

Marketing

General Definition

In plain and simple terms, marketing activities and strategies result in making products available that satisfy customers while making profits for the companies that offer those products. That's it in a nutshell! (In this article, the word Product includes Service, and applies to businesses that provide a service, and not a product.)

Marketing produces a "win-win" because:

- Customers have a product that meets their needs, and
- Healthy profits are achieved for the company. (These profits allow the company to continue to do business in order to meet the needs of future customers.)

Stated another way: A focus on what the customer wants is essential to successful marketing efforts. This customer-orientation must also be balanced with the company's objective of maintaining a profitable volume of sales in order for the company to continue to do business. Marketing is a creative, ever-changing orchestration of all the activities needed to accomplish both of these objectives.

How Are The Customer And Business Objectives Met?

The American Marketing Association's definition of marketing is:

the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives.

You see in the above definition that the process of marketing begins with discovering what product customers want to buy. Providing the features and quality customers want is a *critical* first step in marketing. You'll be facing an uphill battle if you provide something *you want to produce* and then try to *convince* someone to buy it.

The marketing process then continues with setting a price, letting potential customers know about your product, and making it available to them.

What Activities Are Included In Marketing?

Marketing activities are numerous and varied because they basically include everything needed to get a product off the drawing board and into the hands of the customer. The broad field of marketing includes activities such as designing the product so it will be desirable to customers (using tools such as marketing research and pricing; promoting the product so people will know about it (using tools such as public relations, advertising, marketing communications; and exchanging it with the customer (through sales and distribution.)

It is important to note that the field of marketing *includes* sales, but it also includes many functions besides sales. Many people mistakenly think that marketing and sales are the same—they are not.

How Does Marketing Fit into the Company?

Another way to describe marketing activities is to consider the big picture of how they fit in with the other business functions.

- Through **marketing** efforts, decisions are made and strategies are implemented concerning:
 - what products (goods, services or ideas) are to be offered
 - to whom (the target market), and
 - how (how to inform potential customers of the offering, how to make the transaction, etc.)
- Products are created through **production** efforts.
- Capital and operating funds are managed and tracked in the **accounting-finance** area.
- The focus of the **human resources** area is employees and the policies concerning them.

Oftentimes, a marketing approach relies upon the coordination of several business areas to be successful. For example,

- The product might need some tweaking by the person who produces the product to respond to customer complaints.
- The person who handles human resource issues might be asked to develop compensation plans that reward sales people who build significant relationships that have tremendous potential but are slow to close.
- Special payment plans might need to be implemented by the accounting staff to accommodate a variety of customer needs.

As a result, marketing usually crosses more departmental boundaries than other business functions do out of necessity. So, marketing requires the orchestration of everyone who plays a part in the common goal of pleasing the customer. For a small business owner who has no employees, this means that she needs to mentally tear down the walls between varied business functions and think holistically when it comes to marketing strategies.

In Summary

These are the fundamentals of a true marketing mindset:

- Producing what the customer wants should be the focus of business operations and planning.
- Creating *profitable* sales volume, not just sales volume, is a necessary goal.

- Coordinating between marketing activities and all other functions within a business that affect marketing efforts.

Marketing Ideas

Marketing is all about satisfying customer needs. The following represents a comprehensive list of marketing ideas. Use the list of marketing ideas to help better understand customer needs and ways to satisfy those needs.

GENERAL IDEAS

- Never let a day pass without engaging in at least one marketing activity.
- Determine a percentage of gross income to spend annually on marketing.
- Set specific marketing goals every year; review and adjust quarterly.
- Maintain a tickler file of ideas for later use.
- Carry business cards with you (all day, every day).
- Create a personal nametag or pin with your company name and logo on it and wear it at high visibility meetings

TARGET MARKET

- Stay alert to trends that might impact your target market, product or promotion strategy.
- Read market research studies about your profession, industry, product, target market groups, etc.
- Collect competitors' ads and literature; study them for information about strategy, product features and benefits, etc.
- Ask clients why they hired you and solicit suggestions for improvement.
- Ask former clients why they left you.
- Identify a new market.
- Join a list-serve (email list) related to your profession.
- Subscribe to an Internet usenet newsgroup or a list-serve that serves your target market.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

- Create a new service, technique or product.
- Offer a simpler/cheaper/smaller version of your (or another existing) product or service.
- Offer a fancier/more expensive/faster/bigger version of your (or another existing) product or service.
- Update your services.

