## Your goals

Explanation:

Write a short description about what you aim to achieve with this marketing plan. Your goals should be SMART - specific (x% more sales, x new customers, x website visitors), measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound. Revisit these goals at regular intervals to assess how your objectives are being met; it's likely that you will need to keep fine-tuning your marketing plan as you learn more about what works.

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Section 1: Understand your market

It's vital to know your customers, your prospects and your competitors; if there are gaps in your knowledge, it may be worth spending some time and money on market research. Having accurate data is the cornerstone of every marketing plan.

**1. Who are your customers?**

Describe your current customers and create a snapshot of their main characteristics – this could include their age, their lifestyle, their earnings or their location. If you sell to other businesses, it could include their job title and area of responsibility. Now look closely at what motivates them to buy from you. How you market to them will depend on their profile so gather as much information about your customers as you can; think about the best way to reach out to them and the messages they might respond to. Once you know more about your customers, you should be able to segment them into groups so that you can target them with specific messages and offers.

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**2. How do your customers behave?**

Unless you are starting up you will already have valuable information on the way that your customers behave. How often do they buy from you, what do they order and in what quantity? How do they interact with your business? By studying the data you should be able to identify which customer segments have the greatest potential for growth. These are the groups you should target with your marketing activity. Rank your prospects from cold to warm. Those that already know and like your business (your hottest prospects) will respond to more personal marketing approaches such as permission-based email, loyalty schemes and customer events.

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**3. Who are your competitors?**

List your key competitors. Your rivals might include local businesses, other experts in your field or corporate competitors with well-recognised brands. Against each competitor, explain why your customers or potential customers might choose their product/service over yours.

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**3. What's special about you?**

Explanation:

Now focus on why customers are most likely to choose your business. List your unique selling points (USPs) and describe the brand values that underpin everything you do. What is your main selling point – value for money, quality, service, convenience?

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## Section 2: Identify marketing opportunities using SWOT analysis

**1. What are your strengths?**

Identify the key ways in which you stand out from your competitors. Your strengths can be used to create compelling marketing messages. This could include anything from the range of products you offer or your friendly customer service to the location of your premises or your opening hours.

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**2. What could you improve on?**

Are there any aspects of your product/service that could be improved? Have you had any negative feedback on your products or your customer service? Are your employees doing a good job? Other internal weaknesses could include a lack of time, money, resources or expertise. You'll need to address your weaknesses before you embark on a marketing campaign.

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**3. What opportunities are out there?**

Identify the important trends in your marketplace that could open up new business opportunities. Are there any gaps that your product/service could fill? Are there any additional uses for your product/service that you could exploit? Are there new markets that you could expand into or new territories that you could explore?

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**4. What threats are you facing?**

Think about the obstacles that could be holding you back. External threats can include changing customer behaviour and new entrants into your market or local area.

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**Section 3: Assess potential marketing channels**

**1. Review your options**

There are many ways to market your business to your customers and prospects. Some are absolutely essential; others may not be appropriate for you and your target market. Use this list to make an initial assessment of the options open to you.

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| **Marketing channel** | **Questions to ask** | **Advantages** | **Measurement** | **Cost** |
| Email | Have you got a good quality email list with permission to get in touch? | Easy to target messages at segments; great for keeping in regular contact until customers are ready to buy | Email analytics can tell you everything you need to know about who has clicked on what. | Very low cost but doing it well takes time |
| Online marketing | Are you attracting enough people to your website?  | SEO and pay-per-click advertising can help get your business to the top of search results | Google Analytics can help you measure the success of SEO and pay-per-click activity | The cost depends on how much outside expertise you need to bring in |
| Social media | Which social media sites are your customers using?  | Social media helps you build relationships with customers and widen your reach | Everything is measured from followers to likes; use links and calls to action to drive traffic to your website | Social media sites are free but you have to factor in the cost of your time |
| Content marketing | Are you promoting your expertise? | Writing guides, blogs and case studies can help you build a strong reputation in your field | Include links in your content and measure traffic to your website; ask customers for feedback | Creating content takes time |
| PR | Do you need to raise your profile? | PR can give you exposure – whether you are looking for mentions in the business press or a local paper | Measure uplifts in sales or website traffic when you have had media coverage  | Perseverance is the name of the game with PR so it can take time  |
| Exhibitions and events | Can you reach your customers in one place?  | An opportunity for face-to-face contact with lots of motivated prospects | Collect data on everyone you meet, follow up on every lead and measure the results | Events are very costly but they offer big rewards |
| Advertising | Will it be seen by the right people? | Advertising in the press, directories or online can help you reach your target market | Monitor results from ads using dedicated email addresses, URLs and phone numbers | Costs vary |
| Direct mail and leafleting | Could letters and flyers get your business noticed? | Direct mail and flyers are making a comeback | Monitor results from flyers using dedicated PO Box numbers, email and web addresses and phone numbers | Potentially very cost-effective  |
| Sponsorship | Can you improve your reputation by association?  | Local firms can get great goodwill by sponsoring local charities or sports teams | Measurement is not easy but you can monitor overall results over the course of the sponsorship | Local sponsorship can be quid pro quo – such as paying for team kit in return for a logo |

**2. Match the marketing method to your target market**

Now look at these marketing channels from the point of view of your customers. Which of them are most likely to be used by your audience and which are they most likely to respond to? Create a shortlist of 4-5 marketing methods to focus on. If you are looking at social media, choose just two or three social media sites to start with; you can test them out and add more as you learn what works for your business.

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## Section 4: Prepare the ground

**1. Create your marketing toolkit**

Create the collateral to make it easy to roll out your marketing action plan in a clear and consistent way. This should include: slogans and calls to action; images and videos; "about us" wording for social media sites and press releases. Everything should be in keeping with your vision and brand values.

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**2. Get ready for sales**

Don’t roll out a new marketing campaign if you are not ready for the response – otherwise you risk disappointing new customers. Make sure your website is up to date and has all the necessary landing pages to handle specific traffic. Work with staff to make sure they understand the objectives of the campaign and can deal with orders and enquiries efficiently and in keeping with your brand values. It's worth creating a sales forecast so that you can plan for the results of your marketing efforts; as you develop your strategy you'll be able to predict future sales more accurately. List all the things you need to do to prepare for an uplift in sales here.

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**3. Integrate your marketing**

Ensure that all your marketing activity works together. Add social media buttons to your website; add links to online content and web landing pages on your social media sites and in your emails; prompt people to sign up to your email newsletter on your homepage. Make a list of all the ways you can connect your marketing channels here.

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**4. Set a budget**

How much you spend on marketing is entirely up to you. There are always marketing opportunities no matter how small a budget; the key is to agree how much you want to spend and make it go as far as possible. You can increase your budget once you know which marketing techniques are having the biggest impact. Remember your time costs money – many marketing tools such as email and social media can take up a lot of time even if they don’t have significant costs.

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**4. Agree who's doing what and by when**

Establish roles and areas of responsibility with your team and specify deadlines. Also agree dates when you are going to review the activity. List key areas of responsibility here.

**Section 5: Create your marketing action plan**

Now use the table below to summarise your plans.

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| **Activity** | **Timing** | **Target audience** | **Objectives** | **Cost & time** |
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**Section 6: Review your plan**

Schedule review dates so that you can measure the success of everything you do. Marketing is a learning process – use these reviews to continually fine-tune your marketing strategy.

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| **Activity** | **1st review date** | **Measure of success at 1st review** | **2nd review date** | **Measure of success at 2nd review** | **End date** | **Measure of success at end date** |
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