

CREATE A MARKETING PLAN IN 10 EASY STEPS



WORKING OUT A PLAN

Building a marketing plan is a lot like the first time you go to a gym. There's some apprehension, some indecision, and as a whole you may not be entirely sure what to do. It seems simple enough, and seemingly everyone is doing it, but maybe you just don't know where to start. That's what this is for. Much like going to the gym, the biggest step your business needs to take is to walk through the door with a plan.

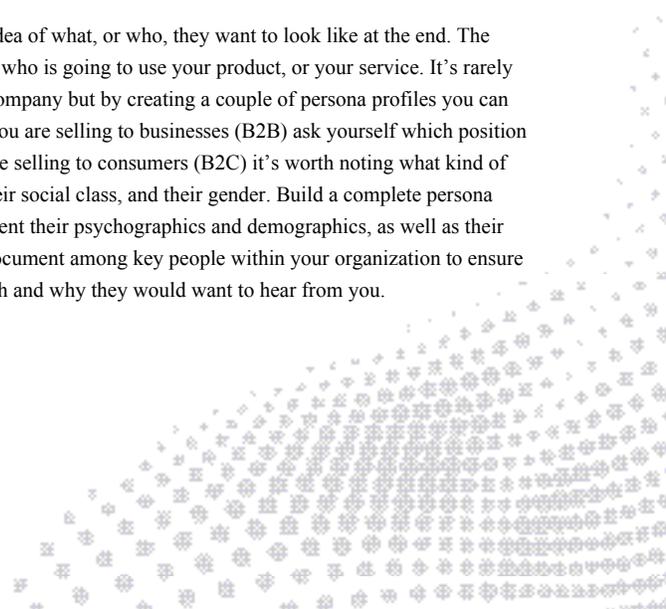
Creating a marketing plan is key to making sure you can put your business plan into action and achieve the goals you have outlined in it. There's no reason why you can't complete your marketing plan, and begin implementing it within a matter of days.

STEP 1: GOAL SETTING

You can't start working out without an end goal. There needs to be a target that you create your workout plan around. The same goes for your business; before you can get started on your company's marketing plan you need to make sure you have set goals. What's your revenue target? How many new customers are you going to acquire? How much will your market share grow? These should be clearly documented so that you can design a plan that will work towards attaining those goals. Find out if your organization has a business plan; that's where you'll find this information. If they don't, talk to a senior executive and identify these objectives and ensure you have alignment on what they are, how they're measured, and when they need to be achieved. These are the goals that your marketing plan has to support.

STEP 2: WHO'S YOUR TARGET?

Most people who go to the gym already have an idea of what, or who, they want to look like at the end. The same applies to your business. You need to figure who is going to use your product, or your service. It's rarely a single person, and it varies depending on your company but by creating a couple of persona profiles you can target your messaging to appeal to that group. If you are selling to businesses (B2B) ask yourself which position the people you are targeting will occupy. If you are selling to consumers (B2C) it's worth noting what kind of background they come from, how old they are, their social class, and their gender. Build a complete persona profile for each target you seek to engage. Document their psychographics and demographics, as well as their pains and how they are measured. Circulate the document among key people within your organization to ensure you have consensus on who you are trying to reach and why they would want to hear from you.



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STEP 3: CUSTOMIZE YOUR MESSAGING

The same way you might create a certain routine to target specific muscles, or to attain a certain look, you need to create specific messaging for your business to target a specific market. Your messaging, just like your workouts, need to be targeted to make sure you are reaching your market and their target personas within the market. Depending on their role, or their persona, they may want to hear about the ROI of the product, or the ease-of-use or the support and community that has been built around it. Your messaging needs to speak to their pains, and the benefit of your service with a vocabulary that is familiar to them.

STEP 4: CHOOSING A PLATFORM

Once you know what you want to look like, you'll need to choose a specific regimen to base your fitness program around. It's the same for your business. When you are first starting up you will need to integrate a form of customer relationship management. There are a variety of options that range from out of the box solutions like Salesforce.com, Microsoft, and HubSpot among others. You can also attempt to cobble together a master federated solution from a variety of programs but that can involve a large amount of coding, wasting time and money, on a program solution that will have limitations. Avoid this and get something out of the box that is proven, has great quick-starts, is supported by a large consulting community, and has a large user base to answer all the questions you will absolutely be asking. Instead consider options like Salesforce.com and HubSpot. For what you will need when you are starting your company they will provide a simple, cost-effective solution.

