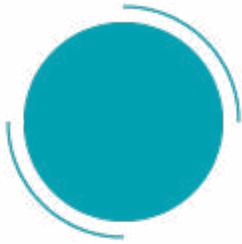




MARKETING RESOURCES

Strategic Marketing



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Chapter One: What Is Strategic Marketing?

The difference between marketing and strategic marketing is like the difference between a carton of eggs and an omelet. Technically they're pretty much the same thing, but the omelet is the result of using the eggs in a planned, structured way to achieve a specific result.

By that same token, strategic marketing isn't just about the raw ingredients — the various campaigns and channels that you use to market your company on a day to day basis. It's a long-term, multi-channel, planned approach to growing your business and gaining a competitive advantage.

Strategic marketing takes into account every facet of your marketing presence. There's the content creation side of things, whether it's social media content, marketing emails, blogs, or pillar pages (like this one!) There's the behind-the-scenes work, like branding and buyer persona development. There are the logistical concerns, like SEO and sales-marketing alignment. Not to mention advertising, collateral, and any number of other marketing goals.

The point of a strategic marketing plan is to unite all of those myriad marketing efforts under one single, coherent umbrella. You should be able to point to each end every aspect of your marketing work and be able to articulate why you're doing it, how it ties back into the broader strategy, and how it's lifting you above your competition.

Chapter Two: The Foundation

You can't build a strong house on sand — you need a solid foundation to support it. You can't build a good marketing strategy without knowing your brand, your customers, and your business.

Who Are You?

[Your brand is critical](#). It's who you are in the minds of your customers. It's the promise you make to them and the personality you put forward. In the minds

of the public, your business is your brand.

There's a marketing concept called "The Golden Circle" that explains this well. The outermost layer of the circle is the "what," — what you actually do or sell. The next layer inward is the "how," which describes what makes you different from your competition. The core layer is the "why," and that layer is the most important.

Your "why" is your reason for being. It's the reason you founded this company, the reason you work there, the reason you get up in the morning — and "to turn a profit" doesn't count. You're not going to be the only company in the game doing "what" you do, and you might not be the only one doing it "how" you do it. The "why" has to make you unique.

When you establish your brand identity, the next step is to put it everywhere. We don't mean buying up every billboard and bus ad in the city — this is about consistency, not quantity. It takes five to seven points of contact with your brand for a potential customer to start to remember it, and even then they need constant reminders.

Think about Coca-Cola. Is there a person on earth who doesn't know what Coca-Cola is right now? Maybe, but not very many of them. And yet Coca-Cola's messaging of nostalgia, community, family, and sharing a good time with friends is everywhere.

Whether you're seeing ads on TV, hearing them on the radio, or scrolling past them in your Facebook feed, the messaging is consistent. You might not be able to articulate what Coca-Cola sounds like exactly, but you'd notice if something felt off. Owning a steady message from top to bottom, at every point of contact, is what has made Coca-Cola one of the most memorable brands of all time.

Who Is Your Customer?

Once you know who you are, what you do, and why you do it — and only after you've figured all that out — you can start to take a hard look at who your

customers are. This is where the concept of buyer personas comes in.

[A buyer persona is a fictionalized version of your ideal customer.](#) It's similar to the idea of a "target market," but it's a little more complex than that. While a target market is a slice of the real world that you'd like to sell to, a buyer persona is more nuanced.

The first step is to think of the broad-strokes characteristics of your buyer persona. Age and income level are important to consider — there's a reason Mercedes-Benz doesn't spend any energy marketing to teenagers. Narrowing down your buyer persona by large categories can keep your message focused and your budget efficient.

Another broad characteristic that lots of marketers forget about is location. If you do your business in person, there's no point in marketing to people who are too far for you to reach. Even if you do business online, like software sales, location matters. For example, do you have staff who can speak languages other than English? Are you available for customer service when other time zones are awake?

Once you have the big questions out of the way, your buyer personas start to get a little more interesting. Think about your ideal customer — lots of businesses even come up with a name for this imagined person, so let's call him Bob. What are Bob's interests? What are his hobbies? What TV shows and movies does he watch? How often does he go out to eat?

Some of these questions might not seem directly relevant to your company, but the idea is to shape a picture of who this Bob person is. Does he read reviews of restaurants online before he goes there? Does he get annoyed when shipping isn't free? Would he rather talk on the phone or by instant message?

Let's take Gatorade as an example. Think of the Gatorade commercials you've seen. Sweaty, chiseled young people running up flights of stairs in the blazing sun, professional athletes, Olympians, and the like. Gatorade's buyer persona is a serious, dedicated athlete — the kind of person who runs with a

headlamp because they'd rather run in the dark than skip a day.

