

Introduction

A good marketing strategy can help launch a new business or hale an existing one to grow. However, too many people approach the advertising and marketing of their business as if it were a chore.

How many of you feel this way?

Maybe you don't know what you should be doing, or feel that what you are doing is ineffective. Perhaps you find the whole concept of "Marketing" so overwhelming that you don't know where to begin.

As a result, you find yourself planning your marketing strategy as quickly as possible with the least amount of thought. Or worse yet, avoiding it completely.

What is marketing?

OK, let's begin at the beginning: What is marketing, and why is it important?

Well, the American Marketing Association's definition of marketing is:

The process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives.

And for those of us without an MBA, I'll put it more simply: Marketing results in providing the consumer with the goods or services that they need or desire, while making the companies that offer these goods and services more profitable.

Once you have a basic understanding of what marketing is, you need to take the first steps to creating a marketing plan for your company.

There are four key components to every marketing plan:

- Products and Services
- Promotion
- Distribution
- Pricing

The first step

Before you can do anything else, you must have a clear understanding of what you are going to sell and whom you are going to sell it to.

Let's start with the first part of this. If you were to describe your product or service to someone that you have just met at a party, what would you say? How would you describe it? Would it be interesting? Would the person you are speaking with understand what you are talking about?

Sometimes, because we know our business so well and because most of the people that we work with do to, we forget that people outside our circle may not get it. We may speak in the language of our industry, using terminology that they don't understand, or we leave out important details because we

forget that they don't know these things. This leaves the other person confused and uninterested, and soon they will make their excuses and walk away.

This is one of the biggest mistakes that people make when putting together their marketing plans. Either they don't clearly define their product or service or they use terminology that is over the heads of their audience. Unless you have a clear understanding of what you are selling and can communicate that to others, you could end up wasting a lot of time, energy and money with little or no results.

In addition to clearly defining your product or service, you must figure out who your customers are, what their needs or desires are and how you can satisfy those needs or desires. Without stopping to think like a customer, you will fail to understand what information you need to supply to potential clients. You won't give them any reason to choose you over your competition because you didn't address their needs.

So you are going to take a few minutes to figure this out. In all likelihood, you have done this at one point in time, but it is a good thing to revisit from time to time.

Exercise 1

Take the next 10 minutes and write down what it is that you are selling and whom you are selling it to. Make it clear, interesting, and with as much detail as possible. This is not your mission statement or your business plan, but, rather, a sales pitch. Include a description of who your customers are and what need you are filling.

Now What?

Ok, so now that you know what you are marketing and whom you are targeting, what do you do next?

If we go back to our 4 key components, the next step is Promotion. There are a variety of ways to promote your product/service.

Can you name a few?

- Advertising (the most obvious)
- Direct mail
- Business Cards
- Brochures
- Company Fact Sheet
- Brand Recognition
- Sponsorships
- Contests
- Trade Shows
- Newsletters
- Referrals/ Rewards programs
- Customer follow up
- Good Customer Service
- Free gifts / special offers
- Web Sites
- Calendars
- Word of Mouth

Are you, as a company, developing and maintaining a database to track customers and sales?

Do you realize that repeat business typically makes up 80% of your customers? How many of you use those Grocery Store Discount Cards? Those supply an abundance of info to the stores about your shopping habits and allow them to target their marketing to each customer – from the cash register coupons to the coupons that they mail out. I know that where I shop, they have made a practice of thanking you for shopping there using your name and always offering to help you to your car. Making your customers feel appreciated will build customer loyalty and good customer service will keep them coming back.

Are you consistent in the look, feel and sound of your interaction with your customers?

- Company Fact Sheet – is this something that had your logo and company name, maybe a photo or two, and says “I’m interesting, read me!” or simply a list, typed up in Word in 12 point Times Roman?
- Have you developed a tag line or logo and do you use them consistently? In other words, **BRANDING**.

Have you gotten creative with your marketing strategy?

If your marketing message is appearing alongside your competition and you are all offering the same basic services or product, then the likelihood of your company standing out in the crowd is small. You need to break through the information overload and capture the imagination and attention of your audience so that they can see how you are different and better.

Developing Branding

What is Branding and why it is important?

In a nutshell, branding is differentiating your business from your competition's and making sure that when consumers think of the product or service you offer, they think of you first.

- Develop a consistent corporate identity
 - Use the same name, logo and tag line in every contact inside and outside the company
- Incorporate GOOD visuals
 - Pictures say more and are remembered longer than words.
- Keep your Tag Line believable
- Grab attention with your Tag Line
- Get your employees involved and excited about your company identity
 - They are representatives of your company and reward them when they get it right
- Word of Mouth
 - Use your existing customers to spread the word. Get them talking about you to their friends and family.
 - Poll them on your greatest strengths and ask what other features or services they would like to see you offer or expand.
- Revisit your marketing plan and materials – don’t let them get stale or out of date
- Track your marketing and branding efforts
 - Ask customers how they heard about you.
 - Adjust your marketing efforts accordingly

The importance of having a well-designed logo

One large source of business failures is sloppy or ineffective marketing. If your company logo does not adequately represent your company or looks amateurish, then your business may appear unstable, unpolished or unprofessional. A well thought out and designed logo and professional looking marketing materials show that you are committed to both your business and your clients.

Develop a Tag Line for your company

A tag line helps explain who you are and what makes you great. However, when developing a tag line, skip the “What we are” and focus on the “What we do for you”. Try to express this in a catchy and memorable phrase. Say it out loud. Does it have a ring to it? Is it easy to say and remember?

Following are five steps to help you create your own tag line:

1. Decide what you want to say with your tag line. Start with a positioning statement that says what it is that makes your company, service or product better than the competition. Extract the fun and excitement from that statement.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Who are your customers?
 - What benefits do you give your customers?
 - What feeling do you want to evoke in your customers?
 - What action are you trying to generate from your customers?
 - How are you different from your competition?
2. Prepare to Brainstorm
 - Gather samples of other tag lines
 - Look at the words used and the phraseology
 - Try to figure out why they are effective, or not, as the case may be
 3. Brainstorm with a small group
 - Write down Everything.
 4. Consolidate your list
 - Pull out those that have the best potential.
 5. Choose the one best tag line.
 - Get the opinion of others – and I do mean others. People outside your company or the industry. Talk to your potential or current customers.
 - Adjust your tag line accordingly

Summary

In order to have an effective and successful marketing program, you must devote time, energy and thought to the process. It cannot be rushed or glossed over, but instead should be approached with a sense of curiosity, adventure and a healthy dose of creative energy.

Resources:

- Internet Search Engines – there is an abundance of marketing information and ideas available on the Internet. Perform searches for marketing ideas, creative marketing, sales techniques, graphics and marketing, etc.
- Books:
 - Thinking Creatively – new ways to unlock your visual imagination by Robin Landa
 - Aha! – 10 ways to free your creative spirit and find your great ideas by Jordan Ayan
 - 101 Ways to promote Your Web Site by Susan Sweeney, C.A.