

Marketing Plans

Marketing your organisation is essential – it will ensure donors, customers or clients know about your organisation and what it does in order to maintain and increase demand and support for your service and boost your income. A good marketing plan can also support your applications for grant funding or loans.

The community sector offer value-added services which may include significant social or environmental benefits. These are likely to be your ‘unique selling point’ which differentiates you from your competitors and should be promoted and celebrated! A marketing plan will help you with how to do this.

You do not need a large document with elaborate charts to market your organisation or service effectively – but you do need to have a plan which gives your organisation a roadmap and a direction:

Where to start

- When developing a marketing plan, remember to put yourself in the shoes of those you are targeting your service towards.
- Identify who your existing customers are (the general public, specific types of businesses, young families etc) and why do they come to you?
- Have you set any marketing or income targets for the next 6, 12 or 18 months? If so, use targets to base your marketing plan around. If not, targets can be identified as you develop your marketing plan.
- Don't forget – only promise what you can deliver!

Position Your Product or Service

There are **four Ps** involved in a marketing plan. These are:

- **Product:** Have the right product or service for your target market, for example it should have the right features and work well.
- **Price:** Sell your product or service at a price that your clients can pay, or are willing to pay at a price that your customers believe is a good deal. Often, the community sector is able to undercut their larger competitors' prices.
- **Promotion:** Using colours, pictures and phrasing appropriate to your market, there are a range of methods you can use to promote your service, which can include flyers, brochures or postcards, TV or radio advertising, newspaper or magazine press releases or adverts, newsletters, vehicle livery, a website, social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter and more.
- **Place:** Distribute your product or provide your service in locations where your target market can easily access it.

If you get all of these elements right you will generate the recognition or interest that will lead to an increase in customers or service uptake that will boost your income.

Develop your Ideas

To develop an effective and appropriately directed marketing plan for your organisation, gather together a group of people which may include family, friends, staff, customers or professionals. These can be fun, informal meetings, or more formal events, or a mix of both – it's up to you! It is very unlikely that you will get everything done in one meeting, but the bullet points below should help you to get started and explore ideas:

- Who are you selling to, or providing services to?
- What do those customers need from your organisation?
- How will your organisations' sales and distribution work?
- What is your 'unique selling point', which distinguishes your product or service from any competition you face? Which marketing tactics can you use to make your products or services more noticeable?
- When (and for how often) should your marketing efforts be used?
- Where do you want your organisation to a year from now?
- Add ideas to post-it notes on a large sheet so you can move them around or group them, then add other notes around them to develop your ideas.

Listen to your customers and clients

For an effective and accurate marketing plan you need to know how your customers and clients react to your product or service – the quality and price, customer service, image and brand—essentially, everything that influences their decision to buy your product or use your service.

So – ask them! Survey some of your current customers as well as customers you want to reach. Survey them when they make contact with you by purchasing a product or signing up for your service, telephone them, or send surveys via e-mail. You may get more responses if you include an incentive such as a discount or entry into a prize draw.

“Business owners are often surprised by what customers say. For instance, one firm learned from a survey that its receptionist was surly on the phone to customers. How would you know that if you didn't ask customers?” (source: Microsoft Small Business Centre: [5 easy steps to create a marketing plan](#))

Once you have enough completed surveys (you will need to decide on a representative number appropriate to your organisation to give you a good idea what your existing and prospective customers and clients want from your organisation) put together a SWOT analysis that will help you to see your organisation in a different way:

- **Strengths:** What makes your organisation thrive?
- **Weaknesses:** What are your organisation's vulnerabilities?
- **Opportunities:** What are the positive external conditions that could affect your organisation, such as market conditions that could lead to expansion and growth?



- **Threats:** What are the external conditions that could damage your organisation, such as competition from other groups or companies?

Click here for [more advice on a SWOT analysis](#) specifically for marketing.

Draft your marketing plan

With the information you have gained you will be able to draft your plan. It does not have to be a formal document but should be written down and an outline should be distributed to staff and volunteers, and kept on file to refer back to at regular intervals. Your marketing plan should include:

- A summary of your organisation's market position and its goals;
- An outline of what you plan to accomplish within a specific time period (i.e.: "we will sign up 30 new customers to our collection service within 6 months");
- A list of target markets, including areas where there is demand for your service, or new client and customer groups you will target;
- An appropriate strategy for the different groups (i.e. a service for young mums will be marketed differently than one for the elderly, in where marketing is placed and how it is designed and phrased, etc);
- The budget you have for marketing and how this will be allocated. You will need an explanation of your "marketing channels" (the kinds of marketing materials) how they will be distributed, i.e. deliver leaflets around an office block advertising a competitive recycling collection service, with links to your website for more information and follow up with a phone call a day or two later.
- A strategy for how you will respond to competitors i.e. what will you do if another group beats your price or offers a similar product or service?
- Develop a marketing calendar to set clear goals for your organisation, and add notes as you progress, or put up a '[fundometer](#)' (click for example) or similar in view of your team to keep them inspired and motivated!
- Finally, it is vital that someone has the responsibility for the marketing in your organisation – to set deadlines and coordinate your marketing campaign to make sure it will work.

Track the results!

Include [benchmarks](#) in your marketing plan to help you identify whether your marketing efforts are working well or if you will need to rethink your approach.

So, if a new customer signs up to your service or visits your shop (for example) how did they hear about you? What attracted them? Would they recommend you to others?

After a set amount of time identified in your draft, assess whether you have reached your goals. If not, why not? What could you change? Ask for feedback from existing and new customers about your marketing material and techniques – do they have any advice you could incorporate into a revised marketing plan?



Finally, remember that markets are continually changing, so it is important to review your marketing plan every year to see if you should change any goals or try new tactics.

Further information

Microsoft Small Business Centre: Click here for [5 easy steps to create a marketing plan](#) and here for [33 tips for marketing success](#), and here to [get big marketing results with little cash](#).

Business Link: [Create your marketing strategy](#).