

## 6 Reasons Every Company Needs a Marketing Plan

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Imagine overhearing this conversation your company's owner and its sales manager:

"Hey Joe, I was talking with Bill at Zippidee Company—our biggest customer—and he stopped by Barebones Inc.'s—our biggest competitor's—booth at the Hodown Trade Show," says the sales manager.

"Bill from Zippidee was at the Hodown?" says the owner. "Well then, we gotta be at that show next year. Call the trade association and reserve a booth for next year. Start recruiting reps to work the show and reorder the coffee mugs with our logo. Come on, let's mooove."

Is this proper marketing? This scenario demonstrates how, all too often, a company implements tactics without first planning strategically. It's a lot like cooking without a recipe. Toss in a little of this, try a dash of that and stir until you think it's done. It's no wonder a lot of small business marketing efforts look half-baked!

### #1 - A marketing plan formalizes ideas

Nothing is more forceful than committing your ideas to paper. If you say to yourself "Gee, I'd really like to upgrade our website this year", that's just an idea, without any course of action.

But, if you write on a piece of paper the:

- Objective ("We will upgrade our website")
- Rationale ("because our site is looking outdated versus our competition.")
- Project leader ("I will take the lead on completing this project")
- Timeline ("by December 31, 2003") and
- Budget ("for under \$3,000").

Now you have a plan that commits time, people and dollars to the project, and its likelihood for success has grown exponentially.

### #2 - You can hang it in front of your nose

After you've finished your marketing plan, I recommend taping parts of it up all around you—on your cubicle wall, on a computer monitor or over your phone. The goal is to hang it where you'll see it every day. There are two reasons for this.

First, seeing it every day serves as a conscious reminder to accomplish this week's tasks. Yes, it's a subtle form of nagging, but I guarantee you'll get more done because of the subtle pressure you feel.

Second, having your plan in plain view helps sink the plan into your subconscious mind. As your eye passes over the plan, your subconscious mind notices and starts converting your plan into action. You don't consciously know it's happening, but it is.

### #3 - A plan breaks down tasks

After completing your marketing plan, you'll know every Monday morning *exactly* what needs to be accomplished to stay on track. If written correctly, your marketing plan breaks down seemingly huge tasks (e.g. develop a website) into smaller, more manageable tasks.

### #4 - A plan gives you hope

With a completed marketing plan guiding your efforts, you'll be amazed at how much more confident you feel. Now amidst all the day-to-day fire fighting, you'll know you *have* a plan, a path

to follow, and a quiet assurance that you're building *momentum* for your business. That positive attitude alone goes a long way towards steering a company in the right direction.

#### **#5 - A marketing plan sifts ideas**

Over the course of 12 months (we'll assume you're writing an annual marketing plan here), you'll probably stumble across a marketing opportunity you didn't foresee when you wrote the plan. Maybe you field a call from a magazine offering you discounted advertising rates. Or, you meet the president of a call center who offers its telemarketing services to your company. Should you do these things?

With a written marketing plan in place, you can sift each idea through it. If you've spent thoughtful time developing your marketing strategies and committing them to paper, you'll know quickly if any of these ideas are on-strategy.

#### **#6 - A plan gives you something to go back to in slow times**

If your business is like most others, it has a seasonality to it. That is, some months are traditionally slower than others. During those slow months, instead of wringing your hands and worrying about slow sales, you know what to do. Crack open the plan, and review it cover to cover. Are your assumptions about the market still valid? Do your strategies still make sense? Which tactics do we need to implement?

At a glance, you'll know whether you're ahead of schedule or behind, and turn passive statements like *"I don't know what I should do"* into active ones like *"We planned for a newsletter in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter, now I'll get started on that."*

#### **How long does it take to write a marketing plan?**

How long it takes to write your marketing plan depends on these factors in your business. Its:

- Revenues
- Geographic scope
- Distribution channels
- Markets served
- Number of products or services offered
- Number of employees.

The larger the number for any of these variables, the longer it will take. As a general rule of thumb, a sole proprietor can write a marketing plan in one to four weeks. A larger company will need eight to twelve because it must account for more input.

Whichever company type you are, budget for enough *think time*—that is, time away from the planning process itself where you can ruminate, cogitate or (if so inclined) meditate about the major questions you face.

#### **When should I start?**

When should you begin developing your marketing plan for next year? Let's assume your fiscal year starts in January. If you're a sole proprietor, start your planning process right after Thanksgiving. If you're in a larger business, begin shortly after Labor Day.

#### **Remember...**

A marketing plan lays the foundation for well-thought-out action. If you are serious about your marketing, start with a plan.

