

The Small Town Marketing Plan

Getting Started

Now that we've established a small town perspective with the Small Town 101 section, let's look at the parts of the marketing plan, and how to use each one.

What is a marketing plan, anyway? You may be saying, "I thought I just needed a business plan." A marketing plan is part of your overall business plan. I usually recommend that 30 percent of your business plan should be devoted to how you are going to market your business. Your marketing plan is one major area that investment bankers take a very close look at before lending you any money. They are very curious to know how you plan to attract customers, make sales, make a profit, and pay back their investment in your business.

You will use some of the information from the business plan in your marketing plan, but the marketing plan is usually its own entity within the business plan. If you don't have a business plan started, begin assembling the information today.

2 How to Promote Your Business

SCORE, “Counselors to America’s Small Business,” offers free help to get you started. You will find a free business plan template at www.score.org. If there isn’t a SCORE office near you, the organization has over 1,000 counselors available online. Find them by asking your local chamber of commerce or checking the SCORE web site.

Also, check out your local Small Business Development Center (SBDC). The local SBDCs are part of the Small Business Administration and are prepaid with your tax dollars. You can find the nearest office at www.sba.gov (or Google “SBDC,” followed by your state). These offices are in most large cities throughout the United States.

If you are in a smaller town that lacks these advisory groups, create your own set of coaches by taking retired or local business leaders out for coffee. Pick their brains in a methodical manner. These are the people who have successfully done what you want to do and made a profit doing it. Their experience and expertise can save you hundreds, even thousands of dollars in mistakes you might have made without their advice.

The last part of your business plan will deal with your financial condition. These numbers are critical to your business success. If you are anything like me, you are definitely not a numbers person. A balance sheet, profit and loss statement, and cash flow projections are financial information that banks are going to want to see before giving you a loan.

Where do you start, and how can you predict sales figures for something you’ve never done before? If you are unsure of how to arrive at these numbers, SCORE and your local Small Business Development Center can help you put the numbers together. They have ratios of how much a landscaping business or a day care center should make in its first year. They can give you industry norms on the percentages certain types of businesses spend on advertising, inventory, and payroll. The online SCORE business plan outline or template, mentioned earlier, contains Excel spreadsheets, complete with formulas. Just fill in the blanks, and it will do the math for you. When

you have your financial statements and projections completed, you can move on to the marketing plan.

Where do we start?

We start with you. You must sit down and really look at yourself, and your business, as you never have before. This is the most difficult part of the marketing plan. We never let anyone really see the real us. You must be completely honest with yourself about who you are, and where you're going.

A Little Information Is a Dangerous Thing

Before customers enter into a relationship with a business, quite naturally, they want to know something about that business. That's where a marketing plan starts. Who are you? Why would customers want to do business with you? In addition, you need to know every aspect of your business before you can prepare your advertising and target those customers. Here's how to start.

If you were looking for a job and saw an ad in the classifieds, what questions would you ask yourself? The first question would probably be: "Am I qualified to do this job based on the job description?" If the answer is yes, you put together a resume and request an interview to present your qualifications to your prospective employer.

Business operates in a similar manner. You need a complete description of your business (business resume) that can be presented to qualified customers (your potential employer) in the form of an advertising message that will cause them to buy your products (hire you).

The next chapter covers the types of things that should be included in your business resume.

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