Does that mean that every Gatorade customer is a seasoned triathlete? Of course not. But that persona informs how Gatorade presents itself to the world at every turn.

When these buyer personas are properly built out, they will inform every phase of your marketing. The more questions you can answer about your hypothetical person, the better you'll be able to hold up new marketing ideas and answer the question, "would Bob like this?" Everything you do will run through that filter, helping you reach exactly the right people at exactly the right time.

When Is The Right Time To Market To People?

[The buyer's journey](#) is aptly named – it's the process that a buyer goes through, beginning as a stranger who's never heard of you and ending as a loyal customer. There are several phases of that journey, and it's important that you know how to tailor your messaging accordingly.

The **awareness phase** is the phase at which you turn strangers into visitors. Your primary goal is to make people aware of you and your brand with high-level content like blogs and social posts. It's not about convincing them to buy or even convincing them that you're better than your competition – you're just trying to get on their radar.

The **consideration phase** is about turning visitors into leads. In the consideration phase, you're appealing to people who already know they have a problem that needs to be solved. At this phase, your primary goal is to address that problem and show that you have answers. Think about your personas! What questions is your customer likely to have, and how can you answer them?

The **decision phase** is where you turn leads into customers. The shopper has identified a problem, and they're comparing solutions. If you've had a few good points of contact with them up to this point, you're on the list! This

is the part where you can do a little bragging — talk about features, pricing, convenience, or whatever else makes you the best choice among your competition.

Let's take an example: say you sell premium foam mattresses. If you go up to a stranger on the street and offer them a thousand-dollar mattress, they're going to scoff at you. You're not respecting the journey.

To capture people in the awareness phase, you write blog posts like “5 Secrets To A Better Night's Sleep” or “Why 31 Million Americans Have Chronic Back Pain.” Customers who haven't been sleeping well or have back pain, but aren't sure why, will find these articles and start to think a mattress is a possible solution to their problem.

Once they're on your site, link from those original articles to ones called “How A New Mattress Can Improve Your Life” and “Stressed At Work? It's Probably Your Mattress.” Now that your visitors have identified their problem — they're not sleeping well — you can present a mattress as a solution.

The final group is customers in the decision phase — they know they want a better mattress, they just don't know how to pick one. That's when you talk about your quality materials, how the cover is easy to wash, free shipping, a 100-night trial, or whatever else distinguishes you from the competition.

Chapter Three: The Walls

Now that the foundation of your house is built — you know who you are, and you know who you're talking to — you can start to build on top of it. In marketing terms, this means building up a strategy, growing your digital footprint, and starting to convert leads in to paying customers.

Developing A Social Media Strategy

It's 2018, and you can't ignore social media anymore. That's probably been true for a few years now, but there are some companies who still think that social media won't help them, based on what they do or their target market.

They're wrong – [everyone's on social media](#), and you need to be able to reach them effectively.

You also need to be able to reach them where they are, and that means taking a multi-channel approach. This doesn't mean using the channels that you like, it means using the channels that they like.

You might think LinkedIn is a glorified resume builder, but if you're selling B2B, you need to be active. And you might never have seen the appeal of Snapchat or Twitter, but today's youth sure have. If you're selling to teenagers, you'll have to learn how to use them.

Regardless of your platform, you'll need to be on-brand. We talked earlier about how important it is for your branding to be consistent – you never want someone thinking, “that doesn't sound like something [your company] would say.” Like it or not, your audience will start to personify your brand, and that persona needs to be consistent no matter where its messaging is.

How often you post is nearly as important as what you post. Your best practices will vary by platform – [you can learn more about optimizing your strategy here](#) – but the broad goal is to post often enough to stay in the front of their mind, while not posting so often that you begin to annoy them. Annoyed followers will leave and not come back.

You'll also want to make sure that you post at the right time of day and the right day of the week. Different people use their social media sites in different ways – some read them while they're getting ready for work, some at odd times scattered throughout the day – and you need to keep that in mind. [Here's a good resource for getting started.](#)

Optimize your content by channel. What we mean is that you can't just copy and paste from one channel to another – hashtags and emojis are fine for Twitter and Instagram, but don't work on LinkedIn. The context of your messaging will affect the messaging itself.

Make sure that your messaging is tailored to your goals and key performance

indicators (KPIs). Ask yourself some critical questions: what's working for you? What's not? What are your immediate goals? Which keywords are you trying to rank for, and which do you not care about? Your goal is to be a part of the right conversations at the right time.

Finally, test everything. There's no shortage of social media management software and back-end analytics out there, so there's no excuse for not knowing whether your posts are getting results or not. Try different topics, imagery, language, and tone. Conduct A/B tests and see what works better. And constantly be refining — if something isn't working, kick it to the curb and try something new.

