

MODULE 8C - Advocate Advanced Topics

MORE MARKETING

L1 - Market Planning

Planning a Marketing Campaign:

As discussed in our previous article on marketing a service business, you should start your plan by creating a list of those benefits a customer can derive from your service. Use this list as a means of keeping yourself focused on the customer's needs. Fulfilling the customer's needs should be the predominant theme throughout your marketing materials.

Identifying Customer Needs:

When an individual applies for Social Security disability benefits, he/she will have experienced a number of problems. Some of these problems include but are not limited to confusion as to what to do next, complicated choices of action, regulatory red tape, frustration with the application process and an inability to acquire clear direction from Social Security. Your service exists to solve these problems! Therefore, these generalized problems, and many others, can be used as part of your list of benefits that the customer can derive from using your service.

Your marketing materials should address the customer's concerns about these and any other problems that may arise during the disability process. You're in effect, listing benefits that the customer can relate to even if he/she does not fully understand the disability process.

Make a List of Your Personality Traits:

Recall that, "no two service businesses are alike." This is true because no two owners are alike. In order to determine how you differ from your potential competitor, you must first identify those traits that make you unique. List those personality traits that you feel best reflect how you would like to do business. Then incorporate your personality traits into your marketing message. Incorporating your personality into the marketing message is what makes your message unique. This is true even when what you are offering is the same as your competitors.

When communicating with customers, use informal language. Express those values that reflect the way you do business. For best results, always emphasize the relationship aspect of your service in your marketing materials! This warm personal approach to marketing has proven itself to be most effective with service businesses.

Don't Try to Predict the Future

Many of those with professional marketing backgrounds use planning as a means of trying to predict the future. If their predictions are wrong, they find themselves paralyzed by their own prophesy. Do not use your marketing plan as a means of foretelling the future. Use it as a means of laying out several possible futures, each with its own plan of action. You cannot predict how the marketplace will respond to your marketing

strategy, but you can define several reasonable possibilities. In general, you will get one of three possible responses to your marketing campaign. These are:

- a) No response from customers. This is your worst-case scenario. Take the time to determine how you would respond to this situation. Your plan should contain multiple alternative courses of action, "tactics" that can be readily and inexpensively executed if the worst-case scenario were to occur. Improving your plan may be a question of finding a better advertising medium or preparing a more convincing advertising piece. In any event, be prepared to act upon failure with the use of tactics.
- b) A fair to good response: If your marketing approach receives a fair to good response from customers, what should you do next? How might you improve the response? What might you avoid that would cause the response to weaken? Again, you must create alternative courses of action, "tactics" which in this case should be designed to incrementally improve results.
- c) An outstanding response: Believe it or not, it is this response that most often takes the new businessperson by surprise. Most business owners do not plan for success! The business owner has not prepared a growth response and subsequently loses control of the business. If success occurs rapidly, the lack of tactical planning can cause a business to fail despite a positive response from the marketplace. Plan for success by having a sound plan of action available.

For example, you may need additional funding to pay for the rapid growth of your business. Where would the money come from? How should it be allocated to assure maximum result? You must contemplate the possibility of rapid success in advance, to assure that it does not destroy your business.

The Process is What Really Counts!

Planning for planning sake is another common mistake made by business owners. Many of them think that they are creating a logical strategy based on the careful analysis of their potential market. In fact, they are simply laying out an unproven course of action. They fail to see that the true value of planning is the act of planning itself.

The purpose of market planning (creating a strategy) is to give you the opportunity to think your marketing approach through. How could I respond to each of the three possible outcomes mentioned above? The act of "thinking it through" allows you to identify unrealistic goals, questionable advertising approaches, weakness in execution, inconsistencies in presentation and much more.

Planning also allows you to structure your marketing strategy in the form of tactics. Tactics are specific actions that make up your strategy. Tactics are also defined as market actions that create response! An example of a marketing tactic would be to place a large bordered ad in a specific section of a daily newspaper. The strategy is to advertise. The tactic is more specific and involves where, when, what and how the ad will be run. It is the tactic, not the strategy that is truly important. Tactics create response, which in turn help to guide your next marketing action. If a tactic works, it can be expanded upon. If it fails, it can be replaced by another tactic that might work. By executing tactical actions, you are in effect moving your marketing campaign forward. Strategies are nothing more than structured intellectual possibilities that can only be

tested by the use of tactics. To execute a strategy, you must use specific tactics such as advertising in a particular medium. If the response is poor, your next tactical move might be to improve the ad message or change to another advertising medium all together. My point is this; marketing strategies are stagnant representations of a plan, while tactics are liquid and adaptable actions that move your plan forward in time. To empirically determine if your strategy will work, you must execute a marketing tactic and note the response! The response provides the feedback you need to execute the next informed tactic.

Accept the Limitations of Planning!

Although extremely important to building a successful company, planning is only a part of the overall process. Planning or creating a marketing strategy is limited by our inability to foresee the future or determine exactly how another person will respond to our words. Use planning as an opportunity to think through your intended course of action. Use the tactics within your plan as a means of testing your guesses and adapting to the reality. Do not become enamored by your marketing plan. To do so will reduce your willingness to change the plan in the face of real world response to your tactics.

Start Failing Now!

Your plan is not perfect and probably never will be! You have had little or no experience creating a marketing plan and you feel extremely uncomfortable with the process. If this is you, you'll probably acquire good results from your marketing campaign. Why? Because your lack of knowledge forces you to take tactical action in order to see what happens. This process is called "test marketing."

You are completely dependent upon the response to your tactics as a means of guiding you in the right marketing direction. This makes your tactical failures as important as your tactical successes. So start failing now! You have nothing to fear by experimenting within your marketplace because each failure moves you one step closer to success. Start yourself on the road to business success by being willing to make tactical mistakes. Analyzing your tactical errors with an open mind will enable you to make better future decisions based on a clearer understanding of your specific market.