



The
A to Z

of
Marketing

An insightful guide that simplifies the
wonderful world of marketing

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Introduction

Marketing has always been a massive business discipline encompassing many different elements which, when combined, form a clear marketing strategy and activity plan. It is also an ever evolving discipline. Rewind the clock 15 years and social media was a phrase that didn't even exist – other than a way of describing the telephone. Pandas and Penguins were merely confined to the zoo and tablets were what you took first thing in the morning to ease your aches and pains.

However many businesses only scratch the surface of what marketing is. It is too tempting as a business owner to rush into the deliverables such as branding, design, and marketing communications. And this is the main reason why this e-book exists. We wanted to show SME business owners what goes into marketing a business and what needs careful consideration. Even as an A-Z we don't cover half of what marketing is, for example there are 7 fundamental Ps of marketing –price, place, promotion, product, people, physical environment and process – however for the purposes of this e-book I have focussed on price (as I felt this is where most people go wrong).

So please bear in mind this is not an exhaustive list but it should give you an idea of the sheer scale of what marketing involves. It will also hopefully demonstrate why you need someone dedicated to it in your business – and I mean a marketing specialist. If you are serious about growing your business and taking it to the next level then either recruit someone within the business, or outsource it to a marketing company who can act as your marketing department. However, always bear in mind, it is not just a creative resource you need, you also need someone to manage the strategy and track the figures.

So we hope you enjoy this e-book. If you are disappointed that there isn't a specific subject covered that you would like to learn more about then let us know and one of our marketing consultants can talk you through the topic from an impartial perspective.

A: Advertising

Advertising is an area that many people think IS marketing. It isn't – advertising is merely one element of the communications mix. Advertising used to be very much a mainstream mass marketing tool but the evolution of a new digital environment with a proliferation of multi-media channels has meant that you can be much more targeted with your advertising.

25 years ago we had 4 TV channels and if you wanted to reach out and send a visual message to your target audience you encountered a lot of wastage as you were sending your message to potentially the whole of the country (and paying to do so). Nowadays, for example, if you want to send a message to 25-40 year old fun seeking male sports fans you can be more specific in the media channels you use such as Sky Sports 1, Dave, FHM, The Sun, Facebook and TalkSport Radio. Such targeted audiences makes the cost of advertising much more cost effective. When you add in mobile applications, websites, billboards and industry journals, the number of advertising opportunities is quite overwhelming.

Advertising helps to make your business and brand “familiar”. When people reach a point in their life when they are ready to buy the products and services you supply, if your brand is in the forefront of their mind, because you have positioned it there, then you will be one step ahead of your competitors (as long as your advertising has had a positive effect).

However remember that the purpose of advertising is by and large to sell (or some other call to action). It does not matter how creative the advertising is as long as it does its job and provides a healthy return on investment. Don't be spun a line from an agency that it is all about the creative and winning awards. Awards are nice, yes, but they only benefit the agency – not your brand. If your audience can remember the advert, but not the company who ran the advert... it is completely pointless.

Make sure you test and measure every single advert you run. If your response rates drastically change with different ads – learn from them and understand the reasons why. Do less of what doesn't work and more of what does. It sounds simple... because it is!

B: Branding

We are all exposed to a multitude of brands on a daily basis, and you will get told, by many different people, different stories of what a brand actually is. So here is our take on it.

Brands are more than just logos and names. Logo's and names are the badges that represent your businesses but the brand represents your values as a business and run through every single thing that you do. You need to live your brand – every employee needs to live and breathe your brand values as these will be transferred to your customers through their positive experiences.

How important is the name? Well the quality of your product and service is the most important element – no matter how good your identity is, if the customer experience is poor you will wither and die (some quicker than others). If your name and logo is poor but the quality of what you do is good – the chances are you will make a success of it but it may take you much longer to fulfil your potential.

If you have strength in both, you have the winning formula of becoming successful quicker. If you look at an industry leader like Tesco for example – what does the name say to you? How interesting is their logo? It means nothing, it makes no sense. The logo is uninspiring. However because of the values that they have fostered into their staff, into their stores and into their communications, we all associate Tesco with value. They are now the number one supermarket in the UK (at the time of writing) by some distance but it took them a while to get there.

One last thing, don't try and stretch your brand too far. Just because you have a strong brand it does not mean that it is easily transferable into a new product or service area. Worst case scenario it could undo all the good work you have done in building up a strong brand reputation in your core area. So tread carefully here!

C: Copywriting

Copywriting, as in the copy that you write in all of your communications, is critical to the success of your marketing communications. Invest in getting a good copywriter to help you out in this area – and choose someone from outside of your industry as this avoids your copy being littered with loads of industry jargon that your prospective customers do not understand.

Focus your copy on the customer benefits of using your product or service. Too many companies talk about themselves too much and go to great lengths at telling you how good they are, how many staff they have, when they were established, how many offices etc. I am getting bored just thinking about it. Forget about YOU and what YOU do and focus on THEM and what THEY get.

Also don't make your copy too wordy. The human race is inherently lazy and will get bored with reading after the first few sentences. Short, punchy messages will have much more impact than War & Peace.....which is why we are going to stop here!

