

Marketing Plan Template: Exactly What To Include

Dave Lavinsky Contributor

Follow

Sep 30, 2013, 02:26pm EDT

🕒 This article is more than 9 years old.

To grow your business, you need a marketing plan. The right marketing plan identifies everything from 1) who your target customers are to 2) how you will reach them, to 3) how you will retain your customers so they repeatedly buy from you.

Done properly, your marketing plan will be the roadmap you follow to get unlimited customers and dramatically improve the success of your organization. To help you succeed, [use this proven marketing plan template](#), and the information below details the 15 key sections you must include in your marketing plan.

Section 1: Executive Summary

Complete your Executive Summary last, and, as the name implies, this section merely summarizes each of the other sections of your marketing plan.

Your Executive Summary will be helpful in giving yourself and other constituents (e.g., employees, advisors, etc.) an overview of your plan.

Section 2: Target Customers

This section describes the customers you are targeting. It defines their demographic profile (e.g., age, gender), psychographic profile (e.g., their interests) and their precise wants and needs as they relate to the products and/or services you offer.

Being able to more clearly identify your target customers will help you both pinpoint your advertising (and get a higher return on investment) and better “speak the language” of prospective customers.

Forbes Daily: Get our best stories, exclusive reporting and essential analysis of the day's news in your inbox every weekday.

Email address

Sign Up

You may opt out any time. By signing up for this newsletter, you agree to the Terms and Conditions and Privacy Policy

Subscribe now: Forbes' Entrepreneur Newsletter

All the trials and triumphs of starting up – delivered right to your inbox.

Section 3: Unique Selling Proposition (USP)

Having a strong unique selling proposition (USP) is of critical importance as it distinguishes your company from competitors.

The hallmark of several great companies is their USP. For example, FedEx's USP of “When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight” is well-known and resonates strongly with customers who desire reliability and quick delivery.

Section 4: Pricing & Positioning Strategy

Your pricing and positioning strategy must be aligned. For example, if you want your company to be known as the premier brand in your industry, having too low a price might dissuade customers from purchasing.

In this section of your marketing plan, detail the positioning you desire and how your pricing will support it.

Section 5: Distribution Plan

Your distribution plan details how customers will buy from you. For example, will customers purchase directly from you on your website? Will they buy from distributors or other retailers? And so on.

Think through different ways in which you might be able to reach customers and document them in this section of your marketing plan.

Click “next page” below for sections 6 to 10 of your marketing plan or [here for the proven marketing plan template](#).



Gallery: A Startup's Marketing Playbook From Twitter To 'Ellen'

6 images

[View gallery](#)

Section 6: Your Offers

Offers are special deals you put together to secure more new customers and drive past customers back to you.

Offers may include free trials, money-back guarantees, packages (e.g., combining different products and/or services) and discount offers. While your business doesn't necessarily require offers, using them will generally cause your customer base to grow more rapidly.

Section 7: Marketing Materials

Your marketing materials are the collateral you use to promote your business to current and prospective customers. Among others, they include your website, print brochures,

business cards, and catalogs.

Identify which marketing materials you have completed and which you need created or re-done in this section of your plan.

Section 8: Promotions Strategy

The promotions section is one of the most important sections of your marketing plan and details how you will reach new customers.

There are numerous promotional tactics, such as television ads, trade show marketing, press releases, online advertising, and event marketing.

In this section of your marketing plan, consider each of these alternatives and decide which ones will most effectively allow you to reach your target customers.

Section 9: Online Marketing Strategy

Like it or not, most customers go online these days to find and/or review new products and/or services to purchase. As such, having the right online marketing strategy can help you secure new customers and gain competitive advantage.

The four key components to your online marketing strategy are as follows:

1. *Keyword Strategy*: identify what keywords you would like to optimize your website for.
2. *Search Engine Optimization Strategy*: document updates you will make to your website so it shows up more prominently for your top keywords.
3. *Paid Online Advertising Strategy*: write down the online advertising programs will you use to reach target customers.
4. *Social Media Strategy*: document how you will use social media websites to attract customers.

Section 10: Conversion Strategy

Conversion strategies refer to the techniques you employ to turn prospective customers into paying customers.

For example, improving your sales scripts can boost conversions. Likewise increasing your social proof (e.g., showing testimonials of past clients who were satisfied with your company) will nearly always boost conversions and sales.

In this section of your plan, document which conversion-boosting strategies you will use.

Click “next page” below for sections 11 to 15.

Section 11: Joint Ventures & Partnerships

Joint ventures and partnerships are agreements you forge with other organizations to help reach new customers or better monetize existing customers. For example, if you sold replacement guitar strings, it could be quite lucrative to partner with a guitar manufacturer who had a list of thousands of customers to whom it sold guitars (and who probably need replacement strings in the future).

Think about what customers buy before, during and/or after they buy from your company. Many of the companies who sell these products and/or services could be good partners. Document such companies in this section of your marketing plan and then reach out to try to secure them.

Section 12: Referral Strategy

A strong customer referral program could revolutionize your success. For example, if every one of your customers referred one new customer, your customer base would constantly grow.

However, rarely will you get such growth unless you have a formalized referral strategy. For example, you need to determine when you will ask customers for referrals, what if anything you will give them as a reward, etc. Think through the best referral strategy for your organization and document it.

Section 13: Strategy for Increasing Transaction Prices

While your primary goal when conversing with prospective customers is often to secure the sale, it is also important to pay attention to the transaction price.

The transaction price, or amount customers pay when they buy from you, can dictate your success. For example, if your average customer transaction is \$100 but your competitor's average customer transaction is \$150, they will generate more revenues, and probably profits, per customer. As a result, they will be able to outspend you on advertising, and continue to gain market share at your expense.

In this section of your plan, think about ways to increase your transaction prices such as by increasing prices, creating product or service bundles/packages, and so on.

Section 14: Retention Strategy

Too many organizations spend too much time and energy trying to secure new customers versus investing in getting existing customers to buy more often.

By using retention strategies such as a monthly newsletter or customer loyalty program, you can increase revenues and profits by getting customers to purchase from you more frequently over time.

Identify and document ways you can better retain customers here.

Section 15: Financial Projections

The final part of your marketing plan is to create financial projections. In your projections, include all the information documented in your marketing plan.

For example, include the promotional expenses you expect to incur and what your expected results will be in terms of new customers, sales and profits. Likewise include your expected results from your new retention strategy. And so on.

While your financial projections will never be 100% accurate, use them to identify which promotional expenses and other strategies should give you the highest return on investment. Also, by completing your financial projections, you will set goals (e.g., your goals for your referral program) for which your company should strive.

Completing each of the 15 sections of your marketing plan is real work. But, once your marketing plan is complete, it will be worth it, as your sales and profits should soar. To save you time, I have developed [this marketing plan template that can be completed quickly and easily](#).



Dave Lavinsky