



Veterans Business Association

Vets Helping Vets - "Building Partnerships for success"

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Marketing 101 – El Paso Style

Some things that you won't find in textbooks are found in practical applications that can help establish your business in the marketplace or expand an existing business.

Every business needs customers – if you have a product or service to offer, someone has to want to buy what you have to offer. Finding customers is a challenge for any business whether retail, service, contractor, or business to business. Helping customers find your business (when they need it) and leave satisfied with their purchase is the key to a successful marketing campaign. Some of the work of finding customers can be done through researching potential customer profiles. Some of the work is just old fashioned horse sense.

Just what is marketing? There are many answers to the basic question of “*What is Marketing?*”

The most simple answer demonstrates the complexity of the puzzle:

The 4 P's of marketing – ***Product*** – What are you offering? A product or a service?
Price – Is it cost effective? Is it competitively priced?
Place – Where can the customer buy your product or service?
Promotion – How can they find your product among all the others in the marketplace?

Some folks would also add - ***Packaging*** – How attractive is your product to a buyer?

Remember, you want to make it easy for the customer to give you his or her money!

A better definition says that “***everything*** a business does to bring a product or service to its customers” is marketing.

Business advisors will tell you that every business needs a sound business plan to succeed.

Business planning is stressed as a key factor of success whether it is committed to writing or a conceptual plan in the mind of the business owner. Marketing plans are traditionally contained within the pages of a business plan may be created separately.

All businesses need a well crafted marketing plan.

Most small business owners think of advertising when they think of marketing, which is only one element of marketing. Beginning with graphics, logos, color schemes for product design, and shelf displays in retail locations, the definition of what is marketing is always blurry.

Advertising and promotion helps present your business to the world and should always be part of your marketing efforts. However, many small business owners are too busy running their business as chief cook and bottle washer to understand the value of setting time aside to learn the power of marketing.

Even a business run on a shoe string budget can benefit from marketing.

One of the most important steps that a small business owner can take is to sit down with a cup of coffee and prepare a ***strength and weakness analysis*** of their business and then compare the results with their largest competitor.

Who/What/Why are good questions to ask your self:

Who are you?

What do you sell?

Why would someone buy from you?

Who are your customers?

What products (or service) are they buying?

Why would they buy from you?

Knowledgeable and friendly staff equals good customer service – good customer service equals good customer relations – good customer relations equals strong customer appreciation and fosters repeat business.

Again, the goal of a well crafted marketing plan is to help your customers find your business, have a good experience, and leave satisfied.

Logos, well designed business cards, letterhead and envelopes, vehicle markings, storefront signage, employee uniforms, cups and pens with your company identification (known as advertising specialties) – these are all forms of marketing that should not be ignored.

An example of poor emphasis on marketing would be the contractor going down the road in a beat up pickup truck – lots of rust and faded paint and worn out name and phone numbers on the sides. Would you be tempted to call these folks for a quote or to hire them for your business?

A clean, well maintained vehicle with clear company information and phone number becomes a moving billboard as you drive around town and invites potential customers to contact you.

Advertising and promotions go hand in hand with any marketing effort. Exactly what is effective advertising? What are the different types of advertising? What is best for your business? Can you market your business by yourself or do you need the help of a professional?

Most sales people in advertising use a simple cost-per-impression to show business owners how little it costs to advertise with their company. What does that mean to you?

There are several schools of thought on approaches to advertising – **mass marketing** or **target marketing** – do you use a shotgun approach to reach a large number of potential customers and hope some of them will buy your product? Or, do you use a rifle approach to hit specific customers that would be interested in your product?

Some traditional mass marketing advertising methods would be:

Billboards – outdoor advertising – these can be seen by thousands every day. How many of those drivers would be interested in your product? The cost per impression is low if the billboard is located on a busy highway and the number of customers you attract may be low as well.

Newspapers - print ads reach thousands every day as well - but how valuable is the ad once the reader turns the page? Again, the cost per impression is low but the returns may also be low.

Yellow page listings sit quiet waiting for potential customers to pick up the book to search for specific products or services. The cost per impression may be higher, but the returns may be higher as well.

Ask yourself – is your business better off with a billboard or a yellow page ad?

Television and cable advertising can reach even larger audiences. Is your business limited to a geographical area? Eastside, downtown, etc? Why spend money reaching people who will not buy your product? What are the demographics of your customers and what are the demographics of the television and cable channel viewers?

Target marketing is a more narrow approach to reaching out to only those potential customers that would actually buy your product or service.

An example of a shotgun approach would be a home décor retailer using newspaper advertising in a special home section to reach households across the city.

An example of a rifle approach would be a commercial real estate broker advertising in the real estate section of a local business trade publication read by business owners and managers. Placing ads in a specialty magazine such as the Golden Pages if you are selling goods and services to seniors is another example of target marketing.

Special promotions are also effective marketing tools – hosting events or sales around holidays or seasonal activities in your community will also enhance sales.

Selling big screen TV's at discounted prices prior to the Super Bowl – starting heaters or coolers or shut down specials, etc.

Think winter, spring, summer and fall and put yourself in the shoes of your customers. You can bring in customers during a slow period using a promotion to attract their attention.

How can you help pay for advertising or a special promotion? Look into co-operative advertising. If you sell a well recognized national branded product or if you are a regional or local representative for a national brand, they may have a co-operative marketing program where they pay some or all of the cost of your billboard, TV, or print ads.

Some not-so-traditional forms of marketing would be networking through chambers of commerce, local trade groups, trade shows, and hosting community events. Give away's to local charities or school groups using your products or services as a fundraiser is also a good way to generate recognition and sales for you business. Taking advantage of fundraising effort by local public television and radio is also a great way to reach unique audiences.

Social Networking: New for the 21st Century is the social networking phenomenon. Programs such as Twitter and Facebook, Skype, and smart phone applications, can take your promotions directly to individual customers. Google ads are relatively inexpensive and give your business a wide exposure that can be tailored to a geographical area.

A quick recap of marketing 101:

**Everything that your business does to bring your product
or service to your customer is marketing!**

The key to successful marketing is taking the time to find out what are your strengths and weaknesses. Use your strengths to differentiate your business from the competition and define your marketing. Then choose the form of advertising and promotion that best fits you company and best targets your customers.