D: Database

The database is a pivotal tool within the marketing manager's, or business owner's armoury. It is core to maintaining the ongoing dialogue with a company's customers, pipeline of prospects and target audience. Yet it is staggering how many reasonable sized businesses that we go to see who still have no database or CRM system in place. Now CRM is a much more advanced database system, but even a very simple contact management system is a start in ensuring that you are hitting the right audience with the right communications in both a timely and cost effective manner.

When people think about marketing, rightly or wrongly, they think about lead generation and attracting new customers. In order to do this effectively you need to firstly decide who your core target audience/market(s) is going to be and then create a message that is going to resonate with them. You may have 3 or 4 different target markets and the message to each one may be slightly different – so a clean, well sorted database will allow you to quickly and effectively segment your data so you are sending tailored messages to the right audiences. We bang on about this quite a lot but “ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL”. You can't buy a general list of “companies trading in Yorkshire” and blanket market to them. Well you can but it won't work – you need segmented data and market specific messages. You will waste time and money in sending out a message that you believe has reached everyone but has in reality failed to reach the consciousness of anyone!

Another area which companies often overlook is to generate more value from their existing customer base. It costs around 7 times more to win a new client than to extract the same value from an existing client. The database is key in enabling you to analyse your customer's purchasing patterns and spotting opportunities. Wouldn't it be great if you could, within a couple of clicks, pull up all previous clients of product X who have been inactive in over 12 months. Why have they stopped purchasing? Have they just forgotten about you? If you haven't been in touch with them in this period then it is no surprise.

It saves you time, money, significantly enhances the targeting of communications and allows you to understand the behaviour of your customers and the metrics of your business. I have really only scratched the surface here...but if you are operating without a central database or CRM system, then you are not operating as effectively as you could be!

E: Exhibitions

Exhibitions can provide an excellent way for you to reach your target audience cost effectively. The key element to this is “target audience”. First of all make sure that the visitor demographics for the show are bang in line with who you are trying to reach. If not, it will be an expensive and tiring waste of time! This information is always available from the exhibition media pack – either online or they will send you one. Many exhibitions will sell off last minute space at much reduced rates so it can often be beneficial to play the waiting game! Also, when evaluating a show - ring round some of the previous year's exhibitors to get a true insight into the quality of the event.

The downside to exhibitions is that you are often crammed into an exhibition hall with 100+ other suppliers, some of whom may well be your competitors! There is going to be a lot of promotional “noise” at the event so you need to make sure that you stand out from the crowd. Quite often the event itself will be a seeding process of what will turn out to be a number of fruitful relationships. Here are some key tips to follow in order to get the best return from your event!

1. Set an Objective & Budget

It seems really obvious but many companies go into an event and don't think through exactly what they want to get out of it. Set some targets and goals and work out how much your budget is for the whole event (including accommodation, travel, stand extras, giveaways etc). Once you have a budget and a target in terms of how many clients you need to generate (based on average transaction values) and good idea of your conversion rate then you are clear on how hard you need to WORK during the event. Don't just expect visitors to pile onto your stand. Being there isn't just enough – you need to entice and engage with them.

2. Select a Theme or Message

The most successful stands at exhibitions have a clear theme or message running through them. Don't just turn up and say “Hey this is us – aren't we great”. Once you know what your theme or core message is (which should be centered around a client benefit) you can then tailor everything so it ties in nicely with this theme. This makes your message much stronger and memorable.

3. Be different

Nearly every single exhibition stand will have some graphics and some form of giveaway available – whether it is a glass of champagne, a promotion pen, promotional confectionery, promo mug or an exhibition bag filled with goodies. However, many visitors are hoarders who end up with bagfuls of

free giveaways at the end of the event. Remember that it is the follow up that is going to be key and your prospect has been exposed to 100+ brands in one day. If you can make your brand stand out from the crowd, through the on-stand experience and your branded giveaway and become memorable – this will make the follow up process much easier.

4. Follow up!

Just like with all marketing activity – the follow up is crucial. Harvard Business School states that 80% of sales opportunities are lost purely because of not following up! If you do points 1, 2 & 3 correctly but then fail to follow up...it will prove to be an expensive waste of time. Follow up promptly as well whilst you are still fresh in the prospects mind. Why not grade your prospects? Because remember if you generate 200 leads there is a lot of work there to follow up with them all efficiently. You could follow up your top grade prospects within 5 days, next level within 10 days and bottom tier within 15 days. It could be that some of your leads will just get added to a database for now until they evolve a bit.

F: Financials

It is essential that any business owner or marketing manager understands the key financial metrics of their business, otherwise how on earth do you go about starting to understand how much you are willing to invest in marketing in order to attract an enquiry?

In order to make the right decisions these are the basic figures you need to know....

- Average gross profit margin % (you will need an accurate grasp on your cost bases here)
- Average transaction values within the business
- Average number of transactions per customer per year
- Average number of years a client stays a customer
- Enquiry conversion rate

OK, obviously the more detail you have, the more accurately you can measure specific campaigns and specific products and services. However, bearing in mind most companies do not even track all of these elements, let alone know the figures, we are purely going to work on averages across the board.

The first four figures outlined above will enable you to start to calculate the average lifetime value of a client. This is a critical figure to know for anyone who is serious about marketing their business. If you don't know this figure you are blindly stumbling in the dark.

