

7 Steps to Market Your Product or Service

By Michael Camp

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Every business or non-profit organization needs to develop an advantage over other similar businesses—a "competitive edge"—in order to be successful. Here are 7 steps to help you develop this "edge" that will produce and retain more of what keeps your business or organization afloat—loyal customers or donors!

1. Analyze Your Business or Organization

The first step is to analyze your business and your customers by answering the following questions: a. What business am I really in? b. What image do I want to project to my market? c. Who is my target market and what are they like? d. Where can they be reached the best? e. What do my customers really buy from me? (E.g. Are they buying widgets or the customer service that comes with widgets?) f. What are the benefits that people derive from my products and services? What problems do they solve for people?

Answering these questions thoughtfully can help you understand your marketing issues. For example, you may discover that you aren't selling a product but the convenience that comes with the product. You may begin to clearly see the type of people who really need this convenience.

2. Develop Distinctive, Superior Benefits for Customers

Ask yourself these questions: "What benefits can a customer, client, beneficiary, or donor, derive from our goods and services?" and "What makes our enterprise distinctive from others?" You need to develop distinctive benefits for potential customers that are superior to your competition. If you don't, there's no good reason for a consumer to come to you for business or a donor to support your organization.

3. Focus on a Particular Target Market

You've analyzed your business. You've developed superior distinctives. Now, answer this question: Who most needs the distinctives your enterprise offers? Understand the type of people these are and how they think and live and begin focusing on marketing to them.

4. Define the Purpose for Your Advertising Plan

Once a competitive edge, or superior distinctive over other businesses is established, it needs to be strategically communicated to the target market you've identified. This communication is your

advertising plan. The first step in creating one is to define the purpose of the plan through listing measurable objectives. "What do you want to accomplish through advertising?" There are a few worthy options. First there's (1) stimulating a purchase decision - get someone in your target market to decide to buy your product or service. Then there's (2) build a company image - this is creating goodwill among the public so they remember it when they come to a point of deciding on a purchase. Others are (3) draw in new customers, (4) build a mailing list, (5) increase foot traffic in a store, and (6) introduce a completely new company or product/service into a new area. Decide which of these are your objectives for your plan.

5. Develop a Unique Selling Proposition (USP)

Once these are answered, you're ready to focus a message on a particular target market. Any advertisement or communication piece should be built around your unique selling proposition (USP). This is the offer of that distinctive about your product or service that gives you the competitive edge over other companies. The offer must be truly unique—something people can't get unless they come to you. When customers see or hear your USP they can answer their question of "What's in it for me?" or "How can I solve my problem?"

The uniqueness could take several perspectives. Is it low price, friendly, helpful service, personal attention, a superior product, and/or long-term support? This can be broken down. If you focus on customer satisfaction there are typically six important sources that can provide that. Are you better than your competition in providing (1) quality relationships with customers, (2) quality products, (3) dedication to service, (4) convenience, (5) innovation, or (6) emphasis on speed?

6. Select and Produce a Communication Media

When these are determined you're ready to select a communication or advertising media. Media options include newspapers, magazines, direct mail, internet, point of purchase ads, outdoor ads, special events or promotions, radio or TV. Most of these need some kind of strategic design and copywriting to produce print or web-based material like print ads, brochures, promotional sheets, letters of appeal, web sites, posters or displays. Then the item, ad or piece is distributed to potential customers through various means—direct mail to a mailing list you develop, posting on your web site, publishing an advertisement, or whatever is necessary to get the word out.

7. Evaluate the Effectiveness of the Communication

Finally, after the plan has been implemented, it needs to be evaluated on how effective it's been. Did it accomplish your objectives? There are ways to do this creatively. For example, coupons in an ad or direct mail that are redeemed can be tracked. Dated coupons and coded response cards identify the time and ad source. Also measuring store traffic or inquirers over a period of time after advertising can be done. Or, simply asking clients who contact you how they heard about your services. If your efforts bring in more customers and increase sales, you're on the right track. If not, then it's time to go through the steps again and make adjustments to your advertising plan.

Michael is a free-lance writer and graphic designer with a masters degree in Economic Development. He has years of experience as a practitioner and technical supporter for micro-enterprise programs that provide loans and business training for the poor in developing countries. Since 1997 he has been providing graphic design and promotional writing services through his company, Promotional Designs. Contact him at: <mailto:promodesigns@home.com> See his web site at: <http://members.home.net/promodesigns/Welcome.htm>

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