

Guide to writing a marketing plan

Overview

Marketing strategy

Your marketing strategy explains the overall objectives for your marketing activity, who your customers are and why they will buy from you.

You should break down your customers into different segments (i.e. groups of similar customers). For each segment, you should look at what customers' want, what you can offer and the competition you will have. Once you have decided on your target market(s), you need to be sure how you will position your products as you will need to differentiate your business from your competition in order to encourage customers to choose your business first. You can then create a marketing strategy that explains how you will match your strengths to the needs of the customers you want to target.

If you are already in business the most promising segments are those where you have existing customers. You should collect information directly from your customers on how they perceive your products or services to help you market to them more effectively.

Your market strategy should also take into account what stage your product is at in its life cycle. It's a good idea to have new products or services to introduce as other decline, that way, one part of your range is always at a sales peak.

Marketing plan

Your marketing plan should start with an executive summary giving an overview of the main points of the plan. Although the executive summary appears at the beginning of the plan, you should write it last because writing the summary is a good opportunity to check that your plan makes sense and that you haven't missed any important points.

In order to connect your marketing plan to your overall business plan you should introduce the main body of the plan with a reminder of your overall business strategy, including:

- what your business is about
- your key business objectives
- your broad strategy for achieving those objectives

You will need to set out your marketing objectives and these should link back to what you need to achieve in terms of sales in order to deliver your overall business objectives.

Objectives should always be SMART:

- Specific: for example, you might set an objective of getting ten new customers.
- Measurable: you need to be able to check whether you have reached it or not when you review your plan.
- Achievable: you must have the resources, usually people and money, you need to achieve the objective.
- Realistic: targets should stretch you, not demotivate you because they are unreasonable and seem to be out of reach.
- Time-bound: you should set a deadline for achieving the objective, for example, you might aim to get ten new customers within the next 12 months.

When you are thinking about your marketing plan, many businesses find it helpful to think in terms of the four P's:

- Product: what your product offers that your customers value, and whether/how you should change your product to meet customer needs.

- Pricing: for example, you might aim to match the competition, undercut them, or charge a premium price for a quality product and service.
- Place: how and where you sell.
- Promotion: how you reach your customers and potential customers, for example, you might use advertising, PR, direct mail and personal selling

Marketing tactics

Once you have decided what your marketing objectives are, and your plan for meeting them, you need to decide how you will make the strategy a reality. Thinking about the tactics you will use to spread the message about your business is crucial and so you need to match your tactics with the outcomes that you are looking for, for example, the smaller or more niche your target market the more focused your marketing tactics will be.

Have a look at the [guide to marketing and communications tools](#) which will give you more ideas of the tactics you can use.

Marketing plan implementation

Your marketing plan should include a schedule of key tasks setting out all the promotional activity you will undertake in order to achieve your marketing goals.

Your implementation plan will also assess what resources or collateral that you will need to communicate effectively with your customers. For example, you might want to develop brochures in both traditional and digital format for distribution by email or from your website. You might also need to look at how much time it takes to sell to customers and whether you have enough sales people.

The cost of everything in the plan needs to be included in a budget. If your finances are limited your plan will need to take that into account when planning what activity and collateral you will develop.

Finally, you will need to manage and monitor your marketing plan so as well as setting out the schedule; the

plan needs to explain how it will be reviewed. A good schedule and budget should make it easy to monitor progress. When things fall behind schedule, or costs overrun, you need to be ready to do something about it and to adapt your plan accordingly.

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Our marketing plan guide

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