



5 Step Marketing Plan For Your Business Success

Unless you're very lucky, marketing doesn't usually come easy. But every business needs to do it. And many businesses don't typically have a good marketing plan in place to refer to for ideas of what works and what doesn't in order to help guide their business.

A marketing plan doesn't have to be long and drawn out. It will probably take a day or so to flush out the key components of your plan. Once you have a plan, you can stick to it or modify it as you learn from your marketing.

Are you aware of what your customers think about your business? Do you know that you're selling the right product? Why did you choose the pricing you chose? Should it change?

A good marketing plan should be able to answer these questions and more. It should give you a clear path of what your strengths are compared to your competitors, who your best customers are, how you can find more of them, what is working to get you more customers, and keep your existing ones happy & loyal.

So here are 5 simple steps for you to take to help build a marketing plan that works for your business.

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Step 1 – What Are You Good At?

This is a good opportunity to take a candid look at what your business strengths and weaknesses are. You might have the best customer service, you might have the most comfortable waiting room, you might even have the most relaxing music playing. So don't have blinders on; look to your best-sellers but also look beyond to other things that may grab the attention of a potential new customer. And remember, no matter how 'good' you are at something, do some research and make sure there is a market for it. Make sure there are people who will actually pay for your product or service!

SWOT Analysis for Widgets Inc.	
Strengths, Weaknesses Opportunities, And Threats	
<i>Potential Internal Strengths</i>	
<i>Well-thought-of by buyers</i>	
<i>An acknowledged market leader</i>	
<i>Access to economies of scale</i>	
<i>Insulated (at least somewhat) from str</i>	
<i>Better advertising campaigns</i>	
<i>Product innovation skills</i>	
<i>Potential Internal Weaknesses</i>	
<i>No clear strategic direction</i>	
<i>Obsolete facilities</i>	

If you have customers and you don't really know what they think of your products or your company, a great way to find out is to send them a survey. In your survey, list what you think your strengths and weaknesses are and ask them to rank you on a scale of 1-5. Then you could have a "fill in" or "other" in case you missed anything, they can tell you. This could inform how you might change your business and your messaging.



Survey your customers to find out what they like and don't like about your company, products or services. Check out [VerticalResponse](#) for easy-to-use online surveys. Try it for free.

One good way to get these ideas down on paper is to fill out a SWOT Analysis. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. [Download a free SWOT analysis template](#) and get writing.

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Step 2 – Know Your Target Customer

It's very important to know who your target customer is. Your target customer might be local if you have a retail location, or might be worldwide if you sell online. Look at your current customers and see if there are any similar attributes between them. Are mostly women buying? You might tailor more services to that gender. Conversely if you want to get more men to buy, you might start introducing products that also appeal to men. Are people over 50 who have high household incomes buying? You might want to stock up on more luxury items. If you're selling to businesses, what are their buying patterns, do they buy at a certain time of year? Do they have budgets that run out? If so, make sure to contact them either via phone or email, perhaps with a special promotion, to entice them to purchase before their budgets are depleted.

Finding out more information about your current customers is very important so you know where to go to find more. Then you can take information you've gathered and put it to work in your messaging.



Look at your list of customers and sort their attributes. You can do this in a simple Excel spreadsheet. Things to look for can be your customer's location, the type of products they purchased, their gender, the total amount of each purchase.

If it's a business-to-business sale, look at your customer's title, industry, and location as well. Then devise your plan to find sites these customers visit on the web or where you can get access to more of them.

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Step 3 – Know Your 4 Ps

If you didn't go to school for marketing, no worries! It's pretty much a common sense game but here are some things to think about when you're getting ready to market – the 4 Ps.

1. **Product** – How you'll name your product/company to how you'll package it. What IS the product/service/value you are offering?
2. **Price** – How much you'll charge, the payment or discount terms, and when.
3. **Place** – What channels and where you'll sell your products.
4. **Promotion** – How you'll get the word out, your advertising & communication strategy.



