



MARKETING STRATEGY

A marketing strategy is a business' overall game plan for reaching people and turning them into customers. The marketing strategy contains the company's value proposition, key marketing messages and information on the target customer. The marketing strategy informs the marketing plan, which is a document that lays out the types and timing of marketing activities. A company's marketing strategy should have a longer lifespan than any individual marketing plan, as these things ideally do not shift very much over time.

It is easy to confuse a marketing strategy with a marketing plan, and it is not altogether unusual to find the marketing strategy and the marketing plan fused together into a single document as they clearly feed off one another. The transition between the two can be a little blurry, a marketing strategy covers the big picture of what the business offers - the value proposition and related brand messaging. The marketing plan defines how the business will communicate these key messages to our

customers - the platforms, the creative, the design, the timing, and so on.

One of the most significant differences between small businesses that are entrepreneurial, successful, and are market leaders and small businesses that struggle to get out of survival mode, is this: Successful businesses have a clear marketing strategy, that gives them purpose, and makes everything they do more effective.



We all know how important marketing is to our businesses but unfortunately many small businesses get caught up in the execution of day to day market warfare and do not take the time to actually measure their marketing performance and review their strategies..... they simply forget the end goal or the big picture.

The definition of the word Strategy is:

1. *A method or plan chosen to bring about a desired future, such as achievement of a goal or solution to a problem.*
2. *The art and science of planning and marshalling resources for their most efficient and effective use.*

Your marketing strategy is the foundation for creating awareness and guiding your brand and the products and services you offer. It is designed to close sales and continue engaging with customers, both current and new.

There are many things to consider when designing a successful strategy, but there are four key decisions that will help small business owners grow their sales

and create marketing maturity in their businesses.

The Keys to a Successful Marketing Strategy:

- Know who your target customer is?
- Know who are you?
- Understand what is your competitive advantage?
- Know who your competition is?

The tactics to help you work better to grow your business and succeed in your marketing strategies are first knowledge, then simplicity. You have to decide on the single, simple answer to each of these questions and make a commitment to not change it for a year or two. Success doesn't come overnight, it's a work in progress.

This is focus. And focus is almost always the difference between a business that grows profitably and one that never seems to gain any momentum at all.



Who is Your Target Customer?

The first decision in any marketing strategy is to define your target customer. "Who do you serve and, who has the greatest need for your products or services?". This always needs to be answered clearly before you can execute any tactic effectively. It will give you the ability to say "no" to other potential customers who might buy from you but who are clearly the wrong fit for your narrow focus. It takes time to develop this discipline, but you can't do effective marketing without it.

Narrowing your focus on a new well-defined target may take some to getting used to, but self-belief and confidence will see you through. If you are spending time and money on marketing but your efforts are not driving enough sales, the problem is almost always that you haven't narrowed your target market enough to be effective. The more you define your market so you can focus on those that you can best serve and those that can best service you, the more effective your entire business will be.

Who are you?

Who you are, should be able to be defined in a few short words and is simply a short description of what business you are in. If you were to ask someone, how do you think they would describe your business? What would their response be?

Most business owners can't resist over-complicating their business. This leaves people confused as to what you actually do. What's worse is that sometimes **we** don't even know or at least lose sight of who we are.

Clearly defining 'Who We Are' helps you narrow your focus on your marketing and sales efforts. Think of what it would take to be the best – the leader – in your channel. If you're not the leader, then narrow your channel definition (or your target market) until you are the leader. A focused laser can melt steel at a distance, but the same light undirected has no effect. Be laser-like in your focus.

Find your competitive advantage!

What is Your Competitive Advantage?

Your competitive advantage should highlight the one (or two) main things your product or service actually delivers that your target customer really wants or needs, and that your competitors cannot or struggle to deliver. This is not to be confused with a list of features and benefits.

A competitive advantage is a product or service, which you have, that is hard to replicate. Of course, your competitors will also be striving for a competitive advantage so be aware.

