



How to Create an Effective Marketing Plan in 6 Simple Steps!

Like writing a business plan, creating a comprehensive marketing plan seems like a big, hairy project that takes forever to accomplish! But if you break it down into steps, and have your team get in on the creative process, you can easily get it done! Remember, it doesn't need to be finely honed prose – just get everything down on paper in an easy-to-read format.

1. Write an Executive Summary

Introduce your company and briefly describe your business and the services and/or products you offer. Describe your challenges and the goals of the plan.

If you're launching a new business, describe the experience and qualifications that you bring, along with the qualifications of business partners and other key employees.

2. Create Your Vision

Describe who you want to be in the future (not necessarily who you are now). A vision statement helps stakeholders, including employees, to understand the meaning and purpose of your business.

3. Frame Your Mission Statement

The mission statement is about what you're doing right now. It defines your business and reason for being.

Don't make your mission statement something that any other business in your industry could write. Make it yours by imagining an actual customer making the decision to buy what you sell. Use your imagination to see why she wants it, how she finds you, and what buying from you does for her. The more details you can add to explain the "why to buy," the more effective it will be, because you'll be defining your target customer, also known as the buyer personal.

As you go through the process, also define how your business is different from most others, or is unique. It simplifies thinking about what a business isn't, what it doesn't do.

4. Conduct a S.W.O.T. Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats)

This is best done with as many of your team members as possible. If you don't have a lot of team members, consider inviting clients or vendors to join you. Get out a big whiteboard or throw giant sized post-it notes on the wall and honestly analyze your company's:

Strengths. These are the internal strength of your business, such as expertise, experience, certifications, years in business, rankings on Yelp, etc.

Weaknesses. Again, look at your own company, and where you may need improvement. Perhaps you need to better train some employees. Maybe your sales have been lackluster because employees don't feel motivated or valued. Or your turn-over is causing poor service. Be really honest here.

Opportunities. These are external opportunities – out there in the marketplace. For example, one of our clients, [Little Sparkie Electric](#), is very good at performing service work. That's a great opportunity because both businesses and homeowners will inevitably need some sort of service work.

Threats. Again, these are external factors in the marketplace. Perhaps you rely on government contracts for much of your business, but regular government shutdowns pose a serious threat to your cash flow and ability to retain quality employees.

5. Describe Your Unique Selling Proposition (USP).

A USP is what separates or differentiates a product or service from its competitors. This could be the lowest cost, the highest quality, or the first-ever product of its kind. A USP could be thought of as "what you have that competitors don't."

Some examples of famous USPs are:

- Avis' "We're only number two. We try harder" campaign.
- FedEx's "When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight."
- Nike's "JUST DO IT."

6. Set Your Goals

These need to be concrete targets that you can easily aim for and achieve. An easy way to do this is to break them down into S.M.A.R.T. Goals, meaning:

- **Specific** –What sales and operational goals do you want to achieve this coming year? Provide six training sessions for employees? Increase sales by five percent? Decrease employee turnover by 20 percent? Increase website visitors by 10 percent?
- **Measurable** – Define how you'll measure your progress towards your goals. Sales reports? HR reports? Web analytics?
- **Actionable** – Make sure you have the systems and staff in place to support your goals. For example, it doesn't make sense to have a goal of increasing web visitors by 50 percent if you don't have the dedicated social media marketing resources to drive that much traffic.
- **Relevant** – Your goal needs to take into account current trends in your industry. For instance, will growing your Facebook following lead to more revenue? Are you following Facebook's most recent algorithm changes that make it much less likely that followers will see your posts? Perhaps you'll better reach your target audience on Pinterest?

- **Timely** – Be sure these are goals you can achieve in one year, or whatever timeframe is important to your business.

7. Action Plan/Timetable/Budget

Too often small businesses go straight to this step, without building the above foundation. There are a lot of tools you can use to do this. Because we work with small businesses and nonprofits, we use a combination of word tables and excel.

Frequently, we divide this up by objectives. For example, if one of your objectives is to create monthly blogs, then your action plan could actually be an editorial calendar of what you're going to write about each month, and how you'll utilize that content on your social media platforms (and perhaps through your e-newsletter).

If a goal is to do more networking, you could lay out:

Organization	Events	Who will attend	Cost

Finally, we strongly urge you to make copies of your plan for all key employees. Put it in a three-ring binder with pockets (for adding materials), and pull it out to review regularly! Scribble your thoughts and notes all over the plan. Make revisions. Keep it alive!

If you'd like help with creating your marketing plan, facilitating your S.W.O.T. analysis, or brainstorming on ideas for your blog/enewsletter/social media editorial calendar, please contact us at 301-696-8886, or Diane@DianeDemarcoMarketing.com. Visit us online at DianeDemarcoMarketing.com.

We specialize in affordable websites, email marketing and more!