Another platform that may be something to consider would be a Marketing Automation platform, to manage, monitor and measure your campaigns. Solutions like Pardot, Act-On, Marketo and HubSpot make excellent choices and provide brilliant insights. Further, you can then seamlessly connect to your CRM solution out-of-the-box and can provide closed-loop reporting on the impact your campaigns have in terms of revenue, customer acquisition, influence, etc.

If you can't afford a solution like these, then consider a simple email marketing solution such as Constant Contact or MailChimp. You can implement basic web forms on your website or landing pages, and each submission can trigger auto-responders to drip-feed email messages to your opt-in lists.

It's all about engaging your audience and building a list of leads for the sales team.

STEP 5: MAPPING THE SALES PROCESS

The next step in your quest for the perfect business and the perfect body requires some mapping. You need to build a map of what workouts you're going to do, and when you're going to do them. Then as you perform them you can note which areas need to be improved on and so you can optimize your workout. The same process applies to your business. By mapping the sales process you can see the journey that your customers will go on. You'll be able to see where they are venturing off course, and where you need to improve the customer journey to make sure they are interested in your product the entire time.



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HOW TO MAP THE BUYERS JOURNEY

1. Start from the point of view of a customer looking to use your product, or something similar.
2. Imagine the steps that they will take from the moment they hear about your product, to the research they will do about you, to the actual buying process they will go through with your sales team.
3. Note any concerns, motivators, and places where the customer may get bogged down or lose interest while going through this journey. Is the price right, is there good support, is it easy to research the product, is it a market leader, is it a high quality product, etc.?

Once you've built your sales map, and noted the positives and negatives about it, you can start creating a list of solutions content pieces for each of the problems, negatives, or hang ups that they might encounter. These may include webinars, email campaigns, white papers, case studies, blogs, or even just an upgrade to your website so that it is more intuitive for visitors to find the information they require.

Once you know the content you need to effectively engage your audience, you can create a content calendar so that you have a plan on when to produce each piece, how to promote it, how to share it via social media, and how to measure the impact the generate. Every good marketer needs a good plan, or a good map, otherwise you'll just get lost.

STEP 6: CHOOSING A PLATFORM

One of the most satisfying moments of working out comes when you finally lose that extra inch here, or you finally hit that magic number that you've been chasing. However, it's hard to tell if you're there or not, without having a scale to measure yourself. The same goes for your business. You'll need a scale of sorts to measure your progress, to see where you can improve, and to see how you stack up against the competition.

What to Measure:

- Leads – what campaigns are driving in leads
- Traffic – Who is visiting your website, how are they getting there
- Conversions – What is the ratio of people that visit your website to people that become leads
- Competitors – Where do you stack up against the competition?

What scales to use:

- Google Analytics
- HubSpot
- Pardot
- Marketo
- Act-On



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Your market is comprised of a variety of subsections, or segments. Not all of these segments are comprised of the same demographic and there's no guarantee they will all respond to the same messaging in a consistent manner. Instead create segments focusing on dividing your market by:

- People who have contacted you for the first time ever
- People who made repeated contact
- People who haven't made contact in the past month
- People who haven't made contact in the past year
- People who made contact only once
- People who haven't made contact yet



Each segment should have a name and description. They should be measurable and visibly different from each other. For each segment ask yourself:

- What Percentage of total sales does it accounts for?
- What are the needs and wants of this segment?
- How will they use my product?
- What is the best media to reach this segment?
- What is the price range this segment can afford?

These measurements are then used to prioritize, refine, and improve your marketing plan and thereby increase your successful conversion rate and goal attainment.