Here you need to take into account each “P” and make sure that the decisions you make for each one relate to your target customer.

Here's a great example of a winery that just produced a limited-run cabernet wine that is sure to get 98 points. The target audience for this wine will be the existing wine club members. A secondary target audience will be brand new customers that are wine enthusiasts, and don't mind paying high end pricing for great wine.

Product – This winery has a wonderful new cabernet, they call it Windy Hill Cabernet for the mountain the grapes are grown on. They tell the story on the back of the bottle and decided to use screw caps to be more environmentally friendly, and because a survey of tasting room visitors showed that there was no negative perception of a wine with screw caps.

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Price – They have looked at the other cabernet wines from this specific region and have assessed the competitive pricing. Since this wine has not been rated yet, they can't command a very high price yet. However, they do think they can get just as much as their neighbor is getting for their cabernet. They will do discounts for case purchases and will not likely do much more discounting on top of that since it is a limited-run and they are anticipating a good rating.

Place – They will sell this wine direct from the winery since there is such a small allocation. It doesn't make sense for them to push it through their normal distribution channel to large retail stores, because if they do, they have to sell the wine at 40% so that the distributor and the retailer can both make some money. This way, the winery makes more profits and is able to offer something exclusive to their best customers while building a direct relationship with their buyers.

Promotion – They've decided to solicit to their wine club members first, since these are their best customers. Then they'll use the website and a few events this year to sell through the wine. If they see that these efforts aren't moving the wine fast enough, they'll do some search engine marketing campaigns to drive new prospects to their site.



Put your own products or services through this test and figure out what the important 4Ps are for each grouping of your target customers.

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Step 4 – Get The Word Out

Nail Your Messaging

You'll have to use your 4 Ps to really get your messaging right. You might even have more than one target audience that you'll need to tailor those messages to. For instance if you sell the greatest tires in the world and they're very safe, that might be the message to the male audience. However if you've got a place for kids to play while the parents wait for their tires to be installed, that might be the message to the female audience.

Depending on the "Place" you sell you might also have different messaging. For instance, if you are selling through a distributor, who is your target customer, you might talk about how well the product has been selling and how much money they'll make because the returns are extremely low. Also, make sure to consider the language your target market uses. If your target audience is a "C" level or executive at a large corporation, you might consider your message to be more formal and contain a lot of industry jargon than if you're marketing sunglasses to a skateboarder.

And make sure that you focus on how your product or service will help your target customer. Make your copy benefit-oriented and tout why your target customers will want your widget, not just how cool your widget is. People are emotional, they buy because they want to know how your product or service will benefit them first; features are secondary.

So when you write your copy and you list a feature, always pay off the feature with what goes after "...so now you can..." or "...for better..." in your copy. If there is no benefit to your target customer, then rethink its value.



Make a list of each group of your target customers. Next to each write down the benefits that will make them purchase. Getting to this will be what drives effective messaging.

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Acquire New Visitors

Once you've got your messaging for your target audience down, you'll use it to spread the word about your business and get new prospects in the door. I've illustrated a few ways you can do this:

Cheap & Easy

Get a Website – You don't need to have a graphic design degree these days to get a website up and running pronto. There are plenty of packages that have great templates – right out of the box – that you can easily customize to suit your business. Try [Intuit Sites](#), you'll have a site in minutes for under \$5 a month.

Collect Email Addresses – Once you have your site up and running, whether you sell products from it or not, you should include a sign up form on every page of your site so that people can sign up for email marketing communications from you. Make sure you tell them what they'll get in return for giving you their email address. You'll want to tell them how often they can expect your emails and if they'll be informational or offer-driven. Once they sign up you should send them a welcome email and once again illustrate the value you'll be providing them with your email marketing updates. Consider a special discount or offer just for providing their email.

