



Why Marketing Planning Fails...and What to Do About It

By Jim Sabraw

Many mid size businesses make attempts to “institutionalize” marketing within the business. They try to make marketing a component of the business and subsequently try to develop and implement a marketing plan. But often these efforts fail. Why? Based on my experience with many different types of marketing plans for many different businesses, I conclude that there are **five broad causes of failure**.

1. Lack of Commitment

Everyone knows the plan is needed, but no one believes it will be used. Since it really doesn't mean anything, no one puts serious thought or effort into the plan and consequently no one tries to make it work. It sits on the shelf until next year. There was no commitment or leadership.

2. Lack of Ownership

The people who have to make the plan work don't accept any responsibility for the plan. Usually this comes from not having been involved in developing the plan. Either a staff person or consultant or someone else wrote the plan and then everyone nodded agreement...and went their own way. A sure symptom of failure is the remark, “That's Jane's plan.” Unless Jane is the owner, CEO or President of the company, the marketing plan probably will never be fully implemented.

3. Lack of Objectivity

To be useful, a marketing plan must reflect a rigorous and objective analysis of the market, the business and the competition. Management wants and needs to believe that their product or service is the best. The trouble comes when this attitude interferes with the objective analysis of why the company is not gaining new customers, losing market share or losing customers. This is the place where someone outside the company can make a real contribution by asking the hard questions, “Why aren't you getting your fair share of customers?” or “Why are customers leaving us?”

4. Lack of Resources

Every marketing plan depends on the availability of certain resources in order to implement: *people and money*. When management restricts these resources, it must understand the negative impact on the marketing plan and the increased risk of failure.

5. Lack of Follow Through

Even the best plans lose their drive if no one makes the effort to ensure they are being implemented and, if not, why not. When things don't get done on schedule because of pressure to respond to more immediate tasks or problems, the plan will start to fall apart or require major efforts to get it back on schedule.

You must have a “champion” who has the desire to keep the plan going forward. How can management avoid these failures and make the marketing plan the useful tool it should be?

Following are a few recommendations to make the company's marketing plan work.

COMMITMENT

Not only the marketing group, but all appropriate departments in the company must be part of the total marketing plan. Each should be involved, in some way, in developing the plan and be prepared to make a contribution in its implementation.

OBJECTIVITY

This is where an outside consultant, advisory board or board of directors can play a vital role by being a devil's advocate, challenging assumptions and asking the hard questions.

INTERNAL CONSISTENCY

Are all resources required available? Is the timetable for success consistent? Realistic? Have enough time



and money been allocated to accomplish each step? This is another place where resources outside the company can be a real plus by bringing experience to the marketing plan. Given the experience of dealing with similar situations, these resources are able to guide the process and impart practical information, market tested strategies and tactics.

TRACKING

Regular efforts to monitor the program must be established. Regular meetings and reports of the concerned parties must be scheduled. In that way management is able to respond to changes in both resource availability and external conditions. At the same time, by meeting regularly, the group increases the probability of meeting timetables, improves

communications and helps those involved stay motivated.

CONCLUSION

In our competitive and ever-changing business climate the challenge for business is not whether marketing and marketing planning is necessary. The real challenge is how good and how effective the process will be. The answer lies in paying attention to the reasons for failure and then doing something about it. That is leadership!

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