



SUCCESSFUL MARKETING STARTS WITH A STRATEGY

There was a time when nurturing relationships involved scheduling more date nights, and drips were simply annoying plumbing issues. Of course, as any savvy marketer knows, in today's world, nurturing or drip marketing can be a powerful tool to grow your business, which involves sending or "dripping" messages to customers or prospects over time. In other words, marketing ain't what it used to be. In fact, some experts say marketing is evolving faster than universities can develop new courses to teach the next generation of marketers—they are essentially learning on the job.

MARKETING
SEO WEBSITES
SOCIAL MEDIA
BLOGS
PODCASTS

Power Shift: Business is now buyer-centric. 86% of consumers stated that using a search engine allowed them to learn something new or important that helped him/her increase his/her knowledge about a product before buying.

(Pew Research Center, Search Engine Use, 2012)

What's New (and What's Not)

The most significant change that marketers face is a shift in power: the buyer is now in control. Consumers gather information and want relevant, personalized conversations on their own time frame. Thankfully, businesses have the tools to reach both existing and potential customers on a one-to-one basis, understand where they are in the buying process, and pull them in through engaging dialogue. Instead of interacting with someone from your company, a customer's first touchpoint with your business is likely to be your website, an email, or another form of inbound marketing. Therefore, it's critical to have your digital messaging "on point" to attract customers and guide them through the buying journey.

Inbound marketing is promoting a company through websites, blogs, podcasts, white papers, SEO, social media, and other forms of content marketing, which serve to attract customers through the different stages of the purchase funnel. (Wikipedia)

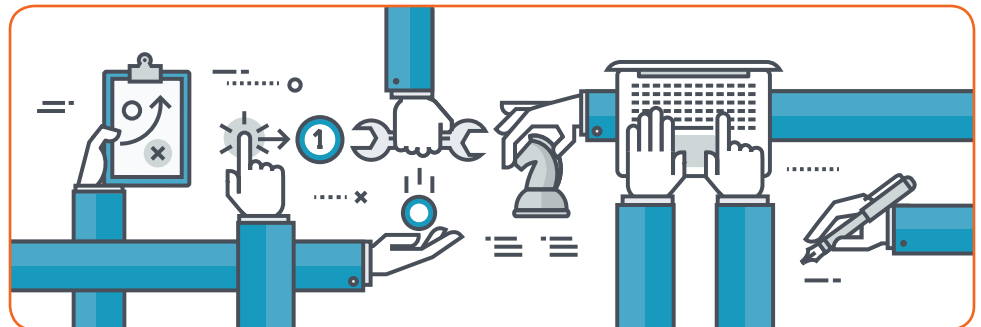


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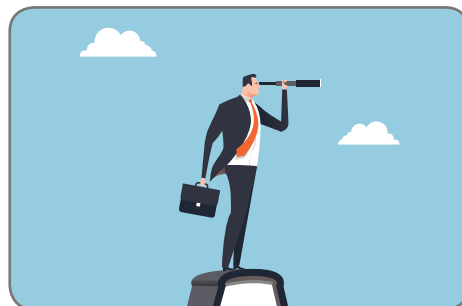
As John Rampton writes in Forbes,¹ “Content is one of the most important ways to get your company noticed these days. Whether it’s by maintaining a blog, an Instagram account, or videos, using content to market your product can be extremely helpful. However, everyone is starting to get on the content marketing train, and customers are bombarded with ads and content more than ever. Therefore, you need to make sure your content stands out by maintaining a high bar of quality.” Your goal should be to create content that positively impacts your SEO (search engine optimization) results and draws customers in. This is important because according to MDG Advertising, 57.4% of B2B companies say SEO has the biggest impact on their lead generation goals. But wait, we’re getting ahead of ourselves ... let’s back up the proverbial search engine and start at the beginning.

Before you can begin developing and distributing content, you need a plan. As much as the marketing landscape has changed, there is one thing that remains the same: **the importance of an overall marketing strategy.** You may have the best product in the world or the most stellar service, but without effective marketing strategies, no one will know. Let’s face it, you can send out more tweets than a bird sanctuary; you can post, blog, and produce award-winning videos and still not achieve the results you want, which are typically better ROI, higher sales, and business growth. Even the most fabulous trade show or webinar is meaningless if it doesn’t reach the right targets at the right time, and there are no means to follow up with prospects. The truth is, without an overall plan, it’s highly unlikely that you are optimizing your resources. It’s a bit like shooting a bunch of arrows into the sky and hoping they hit the right targets—without injuring or annoying anyone in the process.



A Well-Oiled Machine

It might be helpful to think of the marketing process as a large piece of machinery. The machine represents a huge investment, and when it’s running properly it produces efficiently. However, most machines are made up of hundreds, if not thousands of separate components. No matter how state-of-the-art the machine is, if one part is out of alignment, the entire system is negatively affected.



In the same way, a great marketing strategy requires each component to work together, in tandem, to produce optimal results. For instance, a well-defined company vision or mission statement is the power source that sets the machine in motion. The vision shapes the long-term goals, which, in turn, drive short-term goals. Likewise, a company’s strengths and competitive advantages, along with a strong brand image, naturally mold the central message, which triggers meaningful content. This content, when delivered to the right audience, at the right time, turns leads into customers. Instead of producing widgets, this marketing machine generates sales and growth.

