

The Marketing Plan

View it as a whole

Paula Lawlor
PMM Professional Merchandising & Marketing
Email: paula@pmms.ie



"The strategy is the methods you are going to use to achieve your objectives. Marketing strategies will vary according to your requirements, the time frame, the product or service you are marketing and the extent of your budget."

Previous articles have touched on many aspects of the marketing plan, but in order to achieve a suitable marketing strategy it is important to view the plan as a whole. You need to examine where you are now, where you want to be and how you are going to get there. The easiest way to do this is to break out your marketing plan into eight categories as outlined below.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Executive Summary should contain an overview of what your plan is and it can be used by management to get an idea of what is going to be involved in the project and also to monitor the effectiveness of it. The executive summary is like a mission statement and provides direction for the marketing strategy.

CURRENT MARKETING SITUATION:

It is important to examine the current marketing situation of the company to establish where the product or service stands in the market and to review any strategies that have been used previously and to evaluate their effectiveness. For example if you have previously used an advertising method that has not yielded positive results, don't use this medium again unless something has fundamentally changed either with the advertiser or with your target market. Also, review your marketing that is currently underway and try to establish what areas are working effectively so that you can allocate some of your budget towards existing strategies in tandem with the new.

SWOT ANALYSIS:

A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis should be part of your regular management strategy but if you have not carried one out in recent times when looking at your marketing plan is a good opportunity to review the business climate around you and how you are performing within it. Looking at both the positive and negative aspects of your business allows you to formulate realistic plans to improve on your weaknesses, try to counteract threats, explore opportunities and maximise your strengths.

OBJECTIVES & ISSUES:

By having a clear understanding of what you want to achieve and setting defined objectives you can make your marketing plan more

measurable. It will also give you a sense of satisfaction as you achieve your objectives and will be a source of motivation to you and your team. Try to be proactive by identifying any issues that you think may arise and planning for them – ideally to eliminate them or if that's not possible at least to control them.

MARKETING STRATEGY:

The strategy is the methods you are going to use to achieve your objectives. Marketing strategies will vary according to your requirements, the time frame, the product or service you are marketing and the extent of your budget. The marketing strategy should be unique to your product and service – while you will most likely use techniques that are employed by other companies such as advertising and promotion, the combination of marketing tools should be used to achieve maximum exposure to your target market.

ACTION PROGRAMMES:

If you are using your own staff to co-ordinate the marketing strategy make sure that specific tasks are allocated with the associated timeframes and budgets clearly outlined. Using a professional marketer means that you can benefit from their experience, benefit from reduced media purchase costs and the action programme will be

outlined by them. However, even if you employ a marketer to carry out your marketing plan you will need to work in tandem with them to ensure that a message that is reflective of your corporate identity and with which you feel totally comfortable, reaches your market.

BUDGETS:

In the relation to the marketing budgets bigger is better! The bigger your budget the more exciting and high profile your marketing campaign can be but the underlying focus should be on value. The smallest of budgets can be effective once it is used well.

CONTROLS:

The controls section of the marketing plan should deal with ensuring that the overall planning and execution of the marketing campaign is taking place within the agreed timeframe and budget. Normally setting weekly or monthly targets is a good way of monitoring what has taken place or where the marketing strategy has failed. Remember that marketing is about generating enquiries but you or your sales team will need to close the deal, so measuring sales is not necessarily the best way to measure the effectiveness of a marketing strategy. Brand awareness is developed through marketing, which is an

integral part of the long-term growth of any business, however it may not convert into immediate sales. If this were the case, none of us would ever get to see Coronation Street as we would all have rushed to the local shop to get a bar of Cadbury's on account of their sponsorship of the show!

Once you have a clear marketing plan in place you can begin to think about implementation. All marketing tools will require planning and don't forget to leave lead times for printing or even just to gather information, quotations and compare pricing. Leaving your marketing plan until the last minute will lead to disappointment as your competitors are likely to be planning ahead and you may miss out on prime locations or broadcasting slots if you don't book well in advance. A good marketing plan will help you make the most of your marketing strategy and will help you achieve your long-term goal of business development.

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