

Businesses Marketing Research

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Introduction

Marketing is a management process. It involves researching, identifying and satisfying customer requirements in a profitable manner. When one is conducting a business, it is important to have a marketing strategy to advance sales and make sure that the reputation of the business is good. In short, Marketing is about letting consumers and customers know what the business does, what the business sells and what values it represents. A good marketing strategy will drive customers to the business and will enable the business to make a profit.

In order to successfully market a business, several steps must be taken. Creating a marketing strategy and business plan is the first step. By outlining what a business does, what the business goals are and how the business plans to achieve these goals is crucial to forming a marketing strategy. The next step is fleshing out the vision and mission of the business. Understanding what the business represents will enable the creation of a brand that can be marketed with slogans and a logo.

Once a brand is built, it is important to have an understanding of the type of people that will be interested in your business. Factors like age, location, ethnicity, and income level all come into play when marketing a business. After finalizing a target demographic, marketing tools like social media, affiliate marketing, web marketing and others must be used to get the business noticed by potential customers.

Marketing does not end with getting the message out to consumers. Business must track the results of their marketing efforts to see what strategies work for them and which ones don't. Furthermore, businesses must engage with their customers and provide reasons why customers should continue to interact with the business. These points are explored in detail below, and provide reasons, tips and evidence of why these steps should be followed when it comes to marketing a business.

Branding, Vision and Mission

The first step in marketing for business is to create a clear business plan. By definition, a business plan is a document that acts as a manual. It outlines what exactly the business is about, what practices the business undertakes, what the businesses ultimate goal is and what some suggested landmarks for achieving these goals are. A business plan acts as a planning tool that helps business owners assess their goals and decisions. The business plan also helps to frame potential marketing plan.

According to Marketing Your Business, a marketing plan “forms part of your business plan, and presents a step-by-step guide to how you intend to implement the marketing elements of your business plan”. A marketing plan therefore serves as an off-shoot of the business plan, and helps business owners to see their ideas taking shape.

Once the business plan and marketing plan have been outlined, business owners will have a clearer view of what the company is all about. This is known as the “mission” of the company. Every company should have a mission statement that tells consumers what their brand stands for. Additionally, companies must also have a vision. The vision is what the company hopes to achieve with their business, and how they plan to bring about change in their chosen field.

Once a company has its mission and vision, they must concentrate on branding their company based on their mission statement and their vision. According to Greg

Stine, President of Polaris, Inc., “Branding is creating that individual niche in the consumer’s psyche and owning it. More than just marketing, branding is the entire effect that creates a memorable identity”. A successful branding program is based on differentiating a company as unique. Effective branding creates the perception that a business is unique in their mission, vision and services or goods provided. A well branded company shows that although competitors may sell the same goods or provide the same services, they do not have the same values or mission, function, form, price, convince or other service as the company in question.

The next step in branding is coming up with a slogan and logo that represents the business. A slogan, “should be a statement of such merit about a product or service that it is worthy of continuous repetition in advertising, is worthwhile for the public to remember, and is phrased in such a way that the public is likely to remember it” (Foster, 2001). Examples of memorable slogans include Rich Coffee’s ‘get Rich quick’, Tic Tac’s ‘Tic Tac: Surely the best tactic’, and Impulse deodorant’s ‘You can’t help acting on Impulse’ (Foster, 2001). A logo is a graphic that is used by a business or organization to promote their brand. Logos can be entirely graphic oriented, or may include the name of the business in their graphic. Logos are an important marketing tool because easily recognizable logos help to form

associations in people's minds. Easily recognizable logos are easy to market.

In other words, a company's brand is the image the consumers see from the outside. It displays the strength, integrity and reputation of the company.

Audience and Demographics

The next step in marketing is to determine what audience the business is marketing to. Is the product being manufactured by a business something that more men tend to use or a product that more women tend to use? What mean age group will use the product being manufactured? How expensive is the product?

Some business owners may want to market their product to everyone – the more consumers, the better for business. However, more often than not, not targeting a specific audience for a product or service results in unnecessary expenses and low results. As Stine states in The Nine Principles of Branding, “It's easy to fall victim to trying to be everything to everyone”. Stine goes on to explain that companies tend to try

to brand themselves as something that everyone can enjoy. This happens the most with “emerging companies that don't yet know what product or service is going to sell best, or established companies that once had a focus and are now trying to corner the market on everything”. Therefore it is important for business owners to know what their product is and what demographic the product appeals to.

