

## Marketing for Results!

Successful marketing requires a thoughtfully considered business strategy and the identification of specific marketing goals.

**By Margaret Reynolds**

**W**e generally appreciate that marketing is necessary to promote our business and generate sales, but how do we market to get the results we want?

Marketing is a very broad discipline of activities and just getting your arms around all of it, let alone doing it all with impact, can be a challenge. Peter Drucker, the great business management guru, describes marketing as *the whole firm, taken from the customer's point of view*. The key is to see your product or service through your customer's eyes, and do things that will make a difference in their attitudes and behavior towards your product or service.

How do you go about doing that? **Know your competitive advantage.** Identify the feature of your product or service that causes your customer to choose it over other alternatives. This is often referred to as your market position as it describes your position relative to your competitors. It is optimally stated in the form of a benefit such as, "the health conscious customer chooses to buy our food product because it is the only product in it's category with no harmful saturated fats."

**Know what you want your marketing to accomplish.** Define the outcomes that you are trying to achieve. If your goal is to penetrate a new market, you might implement a sampling program to expose those new customers to your offering. But if your goal is to get current customers to buy more, you may try a loyalty program, such as the airlines' frequent flyer programs or Hallmark's Gold Crown Program. Align your activities with your objectives.

**Know who you are trying to communicate with.** Marketing communication, the way in which you reach customers and the messages you share, need to be tailored to

the preferences of the customer group you are trying to reach. This applies to the media you choose as well as the tone of your message.

Don't assume that what works for your competitor also works for you. Even if your offering and your target audience is similar, the way you want your customers to think about your products and the way you want them to think about your company are probably different enough that you need to reach out to them in a manner best suited for your message.

**Know how to integrate the components of marketing and get more "bang for the buck".** Coordinate all of the activities in your marketing plan—this means the message is consistent, the activities all align to your objectives, and some of the activities may be designed to work together.

The message in each marketing communication should be congruous. Remember you have already identified your competitive advantage. Make that the focus of your message. Avoid the tendency to include everything you think is important in the communication to the customer—focus on what your customer will think is important. Remember, be consistent with not only what you say but also how you say it. The way you represent your brand, use your slogan, and the tone of the message should not vary. In this way, you keep the ads focused and produce a more memorable message.

Integration also means that you link all of your activities back to your original objectives. For example, if you are trying to reach a new target group, you may decide to do affinity marketing—working with another organization that already markets to that group. You may also develop special versions of your product appropriate for that group; design a sampling plan targeting their customers to introduce them to the product, and offer a lower introductory price to them while encouraging and rewarding current customers to do referrals.

**Know the value of long-term customer relationships.** It is always less expensive to keep the customers you have than attract new customers. Every interaction with a customer is a marketing opportunity. Each transaction creates a perception that can contribute to building customer loyalty or customer dissatisfaction. Often it only takes one unpleasant experience to lose a customer. Your marketing plan should

therefore include employee/sales training and customer service programs. Make every customer experience a good one.

**Know the success of your marketing efforts.** Marketing results can be difficult to measure, but it is important to understand what activities worked and which did not so that you can design next year's program accordingly. Marketing is difficult to measure because more than one thing might have influenced an outcome. However, don't assume that marketing can't be measured.

Set up a system to track performance against those goals. If the goal is increasing sales, you probably already have tracking systems in place. Your challenge will be determining to what degree the results were influenced by your marketing. If your goals are to change perception or behavior, that can be tracked as well.

One way you can learn how well your marketing performed is by talking to the people who were targeted, either when you conduct their transaction or through the use of a customer survey.

**Know the limitations of marketing:** Marketing is intended to improve your business performance by effectively communicating with the people who buy your products and services and cultivating relationships with them. At its best, it convinces your customers that you are the right choice. Marketing cannot make a weak product great or poor service a treat! In general, customers realize that you are trying to sell to them and marketing must be managed with humility and integrity for the customer's best interest.

Marketing is an exciting and creative discipline. To maximize its success requires a well-thought-out business strategy, and the identification of specific marketing goals. The rest of the marketing plan will be guided by those very important decisions.

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