

10 Things You Can Do Right Now to Improve Your Marketing!

by Jay Lipe

Ever wonder what marketing activities, done correctly, make the difference between business success... and failure? Do you puzzle over why your marketing efforts fall short? Are your competitors out-marketing you every time you turn around? The following report lists 10 things you can start doing today to pump life into your marketing efforts.

#1 Talk with 3 of your customers...this week!

We live in an instant world. Instantaneous change. Instant communications. Markets that change overnight. So this instant world demands you engage in an ongoing dialogue with your customers. Information gleaned from this dialogue helps improve your operations, identify opportunities, and sell even more. Frequent customer research:

- Provides information about your market and your competitors
- Generates new product ideas
- Identifies your competitive edges

This information is already in your customers' heads. You have to be the one to get it out! Try this. Call 3 of your best customers—and schedule a lunch, breakfast or a coffee break with them. Then...ask them these 5 questions:

- 1.** What business are we in?
- 2.** What are our greatest strengths?
- 3.** Why do you use us? How have we improved your company?

4. If you could wave a magic wand & change something about (*your company*), what would it be?

5. (complete the sentence) (*Your company*) is the only company where I get...

Armed with answers to these 5 questions, you'll have a base of solid knowledge about your business and its opportunities. Then, make a habit of repeating the process every 9-12 months. Each time, choose a different 3 customers—you'll discover a new set of insights.

Remember...researching customers provides the purest information about your business. Tap into it and you'll stay one step ahead of your competitors.

#2 Write a Marketing Plan

You wouldn't take a car trip to an unknown location without first consulting a roadmap—would you? Then why do so many companies insist upon venturing out into the wilderness (a new market, let's say) without so much as a short plan of attack?!

Writing a marketing plan is the single most important element of your marketing mix. Don't skip this step. Answer the following questions and you'll draw your own roadmap to success.

#1 Set quantifiable goals

- What sales, costs, and profits do I want in 1, 3 and 5 years?

#2 Develop your strategic profile

- What are our business strengths?
- What do our customers rave about?
- What problems must we fix in order to survive & grow?

#3 Identify the marketing target (s) who need your product or service

- Who are my best customers?
- What common characteristics do my best customers share?

- Why do they buy from me?

#4 Develop tactics and a timeline

- What will we do—by when?
- How frequently will we do them (i.e. quarterly newsletters)?
- Who'll make sure it gets done?

With these 4 easy steps, you can write a short, yet effective marketing plan.

If you need more detailed info on writing a marketing plan—order my Special Report entitled “*How to write a winning marketing plan*”.

With a marketing plan you'll get laser-like focus and a resource you can turn to when the phones stop ringing. You'll also get peace-of-mind knowing you've got a plan—more than most other businesses out there!

#3 Work your plan

Even the best marketing plan means nothing unless it's implemented. The acid test of a marketing plan is how well it gets executed. Commit today to work your plan 30 minutes every day. I try to accomplish 1 task from my plan every week. You should too.

Understand that, like any new skill (i.e. golf, riding a bike), you'll face a steep learning curve initially. Practice, practice, practice and you'll work your way up the curve

If you don't have time to execute your plan—hire out this function. Hire a college kid—or a stay-at-home parent looking for something to do—or a qualified marketing person. This ensures you keep your company 'out there'.

Profit from an executed marketing plan and you'll learn a host of new things about your business. For starters, what works, and what doesn't.

#4 Develop a database

Pure and simple, any company these days have a database...and regularly market against it. Marketing's 'Rule of 7' holds that a prospect becomes a customer only after seven 'moments of truth' with a company. These 'moments of truth' are defining points of contact between your company and a prospect. They can be sales calls, publicity articles, advertising impressions, word-of-mouth mentions, etc. (see box at left).

Start keeping a database of customers, prospects, vendors, contacts, friends, relatives...anybody who knows you well enough to vouch for you. Then commit to obtaining 7 'moments of truth' with these people over 18 months.*

Smaller companies can purchase off-the-shelf PC database packages like My Advanced Mail List or ACT! Larger companies can purchase mini, mainframe, or customized software packages. Track name, address, city/state/zip, phone numbers, lead source (or how they came to interact with you initially---i.e. trade show, direct mail, etc), and products/services purchased. This basic information will form the guts of your marketing database.

A marketing database helps foster one-on-one relationships with customers and prospects.

* Dr. Jeffrey Lant first made me aware of this marketing truth. For more, see his book [Tricks of the Trade](#).

Common 'moments of truth' with your company

- Talking with a receptionist
- Making contact via voicemail
- Reading an article about you
- Seeing a yellow pages ad
- Being put on hold
- Reading a brochure
- Getting a calling card
- Networking with an employee
- Receiving a direct mail piece

#5 Focus on communicating benefits

24 hour hot-lines. Overnight delivery. 10 gigabytes of memory. What do these things mean to the red-hot prospect—**NOTHING!** That's because they're all features. Features give the prospect details about the product. But they don't indicate what the prospect gains from the product. Those are benefits and they're what the prospect really listens for. For example:

"Save \$1,000 over the course of a year."