STEP 7: CREATING YOUR STRATEGY

There is no secret trick to creating a marketing strategy, just like there is no secret to creating the perfect workout regime. Each situation is different and this is the part that will require some brainstorming from your company in order to create an effective marketing plan. However, like a workout regime, you'll need to create a calendar that you stick to that outlines major milestones, dates and budgets. With that said there are certain tactics that every good marketing plan should employ:

Inbound Marketing

Inbound marketing is all about bringing people to you. These strategies all take some time until you see your full ROI, but they will be invaluable in the long run. Here are some of the inbound marketing strategies you can use :

Social Media Marketing

Social media has become too important to be neglected by companies. You will need to make sure your marketing plan not only outlines which platforms your customers are active on, but how you will use that platform to reach them

Content Marketing

Content marketing is your most valuable tool because it gives back to your customers while boosting your reputation. Even if it doesn't drive customers directly to you 100% of the time, it helps answer their questions, solve their problems, and ensures that they think of you as a leader in that market. The most difficult part of good content marketing is simply generating enough content that is current, and relevant to the needs of your customer base.

Once you know the content you need to engage your audience, you can create a content calendar so that you have a plan on when to produce each piece, how to promote it, how to share it via social media, and how to measure the impact it generates.



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Search Engine Optimization

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a fairly simple task that will only take you a few extra minutes but it will make sure you're being seen more often, will increase your traffic, and through that, your leads.

Video Marketing

Video marketing has its own category here because that's how critical it is that you do it.

YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world. Most social media platforms incorporate either capture video, or disseminate it. It's the kind of content that your buyers want to consume, and it's the most important content to make. Video marketing doesn't necessarily need to be a massive investment. There are a lot of tools and techniques to do this affordably with minimal effort.



Outbound Marketing

Outbound marketing is about talking to your targets. Instead of releasing content and waiting for them to find you, outbound marketing is all about making the first move.

Email Marketing

Although it may be a little old fashioned than compared to social media marketing, email marketing is just as important and can be a less daunting task for a small business. With services like Mailchimp it is easy for small companies to send out mass campaigns to certain market segments. Remember not every market segment will respond to the same email; crafting unique campaigns for each segment is vital to a successful email marketing campaign.



Teleprospecting

With the explosion of social media you may be thinking that teleprospecting is dead. You couldn't be farther from the truth. You'll never be able to get away from talking to people. In fact, recent studies have shown over 60% of business deals involve some sort of human interaction, like teleprospecting. If you're worried your business isn't at a stage where it can handle that task there are a plethora of lead generation companies out there that can do it for you.

Mobile Marketing

Now more than ever it is important for companies to have a mobile presence. Whether it's on a phone, or a tablet, you need to be able to connect with your target market on the devices they use the most. Keep in mind that if you bombard your customers with mobile marketing you are more likely to drive them away than create a good relationship. Mobile marketing can be very effective, but it needs to be used efficiently.

STEP 8: ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES

Keep track of alternative strategies that may have come up with brainstorming the main strategy in your marketing plan. We can't predict the future and having a backup plan or two may be just what you need.

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STEP 9: SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM PROJECTIONS

Once you have your strategies in place you need to start creating projections. These projections should line up with the company goals, and personal goals, that you set before you created your marketing strategy. Look at:

- What are your expected revenues and expenses?
- What is your break-even point?
- What possible adjustments might you may need to make?
- What is your timeline for to implement these strategies?

By creating a set timeline and expected revenues and projections you will be able to go back and check each month to see where you stand, and what you need to do to hit your goals.



STEP 10: COMMUNICATE

Once you've got everything written down be sure to wrap it up into one concise document. Something you send throughout your company so that the rest of your team knows, and understands, what it is you are trying to do, and how you are going to accomplish it. Then go and have one-on-ones with the people this will really affect, to make sure they understand exactly what the plan goes over.

Creating a marketing plan is critical for your company. While it may not be the flashiest item on your to-do list it's one that will help you understand your company, your competition and your market; improving you now, and in the long run.



POINTS TO REMEMBER

This isn't something you should be doing on your own. Like a gym buddy, you need input and guidance from other executives in your company so that you can work together to create a well-crafted marketing plan.

Building the body you want doesn't happen overnight. It takes time to build a base, then refine it, and continue working on it until it's perfect. Sometimes, it's never done. The same goes for your marketing plan. This isn't something that can be rushed, or made in a couple of hours. This is going to take time, and it's going to vary based on the size of your company. As your business grows and your goals change you may find you want to go back and fine-tune the marketing plan, or even scrap it and make a new one; but like your workout plan it's something you should always go back to so that it can be used as a guide to keep you on track, and ensure you hit your goals.