Using Email Marketing To Generate Results

People have been counting out email as a thing of the past for a while now, but the fact remains that email is a crucial aspect of any marketing plan, offering [better conversion rates than both social and search results](#).

Due to algorithm changes, it's harder and harder to guarantee that your social posts will be seen — even by your followers. Email, when done properly, offers you a guaranteed audience and a means to truly connect with your subscribers, creating genuine, lasting relationships.

Mobile is king — [88% of smartphone users check their email on their phones](#) — and email is a great way to land on people's smartphones in an unobtrusive way. People don't like being interrupted, and email doesn't interrupt — it waits in their inbox until they want to see it.

Between the low cost of entry and the high conversion rates, email boasts a very impressive ROI — [up to a \\$40 return for every dollar spent](#), according to Neil Patel. That's not a number you can afford to ignore.

Content Creation And Blogging

You should be making monthly or quarterly plans for your content strategies — what you're going to talk about, long-term and short-term goals, which KPIs

are important – and sticking to them.

It's a balancing act. You don't want to plan so far ahead that you're ill-equipped for breaking news stories that are relevant to your business, but you also don't want to blindsides your content creators at the last second. Most businesses plan no further than three months ahead for that reason.

If you're not running a blog, you probably should be. They're an excellent way of distributing content for the awareness and consideration stages. Blog should be authoritative, relevant, useful, on-brand, and carefully edited and written – nothing undermines your authority like sloppy writing.

It's not just blogs, though! Your content strategy should also include whitepapers, downloadable ebooks, and case studies for potential customers who really want to know more about a particular aspect of your brand, business, service, or product.

Advertising

Organic traffic is great, and if you could sustain your business entirely on word-of-mouth and curious Googlers, you would. But sometimes we all need a little jet fuel to boost our traffic to the next level, or help it get off the ground in the first place.

Advertising should be a part of your monthly or quarterly marketing plan – set specific goals and KPIs for reach, engagement, traffic, clicks, conversions, or whatever else is most important to your business at a given time.

Target your advertising. Remember the buyer personas from earlier? There's no point in advertising to people who aren't going to buy your product anyway, so maximize your dollar by narrowing down your audience.

Test everything, then test it again. Run A/B tests so that different segments of your audience see slightly different versions of your posts. Experiment with copy, imagery, subject lines, offers, and topics.

Most importantly, boost what works! It's tempting to boost your low-performing posts to help them catch up, but in most cases, they're not performing well because people simply don't like them. Find the posts that are getting a good organic response and boost those — putting them in front of more people means more engagement and more conversion.

Finally, boost posts that focus on a specific event, item, or promotion that you want people to know about. Your big sales and events are only a success if people know about them, so it's worth spending a little extra cash to get the word out.

The Wide World Of SEO

Search engine optimization (SEO) is a constantly shifting landscape, but it's worth your time to try to keep up with it. Your website is the core of your marketing efforts — it's how you attract new customers and how you manage existing ones. It's vital that people who search for your services are able to find you.

[There are many different facets of SEO](#). The obvious part is the front end — using relevant keywords and topics to make your content more appealing to searchers and search engines. But there's a lot going on behind the scenes that Google can see, even if your readers can't. Header tags, metadata, and structured data are all important factors too.

User experience is important as well. SEO is driven in large part by whether Google thinks people find your site useful or not. Google can tell whether they click on a site, how long they stay there, whether they then leave your site or click an internal link, and so on. [Optimizing your user experience](#) will make your site more intuitive and more functional, and that will reflect favorably on your search rankings.

The point of all your efforts in social media, email, and content creation is to get people to visit (or stay on) your website. That's where the conversion happens, so make sure it's in good shape.

Chapter Four: The Sky's The Limit

With the right plan in place, you'll grow your business, expand your digital footprint, attract more visitors, and eventually turn those leads into customers. The more customers you get, the more data you'll gather on what works, what doesn't, what attracts people to you, and what drives them away.

Setting goals is crucial: [marketers who set goals are 429% more likely to report success than those who don't](#). Setting goals can be tricky — you don't want goals so lofty that you can never meet them, because that's a recipe for frustration and disappointment. But you also don't want to lob yourself softballs. Take a look at your past numbers, think about what's attainable, and challenge yourself.

Strategy is important too — we wouldn't have written this if we didn't think so. [Marketers who document their strategy and clearly spell out what they're trying to accomplish are 538% more likely to report success than those who don't](#).

The key is to build your marketing house in the right order. Focus on your branding first. Then, once your foundation and walls are built, you'll be able to be proactive about your marketing efforts, address gaps, and make changes to your strategy.

You'll have the freedom to test new ideas and pour more effort into the ones that work because you'll always have the foundation to fall back on. It's not easy, and it might not be fast, but eventually, you'll get everything working together in a well-oiled marketing machine.