

The Fear of Commitment and Your Marketing Plan

by Neil Speers

It's that suffocating, claustrophobic feeling commitment brings on. Trapped in a corner, no escape, you long for your youth when you could run free, make your choices as you went, no obligations, beholding only to yourself. Ah, but you're a businessperson now – whether you run your own company or are a manager – and you're stuck making the decisions about how to market your company.

Many of us have continued as if we had never grown up, no plans, live for today.

You could justify not having a plan saying, "What if I make a plan and it's wrong? How do I know what will happen during the year and what if I waste all my money by buying too soon when a better deal could have been had?" However, the last person I knew who said things like that to me still doesn't have very many customers - great idea for a product, no plan.

We probably all know the saying "If you don't make a plan, you plan to fail." Unfortunately, knowing it doesn't make much difference. We also know we should exercise more and take our vitamins.

First, ask yourself if you like being led around by the nose?

Those slick sales people come in and tell you all about how fame and fortune are available if you just use their magazine / web design company / newspaper. So you write the cheque. Are the results what you hoped?

Was there a marketing plan which you used to decide whether their product was appropriate to your company, or even in your budget? If there was, then you might have gotten good results. If there wasn't, they probably built you a nice looking ad / web site / brochure, but it didn't really tell your customers what you do, and why you are the best choice. You probably didn't get the results, winding up bitter and disappointed.

I can see you down at the bar, drowning your sorrow with a beer, telling anyone who'll listen: "All that marketing crap is just that, crap!!!"

But, having a plan in hand can save you from such a fate - at least the "bitter and dissappointed about marketing" part. Think of a marketing plan as having four major chunks. Grab a scrap of paper and spend 10 minutes to answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

1. What are you selling?

What is your product or service and how is it better than your competitors'?

2. Who are your customers?

Are they old, young, male, female, urban, country? The more you define who they are the easier it is to talk to them. You cannot, I repeat, cannot talk to everyone at once. Doesn't work. Never has. Teenagers don't want what their moms want. It's the nature of the beast. Good marketing reaches a specific audience who needs your product – anyone else who buys is a bonus. Develop a picture of your "ideal" customer. Speak to that customer.

3. Where are your customers and when can you get them to buy?

Take out a calendar which shows all the months, and write in all the major times you want to have peak sales. Tack it on your wall. Then, on your scrap of paper, write down where they are located. Do they read one type of publication, live in a specific neighbourhood, take a particular bus route? Whatever you can think of, put it down.

4. How much can you spend?

Put aside a set amount for marketing. Now. Figure on 10 to 15 per cent of what you expect to make in the year. If nothing else you can tell sales people "It isn't in this month's budget!" Many years ago, I was working for a junk-mail delivery company and in the course of creating some materials, found some very interesting statistics about advertising. One that jumped out was that furniture stores with sales of \$100,000 spent 10 per cent of that on advertising, while furniture stores with sales over \$1,000,000 spent 15 per cent on advertising. Of course, marketing isn't JUST advertising, but it is an integral part.

If you've spent the 10 minutes it takes to answer these questions, then you're 1,000 per cent closer to getting the customers you need. With these answers, you can then decide if that flyer in July is going to get to the people who'll spend money on you. If you're clients are more likely to buy, say back-to-school supplies in August, then you know a flyer in July is a waste. But, come August, knowing you have a certain amount to spend and where the people are you want to spend it on, you'll have a tool for buying the right advertising at the right time.

If you're not afraid of commitment – at least, not too afraid – then get some books on the subject and develop a real plan for the next few years. It will reap many rewards, and really doesn't take that long. (Have you heard the expression, "Do it right – once, or wrong – many times"?)

But, if you are afraid, just do the outline above – you can still play it by ear and try to get good deals when they come along, you'll just be doing it better.