also learn and incorporate terms or language common to a particular user group through this process. Just as valuable, these interviews lead to statements that can be used as testimonials (with permission of course) and in future brochures and promotional activities.

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