To identify and understand a target market, business owners need to research how their potential customers behave, what their motivations are, and what their consumer preferences are. As “You also need to know what your customers want. Don't confuse need and want. How many times have you gone to the supermarket because you needed milk and bread – and emerged with a frozen Chinese meal, ice cream, a bottle of wine and some crisps. We forget what we need, but we buy what we want”. Finding out what consumers want and marketing a product to them as something they want rather than what they need is key.

The best way to find out what customers want is to look at a business through the eyes of a customer. Business owners need to assess whether they would buy their own products, if they would be happy with every aspect of the consumer process when it comes to the product in question, and whether the product being offered is something that is wanted instead of needed.

The first step to finding out what kinds of people will become customers for a business is to assess whom the product or service being offered is most valuable to. For example, if a company sells homeowner insurance, the target market is people who own their own property – people who do not own

their own property are unlikely to buy homeowner insurance and therefore do not need to be marketed to. The more detailed information that can be gathered by the business, the better the business will be able to identify and market to potential customers.

There are many questions that business owners can ask when narrowing down their demographic. Once such question is how old should the average customer be and what is their income level? For example, if a company is manufacturing cars, they should target customers no younger than sixteen years of age. Another question that business owners should be prepared to answer before marketing their product is the question of location. Where is the business located and where are the customers of the business located? If a business operates primarily in the United States, is it profitable to market outside the company? Unless the business offers worldwide shipping on products, the answer to this question would be no.

Business owners can get answers to such questions by issuing surveys, questionnaires or putting together market research groups that focus solely on audience and demographic information. Another way to find out more about who potential customers for a business are is to study the competition. If there is a similar business that sells similar products, chances are that customers of that business are potential customers for any other business within the field. For example, a business starting a comic book company that publishes comic books about superheroes should likely study companies like Marvel and D.C, as well as customers who buy comics published by these companies.

While studying competitors, it is also a good idea to assess if there is an audience for your product. Will introducing your product or company into the market entice customers to divide their attention between a company and its competitors, or even perhaps abandon another company for a new one? How much of an existing audience already exists for a product?

Having an existing audience could make or break a business. For example, film production companies have started producing web series' by the dozen to the point where there are hundreds of web series' and not enough of an audience. But for a show like 'The Lizzie Bennett Diaries', creator Hank Green not only decided to base the content of the show on Jane Austen's 'Pride & Prejudice', which already has its own existing audience, but he marketed the show to their own existing audience as well. In her article for Yahoo.com, Rachel Poletick writes, "Part of 'LBD's' success was that it grew an audience out of the VlogBrothers' existing fandom. Fans of Hank Green's vlogs flocked to 'The Lizzie Bennett Diaries' and became advocates for the series, spreading it around on social media and among friends, as well as engaging with it on their own time" (Poletick, 2013). In 2013, the show went on to win an Emmy award, proving that something with good content that is marketed well can truly stand out from the competition.

Surveys & Budgets

The brand has been established and the business has narrowed down the audience it wants to market to. What's the next step?

Surveying a focus group of the narrowed-down audience to determine who buys what is a great place to start. A market survey is a collection of questions posed from the business to potential customers to see if the business proposal included in a company's business plan holds true. Surveys are an important requirement for initiating any successful business, because they provide valuable information the business owners as far as their goals are concerned. After the results of a survey are gathered, businesses often restructure their business plans to include the results of the survey so that they can better serve customers as well as minimize the risk of capital loss. Surveys help business owners obtain information about the size of the market they wish to sell to, the amount and pattern of demand for the product or service the business is offering, the buying habits and motives of their selected audience and the past and present trends for other types of products in the market.

An example of a survey resource for businesses is the Amazon Mechanical Turk program. Amazon Mechanical Turk provides businesses the opportunity to compile human intelligence tasks (HIT's) that are then sent to survey takers. Survey takers get a small amount of money for each survey they take. The business providing the HIT decides the amount per survey. Business owners can customize whom they want to take their survey based on the survey takers' expertise and history. According to the Mechanical Turk website, business owners can also use "System Qualifications provided by Mechanical Turk, such as location or approval rating" ("Mechanical Turk Service Summary", 2014). Business owners also only pay for the result of the survey if they approve the conditions of the HIT – if they believe the survey taker does not meet the criteria or has not filled out the survey accurately, the business can 'reject' the hit, and not pay for it. As the website states, "The scale, flexibility, and cost advantages of Mechanical Turk allow developers to create new applications and business models that were previously practically impossible. Whether it's search results enhanced with human input, automated content moderation, or distributed media transcription, companies are relying on human judgment and Mechanical Turk to power a whole new class of applications" ("Mechanical Turk Service Summary", 2014). Businesses like Mechanical Turk show the importance of surveys for business.