EDUCATION, RESOURCES AND INFORMATION

- Establish a marketing and public relations advisory and referral team composed of your colleagues and/or neighboring business owners to share ideas and referrals and to discuss

community issues. Meet quarterly for breakfast.

- Create a suggestion box for employees.
- Attend a marketing seminar.
- Read a marketing book.
- Subscribe to a marketing newsletter or other publication.
- Subscribe to a marketing list-serve on the Internet.
- Subscribe to a marketing usenet newsgroup on the Internet.
- Train your staff, clients and colleagues to promote referrals.
- Hold a monthly marketing meeting with employees or associates to discuss strategy, status and to solicit marketing ideas.
- Join an association or organization related to your profession.
- Get a marketing intern to take you on as a client; it will give the intern experience and you some free marketing help.
- Maintain a consultant card file for finding designers, writers and other marketing professionals.
- Hire a marketing consultant to brainstorm with.
- Take a "creative journey" to another progressive city or country to observe and learn from marketing techniques used there.

PRICING AND PAYMENT

- Analyze your fee structure; look for areas requiring modifications or adjustments.
- Establish a credit card payment option for clients.
- Give regular clients a discount.
- Learn to barter; offer discounts to members of certain clubs/professional groups/organizations in exchange for promotions in their publications.
- Give "quick pay" or cash discounts.
- Offer financing or installment plans.

MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

- Publish a newsletter for customers and prospects. (It doesn't have to be fancy or expensive.)
- Develop a brochure of services.
- Include a postage-paid survey card with your brochures and other company literature. Include check-off boxes or other items that will involve the reader and provide valuable feedback to you.
- Remember, business cards aren't working for you if they're in the box. Pass them out! Give prospects two business cards and brochures -- one to keep and one to pass along.
- Produce separate business cards/sales literature for each of your target market segments (e.g. government and commercial, and/or business and consumer).
- Create a poster or calendar to give away to customers and prospects.
- Print a slogan and/or one-sentence description of your business on letterhead, fax cover sheets and invoices.
- Develop a site on the World Wide Web.
- Create a "signature file" to be used for all your e-mail messages. It should contain contact details including your Web site address and key information about your company that will

make the reader want to contact you.

- Include "testimonials" from customers in your literature.
- Test a new mailing list. If it produces results, add it to your current direct mail lists or consider replacing a list that's not performing up to expectations.
- Use colored or oversized envelopes for your direct mailings. Or send direct mail in plain white envelopes to pique recipients' curiosity.
- Announce free or special offers in your direct response pieces. (Direct responses may be direct mail, broadcast fax, or e-mail messages.) Include the offer in the beginning of the message and also on the outside of the envelope for direct mail.

MEDIA RELATIONS

- Update your media list often so that press releases are sent to the right media outlet and person.
- Write a column for the local newspaper, local business journal or trade publication.
- Publish an article and circulate reprints.
- Send timely and newsworthy press releases as often as needed.
- Publicize your 500th client of the year (or other notable milestone).
- Create an annual award and publicize it— as an outstanding employee of the year.
- Get public relations and media training or read up on it.
- Appear on a radio or TV talk show.
- Create your own TV program on your industry or your specialty. Market the show to your local cable station or public broadcasting station as a regular program. Or, see if you can air your show on an open access cable channel.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper or to a trade magazine editor.
- Take an editor to lunch.
- Get a publicity photo taken and enclose with press releases.
- Consistently review newspapers and magazines for possible PR opportunities.
- Submit "tip" articles to newsletters and newspapers.
- Conduct industry research and develop a press release or article to announce an important discovery in your field.
- Create a press kit and keep its contents current.

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND CUSTOMER RELATIONS

- Ask your clients to come back again.
- Return phone calls promptly.
- Set up a fax-on-demand or email system to easily respond to customer inquiries.
- Use an answering machine or voice mail system to catch after-hours phone calls. Include basic information in your outgoing message such a business hours, location, etc.
- Record a memorable message or "tip of the day" on your outgoing answering machine or voice mail message.
- Ask clients what you can do the help them.
- Take clients out to a ball game, a show or another special event— just send them two tickets with a note.
- Hold a seminar at your office for clients and prospects.