Creating a Strategy

It may sound old school, but a good overall marketing strategy begins with the basics. Remember the “four Ps” or marketing mix—product, price, placement, and promotion? Today, some would add the importance of a fifth “P”—positioning. These are still relevant, because you can’t market what you don’t fully understand. Though marketing plans can differ greatly from company to company, they generally include the following elements:

1. **Executive Summary.** This section typically appears first, but is written last as it summarizes the other elements into a succinct analysis.
2. **Business Description.** This is sometimes referred to as the “elevator pitch,” because it clearly and concisely describes your business to others. Therefore, an employee could deliver this description to someone in an elevator or perhaps waiting in line for a latte.
3. **Company Vision or Mission Statement.** This explains what your business is trying to do. It can help guide and inspire employees and give investors, partners, and customers a feel for your overall goals. (It can also be the theme for a really great company party!)





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4. **SWOT or SCOPE.** For years, this section was called the SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats). Today, there is an updated approach that looks at:

- Situation—an analysis of internal or external environmental factors that may impact your business.
- Core Competencies—that define your company’s unique strengths and abilities, or the basis for added value to customers and competitive advantages.
- Obstacles—potential issues and threats that could negatively impact your business.
- Prospects—the possibilities and opportunities, both internal and external, that may enhance sales or profitability by leveraging your Core Competencies.
- Expectations—the anticipated developments, market conditions, competition, etc. that could influence or impact your plans to meet the identified Prospects.

Whichever approach you use, the idea is to take an honest assessment of your business, identify opportunities and advantages, determine your unique selling position (USP), and then use this information to derive a central marketing message.

5. **Company Goals**—both long and short term.

6. **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**—that measure success for your particular company. When you know how your business is performing, you can make adjustments as needed.



7. **Environmental Analysis**—defines your competition and identifies economic forces, regulations, emerging technologies, cultural trends, etc. that may impact your business.

8. **Marketing Objectives and Performance**—based on environmental and SWOT or SCOPE analysis, along with your company goals.



9. **Marketing Strategies and Implementation**

- Outline the four Ps.
- Identify your target markets, using demographic, psychographic, and product usage research.
- Create an outline of activities, responsibilities, and a timetable for completion.
- Evaluation—also known as “where the rubber meets the road!”
- Prospects—the possibilities and opportunities, both internal and external, that may enhance sales or profitability by leveraging your Core Competencies.

Obviously, this a brief overview of a complex task. It requires input from many departments, customer feedback, and research. It may also be wise to enlist the aid of an outside agency to develop an overall strategy or perhaps revamp an existing strategy (you know, the one in a long-forgotten binder sitting on a dusty shelf!). A third party can bring a fresh perspective to the table and oftentimes provide a “reality check”—offering suggestions that employees can’t see (or don’t dare comment on).

An Ongoing Process

Keep in mind, once you develop your marketing strategy, you’re not done. An effective strategy should provide a daily, monthly, and yearly roadmap for your business; gauge performance; and create accountability. It should remain flexible to changes within the marketplace and may require tweaking, just like a machine requires regular maintenance. *A well-developed plan can also help outside vendors, such as marketing automation companies, build systems to match company goals.*

Marketing has always been part art and part science. It involves creative, innovative thinking, as well as solid research, data analysis, and metrics, because when all is said and done, results should be measurable. Marketing has also always been multifaceted—we simply have more tactics and channels at our disposal. This abundance of choices makes an even stronger case for having a clear direction, because as Yogi Berra once said, “You’ve got to be very careful if you don’t know where you’re going because you might not get there.”



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CASE STUDY



Case Study: Cisco, a network equipment vendor, began experiencing a major turnaround in 2012, after several rough years. In an unprecedented move, Cisco's CEO at the time, John Chambers, changed the company's overall strategy. First he lowered the cost structure, making the company more competitive, and then he made the company more "shareholder friendly" by committing a return of at least half of the company's profits to shareholders.

However, the most important factor, according to Shaw Woo, a senior technology analyst at Sterne Agee was "taking advantage of the Cloud and mobile devices." The company made a switch from conventional advertising to brand journalism, which is helping consumers envision the potential improvement Cisco's products can bring to their lives. For instance, the company published a collection of My Networked Life video documentaries on their website and publicized them through social media. The videos told stories of how young professionals, entrepreneurs, artists, and students are using connected technology to achieve goals and realize dreams, helping to reinforce the company's "human" image. Current video documentaries feature customer success stories, highlighting how Cisco can help companies stay ahead in a rapidly changing digital world. The company ended its 2015 fiscal year with record revenues of \$49.7 billion.

¹ "6 Marketing Tips for New Companies from Successful CEOs," by John Rampton; *Forbes*, July 8, 2015.

Other Sources:

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MDG Advertising, 2013

Pew Research Center, Search Engine Use, 2012

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"SWOT Alternative—The SCOPE Planning Model," Get2Growth, 2015.