"Contact us when it works into your schedule."

"Store even the largest files and never worry about available storage."

These are benefits and they turn a prospect's head. If you're unsure how to link features or benefits—try this exercise. First, write down a phrase (i.e. legal services). Then ask yourself “What does the prospect really get?” (i.e. fewer headaches, elimination of wasted time, monetary gain). Then link the two with the phrase ‘You get’.

The result would be “When you use our legal services, you get fewer headaches, saved time and a possible financial windfall.”

To get a prospect's undivided attention, you must say what they need to hear. Communicate benefits and their ears will perk up!

#6 Identify your best customers...

If you picked apart your business, chances are you'd find 80% of your sales come from 20% of your customers. But do you know exactly which customers represent this 20%? If you don't—you should.

Analyze all customers for total sales over the last 12 months. Rank them in descending order. Then, identify those customers who've purchased more than once from you (note: this measure will vary for different businesses—maybe it's those customers who've purchased 3 times...5 times...monthly).

Using these two gauges, you'll identify your top customers—or *champions*. Note these champions. What similarities do they share? Are they in the same industry? Same geographic area? Once you know who your champions are—learn everything about them you can. Why do they do business with you? How do they prefer to buy from you? What problems of theirs do you solve? This information will be used to find more prospects just like them.

The best method of targeting is to find out who your best customers are—then find others just like them.

5 Ways to Recognize Your Champions

- #1 List their names in a direct mail piece
- #2 Write them a thank you letter
- #3 Give them special discounts
- #4 Picture them in a sales flyer
- #5 Send them a gift certificate

#7 ...then market to them differently!

Since these 20% of customers contribute the lion's share of your sales, you need to reward them. Why? Because you want them to keep purchasing from you. And referring business to you. And advertising

your business through word-of-mouth. These champions are your *ambassadors*, and you don't want your competitors to get their mitts on them!

Send them a thank you note! Give them preferred discounts. Announce new products to them first—before announcing to the general public. Give them 'sneak previews' of new products. Whatever the method, lavish your attention upon them—they deserve it.

If you market properly to them, they'll feel like you're sharing 'secrets' with them. In turn, they'll share a little secret (i.e. your business) with others!

Treat your best customers differently...like the champions they are.

#8 Use voicemail as a marketing weapon

Don't just tell with your voicemail...market with it!

Instead of saying:

"Hi this is XYZ Company...please leave a message"

Change it to say:

"Hi, this is XYZ Company, the marketing company whose solutions save you time & money. Please leave a message...and ask us about our new special report entitled "The 7 Most Common Marketing Mistakes (and what you can do to avoid them!)"

Do you see what I've done in the second example? I've turned the message from a boring monologue into a dynamic selling dialogue. I've further clarified exactly what benefits I offer you ("save you time & money"), educated you about a product I offer and suggested you ask me about it.

I do this on my voicemail, and I'm surprised at the number of callers who request more information—or even buy off the voicemail.

Latest statistics show that the vast majority of business calls reach voicemail. This is a huge marketing opportunity for you. If 80% of your customers & prospects are a captive audience of yours for one minute—shouldn't you commit some of that time to marketing them?

Also, don't forget to mention your website address in your voicemail. We've been doing this for several years and I'm pleasantly

surprised how many people check out our website after hearing about it on our voicemails.

Change your voicemail today and make it market your business.

9 Eliminate 1 marketing task each year

I can't count the number of overworked & stressed out marketers I've seen in the last 15 years. Much of the reason for this is because more is added to their plates daily (the test launch in Albuquerque, new packaging for the XYZ line, updated computer database system), yet nothing is removed. In short, this is a prescription for burnout.

Stop this madness at once, and identify 1 task today you can eliminate. Then, jettison it. All too often, top brass (or you) get used to doing something again and again (i.e. management reports, staff meetings), yet there's no apparent benefit.

What everyone's forgotten is that someone (read YOU) sinks boatloads of time into these tasks, without any benefit. Identify one task a year that makes no sense to you. Then eliminate this time-waster and free up time for more critical marketing tasks.

Each year, eliminate 1 task. Your health depends upon it!

#10 Understand your company's value as a distribution channel

I'm willing to bet your customers are just like mine—they have too many things on their to-do lists. And they lack the in-house resources to get them done. Consequently, they're looking for 'go-to vendors'.

Customers align themselves with 'go-to vendors' for the express purpose of accomplishing many critical tasks. In my business, clients look to me for expertise in writing marketing plans, developing innovative strategies, launching a marketing program, analyzing the program's return—and dozens more.

The more projects they can outsource to me, the more they can concentrate on their core competencies.

You can do the same for your customers. Ask them what other projects—in your area of expertise—they need help with. Then, offer to get them done. Doing the work yourself, subbing out the work, even

referring the right person, all strengthen your bond with that customer. And that means the customer views you as a go-to-vendor!

Identify with your customers what other tasks they need to get done. Then work to take it off their to-do list.

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