Once the results of a survey have been collected, the next step is to analyze those results to determine whether the business can afford marketing strategies that will fulfill the requests of the customers. For example, if many customers have indicated that they mostly respond to large billboard type advertising, the company must assess if billboard advertising is in their budget. Small businesses

may not be able to afford expensive advertising. This is where marketing budgets come into play. Marketing budgets not only outline what a company can afford, but also what amount is absolutely necessary to spend in order to reach a business's target market. Survey results help businesses become aware of the various marketing options they have – online advertising, media, word-of-mouth and P.R. But once the business is aware of the different marketing strategies that can be used, the next step is determining whether the business can afford to use these strategies and how much they need to spend to be able to use them.

Advertising & Marketing Strategies

According to Marketing for Business, “94% of consumers research products online before buying, and three out of five people use search engines as a go-to shopping resource”. This means that the internet is a key means for consumers to access products.

The introduction of the internet into our society means that search engines and social media control a large portion of business marketing. This has opened up a whole new world of online advertising and marketing. In today's world, there are several tools available, both online and offline, to help a company market their product or service.

The first place that most businesses start is to place advertisements in local listings and classifieds. However, it is not enough to just create a business listing online or in the classifieds so that people can find you. Advertising is getting a business out there – marketing is getting it out there in the right way to the right audience. For example, some listing websites allow businesses to promote offers such as sales and new products. The text, images and logos used in these promotion offers market the product or business to potential customers.

Another method used to advertise a product and consequently market the business that sells the product is search advertising. Search advertising means choosing keywords that relate to your business and making sure that your business comes up as one of the first results in a web search. As with listing an advertisement in a classified, a successful business marketer will ensure that the text or slogan that comes up below the company name in the search results markets the business as the best possible place to find what the consumer who typed in the search keywords is looking for.

Next, we have contextual advertisements. These types of advertisements require exceptional marketing knowledge and audience strategy. For example, if a business sells cameras, the marketing department of the business will likely research websites that are related to filmmaking and photography,

so that contextual advertisements can be placed on those websites. This is because people visiting filmmaking or photography related websites are more likely to buy a camera than people on a website in completely unrelated field.

Along with targeting specific interests, another marketing strategy would be to connect with new customers through group programs. Group programs offer special discounts or offers to multiple buyers that are interesting in securing a deal. This strategy not only gets more customers interested in the business, but also makes the business more money on a product that may not have been doing well in an individual market.

Perhaps the most important marketing strategy today is social media marketing. Websites like Twitter and Facebook and even YouTube, offer businesses the chance to share updates and developments with their customers. Through “sharing”, “liking” and “following”, people spread the word about businesses to their friends and family, increasing revenue and exposure for the business. According to an article in the *MiamiHerald*, Businesses “need to understand how their target audiences use social platforms. Consumers are most likely to “follow” a company on Facebook or Twitter after they’ve already bought from that firm — meaning some social media platforms work better for engaging and retaining customers. Others, like Google Plus, provide opportunities to reach out to prospects by influencing Google Search, where potential customers scout for offerings” (Krischler-Goodman, 2014). In fact, social media marketing is so important that “Approximately 46 percent of business leaders said they plan to increase their social media budgets in 2014” (Krischler-Goodman, 2014). The growing importance of social media is a key factor in marketing strategies for businesses today.

Lastly, affiliate marketing is a strategy that helps businesses unite and help each other. An affiliate website may help drive traffic to the businesses site and in the process, gain some customers themselves. Affiliate marketing allows businesses to reach potential customers in their market that they may not have been reaching before. For example, many credit card companies affiliate themselves with certain businesses to offer cash back or discounts to customers for purchasing at the businesses they are affiliated with. This provides a win-win situation for both the credit card company and the affiliated business – the discounted offer encourages the credit card customer to shop more at the affiliated business than they would if there was no discount offered. By looking at the strategies outlined above, we see that advertising in the right way to the right people using marketing strategies that work for the business are important steps to creating a successful and profitable business.

