

Successful Marketing Requires Strategy

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September 16, 2020

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411 views | Sep 16, 2020, 07:00am EDT

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My son wanted to run a half-marathon for a while. As a high school cross-country runner, he longed to pass the 5K mark and run clear to 13.1 miles. But he knew it would take planning and preparation.

So he did some research to figure out the best way to build up to running such a long distance and devised a plan to follow over the course of several months. Since most major races are sidelined or canceled due to the pandemic, he created a course of his own and set a date in later summer.

Every week on his calendar was flagged with a new purpose, which helped him get to his goal mile by mile and day by day. After four months of thoughtful, planned training, he ran his 13.1 miles, with all the exhilaration and satisfaction of a job well done.

His step-by-step, planned approach to achieve his goal is quite similar to how I guide clients in approaching marketing.

Most companies say they know they need to market, but they're not quite sure what that means, what it entails or how to go about it. They seek out a marketing agency when they feel that desperation knot in the pit of the stomach that tells them something has to change and they need to attract new customers quickly.

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Of course, growth never happens overnight. It's a marathon, not a sprint, and it requires careful planning and week-by-week (or day-by-day) building, much like preparing to run a half-marathon.

Any achievable goal requires thoughtful planning and a commitment to stay the course. You probably can't lose 10 pounds in a week. You might not be able to attract 10 customers in a day. Thus, successful marketing requires strategy.

Developing a marketing strategy requires several stages, and you can't rush the process. Here's how to create a strategy that takes you to your goals.

Step 1: The Brainstorm

Gather all stakeholders together for a throw-it-at-the-wall meeting. This should include C-suite folks as well as salespeople, division managers and communicators.

(If you can, add another step to this process: Interview customers to gain insight and feedback into what has worked and what more they would like from you. Make it worthwhile by giving them a value-added thank you for participating — a discount coupon or cool free merchandise.)

Identify what you need to have happen: Greater revenues? How much, exactly? Increased sales? Specify the volume. New customers? How many? Who are they? What pain point are you solving? More business from existing customers? What added value can you offer, and why do they want it?

Make sure to articulate the time frame, too. How quickly can this change happen, realistically? Are you giving it a month? Six months? A year?

Step 2: The Ask And The Give

Once you identify your desired outcome, create the road map for getting there. What will you ask customers to do? What will they get in return? Where are they? How will you interact with them?

This phase requires you to do a deep dive into the marketing channels you'll use to achieve your goal: social media, email blasts, blogging, media pitching, podcasting, direct mail, advertising, brand ambassadors, influencer marketing, etc. Any and all are fair game. What do you think will be most effective in getting you to your goal?

Step 3: Implementation

Now, put your plan into action. Do the work, and roll out the campaigns. All the while, take the temperature of those involved. Is it working? What feedback are you receiving? Tweak as needed to meet expectations and respond to desires from your audience.

Step 4: Assess, Tweak, Repeat

A marketing strategy can be for a quick campaign or for the long haul. It can be a focused effort, or it can comprise a variety of efforts simultaneously. Whatever you engage in, create opportunities throughout the process to assess, make adjustments as needed and go at it again.

Your strategy is the structure you create that makes the steps clear and the process easy. When done right, it should get you to growth. If it doesn't, that's where you take a hard look at where the obstacles are and work on removing them.

Finally, remember that a marketing strategy is a plan — but not a promise. The best entrepreneurs try and try again — and when something doesn't work, they don't lament their losses. They learn from mistakes and create better plans.

Business owners who can be open enough to try new approaches to welcoming people in will find that some actually work — and they stand out for their willingness to innovate and explore.

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