This can be simple calculated by the following formula:

**Avg Transaction Value x Avg Transactions Per year x Avg Number of Years x Avg Gross Profit margin =
TOTAL LIFETIME CLIENT PROFIT VALUE**

An even more accurate reflection can be calculated if you measure the average number of referrals a client makes over the course of the year. However, for simplicity purposes, we are not going to include that figure in this example.

So now you know what a client is worth to your business, you can start to calculate how much you are willing to spend to gain a new one. So if a client's lifetime profit value is £500, are you willing to spend £50 on winning a new one? £100? £200? £400? You see it all comes down to your business model and different people will see this differently. Only you can make this judgement.

When you have settled on a figure on how much you are willing to spend to win a new customer, you then need to consider your conversion rates. If your conversion rate is only 4% - i.e. you only convert 1 in 25 enquiries into the business and you are willing to spend £300 on winning a new customer then you know that a campaign that costs £1500 needs to generate 125 enquiries in order to secure 5 new clients. Similarly you know that in order to break even on the campaign you need 75 enquiries generating 3 new clients.

Now we are not going to go into how you improve your conversion rates here because there are many different variable factors that contribute to this, such as the number of enquiries, quality of enquiries, price, sales process etc. However, if you don't start testing and measuring campaigns you will have no idea what works and what doesn't work.....and if you don't have a good grasp of the financial metrics of your business then how do you know if your marketing spend is generating a positive return on investment? The simple answer is you don't!

G: Google

From nowhere Google has become an important word within the Marketers' glossary of terms. But is it really the be all and end all? We have all seen business owners obsess over being at the top of Google. Is it really that important? Well the answer is...it depends.

Like anything within the field of marketing, the importance of a channel largely depends on the following factors...

- the objectives of the business
- the product or service that you supply
- the behaviour of your target market
- the financial metrics of the business.

So what do we mean by all this? Surely everyone should aim to be at the top of Google? Well not necessarily. Consider the following scenarios...

- Company W is running at around 90% capacity and has a loyal customer base with high levels of repeat purchase. Its objective is to reach capacity from its existing client base.
- Company X supplies a brand new product which is totally unique but fulfils a problem that consumers are not even aware that they have yet!
- Company Y targets the over 70's market with a special car insurance policy for the elderly.
- Company Z's product has a unit cost of £2.50 at a 20% margin, yet to be on the first page of Google is going to cost around £1500 per month and the estimated volume of traffic is 10,000 searches per month.

So we may have exaggerated some scenarios to make a point, but you can see that for all of the above examples being on page 1 of Google is not really going to help them. If you are mathematically minded you may say that if Company Z converted 3000 sales out of the 10,000 searches then they would cover their costs? But the point is they would not make a profit and they would need a high number of browsers first clicking on their site and then following up with a sale – way above Google averages. A lot of pain for no gain!

However, don't get us wrong, for many businesses (and in fact the majority of businesses) the power of understanding how Google works and being found online quickly and relevantly cannot be underestimated. Some businesses have been built solely open an online presence.

Google is the 21st Century's answer to the Yellow Pages. If you have a need and you don't know anyone through personal experience (or recommendation) to fulfil that need then the vast majority of the population will search online...using Google as their search engine. If you are not found on the first page

but 10 of your competitors are....you have just missed out on a potential enquiry. Google, as a subject area, is very in depth and diverse and many 200+ page books have been written on how to utilise Google within your marketing. I will not attempt to cover off everything about Google but, very simply, you have three main ways to appear on the first page of Google. Through the natural search results, through Google Maps or through paid adverts. To be honest it doesn't matter which method you use, or even all three. The key is that the money you invest into your website, search engine optimisation and cost-per-click adverts generates a positive return on investment.

Whatever you do (and we have often seen this happen) don't let vanity supersede common sense and end up investing thousands of pounds on being top of Google if it is not generating a positive return. It is all very well being top – but if your website itself doesn't work in converting browsers to buyers or enquirers, then it is pointless. Google with care!

H: Hubspot

Hubspot? What is Hubspot? Well it is actually a very natural follow on from the previous topic, Google. Hubspot is a company which specialises in inbound marketing - driving customers to enquire to you rather than you selling to prospects.

Hubspot offer a couple of useful free online tools which can give you an insight to how well your website is performing, from a technical perspective, and also how effective your online marketing is in comparison to your competitors. In effect it is a free resource to benchmark how you are performing and to highlight areas where you could improve things.

Take a look at the following:

<http://websitegrader.com>

<http://marketing.grader.com>

These handy tools take a look at the structure of your site in the same way that Google would view it – so it looks at all the tagging, the number of incoming links of authority, the way you have titled pages and connected social media accounts and blogs.

Basically take a look at these sites and analyse your performance within a few seconds. It may highlight a few areas that you can easily address to improve your online performance! If you don't know how to correct areas of concern you can subscribe to their service to help you, or any web designer/developer, search engine specialist or online marketer should be able to help you!

I: Inbound

Inbound Marketing is a term to explain a different way in marketing your business. Historically marketing has very much been viewed as an outbound discipline, also known as “push marketing”. In short what this means is a company proactively pushing a message out to a marketplace – quite often through channels such as advertising, exhibitions, PR, e-shots, direct mail or a commission driven sales team. It is a scattergun “look at me” approach, often to a mass audience, where you may get lucky and secure some sales – but the chances are your return on investment won’t be too great. Obviously the more targeted this outbound marketing is – the better response and return rates you will get. However bearing in mind the average person is exposed to an average of around 2000-3000 outbound marketing messages per day – you have to cut through a hell of a lot of “marketing noise” to get your message heard.

