

Integrated Marketing

The Elements of an Effective Marketing Strategy

As we try to keep up with the newest marketing philosophies and tools, one principle which remains constant is the need to use more than one channel to reach your audience. Avoiding over-reliance on just one or two marketing methods is essential to prevent being blindsided by new channels of communication that your prospects and customers are adopting.

Social media and mobile are the most recent examples of fast moving trends that marketers need to be aware of – these technologies are not fads. Planning how to effectively spread marketing across multiple channels also enables you to reinforce the same message through different media which can amplify its impact on your target audience. Here we will discuss basic components of an integrated marketing strategy along with examples of how marketing tools can be effectively used together.

In this context, integrated marketing strategy refers to a plan that is a subset of an overall business plan designed to help achieve business goals. The marketing strategy may be intended to increase brand awareness, generate sales leads, establish thought leadership or some combination of these. The strategy is integrated because it involves the coordinated use of various marketing tactics which support each other toward the achievement of business goals.

Research

You may have already done extensive research on your market, but we will cover some highlights due to the importance of market research. Here is one definition of market research from the Entrepreneur publication: *The process of gathering, analyzing and interpreting information about a market, about a product or service to be offered for sale in that market, and about the past, present and potential customers for the product or service; research into the characteristics, spending habits, location and needs of your business's target market, the industry as a whole, and the particular competitors you face.*

Entrepreneur - <http://www.entrepreneur.com/encyclopedia/term/82436.html>

Knowledge of the market including your customers, competition relevant government regulations, technology and the environment is essential for long term success. Unfortunately, it is also an area that most small businesses spend little time on. To paraphrase marketing maven Jay Abraham, market research prevents you from doing the perfect triple somersault off the high diving board without realizing that there is no water in the pool.

You need to understand your industry in order to see where you fit into its overall context. What are the major trends in your industry, who are the industry leaders and how large a market share do they own? Is yours an industry with a long tail of products such as music or books? Or is it one where the vast majority of market share is held by a small number of players such as the automobile or telecommunications industries?

Positioning Your Product

The market research discussed in the previous section is the foundation for properly positioning your product and establishing a clear value proposition or Unique Selling Proposition. Market research will enable you to understand what issues are top of mind for your customers so you can explain how you can help solve these problems. Most business owners approach marketing from the standpoint of asking "How can we sell our product?" rather than asking "What is the customer's primary problem that we can solve?" Keep in mind that your customer does not care about you or your product, they care about themselves and how they can scratch their particular itch. The value proposition should answer the question of how your product adds value to your customer's personal experience.

Customer profile

If asked to describe their ideal customer, many business owners would simply say anyone who buys from us or pays their bill on time. In order to optimize the growth of your business, it is critical to understand what your ideal customer looks like. This is the only way you will be able to devise an effective strategy to get more customers like them. The 80/20 rule says that 80% of your profits come from 20% of your customers and if you extrapolate this you will find that more than half of your profits come from about 5% of your customers. Your goal is to find more customers that fit the same profile as the top 5% of your customers.

In order to put together effective marketing materials you need to have a clear image of the person they are addressing - age, income level, gender if appropriate, emotional hot buttons, etc. Your marketing message should be written as if you are talking to an individual, not as if you are communicating with a mass audience.

If you have a customer base you should survey them as to why they purchase from you, what they like best about your product and what additional features or products they would like to see. You should look at what characteristics the top 5% of your customers have in common - in terms of demographics (income, occupation, age, gender, education, location, etc.), psychographics (hobbies, lifestyle choices, purchase behaviors, media habits, values, etc.), and

any other variables you think important.

In many cases, you will find that your customers fall into distinct groups based on their characteristics. As you learn more about your customers, tailoring your marketing messages and campaigns to address these specific customer segments will deliver better results than using generic communications that do not resonate with sectors within your general audience.

Marketing Tools

There are many tools for marketing - paid and free, online and offline. Free refers to approaches such as Search Engine Optimization and social media, which still require payment in the form of time or hiring the expertise to make them work. Which tools you select will be based on your budget, product and the target market you want to reach.

