

Creating a Marketing Plan

Almost everyone who dreams of starting their own business knows they need to create a business plan. However, that's often where many people stop. When you created your business plan, what did you do with it? You actually have the basis for the next step, which is creating your marketing plan. Without the plan of how you are going to market your business, the business plan is just an empty jumble of words speaking of dreams and desires. The marketing plan takes those dreams and creates a strategy for how to make them come true.

Marketing plans need not be complex. Following the eight steps below will lead you in the right direction to grow your business.

Prepare a mission statement.

Your mission statement should clearly and succinctly describe the nature of your business, services offered, and markets served in just a few sentences. A mission statement is a statement of who you are and what you stand for. It answers the question of why you are in business.

List your ideal client.

I cannot emphasize this enough. You have to know who your ideal client is and what their needs are. You have to be able to visualize them in front of you. Be very specific in identifying your ideal client. What are their values, what do they like, and what do they need? Really get clear who this person/business is.

Describe your services.

Imagine everything you currently do and everything you want to do in the future. It's ok if you haven't done it before — If it's something you want to do in the future, list it. You will later determine how to make it happen. Don't leave anything out even if you're not sure it's something you want to do in a month or a year or even 2 years. It's all about setting goals.

Who is your competition?

In order to know how to position yourself from your competition, you must know who your competition is. Do some research and determine what your competition offers, how they promote, what they charge, and what their strengths and weaknesses are. Do your research.

Marketing objectives and strategies.

Marketing objectives will indicate targets to be achieved across several marketing decision areas. Examples could include such things as what products/services you wish to offer, who you plan to offer them to, how you plan to make your services known, your promotional objectives, etc. Objectives should be clear, measurable, and have a stated time frame for achievement. Objectives should include both marketing objectives and financial objectives.

Marketing strategy.

This is your game plan to achieve your marketing objectives. You are now getting into the nitty-gritty. This is where it's time to play and play big! The marketing strategy should include information about your products/services, pricing, how you will promote or create awareness, and how you will distribute that information.

Create the action plan.

Once the objectives and strategies have been developed, put together an action plan describing the steps that need to be taken in detail. This is your actual game plan for how you will accomplish all that you have written about in your business plan and marketing plan. It will include what the specific objective is, exactly what and when the steps will be taken, what results you expect to see, the marketing tactics you will employ and so on. This will be your template for your marketing calendar.

Monitor results.

By monitoring results, you can determine which of your strategies are working and which are not. Identify strategies that generate increased business. This involves tracking and evaluating responses to each marketing strategy.

Creating a marketing plan is not something enough people take time to complete. I can't emphasize how important it is to do this work. Skipping this step can mean the difference between success and failure. Many people who start a small business are aware of creating a business plan. However, the business plan is just the first step. The marketing plan is not the final step either! This document is the template for creating your marketing calendar that will set your projects in motion. You are creating your future with the marketing plan, and then watching that future become reality with your marketing calendar.

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