Inbound marketing, also known as “pull marketing”, is centred around placing yourself in a position where prospects naturally come to you when they are actively in the market for your product or service. Because they are ready to purchase, they are far more receptive to your messages and communications and so your conversion rates are far greater. Your “marketing noise” is actively being sought. Surely all of us would like to be in this scenario? Customers, ready to buy, actually contacting us and looking for us to solve their problem or need? If we can’t convert these types of prospects there is something seriously wrong somewhere!

So Inbound marketing is all about being findable. Key channels in mastering the art of being found are online and also building up a positive reputation that will enhance the natural word of mouth referrals you receive.

Taking a look at your online strategy, there are a number of components that all contribute to your inbound findability – search engine optimisation, blogging and social media activity. All of these will lead an active prospect to your website. It is then the job of your website to engage and communicate to a level that is going to make that prospect contact you for more information. It is no good getting the first half right and driving lots of traffic to your site if your site then turns the hot lead cold. Similarly there is little point having an awesome site if you are not getting the active prospect to find it.

Inbound/outbound and push/pull marketing is a conundrum that many marketers take the wrong option with. Whatever industry you are in, the likelihood is that you will need a mix of both. However more of your efforts should go into creating an inbound marketing strategy as it will be far more cost effective in the long run!

J: Jelly (effect)

J = Jelly.....what are you on about? It sounds like a terrible way of finding a blog for a difficult letter of the alphabet. However Jelly is in reference to a great business/marketing book called The Jelly Effect by Andy Bounds.

Jelly is, in effect, the unnecessary information we throw at people in most scenarios – whether we are in a sales meeting, networking, a presentation or in our everyday marketing material. So how do we determine what information is worthwhile and what is “Jelly”. It is actually not that difficult to identify. Any information that we are firing at people that doesn’t explain the benefit of what our product or service does for them (i.e. what it leaves them with), is not relevant and is unnecessary.

As business owners and marketers we need to stop throwing a bucket of jelly at people and hoping that some of it sticks. How much more powerful would your marketing communications be if 100% of what you said was relevant to the recipient?

In our line of business we do end up looking at a lot of companies websites – it is the first step for many in checking out a potential prospect, supplier or competitor. How many times is “About Us” the first tab on the menu bar? It should be the last. We are visiting a site to try and find out about what you can do for us, but first you insist on telling us all about you and how great you are. How many years you have been in business, how big you are, how many staff you have, how many offices, who all your clients are etc. It is a turn off and unnecessary information. Just because you have over 200 staff doesn’t mean you are going to serve my needs any better. In fact it could mean the opposite?

Only communicate what is relevant. Less is more. It can be very difficult, especially for a business owner, to take a step back and decipher what really is relevant. The only way you can really do this is to put yourself in the mind of the customer. If you can’t do this then get someone in from outside of the business who will see everything completely objectively. Alternatively buy a copy of the Jelly Effect and carry out the exercises within it. It may not solve all of your problems but it will certainly make you more aware of the mistakes you are making!

K: KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid)

Those who have worked within a marketing environment before will recognise the KISS principle – which is an acronym for Keep It Simple Stupid. Basically it means exactly what it says – just keep your messaging as simple as possible.

It is estimated that the average person is exposed to around 2000-3000 marketing messages per day. At first that sounds ridiculous but then when you think about the media we are exposed to daily – TV, radio, magazines and newspapers, shop fronts, van signage, billboards, buses, clothing, websites, direct mail, phone apps, promotional merchandise, e-mails, logos etc and you realise that it is probably quite accurate. So, when the average person is constantly being bombarded with marketing messages, if your message is anything other than simple, it has no chance of cutting through the marketing “noise”!

You also have to bear in mind that the human race is made from a plethora of different personality types and intellects. Some of us like lots of information, however the vast majority of us prefer to get to the crux, quickly and simply. It is no coincidence that some of the most successful people in business over the last 50 years share a similar trait. Richard Branson, Henry Ford, Charles Shwab, Bill Gates, Theo Paphitis, William Hewlett and Simon Woodruff (Yo Sushi) all share one very similar trait – they all suffer from dyslexia. It is their determination to make things as simple to understand as possible – that has enabled them to communicate more effectively with their client base.

So next time you are creating some form of marketing communication then remember to KISS your customers!

L: Loyalty

Loyalty is an important element of any marketing strategy for any business – and comes in various guises, depending on the type of business model you are operating.

How important are your clients to the continued success of your business? It seems like a ridiculous question, because it is obvious that clients are the lifeblood of any business. Without customers you simply do not have a business, just an expensive hobby that won't last very long as you will eventually run out of money (unless you are Roman Abramovich).

Unfortunately, many businesses view marketing purely as a function that generates client interest and then feeds enquiries into the pipeline for the sales team to then convert. There is no doubt that this is one element of the role that marketing plays. However, once a prospect has been converted into a client it doesn't stop there. There should then be a huge marketing effort to build a relationship with that client in order to foster loyalty to your brand and company.