The main point here is that you should not rely exclusively on any one marketing method and that these methods work best when used in conjunction with each other. For example, for a hardware technology product social media may help to raise awareness but buyers will also want to see a demonstration or do their own in-house evaluation of the product as well. For most products you will find portions of your target audience both online and off line. Consequently, though online marketing is all the rage right now, don't forget about using the phone and direct mail to reach your audience. Not only can you reach a market outside of the online world, but direct mail and telemarketing done correctly can also differentiate you from others who are relying primarily on e-mail.

Online marketing tools include:

Websites

Blogs

Search engine optimization

Social media

Mobile marketing

Pay per click advertising

Article marketing

Banner advertising

Joint venture promotions

Webinars

Videos

Podcasts

Online business directories, e.g., Google Places, Manta, Yelp.

Off-line marketing tools include:

Print advertising - magazine and trade journals

Yellow page advertising

Direct mail
Person to person networking
Digital signage
Billboards
Print business directories
Flyers
Radio advertising
TV advertising
Publicity

Pros & Cons

Each marketing tool has its advantages and disadvantages. For example, in the online world, e-mail marketing is inexpensive (not zero cost due to the time required to set-up), enables you to reach a large audience, and allows you to leverage auto-responder technology which is extremely efficient. On the other hand your e-mail is competing with hundreds of others for attention, may get deleted without being opened and requires the permission of the recipient in order to be sent legally.

Search engine optimization can generate an on-going flow of leads at no additional cost once in place, but requires a significant level of expertise to properly set-up, requires a period of time before leads begin to come in regularly and is subject to changes in search engine algorithms with no advance warning.

Pay per click advertising can bring in leads the same day and can be used to rapidly test variations in your ad to see which ad will pull the best. Depending on the market you are in, it can also be costly, requires a level of expertise to do properly and can also be drastically affected by changes in search engine algorithms.

In the offline world, print advertising can allow you to target your audience based on the publication's demographics, offers variety in terms of ad sizes and colors, and has the advantage of potential pass along readership. However, this form of advertising can be costly, it takes several months to effectively test ad variations and will not be seen by those searching online for information.

Print ads can be used to build brand recognition and/or to make direct sales. In the past, ads primarily designed for branding did not include a call to action to respond to the ad, so advertisers could not accurately measure their return on investment. Hence the famous saying: "I know that half the money I spend on advertising is wasted, the problem is, I don't know which half."

Direct response advertising by contrast always includes a way to respond to the advertisement, enabling advertisers to measure response. Testing ads to see which delivers the best return on investment has always been integral to direct response advertising. Claude Hopkins talks extensively about the importance of tracking and testing in *Scientific Advertising* which was

published in 1923. The internet has vastly accelerated the process of testing, now you can start getting results in hours from PPC ads instead of waiting for weeks for print ad results.

Social Media

Social media has exploded onto the scene in recent years. Originally designed as a means for individuals to create and share content, it has fundamentally changed the rules of publishing, distributing, sharing and consuming all forms of content. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google Plus, iTunes and many others give everyone the ability to be a publisher and share information with a worldwide audience for free.

Social media can be used to research markets, promote products or causes, do customer service, help brand a business, get feedback, establish yourself as a thought leader, do fundraising and more.

Marketers are realizing that social media, in most cases, must become part of their marketing strategy if they want to reach their customers and remain relevant. From a marketing standpoint it can be used to establish and build relationships, maintain contact with prospects without constantly selling them, sell products, get referrals and testimonials, and generally stay in touch with customers.

Mobile Marketing

A marketer's dream is to be able to reach each individual with a marketing message specific to them and which takes into account their location and the time of day. Mobile marketing offers the closest thing to this capability. Some studies show that more than 90 of smartphone owners keep their devices with them 24/7. All of this is driving the rapid growth of mobile marketing as it provides a way to reach some of the most valuable marketing real estate available - the mobile device.

The main elements of mobile marketing are mobile enabled websites, text (SMS/MMS) message marketing, mobile applications, 2D codes and mobile advertising. Probably the most basic of these is the mobile website, simply meaning that you should have a version of your website optimized for viewing on a mobile device. This should not simply be a smaller version of your current site reduced in size to fit a mobile device screen. Since usage patterns on smartphones are different from laptops only the information that on-the-go viewers will typically need should appear prominently on a mobile website. Local businesses need to have their location, phone, business hours and directions appear on the mobile home page in a thumb friendly format.