Measuring Your Results

Once the message is out there and people are responding to advertisements, the results of the marketing strategies used must be measured. Measuring results is important because the results of marketing and advertising will tell business owners the best places to spend their marketing budget and how to refine their marketing strategies. If an affiliate site or classified ad is producing no results for the company, it would be unwise to spend more money on advertising on these sites.

When marketing online, there are several ways to easily assess the success of a marketing campaign. How many people clicked on the ad? How many of those people actually bought a product because of an ad they saw online? There are several marketing programs that help business owners to assess and refine their marketing strategies.

First, there's website analytics. These analytics help businesses dig into their visitor data to see where most of their customers heard about them. The way to measure this data is to measure how many people actually bought a product or service from the company rather than how many people clicked on the ad or visited the website. For example, an affiliate website that delivers six people that became actual consumers is more valuable than a website that brought in a hundred visitors that didn't go on to buy anything from the company.

Next, we have the concept of click through. Click through's measure the rate at which people clicked on the company's ad online. The value of click through measurement is that it will tell business owners which affiliate website or classified placed their ad in the strongest area of the website. The placement and overall look of the ad is important when it comes to clickthroughs. People are more likely to click on a well-made ad that is placed on the homepage of an affiliate site rather than a small, cluttered ad placed in a small corner of an affiliate's page.

Finally, the success of a marketing campaign can be measured in conversions. Conversions are a hybrid between analytics and clickthroughs. Conversions measure how many people who clicked through to the website became a potential consumer.

This is measured not only by whether they ended up buying something from the business, but also if they signed up for the newsletter, recommended the site to a friend or share the website over social media. Conversions are important because they help businesses track potential customers who may not yet be consumers, but are likely to become consumers in the future.

Customer relationship management (CRM)

Once a potential consumer has become a customer, businesses must be prepared to invest resources to maintain an ongoing, and profitable relationship with the customer. Reaching and acquiring new customers is just the beginning. The real challenge is keeping customers loyal to the company and making sure they don't stop being a customer one day and start being a customer of the competition instead. Part of customer relationship management is also making sure that the customers keep being interested in products and services offered by the business. Customer relationship management is crucial to the long-term survival of a business.

A example of a company that is excellent in customer service management is Amazon. According to an article on Forbes, "As the world's largest online retailer, Amazon has been a driving force behind the e-commerce movement and changing standards for customer service excellence. Some of the words consumers used in their reasons to nominate Amazon for Customers' Choice included "efficient," "fast," "reliable," "no hassle," "easy," and of course, "free shipping" (Goodfellow, 2012). This shows us that Amazon is a company that completely understands what customer relationship management is all about.

The key to customer relationship management is maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship between the business and the customer that is sustained over a long period of time. In order to help create this value, businesses must treat their customers as unique individuals. The better a business treats a customer, the more loyal the customer will stay. This is why customer service employees at businesses are constantly going through customer service training – the value in providing good customer service is so that the business does not lose customers.

Each customer has their own need for the product the business is providing, and wants that involve improvement of the product they own. When a business doesn't meet the needs and wants of a customer, the business stops representing value to the customer, and the customer starts buying a different product from a competitor.

From the business perspective, customers represent various levels of value to a company. Businesses can maximize their profits by analyzing which customers are the most valuable customers, and subsequently devising ways to keep them interested in order to keep these customers loyal to the business. If the business finds that some customer relationships are not mutually beneficial, and that certain customers provide little or no value to the business, these customers can be taken out of the target

market to which advertising and marketing strategies are being applied.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Marketing is vital to the success of an organization. A well-executed marketing plan can help business secure new customers, retain existing customers and expand their market range to a wider audience. Marketing starts at the very beginning of the organizations conception. The very concept of what a business is and what it represents is the heart of marketing – building a brand and a name for the business. Businesses cannot function without a consumer base to sell to, and they cannot sell products to their consumer base without marketing their product.

The recommendation put forth in this paper, supported by research on the subject of marketing is for businesses to follow all the steps outlined, from creating outlines and business plans to consumer relationship management and everything in-between. Following these steps means that the business in question will likely see results in profit, and an increase in customers

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