You may have heard before that it can cost 6-7 times more to attract a new client than to generate the same revenue from an existing client. What is more, maintaining an existing customer is much easier and requires less effort! The key is to make the customer feel like a valued client and then fostering brand loyalty within them.

This can be achieved in a variety of ways:

- **Service excellence** – create such an awesome customer experience that they will never desire to go anywhere else. This is an essential component whether it is a low value, regular purchase type of business or a high value, infrequent purchase.
- **Loyalty rewards** – this is financially incentivising the customer to stay loyal through schemes like loyalty cards or member schemes. If you are truly offering service excellence this method shouldn't be needed but it works particularly well when trying to get your clients into an "autopilot" habit – i.e. coffee shops, supermarkets, petrol stations etc.
- **Price** – offering existing clients a reduced renewal deal. Unfortunately most businesses get this wrong, such as insurance companies, financial services and utilities, offering the best prices for first time clients – and then putting the price up in year 2 (which then drives them away). Madness – a lesson in how not to foster loyalty.
- **Recognition** – purely showing clients' that their custom is truly valued and appreciated.

Loyalty is the hidden goldmine of marketing. Your existing clients hold the business growth that your company is seeking and it is right under your nose. If you can foster loyalty you will benefit from repeat purchases, frequency of purchases (potentially), added value purchases, cross selling of products and a solid foundation from which to base your marketing strategy. What's more, if they become true brand ambassadors (they really love you) they will do your marketing communications for you – which has become even easier and more powerful with the boom of social media!

M: Media

One of the key elements to consider when communicating to your target audience is which are the right channels and media to choose. Get this wrong and your whole investment into a specific campaign is likely to go up in smoke. It doesn't matter if you have an award winning creative campaign, if it is not reaching the right audience it will not achieve anywhere near the maximum potential returns.

The first element is to understand who your target audience are. What do they look like, what do they like doing, what papers or magazines do they read, what TV programmes do they watch, what websites do they visit, what shops do they visit etc?

Long gone are the days when you could place an advert on ITV and know you were communicating to roughly a third of the population. Technology and media has moved at an incredible pace over the last 30 years. We can remember the excitement of when we got a fourth TV channel (only to be extremely disappointed – with the exception of Countdown and Italian Football). Today most of us couldn't even tell you how many TV channels we can access from our homes – with them stretching well into the hundreds. What's more is that many of us rarely watch a programme when it is on – meaning we can whizz through the adverts via Sky+ (although there are suggestions subliminal marketing is at work here!).

In addition we now have more radio stations than ever before thanks to the evolution of digital broadcasting, the internet, mobile phones, apps for phones and tablets, iPods, Kindles and we don't even need to go to the paper shop anymore to get the daily paper!

However all of this change is good news for marketing – and we don't mean for the marketing industry, we mean for you marketing your business. You can now be more targeted than ever before. If you want to target 18-25 year old females who enjoy clubbing – there is a selection of specific media you can use to reach them. If you want to target sport loving middle aged men – again they are easy to reach!

The good news is that you no longer need to take a scattergun approach to marketing – if you know who you target market is you can use a sniper rifle.

One last comment on media is that the best time to invest in marketing is during difficult financial periods (which can also be the hardest time to make that call). With the doom and gloom engulfing the world around recessions and national debts you can actually get a much better deal on your media buying opportunities. Couple this with the fact that there is less noise in the marketplace (as less competitors are active) and that you can ensure the right audience is seeing your message (less wastage), the net result is that marketing has never been more cost effective!

N: Networking

According to Harvard Business School, Word of Mouth marketing is the most effective form of marketing. You can see why this is so – we all like to be recommended a company before we take the plunge. Virtually every single person who reads this blog has had a terrible experience with a company that they “took a punt on”. One of the reasons why we can state that with confidence is that, as a country, we have an appalling attitude to customer service. Excellent customer service is actually the exception in the UK – and when we experience an excellent job done we are more than happy to share our experience (especially if provided at good price).

Therefore, it makes sense, that as business owners we should have a strategy for utilising word of mouth marketing in our business. Now “networking” is usually associated with the spread of positive word of mouth and can be a very useful marketing tool for any business but there are a few key elements to doing this properly – otherwise you will find that networking becomes an expensive waste of time (without even noticing). Here is our 5 point checklist to ensure that you are networking in a way that is going to benefit your business.

- Ensure you have clarity over your proposition – can you convey the value you add to clients succinctly within seconds? After all, if people don’t get what you do – how can they refer you?
- Are you networking in the right place? There are a host of networking events – some specialised, some restricted by category, some a free for all. Make sure you are mixing with the right people! It only takes 1 visit to an event to assess the quality of people. Avoid serial networkers – these are the energy sapping leaches that will put you off for life. You know the ones – they cross you palm with a business card within seconds of meeting them! You don’t need a fortune teller to tell the sort of person they are!
- If you are networking via organised events, (which isn’t always necessarily the best way for you or your business), make sure you are happy with the event format. Some are like speed dating, some are more social events, some are referral driven and focussed on generating business. Work out what it is you want and also enjoy.
- Are you trying to help/connect people? That, after all, is what a network is. Good people will always try and reciprocate. You will get to a place where you can be very selective on whom you actually meet up with. Assess who introduces you to the best people and build closer relationships with them, and people like them. Keep in touch – don’t just become a business card (in a drawer).
- Track what you are giving and getting, from which events and from whom. Do more of what is working and ditch what isn’t.

