

TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

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How to develop and implement a marketing plan



Over the past six months, I have written about several key tactics to improve your organization's professional

communications—from branding and social media to networking, crisis communications, and more. As we begin to think about the business possibilities for the New Year, now is the time to focus on your marketing strategy. Are you prepared to make 2008 the best year yet for you, your business and your customers?

Your marketing plan is just as essential as your business plan. The strategy and tactics in public relations, advertising, media relations, etc. are what help you define and reach your target audience. A successful marketing plan will go beyond the operational needs of your organization, and will address the expectations of your audience. While you ultimately want a marketing plan to benefit your business, focus on how to reach and resonate with your target audience to drive them to action—after all, they are who your plan will try to reach.

When considering your marketing plan, think about what will really work for you and your clients, so that

you don't end up with a plan that just collects dust on the shelf. In the spirit of the season, I offer the following New Year's marketing resolutions that will make your 2008 marketing plan more targeted, complete and effective.

Resolution 1: Make your list.

It's just not enough anymore for businesses to simply be "out there" for the world to find. Know exactly who is interested in your product or service—your target audience—divide them into groups, and identify how each group gets information (Newspaper? Online discussion group? Radio? Search engine?, etc.). If you're not sure who you want to reach or how to find them, take a step back and do some preliminary research to identify your niche and find out how they communicate.

Resolution 2: Know your message.

Key messages should cover questions including: What do you offer? How do you want to be known? What's in it for your audience? These messages need to carry over in your marketing, advertising visuals, staff meetings, one-on-one communications with clients—everywhere. They define the heart and soul of what makes your business unique. Make sure your key messages don't just resonate at the 30,000-foot level; they need to reflect

the demands of your consumers (their purchase plans, values, etc.).

Resolution 3: Set your mark. You know who you want to reach and what to say, now identify your goals. These should be quantifiable and measurable, and can range from how many people in each audience segment you want to reach to the desired action you expect from your customers. Look back at 2007 and ask yourself: What did we do well that we can build upon? Where do we need to improve? How much do we have to invest? These goals will need to coordinate with the objectives and tactics of your business plan.

Resolution 4: It's time for tactics.

Exactly what you do to reach your audience will depend on several things, such as the size of your business, your budget, and the needs, habits or even the schedule of your clientele. Marketing can come in many forms—paid (advertising), unpaid (media relations), print, online, special events or new branding, etc.—but each tactic should tie into your overall strategy and goals. Also, don't put all your eggs in one basket; integrate multiple marketing vehicles for each audience in order to ensure the strongest reach

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and make sure that each platform works together to reflect your overall brand identity.

Resolution 5: Make a “touches timeline.” Detail what tactics will be used to reach each audience, and when. Again, this should be timed to meet the needs of each niche group as well as the goals of your organization. Don't forget, too, the schedules of media such as monthly publications, which tend to work two or three months in advance, or advertisers' deadlines and artwork development time. By having a marketing plan and timeline worked out in advance, you save yourself the stress of dealing with last-minute deadlines, mistakes, or worse, missed opportunities.

Resolution 6: Ask yourself if you measured up. Marketing plans are flexible. As you implement your plan, take time to review the results along the way. Set quantifiable measurement parameters that show the percentage of growth in market penetration and provide specific tactical measurements, such as the number of web hits you want to generate, for example.

If you started out wanting to do a direct mail campaign once each quarter but the first pass fails, ask yourself first if you could have done anything better. Did you send it at a bad time? Was the messaging right for that audience? If you still didn't get the results you needed, free up those funds to invest elsewhere in your campaign.

It's also important to evaluate the entire campaign each quarter and again at the end of the year. Did you meet your goals? What worked best? If you are concerned about biting off more than you can chew, it may be worthwhile to investigate partnering with a communications firm to assist in the brainstorming, research, development, implementation and evaluation of your plan. A professional firm will be able to lend its expertise and manpower to your business to make sure you get the most out of the time and money you invest in bringing your marketing plan to life and taking your business to the next level.

Once the year is over, be sure to congratulate yourself, your team and your clients for your success. Once you've had a chance to celebrate, reward your business by resolving to set the bar even higher in 2009. 



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Karen's '08 Marketing Tactics

- 1) Ensure your Web site effectively brands your business
- 2) Participate in speakers bureaus
- 3) Integrate multiple marketing tools
- 4) Have professional-looking business cards, letterhead and note cards
- 5) Take advantage of opportunities for positive media coverage for your organization's newsworthy events and happenings
- 6) Value social media
- 7) Network, network, network
- 8) And, believe in the power of marketing—it's a resolution worth keeping!