Mobile marketing must be combined with other forms of marketing in order to work most effectively, if only because sending messages to mobile devices legally requires an opt-in by users. Second, mobile users must be made aware that they can receive marketing communications on the devices and TV, print, in-store signage, and other media are the best

ways to make them aware of this.

Lead nurturing

Most prospects will not be ready to purchase the first time you contact them, hence the need for an effective lead nurturing strategy. The goal here is to continue to develop a relationship with prospects without investing a great deal of time with those who are not ready to purchase at this point. This is an area where automation can provide the leverage you need to stay in contact with a large number of prospects and deliver value with a minimum investment of time.

Ideally you want to provide information of value to your audience and spend a minimal amount of time selling your offering. Your primary purposes are to build trust, position yourself as an expert resource in your industry and keep your name in front of them so you are top of mind when they do decide to make a purchase.

Metrics

Once you have a marketing strategy working, the next challenge is properly measuring its effectiveness so you can fine tune it. This is another often overlooked area as it requires thinking through how results will be measured, ideally before a marketing effort is started. Simply saying that you will look at how much sales increase over the period of a marketing campaign is not enough as other variables beyond your marketing efforts may be affecting the levels of sales.

For those operating brick and mortar businesses with walk in traffic, it is always a good idea to ask customers how they found you. In addition, experimenting with different ways of greeting visitors to your store can make a difference in sales. Finding an alternative to the usual “can I help you?” greeting can pay dividends in increased sales if you track how visitors respond to different ways of welcoming them to your establishment.

A major advantage of online marketing is that there are tools that enable you to track and measure a number of variables so you can fine tune your marketing efforts. Online tools such as Google Analytics allow you to see where visitors are coming from, where they go on your website, how long they stay, how much traffic is from repeat visitors and myriad other metrics.

Integration with the sales process

Marketing and sales need to work together. An effective marketing strategy will support sales efforts by educating, informing and supporting the sales channel. Although Sales and Marketing are usually different departments in larger companies, in small businesses the same individual or team may be doing both. As sales involves personal contact with customers, the sales staff is usually in a good position to provide marketing with valuable insights into the needs, wants and objections that customers will have. This should be an advantage for the small business where sales and marketing are closer together than they are in a large corporate structure with its departmental silos.

Good marketing paves the way for easier sales by educating and building relationships with prospects such that when they are ready to purchase you will be perceived more as an advisor than a vendor. At a minimum you want prospects to trust you enough to come to you when they are considering a purchase.

Done properly marketing changes the sales process from one where you are pursuing prospects along with your competitors to one where the prospect perceives you as a trusted advisor with their best interests at heart and would never consider purchasing from anyone other than you. In order to reach this point, marketing must provide value to prospects before they purchase and sales reps cannot be continually pushing prospects to buy.

With proper marketing, prospects will be willing to take calls from sales reps and will often reach out to them when the time comes to purchase. When prospects are considering a purchase the rep can be effective in helping customers tailor a solution to fit their specific needs and provide person-to-person contact.

Summary

An integrated marketing approach enables you to target the broadest possible audience for your offering without losing focus. Using different marketing tools selected based on how well they fit your market produces a synergistic effect as these tools complement each other. The strategic use of carefully selected marketing tools combined with a good tracking and testing methodology will help your marketing to produce increasingly profitable results over time.

About Stan

Stan Robinson, Jr. helps businesses and professionals grow revenues and advance their careers using social media and content marketing. He specializes in helping clients use LinkedIn to showcase their personal brand, develop new business relationships, and generate more sales.

As a content strategist and copywriter Stan works with businesses to increase their profitability by providing useful and relevant content to their customers and communities. This includes blog posts, website content, case studies, White Papers, newsletters and other forms of content.

His background includes over 20 years of experience in sales and marketing with organizations ranging from start-ups to companies with over \$500 million in sales. Stan has worked in the publishing, banking, computer hardware and software, business consulting and information products industries.

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