

The basics of a marketing plan

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Marketing is a process where you define the most important attributes of your product/service, with the ultimate aim of turning them into communicable benefits for your target audience. From the consumer/user point of view, in any marketing category, the difference between attributes and benefits is best summed up in the ancient proverb: 'Don't tell me about your manure, tell me about my flowers'. The first step to planning successful marketing is to get a ream of butcher's paper and several clever people together in a room with lots of tea, coffee and biscuits.

Putting together a basic marketing plan is a matter of asking yourself some simple questions, in a methodical manner, in order to create a platform for future communication activity. It's nothing more than a template to help you examine the issues and analyse the possibilities. Simplicity of language, brevity and intellectual honesty are key.

1. Start with a simple **description** of your product/service. Look at its recent history, major events and current position in the marketplace. Where have you been and where are you going? What are your primary benefits? How would you like to be viewed? Think about your mission statement. Emphasise clearly what is unique, innovative or special.
2. Describe each of the main **markets** (including potential customer groups) that you want to target. Rank them as primary, secondary and tertiary. Estimate how many people from each group you may be able to service in the coming year. Describe how your product/service satisfies their needs. As well as customers/users, consider the views and needs of funders, staff and other stakeholders.
3. Describe the competitive **environment** (not just other libraries, include alternatives to libraries). How does your product/service compare in regard to reputation, size, location, ease of use and so on)? Is your competition growing or shrinking? What are their strengths and weaknesses? What can you learn from these trends? Analyse the technical environment – how is technology affecting your product/service? Will it become obsolete? How are you equipped to adapt to changes? What about the socio-political environment – describe relevant changes in attitudes and trends and your responsiveness to them. What other situational factors will affect your marketing plan?
4. Do a **SWOT** analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats). This covers the current business environment, internal and external issues. State each problem and opportunity and what can be done about each.
5. Define your key **objectives** against each target market in precise and quantifiable terms: how you will measure when you have reached your objectives. The objectives are about *what* you want to achieve.
6. The **strategy** is about *how* you mean to get there. Consider which strategies will take you to these objectives. (Is it about new

market penetration or expansion of market share?) Take into account the problems and opportunities mentioned above, as well as the potential reaction of competitors. How can you best exploit your opportunities?

7. Now, you should be able to describe the **positioning** of your product/service in a statement no more than one sentence long. A positioning statement is designed to be the basis of all future advertising and promotion, as well as being something staff can understand and feed back easily and concisely. (This is the first step to writing an advertising brief and the creation of your most important selling tool: a single-minded proposition.)
8. How can you best **implement** these strategies? Will you have to modify your product/service in terms of image, quality, branding, programs, location, training, distribution, or pricing? Examine all the available promotion methods – PR, editorial, exhibits, events, functions, advertising, websites, catalogues, personal selling, direct mail, e-marketing, telemarketing, joint ventures and other collaborators, etc. Budget your expenditure specifically for each relevant communication channel. Set objectives and strategies for each. A monthly chart of activity and expenditure is helpful. The marketing plan should be shared with everyone in the organisation so they all understand how to assist in measuring and executing the plan. Do you have a script that everyone can refer to represent the organisation to the community (for board members, management, staff)? Write down a set of key topics to cover when talking to others outside the organisation. Ultimately, after clear feedback, you will be able to learn what combination of the various marketing approaches is working and why. And vice versa.

Using this as a basic template, after several attempts, you should be able to hammer out a simple, cogent marketing plan. Getting the strategy and positioning right is where most of your brainpower should be spent.

Only then can you determine where and how much money should be spent.

If you've done that, congratulations. You have reached the beginning.

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What's SWOT?

Lots of information about this analytic tool out there. Try http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_05.htm or <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SWOT>. ■