

Five Simple Steps to Your Strategic Marketing Plan

Always remember that a Plan is simply a means for achieving an end.

If it's been more than 2 years since you've done a full review of your position in (and relationship to) the marketplace, you're overdue. Here are my suggestions for developing a strategic marketing plan and/or revamping your firm's image, policies or market position.

1. Have a **one-or two-day brainstorming session** focused on strategic marketing. This can be done in the office but better at an offsite location, if possible. To keep the session focused and moving toward a conclusion, hire a trained consultant as your leader to facilitate and keep you on track during this initial process. Analysis of your client base and your company should be completed and circulated to relevant staff before this session. The "data dump" should point to **which customers or categories account for what portion of total revenue and profit**.

2. **Set goals** to ensure the strategic plan has **direction and specific objectives** for the next year, three years and five years. Your goals and objectives should take advantage of your strengths while compensating for any perceived weaknesses. Remember that **developing objectives generally means change**. This is a critical phase because too much change, or the wrong kind, can lead to frustration—even failure. Your goals and objectives must be very specific or they will be difficult to implement. For example, your goal might be to "develop new ways to increase work commissioned by current clients." This requires listing objectives, such as the increased percentages you want from each of your client lists and the methods to achieve them.

3. **Develop and use tactics** to achieve your goals and objectives. Tactics may include:

- starting a newsletter for current and former clients to keep them up-to-date on your products and projects while positioning your firm as a trusted and knowledgeable business resource/advisor;
- increasing your presence at selected trade shows;
- having your principals hone their presentation and public speaking skills;
- linking your principals with organizations that will help increase the scope of your client base;

Selling is Stupid! Okay, before you get offended, I'm not making fun of selling. I'm saying that it's stupid when you consider the true definition of the word. Here are my definitions of the words "buying" and "selling":

Buying: The act of willingly acquiring for money something that you want or need. The buyer generally leaves the transaction feeling happy and satisfied.

Selling: Attempting to convince another that they want or need your product or service despite the fact that they may not. The purchaser typically leaves the transaction with a strong feeling of buyer's remorse.

With that in mind, does it make sense to sell to someone? Or does it make sense to get them to buy from you? Think about it. Think about whether the things you're doing on a day-to-day basis are selling, or if they're setting people up to buy from you. This is very powerful when properly applied.

Speaking of definitions, consider the #1 sales technique of traditional sales managers; cold calling:

Cold Calling: The practice of making unsolicited calls to people one does not know in order to solicit new business.

Now that doesn't speak very highly of cold calling. It's a reflection on how cold calling is perceived today. It suggests that cold calling immediately triggers a lack of trust and a credibility issue. As we discussed in a recent article on Permission Marketing, trust and credibility are at the heart of putting prospects in a buying mood.

If cold calling is not working for you (and research indicates that conversion rates are extremely low for this method) then try something different! Don't keep doing something that isn't getting results! Focus your efforts on those who have already shown an interest in your product or service (i.e., past clients, web site inquiries, trade show contacts, and other networking connections)!

Remember, the worst that can happen is nothing. Since nothing is the usual result of a cold call anyway, you've got nothing to lose and everything to gain. So get out there and try something new and different. Besides, doing something different is fun. And that alone will make your job a lot easier!

- hiring a graphic artist to revamp brochures, graphics and logos;
- emailing to staff a list of goals, which is updated on a weekly basis to show current action items as well as progress toward the goals; and
- hiring a consultant to assist in the recruitment and (re)orientation of staff.

4. Develop action plans for management and staff members that assign specific responsibilities for tasks, as well as time frames, deadlines, budgets and expected results. Tools for monitoring and evaluating progress and results must be clearly defined. Make sure that everyone is committed to the goals and changes, and is willing to make changes or try new techniques to reach your corporate objectives.

5. Monitor the plan on an ongoing basis, so that staff can determine whether goals and objectives are being met within time, staffing and budget constraints. For example, did you obtain 15 per cent more work from existing clients? If your goals and objectives were met, evaluate the methods used in order of effectiveness. If you did not reach your goals, re-evaluate action plans and make revisions to get you to your goals, or, if necessary, re-evaluate and revise your goals.

To help ensure success, keep your strategic marketing plan simple and achievable. Remember that you will need commitment from staff to reach your firm's sales and marketing goals, so it's important to monitor results and keep staff up-to-date.



Retail Roundup.



A harbinger of things to come:

Canadian Tire has set up a website specifically devoted to solar and wind energy products. They say they're "making it easier than ever to start generating your own power." They offer design solutions for different circumstances, ranging from "convenience power" for a small cabin with no electrical service (power is generated and stored during the week, for weekend use) to an "on-grid home" system (power is generated and fed back into the energy grid to reduce your electric bill). Visit the site at www.canadiantirepower.ca

WAL-MART® My name is Linda! In case you missed the Globe & Mail article, the new Supercentres' marketing campaign is directed at "Linda" who represents the average Canadian Wal-Mart customer. Apparently, there is even a cutout picture of her that the Wal-Mart executives take to meetings. I am not kidding. So, who is Linda? Well, according to Wal-Mart execs:

- "Linda" is 30 to 45 years old, has two or three children, a husband and a career. She's a soccer mom who multitasks, and she's time-starved
- When she heads to Wal-Mart for the family shopping, she'd like to pick up some cosmetics for herself, a prescription for her son, diapers for the baby and dog food for the pet. All in that order. Then she'd like to get some grocery shopping done at the same time.
- She might even have noticed a parka or a pair of pants at the nearby fashion section. Or spotted a cellphone across the way that looked appealing.
- But at her regular Wal-Mart, she's not completely comfortable in the lingerie section. It's next to a busy aisle, and across from electronics. Men often frequent that department, and that may mean that she spends less time there than she otherwise would.

Aren't stereotypes fun? That's right, marketing professionals actually get paid to come up with this stuff!