If you fail to follow the above points – networking will not work for you. All you will be doing is having lots of cups of coffee with people who are going to sap your time and energy. You will find the whole process exhausting, time consuming and misleadingly expensive (when you take into account how many business hours you are devoting to it).

If you follow the above pointers, networking can be a really effective way of marketing your business. In order to establish and grow Opportunity Marketing networking has been a critical element in our marketing activity. Some people will tell you networking doesn't work – that is rubbish. They are just not doing it properly (and there are a lot of those people).

O: Online

There have been a lot of letters within this A-Z guide that look at the digital marketplace – whether it is talking about SEO, Inbound Marketing or Social Media. This highlights the importance that an online presence plays in most businesses' marketing strategy today.

25 years ago, most of us would never have even been on a website, let alone built one for our own business. However, fast forward to the modern day and if you don't have an online presence, you are being left behind – and we do seriously mean you will be out of business soon.

Although a website doesn't necessarily need to play a key role in terms of lead generation for your business, today's generation of media savvy purchasers will always (re)search online for a business to check out who they are potentially going to spend money with prior to parting with their hard earned cash – whether they are business clients or consumers.

If you went online to check out a potential supplier and they had no website, what would you think? Have they gone bust? Is this a real company or is someone trying to pull fast one on me? How out of touch is this business – do I want to work with them?

Even the dreaded "website under construction" page sends a shiver down our spine. If it is under construction, leave the old one up until you are ready? (Unless it is damaging your business). What that message says to us is that "I am not interested in giving you any further supporting information about my business and my credentials". We have never worked with a supplier whose website is "under construction" – it doesn't exactly suggest to us that they are completer finishers!

Another no-no is to have a website that does more harm than good. Now we look at a lot of websites in our job and some of them are atrocious. They are littered with grammatical errors, links that do not work, poor copywriting and content, and some of them look (and sound) absolutely awful. If it looks like it is from the 80's – change it. The Internet didn't even exist then! Get someone outside of the business to look at your website from a customer's perspective (not friends and family). Listen to their feedback and make the changes.

Understand the role the website plays in your business. At the very least it should be communicating the values of the business and the level of professionalism you want to convey. At the most, if you marry content, design, functionality and findability it can become the sole sales function of your business.

I bet if we looked at all the SME businesses that have disappeared over the last 5 years and lined up their

their websites alongside their competitors – 90% of them would realise why they went bust! Don't be the next one! Even if online is not viewed as an essential part of your strategy at least make sure it is not damaging your reputation.

P: Price

Price is an issue which many companies struggle with – too expensive and not enough customers will buy their products and services (although margins will be good). Too cheap and the business may win lots of clients and struggle to make any profit at all.

There are many factors that come into play when setting your pricing levels:

1. [What costs are incurred in the supply of the product or service?](#)
2. [What are competitors pricing similar products /services at?](#)
3. [What is the added value that your product or service brings to the customer?](#)
4. [How much is a customer willing to pay for the product or service?](#)

Now, first of all we would like to stress that pricing is intrinsically linked to the underlying strategy of the business. Is the company a volume business – making very small unit margins but working on the basis you will have a high volume of units passing through the business? Or is the company trying to create a luxury brand – is the product of supreme quality or, perhaps, is there such a scarcity that customers are willing to pay a premium? Or is the business a middle of the road mass market mid-range product or service? So whether you base your pricing on points 1, 2, 3 or 4 (or a mix of a few of them) will depend largely on what the fundamental strategy is.

However, coming back to the key pricing factors above, it is imperative that businesses fully understand all of these four elements before setting its pricing levels.

So first of all what costs are involved? You need to have a real grasp on what the base costs of your product/service are before you start. This may sound obvious but if you don't know the absolute minimum cost base of your business, then pricing products and services on gut instinct rather than fact can be a dangerous game to play! You could potentially be haemorrhaging cash on a monthly basis to a point where one day the business is no longer sustainable.

Many businesses operate solely on the basis of knowing what their cost base is and adding X% mark up on these prices across the board. The benefit of this is that you know, as long as you are doing everything else right in the business, your pricing will generate a profit. But will it generate as much profit potential as it could? Another trap to avoid is to always look at profits as a percentage – rather than levels of cash. For example rather than being fixated on operating at 75% margin across all products, dropping the margin on certain products by 10% could cause an uplift in volume sales meaning you could actually generating a higher level of profits (cash in the bank).

This however does not work effectively in the service environment because if you reduce your prices

to increase demand you are then doing more work for the same (or less) money. As a rule of thumb if you are working at a margin of 20% and cut your prices by 10% that would mean that you would have to sell twice as much or work twice as hard to stay at the same profit level.

Price of £100 (Unit price £80 and £20 profit) = 100 units sold equals £2000 profit

Price of £90 (Unit price £80 and £10 profit) = 200 units sold equals £2000 profit

The problem is that a lot of managers within businesses do not have a grasp of their financials and they have no idea how many more units they need to sell to break even if they cut the price. If they did, we think we would see a lot less knee-jerk price slashing 'to survive'.

So once you know your base costs then many companies will then look at what competitors are doing – what level of pricing is the market currently able to take? However, this is an area where you need to be careful and need to be asking yourself the following questions – because is it not always a like for like comparison.

