

How to Create a Marketing Plan

Does your surf school or shop really need a marketing plan? Maybe not but in general, businesses that are successful in marketing invariably start with a marketing plan. Small companies like surf shops and surf schools are subject to a lot of change and can get by with a small plan that only covers a single season or year. Plans should be written based on previous experiences and developed prior to the season start. The plan is considered the "heavy lifting" of marketing since it covers what to do and how to do it, probably marketing's greatest challenge.

Everyone who works for the business should see the plan. No matter the business size, get feedback from everyone involves since the marketing itself is everyone's responsibility. If the business is essentially a one-person management operation, you still need even part-time employees to understand and support the ideas in the plan.

There is a relationship between a marketing plan and a business plan or vision statement. The business plan spells out what the business is about--what to do and not do, and what the ultimate business goals are. The company's business plan provides the environment in which the marketing plan must flourish.

The marketing plan and business plan must be consistent but the marketing plan is more meaningful at the basic level.

- Rallying point: The marketing plan gives employees something to rally behind. If employees are to feel committed to the company, it's important for them to share the vision of where the company is headed in the years to come.
- Chart to success: Even though it's imperfect, if you don't plan at all, you're doomed. Even an inaccurate plan is better than no plan at all.
- Business operational instructions: The marketing plan is a step-by-step guide for a company's success. More important than a vision statement, the plan will assess the business from top to bottom and make sure all the pieces are working together in the best way. It could be considered a to-do list on a grand scale. It assigns specific tasks for the year.
- Captured thinking: Financial reports are the lifeblood of the numbers side of any business, no matter what size. It should be no different with marketing. The written document lays out the business game plan. If people leave, if new people arrive, if events bring pressure to alter the givens, the information in the written marketing plan stays intact to remind everyone of what the original plans were focused on.

- Top-level reflection: In the daily hurly-burly of competitive business, it's hard to focus attention on the big picture, especially those items that aren't directly related to the daily operations. Take the time to periodically rethink about the business--whether it's providing owners and employees with what they want or there aren't some additional details that could be added.

Hopefully, after writing marketing plans for a few years, a business owner can sit back and review a series of plans, year after year, and check the progress of a company. Of course, sometimes this is hard to make time for (there is that annoying real world to deal with), but it can provide an unparalleled objective view of what the business has been doing over a number of years.

Source: The Small Business Encyclopedia and Knock-Out Marketing.