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Marketing Plan, Time Line, And Budget— Drafting The Document

You may be wondering why the administrative aspect of marketing—the marketing plan, time line, and budget—is the last critical component that we cover, instead of the first. The reason is simple: Before you learn how to write and cost out a marketing plan, you must first understand the components that make up a marketing plan. Now that you have a solid understanding of the critical components of marketing, it's time to document, in the form of a marketing plan, where you are now, where you intend to go, and how you will get there.

Most of us have a natural tendency to avoid the documentation process. The notion of hammering out a comprehensive plan may seem like a daunting assignment. It's just one more item to add to your never-ending task list. Or, you may be a shoot-from-the-hip type who prefers to bypass the bureaucratic paperwork and just get the job done. Old-school marketers seem to have the hardest time documenting their destination. They know how to “get there” without a marketing tome that tells them what they need to do.

Alas, times have changed, not just within the industry, but also in the expectations an organization has of its marketing function. Competition has catapulted the subject of marketing to the top of an organization's list of strategic initiatives and the heat is on. Marketing roles have been expanded, expectations have been raised, accountability is expected, and results are demanded. Scanty outlines and Post-it Notes just won't cut it anymore. You need a plan to guide your efforts. The organization's stakeholders require a plan in order to understand your efforts.

The Politics of Planning

The time invested in drafting a document that explains what you intend to do pays dividends. Here's why:

A good marketer is a good manager—and a good manager always has a plan. Good managers endeavor to shape their operational environment within the organization. They educate their superiors and departmental peers on their department's role. They lobby to obtain the resources and support necessary to simultaneously fulfill their program objectives and support their departmental staff. Good marketing managers use a written marketing plan to educate key constituents on the marketing agenda and initiatives. They are adept at "selling" to their internal customer base (management), while they also sell to their external markets.

A proactive marketing plan, grounded in research, is the best way to ward off the steady stream of polite ideas and strong-arm suggestions on how to fill your building. There are two kinds of marketing programs: situation-driven and market-driven. Unfortunately, the most common is situation-driven, where everything but good information and intuition steers your marketing direction as you react to whatever comes down the pike. Instead of a cohesive marketing process, there is chaos. If you experience a period when sales are slow, you have everyone breathing down your neck asking why, wanting more sales, and providing lots of ideas on how to get them. Your superior returns from a conference all lathered up about a new marketing idea touted by a consultant and wants you to revamp your program, or worse, wants to hire the consultant to help you do your job. You just can't seem to move those few remaining one-bedroom apartments, so the best fix must lie in changing the unit mix. Situation-driven marketing lurches from one fix to another, without ever realizing any sustained improvements or momentum.

In contrast, a market-driven program—one in which you have carefully followed the critical components and produced a well-thought-out, information-based plan, sets the marketing course and keeps it on course.

A marketing plan dispels prima donna perceptions. An organization's success depends on marketing and operations working hand-in-hand, making equal con-