- Send hand-written thank-you notes.
- Send birthday cards and appropriate seasonal greetings.
- Photocopy interesting articles and send them to clients and prospects with a hand-written "FYI" note and your business card.
- Send a book of interest or other appropriate business gift to a client with a handwritten note.
- Create an area on your Web site specifically for your customers.
- Redecorate your office or location where you meet with your clients.

NETWORKING AND WORD OF MOUTH

- Join a Chamber of Commerce or other networking organization.
- Join or organize a breakfast club with other professionals (not in your field) to discuss business and network referrals.
- Mail a brochure to members of organizations to which you belong.
- Serve on a city board or commission.
- Host a holiday party.
- Hold an open house.
- Send letters to attendees after you attend a conference.
- Join a community list-serve (email list) on the Internet.

ADVERTISING

- Advertise during peak seasons for your business.
- Get a memorable phone number, such as "1-800-WIDGETS."
- Obtain a memorable URL and email address and include them on all marketing materials.
- Provide Rolodex® cards or phone stickers pre-printed with your business contact information.
- Promote your business jointly with other professionals via cooperative direct mail.
- Advertise in a specialty directory or in the Yellow Pages.
- Write an ad in another language to reach a non-English-speaking market. Place the ad in a publication that market reads, such as a Hispanic newspaper.
- Distribute advertising specialty products such as pens, mouse pads or mugs.
- Mail "bumps," photos, samples and other innovative items to your prospect list. (A bump is simply anything that makes the mailing envelope bulge and makes the recipient curious about what's in the envelope!)
- Create a direct mail list of "hot prospects."
- Consider non-traditional tactics such as bus backs, billboards and popular Web sites.
- Project a message on the sidewalk in front of your place of business using a light directed through words etched in a glass window.
- Consider placing ads in your newspaper's classified section.
- Consider a vanity automobile tag with your company name.
- Create a friendly bumper sticker for your car.
- Code your ads and keep records of results.
- Improve your building signage and directional signs inside and out.
- Invest in a neon sign to make your office or storefront window visible at night.

- Create a new or improved company logo or "recolor" the traditional logo.
- Sponsor and promote a contest or sweepstakes.

SPECIAL EVENTS AND OUTREACH

- Get a booth at a fair/trade show attended by your target market.
- Sponsor or host a special event or open house at your business location in cooperation with a local non-profit organization, such as a women's business center. Describe how the organization helped you.
- Give a speech or volunteer for a career day at a high school.
- Teach a class or seminar at a local college or adult education center.
- Sponsor an "Adopt-a-Road" area in your community to keep roads litter-free. People that pass by the area will see your name on the sign announcing your sponsorship.
- Volunteer your time to a charity or non-profit organization.
- Donate your product or service to a charity auction.
- Appear on a panel at a professional seminar.
- Write a "How To" pamphlet or article for publishing.
- Produce and distribute an educational CD-ROM, audio or video tape.
- Publish a book.

SALES IDEAS

- Start every day with two cold calls.
- Read newspapers, business journals and trade publications for new business openings and for personnel appointment and promotion announcements made by companies. Send your business literature to appropriate individuals and firms.
- Give your sales literature to your lawyer, accountant, printer, banker, temp agency, office supply salesperson, advertising agency, etc. (Expand your sales force for free!)
- Put your fax number on order forms for easy submission.
- Set up a fax-on-demand or email system to easily distribute responses to company or product inquiries.
- Follow up on your direct mailings, email messages and broadcast faxes with a friendly telephone call.
- Try using the broadcast fax or email delivery methods instead of direct mail. (Broadcast fax and email allows you to send the same message to many locations at once.)
- Using broadcast fax or email messages to notify your customers of product service updates.
- Extend your hours of operation.
- Reduce response/turnaround time. Make reordering easy– reminders. Provide pre-addressed envelopes.
- Display product and service samples at your office.
- Remind clients of the products and services you provide that they aren't currently buying.
- Call and/or send mail to former clients to try to reactivate them.
- Take sales orders over the Internet.