



## **Marketing Isn't an Afterthought**

By Laura Patterson, President

Successful firms know the value of a well-thought out marketing plan. They see their marketing plan as a critical vehicle for charting their organizations' course of action for generating revenue. Properly created, the marketing plan is a living plan that is anchored to the overall business' initiatives and focuses on customer value, growth, and profitability. Some research has shown that companies with a marketing plan experience a 24-30% improvement in sales over those without a plan.

While having such a plan seems intuitive, it's astonishing how many marketers operate without one, easily succumbing to the day-to-day activities. The problem with this approach is that these marketers often find themselves living the drama of the moment — which may well be sliding down the edge of a razor. A marketing plan enables you to take back control. Creating a marketing plan forces you to take time to think about the markets you will tackle, the competitors you will overcome, the products you will develop, and the strategies you will employ to acquire, keep and grow the value of your customers and sustain a differential advantage.

With many companies entering the budgeting and planning cycle, now is a good time to develop a customer-centric measurable marketing plan. This year vow to do more than just take last year's tactics and budget and reapply them to this year's Excel spreadsheet. Commit to developing a plan that explains the strategies around the target market, product, channel, price and promotion and details the implementation of these strategies that will cost-effectively generate the organization's revenue goals and business outcomes.

## **Knowledge is Power**

Over 400 years ago, Sir Francis Bacon said, “knowledge is power.” This statement couldn’t be truer today. Success today is knowledge-driven. Ted Levitt, author of *Marketing Imagination*, writes, “The role of marketing is to create and keep customers.” To fulfill this role, marketers begin by knowing their markets and customers, and by understanding the shifts in the marketplace. Knowing why the customers buy from the marketer’s company rather than a competitor is crucial to effectively marketing. That is, the first step — research — is the value of knowing what the company’s customers regard as their best options for meeting their needs. Through research and evaluation of products and services, marketers learn what markets value most and what barriers exist to marketing their company’s products and/or services. There are many different ways to do research. For those on a shoestring budget, the Internet and the libraries can provide important and useful information. With a small budget, marketers can purchase research reports and conduct focus groups and electronic surveys. Larger research budgets make it possible to commission research and conduct independent marketing audits. Regardless, doing the homework and analyzing the market, the competitive environment, the customers and the prospects is essential in determining the key factors that impact success. Market research is an investment, not an expense. It aids judgment. Good research reduces the number of projects to be undertaken and increases the usefulness of those that are done. Because we live in a dynamic environment; where the world and therefore our markets change rapidly, it behooves marketers to do research on a regular and periodic basis.

## **Use a Methodical Approach - MOST**

Proper planning requires a methodical approach, not unlike the planning approach used in software engineering. It will save you time and produce a better result. One easy method for developing a marketing plan is to use the **MOST** (Mission, Metrics, Outcomes, Objectives, Strategies and Tactics) approach.

- **Mission:** A mission statement is generally tied to the company/organization outcomes; it provides a reason for your existence. For most companies, the ultimate goal is return on 3 shareholder equity. Shareholder equity is derived from profitability and there is a strong correlation between profitability and market share. Impacting market share is a consequence of

influencing purchasing; that is, creating a state of purchase readiness. This is what marketers do. We move customers and prospects to a state of purchase readiness.