Direct Mail Postcards – Direct mail can be a great tool to introduce your business, especially if it's a local business, serving a specific region. Try renting a list from [InfoUSA](#) or [USAData](#) of people who live or work in a specific set of zip codes. Then mail a postcard with your offer and targeted messaging to either get them to your physical location or to get them to your website.

Flyers – Flyers may seem old fashioned, but you still see them everywhere. If you're not up to producing them yourself, march over to [Fedex Kinkos](#) and I'm sure they'll be helpful. If you want to do it yourself online and have them delivered, check out [Overnight Prints](#) or [PrintPlace](#) they have an easy to use tool with templates – \$40 gets you 1000.

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Launch a Blog – Most people think blogs are daunting but they're not. They are super simple to set up with templates that most blogging software companies already provide. Then comes the scary part, what do you have to write about? Start writing blog posts about your industry, products or your company. Blogs act as a voice of your business. Always link back to your site with your keywords, as the search engines give points for this and raise you up in "natural search" which are the listings that appear on the large left part of the search results pages.

In addition, the search engines also like when you update your blog, so you'll rise to the top of the search engines with the keywords you use. For instance, we use "email marketing" since that's the number one keyword that people use to find us through Google. If you are ready to start a blog check out [WordPress](#), [TypePad](#) and [Blogger](#) for online blogging software.

Social Media – Social Media can be so easy and a ton of fun to add to your marketing mix. Get a [Facebook Fan Page](#) and a [Twitter](#) account and start to ask people to follow you in your email signatures and on your blog. Then do the following:

- When you send an email newsletter, simply add the subject line and a link to the hosted version of your email to your Twitter stream and your Facebook Fan page. This gets your email to a wider audience. If you use VerticalResponse you can do this from within your account.
- When there is something interesting going on in your company, post to Twitter and Facebook.
- When there is an industry change, tweet about it and post to Facebook so you'll start to be seen as the expert in your industry.
- Use Twitter and Facebook to be transparent. If there is something good or bad going on that your customers need to know about, put it out there and how you'll address it. You'll find it's a great customer service tool.
- Use these outlets to announce new products, new services and new events to get people to act.

Growing these lists of followers will help turn more prospects into customers and get more customers liking the company they do business with.

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Videos – Videos can be a dramatic way for you to get the word out about your business. If you don't think your business lends itself to adding interactive videos on your site think again. With the YouTube platform you can publish videos all day long, tag them and the search engines will pick them up. Not to mention it's easier than ever to actually do. These days you don't need a high-powered video camera to look like a pro. Try the [Flip HD Video Camera](#), it's amazing for what you mostly need. Once you upload your video on [YouTube](#), just add your keywords so you can be found when someone searches on them. Then you can link to it from your site and you don't have to host it at all!

More Expensive & Harder

Advertise on Search Engines – Managing search engine marketing (SEM) or Pay-per-click (PPC) marketing is a science, and it can be either very simple or very tricky and labor-intensive depending on what you want out of it. Pay-per-click marketing means that you agree to pay a certain amount when someone clicks through to your site from an ad that appears when someone types in a search phrase you've identified.

How does it work? Basically you create an account with the search engine you choose ([Google Adwords](#), [Bing](#) and [Yahoo!](#) are the three biggest) that you fund with your credit card. You create an ad using guidelines that they give you using keywords they help you choose, then you tell them how much money you're willing to spend per click. When someone clicks on your ad, they deduct the cost-per-click charge that you agreed to pay, out of your account. This is a great form of 'performance marketing' since you only pay when an action (a click) occurs and you can control how much you spend overall.

Get an Affiliate Program – An affiliate program is a performance based marketing channel that pays commissions for completed sales. Since you only pay commissions when you make sales, it is often one of the most cost effective ways to generate new customers.

Your company can choose to run and manage an affiliate program through software or opt to join an affiliate network which has thousands of affiliates ready to sell for you.