- What is our competitor(s) cost base?
- How is our competitor(s) performing financially?
- How do our products/services differ?
- Are we targeting the same type of client/market?
- Are we going to be using the same channels?
- Is there any added value of one over the other?

If your product or service is of a higher quality or has an additional benefit then it may well be possible to charge a premium for this. However, in order to do so, it is essential that this difference is clearly communicated to customers so that they understand why they are being asked to pay an additional premium.

Unfortunately many companies only go through steps 1 and/or 2 when deciding on the pricing strategy for the business. However it is steps 3 and 4 that hold the key to ensuring that you get your pricing right and maximise the profitability of your business.

What is the added value that your product/service brings to the customer? This is sometimes the hardest element to ascertain. So research your target market and understand the types of customers you are trying to attract. Interview them and find out how they view your products and services. The knowledge you receive from these insights will enable you to price with much greater confidence.

We conducted a series of focus groups recently for a client and the feedback we got from target customers was that they were not buying their product because they thought it was 'too cheap'. They were suspicious of the product because of the pricing and because the benefits (or added value) of using

the product were so important to them – they felt more confident in spending over double the price for a brand that instilled confidence in them, that it was going to do what it promised.

Never assume you know what is important to the customer – ask them and find out! Don't forget that it is never the actual product or service that someone buys – it is the benefit of what that product or service does for them. No-one buys a newspaper – they buy the information and knowledge within it, no-one buys a drill – they are buying the holes, no-one buys the actual haircut – they are buying the image and style they are portraying afterwards.

Hairdressing is a very good example because, at its most basic level, wherever you go you are paying for one stylist, one chair, one mirror, a sink, a pair of scissors and hot air (that is the hair dryer – not the small talk). Yet some hairdressers charge £7 and others charge £70. So who has got their pricing right? Well potentially they both could have because they have completely different strategies. The £7 hairdresser is targeting less affluent customers and trying to attract a high volume of clients and probably has a very basic retail environment and employs stylists with the basic skills and operates at a decent profit. The £70 hairdresser will probably have more salubrious surroundings, more experienced stylists, has invested in marketing and branding, probably be a lot harder to book appointments with (scarcity) and they will be targeting more cash-rich individuals to whom image is critical.

The fourth area is to base your pricing on what the customer is willing to pay. Obviously this needs to take into account points 1-3, but very few companies ultimately base their pricing strategy around this point. If the company has initially overpriced – to stay in business the company will ultimately eventually find this point. If the company has initially underpriced there is a real danger that it will never push its pricing to the point where it finds out how much ultimately the customer is willing to pay.

Each person's perception of value for money differs and there isn't a clearer example of this than the old Leslie Crowther game show "The Price is Right" where contestants spent the whole show trying to guess the prices of products. What always struck me about that show is how far out everyone used to be with their guesses. Now this could have been down the pressure of being on TV and having to make decisions very quickly but it was always interesting to see drastically some people over priced products. This wasn't because they were stupid or lived a sheltered life, it was because the value we attach to different things is very personal. We regularly ask people when they are showing us their latest pride and joy "how much did that cost you" and when they tell us the price we generally think one of three things...

1. You sucker – that is well overpriced for what it is.
2. Wow what a bargain – I may look into one of those.
3. Yeah that sounds about right for what it is!

However someone else looking at exactly the same product may have a completely different immediate response to the price given. This is because we all have different values, different pressure in our life and different views to money. For instance some people really value their time and if they see something that on the face of it seems quite expensive but can save them a lot of time – it interests them. Now someone else may well think – why would I spend all that money on something that I could do myself?

There are many other issues that we could go into with pricing such as multiple-product pricing strategies, loss leaders, pricing clarity, pricing ‘bundles’ but there is probably enough content to create its own e-book. Pricing is just one element of the 7 P’s of marketing. A company cannot compete purely on price – that is a flawed business model and one that will lead to failure. We will just leave you with a quick recap:

- Understand your cost base and profit ratio before dropping prices – don’t assume a price cut will boost profits
- Understand customer needs and added value – communicate these
- Look at competitors carefully – don’t just adopt their pricing strategy
- Don’t discount just to compete – your competitor could drop prices further
- Look at how pricing and brand reputation are interlinked
- Customers DO NOT always chase the lowest prices.

Q: Quality

The overarching key to your success is ultimately in the quality of the product or service you provide. Conducting all the marketing in the world is all good and well to raise awareness and generate leads however if the quality of what you offer isn't up to par then you'll still experience trouble in converting leads into acquisitions and retaining customers in the long run.

When many SMEs start out a massive onus is often placed on ensuring the quality of their product/service is spot on. This is often due to the need to prove that their offering is worthwhile and so the quality helps to build credibility during the initial stages. However what often happens with these very same businesses when they grow is that quality can be sacrificed and the focus is instead turned to other areas. For example if an SME starts to experience a sudden growth in demand and is currently working at close to full capacity the focus is then switched to meeting this demand by any means necessary which often leads to quality deteriorating at some point.

