

Make or break marketing

12 rules of marketing success

Effective marketing is the key to success for every small business but it's an area where many business owners struggle. The most common questions they ask include 'What exactly is marketing – how is it different from sales?'; 'What are the most effective things to do?'; 'What should we be doing – and is it the same for every business?'

Other questions that crop up time and again are 'Are we doing enough?'; 'Can we do our own marketing or should we employ an expert?'; 'What guarantees are there that investing in marketing will produce results?'; 'How come some businesses seem to be terribly successful without marketing?'

In this fact sheet, although we can't answer everything, we will attempt to address these questions and also provide you with a few simple guidelines, which, if followed, are guaranteed to lead to success.

But first of all, what exactly *is* marketing? Well, there are numerous definitions, but the most straightforward is probably that of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, the body responsible for regulating marketing activity and development in the UK (see www.cim.co.uk). They say that marketing is '**the management process for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customers needs, profitably**'.

Identify what your customers want

What this makes clear then is that successful marketing is all about identifying what your prospective customer wants and supplying it (at a profit), rather than the usual approach most businesses adopt, which is to produce and deliver what they want (whether goods or services) and try and then try and find someone who wants to buy it.

Marketing then is essentially a *strategic* activity, as opposed to **sales** which is the process of establishing a relationship with another party in which to exchange what you produce for money; or **marketing communications** – which is the

covering the process by which organisations promote their goods and services. Those aspects of marketing with which we are all most familiar – advertising, websites, mail shots, sponsorship, hospitality – are all marketing communications. They are the means, partially, by which marketing strategy is delivered and by which sales are created.

Marketing strategy, then, is all to do with matching products and services with particular markets and breaking down those markets by their unique characteristics into market segments. An organisation then needs to manipulate what is known as the 'marketing mix', that is, their product/s (or service/s), price, distribution systems and promotional tools in order to beat the competition. Simple, isn't it!

SMART goals and simple actions

Marketing is quite simple if you stick to the basics and find out what works for you. Although most large companies will have huge marketing departments with legions of different job titles, it's really just a matter of degree. You can do the same things yourself if you set yourself some SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) marketing goals, put together a basic marketing plan, and **keep at it**, relentlessly, week in and week out.

The biggest mistake most small businesses make (and regrettably, some larger ones too), is that they don't pay attention to marketing until they realise that their customer base is declining and they are facing financial difficulties.

The problem then is that it's too late. Marketing isn't magic. It takes time to find new customers – however you do it, and generally the less time you have, the more it will cost you to try and generate interest. So the message is – pay attention to marketing from the start and don't ever stop, regardless of how busy and successful you seem to be. Particularly if your business is reliant on just a few key customers, you could find yourself in big trouble suddenly if even one of them stops coming to you.

So, what exactly are the things that you – as a small business owner – should be paying attention to in order for your marketing (and your business) to be a success?

1. Be passionate about your business

This is perhaps the most important thing of all. There's nothing so infectious as enthusiasm and being passionate about what you have to offer generates interest in others. And after all, if you're not excited about your business, why should anyone else be?

2. Don't just be different, be unique

Look at what your business offers that is unique. Ask your customers what they think. If you have staff, challenge them to justify what they feel they contribute. Build their confidence and collectively create your own shared vision of what you want to achieve and how - don't just look at what other companies do.

3. Be clear about who your customers are and why they buy from you

When asked about who they're going to sell to, prospective business owners often say 'Anyone and everyone'. That's not their way to build your business – you need to know *specifically* who your customers will be and what *exactly* they want.

4. Be creative

Many people think the only way to promote their business is through advertising. In fact that's far from the case. Not only is advertising hugely expensive – for many types of business, it simply doesn't work. Think through all the options – PR, networking, e-commerce – any of these may be far more beneficial for you at a fraction of the cost.

5. Measure what works for you

A big mistake many businesses make is not to monitor where their prospective clients come from. Yet in order for your marketing to be effective you need to know what works for you and what doesn't. Successful marketing comes from deciding on the processes that are most effective and 'do-able' for you and then DOING THEM – over and over and over again.

6. Analyse your sales pipeline process

Where do new sales leads come from? Who develops those relationships? Are there enough new prospects coming in? If not, where and how can you get more? How effectively do you manage relationships with existing customers/clients? And at the other end of the pipeline, how many customers/clients are quietly

dropping away through lack of attention and interest?

7. Take the advice of marketing experts

Marketing – like accountancy or plumbing - involves experience and a specific skill set – you're unlikely to have the experience or the inclination to spend as much time as you need to get everything right by yourself. Seek specialist advice - it will cost you, but an investment at the right stage could set your business on the right track for many years to come.

8. Set goals and targets

Whether it's new customer/client gains, increased profits, or an improved level of customer/client satisfaction – focus on whatever is most important to you. And having set goals, work towards them, review them, and monitor progress. If you have staff, make sure marketing objectives apply to them, too.

9. Put yourself in their shoes.

Particularly when pursuing new business, don't just tell your customers/clients who you are, look at it from their perspective. Ask them what they need, tell them what you can **do** for them, what problems you will solve, and what benefits you can bring.

10. Focus on people

People and the quality of relationships with them is what ultimately underpins every successful business. Every customer/client should always be treated as a valued individual, not a faceless, money-generating machine. Organisations who appear not to market often win their business through being hugely talented at building and maintaining personal relationships.

11. Seek feedback

What do your customers/clients really think about you – good or bad? Remember that great service, open and empathic relationships, and a general atmosphere of enthusiasm and energy will attract customers/clients and word-of-mouth referrals. Whatever the nature of your business, customer/client care should never be neglected.

12. Regularly show your appreciation

Call your customers/clients and tell them how much you appreciate their business, remind them that their contribution is valued, and work towards building true working partnerships. Send them birthday cards, the occasional small gift, or take them out to an event which you know they will enjoy. Remember, many successful business relationships – and the associated loyalty - are built outside the office environment.