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We recommend you sign up with an affiliate program provider. If you have a larger business check out [LinkShare](#). They are a bit more expensive and have more options for you to choose from. If you have a smaller businesses check out [Shareasale](#). You get an online platform for affiliate approval, management of your ads, and payment tracking. They also give you access to a network of existing motivated affiliates who are already selling for other types of merchants. Most importantly, they'll disburse the payments to the affiliates that gave you customers. This gets rid of a huge headache for you.

In some cases you'll find your affiliates buying keywords in the search engines and getting a better placement than you! Should you care? I say no way! Let them get you a customer, pay them, then you've got two happy customers!

Success doesn't happen with affiliate programs or search engines overnight. You've got to work at it. Your affiliates need to be treated like an extension of your sales team, no matter what you sell. If you put the time into it, you'll have a better chance at reaping the rewards.



Get your messaging right for each target audience you serve. Then pick the tactics you think will make a difference for your target audience. Short on time? Start small. Choose one or two new things you can handle, then work to make them successful. As you get to your definition of success, add another one to the mix to see if it works. Don't take on more than you can handle, you won't put forth the effort needed and you'll wind up with nothing working.

Turn Them Into Customers

If you've got first time visitors to your physical location, make sure you give them a great experience to gain their trust. If they've never visited you before, their experience with your business has to win them over, whether it is your product selection, your great promotion or a face-to-face encounter with one of your staff members. You may never get a chance to win them over again, so make it count.

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If your website visitors have given their email address either on your site sign-up form or in your store sign-up book, use it. Email your recipients great offers to help them make that first purchase. Test different offers and discounts, like the ones you've identified in your Pricing "P". Make sure you stick with your messaging to your target audience that you've constructed in your Promotion "P".



Action Tip!

Devise your communications plan for getting prospects to purchase for the first time. This might be in the form of a great offer like a 2 for 1, or a great discount like half-off for first time buyers. Either way, you need to get the message out and get them buying.

Once they're customers, create a calendar to communicate to them weekly, monthly, or quarterly. Whatever you promised your recipients when they signed up, make sure you follow through on it, and continue to provide them value. Remember, they can click unsubscribe any time they want.

Win Back Those that Have Left

If you've got customers who haven't been back to purchase for a while, you'll need to reach out to them and win them back. There are many ways to do this, consider what will work for your business.

Telemarketing – Set aside two half-hour time slots per day to call your customers telling them you miss them, inviting them back to your site or your location with a great deal. Also take the opportunity to find out if there is a reason they have not done business with you. It's an opportunity to improve!

Email Marketing – Create and send a win-back email. Choose a list of customers who haven't purchased from you in, say over 6 months, giving them a customer appreciation or friends & family discount on your products.

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Send a Gift – Do a direct mail piece where you put something of value in an envelope and send it to them with a “We Miss You” note with an offer. The gift can be a magnet or a pen with your logo and information on it.



Using your contact manager or your accounting software, search for customers that have not made a purchase in a number of months. Pull out that customer information and do a win-back email each quarter. You'll be amazed how many people come back.

Step 5 – Analyze Continually

Now that you've got all of your ABCs and 4 Ps down, you'll need to continually analyze what's working and what you'll need to refine or ditch. Not everything will work but don't just try it out once and then shelve it. Keep trying different things to make it work.

If you have a website, ask people when they purchase with a pull down menu about how they heard about you. Then list all of the Promotion “Ps” you're doing at that time. Don't forget 'word of mouth'.

If you have a physical location, ask customers how they heard about you and keep track of the responses. At the end of each week or month, look at your numbers to see what's driving the most traffic for your business, refine, and do more of that.

Your marketing plan should be your stake in the ground to get started doing some really creative and exciting things to bring new visitors in the door, convert them to customers and keep them coming back. But things can change fast in your industry. So revisit your plan at least twice a year to ensure that you're still on the right track with what will make you a success!

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