

## **Plan for Success:**

### ***Your Marketing Plan: As a Component of Your Business Plan***

A major component of your company business plan is the marketing plan. A marketing plan is essential in helping you to:

- understand the business you're in
- know your market
- forecast your sales
- forecast your target market

There is a misconception among many, as the term “marketing” is often used in place of the word “advertising”. Yes, advertising is a small piece of marketing, but marketing encompasses a wide range of sections that require research to provide essential information that successfully drives your business.

The contents of your marketing plan are dictated by the nature of your plan and your marketing situation, and you add or subtract details that suit your business. In addition to marketing strategy and tactics, the plan allows you to create a process to channel what you know into a logically sequenced, orderly plan that you will be able to implement. Following are some absolutely essential standard components of a marketing plan, representing the bare minimum of what should be included:

1. Situation Analysis: This includes market analysis, SWOT analysis, and competitive analysis. Market Analysis: This is the foundation of the marketing plan and should include a clear explanation of market segmentation, target market focus, and market forecast. This analysis answers such questions as:

- Who are my customers?
- Where are my customers?
- What do my customers need?
- How do my customers make their buying decisions?
- Where do my customers buy?
- How do I reach my customers with my marketing and sales messages?

Answers to these questions determine your customers' needs and nature.

SWOT Analysis: This analyzes your company's present marketing situation.

Competitive Analysis: This analysis answers questions such as:

- What might make my customers decide: price, billing rates, reputation, or image and visibility?
- Are brand names important?
- How influential is word of mouth in providing long term customers?
- Who competes with me for my customers?
- Are competitors selling directly competitive products/services, or substitutes?
- What are my competitors' strengths/weaknesses?
- How are my competitors positioned in the market?

2. Marketing Strategy: This includes your mission statement, objectives, focused strategy, market segment, and product positioning.  
Mission & Objectives: A good mission statement focuses on the benefits you offer to your customers and links to your corporate mission, while also focusing on underlying market needs and customer benefits. Your objectives must be concrete and measurable, and usually address sales, market share, market positioning, image, and awareness.  
Strategy: Your strategy is supported by tactics, which are supported by programs for implementation. Strategy alignment is matching your strategy to your tactics and specific programs/business activities and is sometimes hard to implement at all times; i.e. blue-sky strategy is easier than day-to-day implementation.  
Tactics: Your tactical decisions should complement your marketing strategy in a manner that is practical with the ability to implement, and includes pricing, advertising, public relations, product marketing, direct marketing, channel marketing.  
Market Segmentation: This divides a market into workable groups/divisions which allows you to focus more effectively, to define specific messages, and to send those messages through specific channels. An example of how this is done is you research your market to find out how many potential customers you have, what their needs are, and how to reach them. You then divide them into segments based on their common characteristics such as: age, income, product needs, geography, buying patterns, eating patterns, family make-up, etc.  
Product Positioning: This involves positioning your product properly in the market so it stands strongest.
3. Sales Forecast: Include enough detail to track sales month by month and follow up on plan-vs-actual analysis. You can also include specific sales by product, region, or market segment. In this section you will also include:
  - Sales Forecast
  - Market Forecast
  - Expense Budget
4. Action plan: Planning is about results, not just the plan itself. The implementation of your plan is more important than the ideas and vast market research. Include a specific action plan that includes measurable and concrete plans that can be tracked and followed up. A marketing plan must be measured by the results it produces. Analysis of plan-vs-actual should be built into the plan as it is critical to your final results.  
Publish your Plan: The worst danger in the plan is not having it implemented. It is imperative that you publish and distribute the plan where all managers can see it and commitments made by managers are clearly known and acknowledged. They need to know the plan is on record and that it will be tracked with variances of actual-vs-planned to be calculated and discussed.  
Keep It Alive: A good plan alone is not enough. A plan won't be implemented unless responsibilities are assigned to specific people, with milestones established and agreed upon. Also the people responsible need to know that somebody will follow up to check on results. If there is no follow up, the plan will not be implemented.

It is evident to see how the marketing plan impacts decision making in all sections of the business plan, so "Plan for Success" by incorporating into your business plan, a comprehensive marketing plan that is simple, specific, and realistic, with follow up for implementation.