- *Outcomes:* Your marketing plan focused on how the Marketing organization is going to contribute to the organization's success. Before you can craft the plan you need to know the business outcomes you are expected to impact. The business outcomes are how the organization will measure success at the end of the time horizon. They are specific and quantifiable, for example, X% of tier one existing customers will adopt WIDGET X resulting in \$ of revenue; or acquire X number of net new customers in ABC segment to increase market share by Y%.
- *Marketing Objectives:* The marketing objectives state what is to be achieved and when results are to be accomplished. These are what Marketing will do to move the needle. Objectives are measurable and time-bound, for example, increase preference for ABC product among top share determiners in XYZ markets from A-B by end of 2Q or generate X number of qualified leads within 6 months of product launch at \$Y/lead.
- *Metrics:* Once you have the outcomes and objectives you will have an insight into what metrics to use that will demonstrate your effectiveness, efficiency, and value, such as product adoption rate, share of wallet, share of preference, or pipeline velocity to name a few.
- *Strategy:* To accomplish the objectives, marketers choose the strategy that will best meet those objectives. According to famed business strategist Michael Porter, a strategy "creates a company's position, making trade-offs and forging fit among activities." Strategies often include the expected results; they provide the "how" and the direction for the course of action. Marketing strategies tend to be about how to sell existing products/services into existing markets, extending new products/services into existing markets, extending existing products/services into new markets, and/or selling new products/services into new markets.
- *Programs:* With the strategies in place, a logical set of operations follows that marketers refer to as the programs and their accompanying tactics and specific actions to be taken. Often these 4 tactics revolve around one or more of the six marketing Ps: Positioning, Promise, Product, Price, Placement, Promotion. It is from these tactics, that timelines, resources and budget are derived.

## **The Battle in the Mind**

These days it isn't hard for a rival to overtake you. It takes ante to get and stay on the radar screen of your target. Will you be one of the first companies that pops into your prospect's mind when they think of your category? Without mind share, you're not even in the race. Positioning and a clear value proposition are fundamental to mind share. Mind share precedes market share. Awareness precedes consideration. It is used to build recognition and reputation. It is hard for buyers to consider a company they aren't even aware of. Awareness is the first ingredient to getting your company on the shortlist. People buy from people they know and like. Just as important as building recognition is building recall and a relationship and developing market traction, the elements of familiarity. Familiarity creates the opportunity for dialogue.

## **Measure Your Progress**

Marketing needs to embrace measurement and the data and analytics required to measure its contribution and value. Metrics serve as a barometer of our progress. By constantly measuring actual performance against the metrics, you can determine whether a course change is required. Metrics and feedback processes are essential elements of a marketing plan. Evaluation of the plan at key intervals should be part of the plan to determine if marketing is meeting the objectives outlined in the plan.

## **Avoid Ready, Fire, Aim**

The marketing plan is a blueprint and as such merely a guide, not a master. Should circumstances significantly change, adjustments will be necessary. However, with proper preparation, the plan should give you the confidence that you are prepared for most scenarios. A plan becomes the promise to the organization and the means for creating a state-of-purchase readiness. Because you've done your homework and thoughtfully developed your plan, your Marketing efforts are now aligned with the company's business plan and are truly focused on delivering what customers value and the organization is focused on maximizing customers' product and service experiences.

You have a plan that is based on how the company can best provide value. Your plan addresses the company's positioning and brand equity at the current point in time and in contrast to the

competitive field. You know which tools to develop to support the sales team and you've identified tactics for generating demand and they are synched up with the sales pipeline. Because you have a solid position platform, all your communication vehicles can be integrated and leverage a consistent message. And your plan takes into account customer retention and advocacy in order to accelerate the growth of existing customers and the rate of new customer acquisition. This is ideal marketing. These are the core competencies you should expect from your marketing team.

### **Basic Marketing Plan Checklist**

If you're wondering whether your plan has all the right components, check your plan against this list. Does your plan address...

- Who is being served? Who are the right sets of customers?
- What are their needs and priorities? What is a meaningful value proposition and brand promise?
- How can quality product/service be provided cost effectively?
- Are outside conditions right for the company's product/service?
- What is the most convenient way to bring the product/service to the market? How can the product/service be best delivered to fulfill the brand promise?
- What are the best ways to inform the market about the products/services?
- How will we measure if the market is satisfied?
- What can we do to make things even better?
- How can we become the customer's first choice?

The slogan "Just Do It"® may motivate you to convert your ability into action – but at what cost if you are without a plan for that action? "Not having one is like entering battle under a commander whose only advice is Ready!Fire!Aim! Don't even think of waging a battle or producing marketing materials without a plan," advises Jay Conrad Levinson, president of Guerilla Marketing, International.

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