Your strategy must take account of how your business' strengths and weaknesses will affect your marketing.

Begin your marketing strategy document with an honest and rigorous **SWOT** analysis, looking at your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

It is a good idea to conduct some market research on your existing customers at this point. This will help you to build a more honest picture of your reputation in the marketplace. Don't make assumptions or have an overinflated ego of yourself. Egos are best left at the door when looking inward.

Strengths could include:

- Personal and flexible customer service
- Special features or benefits that your product offers
- Specialist knowledge or skills
- IP that your own

Weaknesses could include:

- Limited financial resources
- Lack of an established reputation
- Inefficient accounting systems
- Poor cash flow and working capital

Opportunities could include:

- Increased demand from a particular market sector
- Using the Internet to reach new markets
- New technologies that allow you to improve product quality
- Acquisition

Threats could include:

- The emergence of a new competitor
- More sophisticated, attractive or cheaper versions of your product or service
- New legislation increasing your costs
- A downturn in the economy, reducing overall demand



Having done your analysis, you can then measure the potential effects each element may have on your marketing strategy.

For example, if new regulations will increase the cost of competing in a market where you're already weak, you might want to look for other opportunities. On the other hand, if you have a good reputation and your key competitor is struggling, the regulations might present the opportunity to push aggressively for new customers.

Once you have defined your own strengths and weaknesses and those of your competitors you can clearly see respective competitive advantages. Now, rank each of them by how important these factors are to your target customer. Pick the top one or two and put them on your homepage, front and centre. Don't overcomplicate this. People just want to know one or two things to move their decision along. Is it cheaper? Do you have faster delivery? Best personalised service? Unique product solutions?

Who is Your Competition?

When someone is looking to buy a solution to a problem, they will quickly make sense of the alternatives to compare you against your competition. However, most small business owners haven't specifically defined who their real competition is and don't focus their messages to create clear differentiation for their buyers.

Clearly, customers are important, but do not underestimate the power of the competitor and what you can learn by studying them, learning their strengths and weaknesses to help form the basis of your Marketing Strategy. Narrow your competitor focus to one or two main competitors but also remember that as things change, so too will the main competitors, so be ever vigilant.



What Does Your Marketing Strategy Look Like?

List all the possibilities your customers use when making a purchasing decision. Get some perspective from employees, friends and friendly customers. You should see some clarity and the power coming through narrowing your focus through needs analysis. It will also show you a few things you could stop doing in your business that would create more focus.

Can you see why it makes no sense to send a broadcast email, build a new website or create a media campaign if you are not clear about your marketing strategy. Implementing these tactics without a road map (your marketing strategy) will not deliver the right message to the right customers and the nett result would be fewer sales than if you had invested the time to implement a focused marketing strategy.

The real secret that successful companies practice, with extreme discipline, is creating a clear and concise marketing strategy. It's not the only action that made these companies successful, but it's what small companies **must** do to grow.

The focus of your marketing strategy should be making sure that your products and services meet customer needs and developing long-term and profitable relationships with those customers. To achieve this, you will need to create a flexible strategy that can respond to changes in customer perceptions and demand. It may

also help you identify whole new markets that you can successfully target.

The purpose of your marketing strategy should be to identify and then communicate the benefits of your business offerings to your target market. Once this has been completed, decide on the best marketing activity that will ensure your target market know about the products or services you offer, and why they meet their needs.

Once you have created and implemented your strategy, monitor its effectiveness and make any adjustments required to maintain its success. A key element that is often overlooked is monitoring and evaluating how effective your strategy has been. This control element not only helps you see how the strategy is performing in practice, but can also help inform your future marketing strategy. A simple device is to ask each new customer how they heard about your business.

With an understanding of your business' internal strengths and weaknesses and the external opportunities and threats, you can develop a strategy that plays to your own strengths and matches them to the emerging opportunities. You can also identify your weaknesses and make attempts to minimise them.