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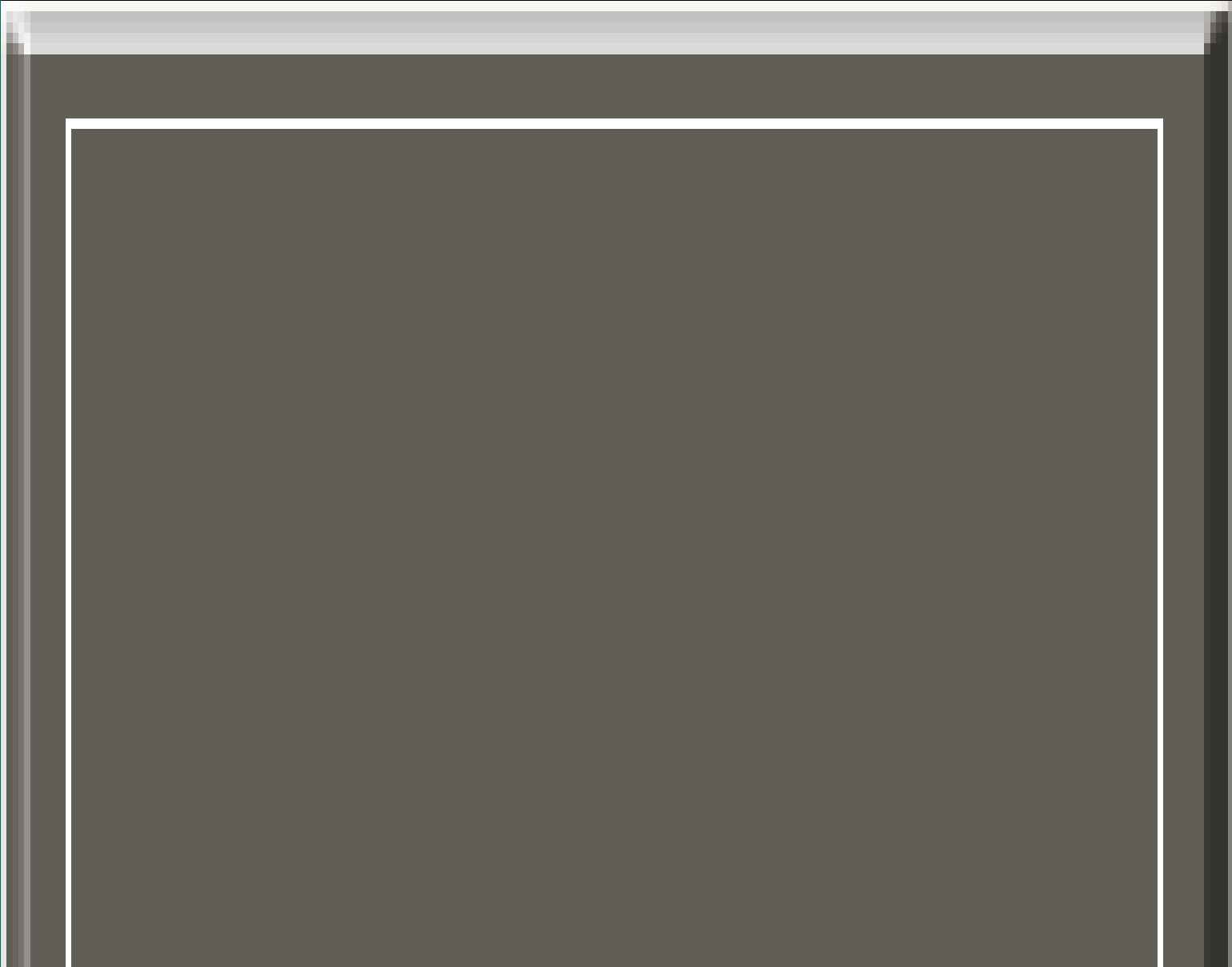
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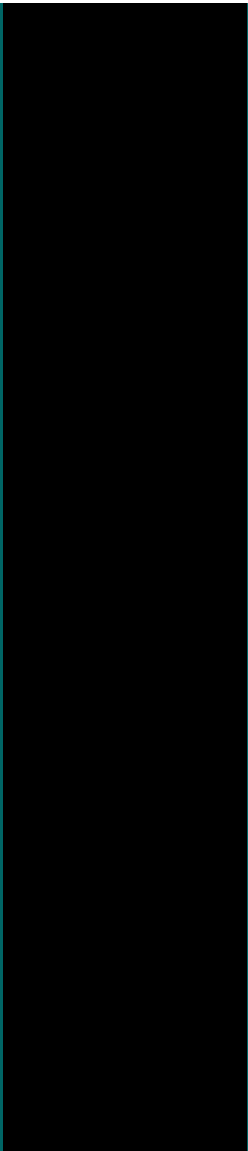
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