




A guide to B2B Marketing Planning

Whether you run your own business, you are a managing director or you are a senior marketer in a large corporation, planning is a fundamental part of a successful business.

Despite being an essential task, finding time to put an annual marketing plan together is not always easy as it's time consuming and will take you away from your day to day tasks.

The plan will take into consideration a plethora of information which has been gathered throughout the year so for many senior marketers it means putting aside a block of time in the annual calendar to give the plan full focus. It's not uncommon for marketers to take themselves off site in order to complete, what can sometimes be, a complex task.

Marketing planning usually begins around the same time as budget planning (it's a bit 'chicken and egg' as you need one to do the other). Plans come in all shapes and sizes depending on the size of the business, resources, budgets and of course, need. However, regardless of the size of your business, a plan will keep you focused and give you guidance throughout the year and will help you manage your budget more effectively too.



The Strategic Plan

Planning starts at the top with The Strategic Plan which is typically extracted from the overall business plan.

This might outline things such as:

- Changes in business direction
- Emerging markets/market changes
- New products or services
- Sales strategy
- New technology
- Investment in new equipment

It might also highlight issues such as:

- Falling profits
- Negative reviews
- Resource issues
- Market changes
- Supply chain issues
- Emerging competition

These and other factors need to be considered prior to planning to ensure that the plan is in line with the strategic direction of the business, ensuring that it is focused on the most relevant areas.

Situation Analysis

Analysis is the nitty-gritty of planning. Understanding the situation of the company, the environment, opportunities and of course, threats will enable you to tailor your plan more precisely. A SWOT analysis is the age-old method that allows the facts and the truth to be clarified.

Evaluating and validating the purpose of the business annually also ensures that the brand and messaging is still in line with the strategic plan. Any fundamental changes or issues may affect previously defined brand guidelines and therefore it is important to verify this by asking:

- Where does the company want to be in the future?
(The company mission)
- What do we do?
- What do we want to do?
- Why are we here?
- What is the personality of our business?
- Who do we do it for?
- Who can we add value to our customers?

Comparing the answers to those asked last year will enable you to make adjustments to branding, planning and tactics.



Internal Analysis

The internal analysis looks at the company as a whole.

This could include:

- Design
- Production
- Supply chain
- Logistics
- Operations
- Technology
- Service
- Value
- Human resources
- Finances

External Analysis

Analysis of the external environment is essential in order to understand any high impact forces that the company might have to endure such as:

- Price increases
- Volatile markets
- Technology
- Current and emerging competition
- Political or legislative changes
- Recruitment

The external analysis should also include an evaluation of customers including new business and profitability. Changes to the customer base can give an early indication of shifts in buying patterns and changing markets enabling you to adjust the marketing plan accordingly.

Developing the marketing plan.

Now that you have gathered and analysed the data, it's time to set out the plan. Budgets can often dictate how and where marketing activities are focused and where the best return is likely to come from. Decisions now need to be made on what areas need primary focus and then secondary focus.

The marketing plan as whole would aim to maintain or increase a level of brand awareness through all communications. The primary objectives would be those that need to address key issues or a growth plan as outlined in the strategic plan.



Here are two examples:

Company A

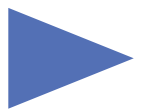
The company is planning to develop a new or range of new products for specific markets.

Primary objectives:

- Carry out market research to establish a need or input into product development.
- Identify target audiences
- Identify customers who will test and evaluate prototype products through the development stage
- Brand and create marketing collateral for promotions
- Create new sales tools
- Update sales collateral and digital platforms
- Develop a marketing campaign
- Soft launch the product(s) to customers
- Launch the product/products at relevant trade shows
- Promote the product(s) publicly through multimedia channels
- Evaluate feedback

Secondary objectives:

- Improve and increase customer and internal communications
- Develop targeted sector focused communications
- Increase customer interaction with the brand
- Improve internal brand perception
- Create a corporate video/platform



Company B

The company has become increasingly concerned about the number of accounts that it has lost over the last 12 months. It has identified that customer service and poor account management are key factors and therefore a customer care plan needs to be developed to add value, rebuild trust and improve retention.

Primary objectives:

- Develop a customer-centric programme with sales team
- Carry out a customer satisfaction survey
- Identify the key areas of concern for customers
- Develop a strategic account management programme with sales team
- Develop processes to capture customer insight throughout product life cycle
- Develop customer incentives
- Develop a segmented database for targeted communications
- Identify areas where value can be added
- Develop new communication tools
- Secondary objectives:
 - Improve and increase customer and internal communications
 - Develop targeted sector focused communications
 - Increase customer interaction with the brand
 - Improve internal brand perception
 - Review website effectiveness with a view to updating in the future

Marketing Tactics

Tactical planning is essentially the methods and channels through which you will implement your objectives. Trained marketers will follow the 7 P's, however these do vary and they do depend on the size of your business.

The basic 7 P's are:

- Product: What is the product/service that you are selling?
- Price: What price are you selling at? What is the cost to us?
What discounts will you offer?
- Place: Where are you selling? Online? Through a third party? Direct sales?
- Promotion: How are you going to sell? What is the message?
What is the communications mix?
- Physical: What tools do you need? What collateral do you need?
- Processes: How will you control the quality, service, output and reporting?
- People: Who will sell the product? What training is required?
Do you have the skills required?

Marketing Communications

The final part of the plan will be to decide on the best routes (channels) to market(s). Marketing communications should not be restricted to just new markets. All stakeholders should be targeted including:

- Customers
- Prospects/new business
- Distributor/Agents
- Employees
- Shareholders
- Supply Chain

There are many different methods, channels and tactics to choose from however those that you decide on will be dictated by the products that you sell and the markets and people that you sell to.

B2B markets can vary significantly so it is important that you understand your customers/prospects:

- What is their buying behavior?
- What is their decision making process?
- What market intelligence do they use/ need?
- What do they read?
- Where do they go?
- Who are the influencers?
- How can you reach them?

Also:

- Who are their customers?
- How do they solve their customers' problems?
- How can you help them to solve their customers' problems?
- How can you add value to them?

Based on your understanding of your markets you might opt for some or all of the following:

- Advertising
- Catalogue / ecommerce
- Digital communications
- Direct mail
- Direct sales
- Events and exhibitions
- Telemarketing
- Trade PR
- Website

Planning review and reporting

The marketing plan, whilst offering focus and guidance throughout the year, should also be flexible. There will always be external and internal changes that affect the plan and it is recommended that the plan is reviewed after six months. An interim report should be written after six months to review the status and make any adjustments.

This document is meant as a guide to B2B marketing planning. If you would like more detailed information please email deb.reeve@product-marketing.co.uk