

Marketing Initiatives Require Research

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2 top mistakes in marketing: treating all customers alike, calls to action are not clear or prominent enough.

In my company, the job of marketing isn't well defined. I worry that this year and next, we need to be a lot better at marketing, in order to keep my company growing. Without enough growth, we could be in real trouble. Any suggestions?

Marketing is a big subject, as you'll discover once you start. No one individual or vendor will be able to do it all for you. It's a given that everyone in the company looks to the owner for marketing direction and advice. Unfortunately, marketing is often not a core competence for the owner. You'll need to build a team, and make time to chip away at it over time.

In order to learn more about marketing, start by doing some research. Recognize you can't do it all yourself. Remember that Rome wasn't built in a day, and it will also take time to build a robust, productive marketing program for your company.

What's marketing all about? Take the classic education approach and read a book, or two, or three, about marketing. Take a look at competitors and peers who are twice your size, to see what they're doing for marketing. Look at what your customers are doing - often they'll be the most forthcoming with ideas and suggestions.

Make a long list of all of the ideas that you might want to try in marketing, including notes on where the idea came from, and who else might be able to tell you more. Build a list of potential vendors. Find out who's been helping the competitors you admire. Ask referrals. Start interviewing individuals and companies who work at marketing. Here's a list of interview questions:

- what kind of work do you do most frequently
- what's an example of your best work
- what kinds of customers do you work with most often
- what kind of work and customers do you try to steer clear of
- what's a ballpark of costs for working with you / your firm, over what period of time - what kind of budget should I expect to have
- how do you know if you have a good customer - or a project that's in trouble
- what kind of results do you expect to produce, in what timeframe

Define where you want to get to - short term and long term. Work backwards from your company's sales goals and activities. Figure out how much additional lead generation is

needed - this year, and over the next 3+ years, to insure the company hits its sales targets. That will tell you a bit about how hard and fast you need to press forward in marketing.

Realistically define the budget for marketing. If you need things to move quickly, identify where else in the company you'll make cuts in order to free up funds. Expect to put at least 5% of gross profit into marketing, to build fuel for the future.

Define some goals, using what you learned from your interviews. Pick one or more key players on staff, who will work with you on the project. Pick 3-4 marketing initiatives to focus on first. Define a period each week when you'll work on marketing. Do the strategic homework first - understand your company's position in the marketplace.

Chip away at the item list, doing trials to learn about what works for your company. Here are some of the projects you might want to explore: direct mail, telemarketing, market research, branding and positioning, brochure development, web based activities including website design, SEO and blogging, upgrading copy, print and web offer development and advertising, public relations, public speaking, networking, referrals, niche marketing.

As you work on trials, change one thing at a time, so you can measure the differences in outcomes and know what to attribute success and failure to. At this stage, the one big mistake you can make, is not to get started at all. Think of the great leads you'll have coming in, for sales to work on, as you figure out your company's marketing program.

Looking for a good book? *The Marketing Gurus: Lessons from the Best Marketing Books of All Time*, by Chris Murray.

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