This is especially true for businesses operating in the services sector where the quality of the service provided is paramount, however if resources are over exerted due to excessive demand then chances are customers will experience at best a mediocre level of service. Many businesses who offer a service rely on retaining customers for future business and so providing a quality experience on a consistent basis is vital as a couple of bad experiences could lead to losing a customer for a lifetime. Manufacturers also face a similar problem when they take their eye off quality. Faults and defects can start to creep through and end up on store shelves, opening the door to scrutiny when noticed by buyers. This is why it's important for them to maintain quality control procedures and conduct regular checks at varying stages to ensure everything is as it should be.

Why quality is more important now than ever before

The adverse affect of poor quality is far more damaging now than ever before. The growth of smartphone technology along with smartphone ownership now means that people have instant access to voice their opinions as and where they please. Many people will waste no time in leaving negative feedback on review sites and social media, with research supporting the fact that people are more willing to leave a review after a negative experience than they are for a positive one. Additionally people are also more likely to share a bad experience amongst their friends and family than they are a good one. A few bad reviews can seriously tarnish a SMEs image, especially if they don't have positive reviews to counteract these. For this reason it should be encouraged to develop a degree of dialogue between your business and your customers in order to not only receive more reviews of a positive nature but also gain feedback on any issues which there may be in a more constructive manner.

Measuring customer satisfaction

- **Customer surveys** - conducting a post purchase survey is a great way of gaining customer feedback fresh from their experience. These surveys don't have to be publically published and so provide a discrete means of identifying and then dealing with any issues internally.
- **Independent review site** - sites which such as Trust Pilot and Trip Advisor allow you to gradually build a set of reviews which over time will support the quality of your offering and allow your business to be seen in a more favourable light.
- **Social media** - Social media is huge today and people are often directly communicating with brands. Having people leave their feedback on social media can be a risky ploy with it being such an open and public platform. However doing so also shows a degree of care and concern in the quality of the offering you provide and direct communication through social media can help to alleviate bad feelings with a dissatisfied customer.

A high quality offering should be the focal point of your business, and having it publicised through things such as reviews should also be concentrated on to help build credibility for what you do. Engage with your customers and encourage them to leave reviews when you feel they've been pleased with your product or service.

R: Research

While some decisions are fine to be made on gut instincts, there are also times when a well informed decision is required and in these instances research is needed to justify the decision. While conducting research is crucial for making certain decisions, it also plays a major part in maintaining awareness of the current market landscape and your position within it.

Research can be conducted to look at a number of things. These areas include:

Competitors:

Assessing exactly who your competitors are and how they're doing is crucial to the success of your own business. Conducting research can bring to light things such as their financial performance and any plans to expand their current offerings. This will give you a better idea of where you stand amongst your competitors and allow you to better plan for the future.

The market place:

Having a clear idea of market demands is vital as these things can evolve gradually over time and can go unnoticed without the required research. Being able to cater for required changes is vital and could mean you need time to adjust so identifying it as early as possible will only stand you in a better position.

Your own customers:

Researching your customers is a great way of finding out how your business is doing. It may also help to bring to light other information such as consumer buying habits and what really matters to them during their purchasing process. These insights will then allow you to improve the quality of your offering from not only the end product but also the buying experience itself.

The internal running of your business:

An area which is often overlooked when conducting research is looking into your own business. While you may feel you know it well, conducting research is sure to uncover some things you may have been unaware of. Getting staff feedback every so often will ensure that you're always on top on any issues that may be arising and will allow you deal with them before they grow any further.

Technological changes:

We live in an age where technology is so influential around us, and most businesses will face technological changes that will affect their business in some way or another. Ensuring you're aware of technological advancements will mean that not only will you be prepared to embrace new ways of operating but you will also place yourself in line with or ahead of your competitors.

There have been a number of high profile cases where a lack of research and market awareness has led to the downfall of businesses. A prime example of this is Blockbuster's demise which saw it hit bankruptcy in 2010. The lack of understanding for the potential demand for online video streaming was not recognised early enough and once Blockbuster did attempt to provide an online offering it was too costly for the business. This led to the decision being overturned and their continued offline operation eventually saw the business hit rock bottom as the likes of Netflix grew in popularity.

As an SME it can be difficult to free up the hours to conduct enough research into the internal and external factors of your business and market place. So while the process of researching can be time consuming there are alternatives to getting it done such as outsourcing the process to companies which specialise in conducting research. This will allow you to continue to operate as usual and dedicate more time to the business while the data and information is collected and reported back to you.

S: Social Media

The 21st century has opened up a plethora of new marketing avenues and opportunities for ambitious UK businesses to explore, none more convenient and adaptable than the world of social media. Social networks like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+ have taken the world by storm and offer lucrative opportunities for companies here in the UK and abroad, but they often represent something of a double-edged sword, too. If you wish to make the most of the world of social media marketing, it makes sense to understand a little more about it. Take a look at the pros and cons of this modern approach to marketing here, and see how your business can benefit in future.

The pros

- **It's free** – As you'll no doubt be aware, it's free to set up a social media account, and your marketing activities via these means needn't cost very much whatsoever. While sites like Facebook and now, Twitter, will charge you for advertising directly on their networks, certain types of marketing, like content marketing for instance, won't cost you a penny.
- **It's popular** – Never before have marketers been able to reach so many people at once at such a low initial cost. Millions of people worldwide have social media accounts, so your marketing activities can be more far-reaching than ever if you take advantage of the opportunities offered by social media marketing.
- **It's interactive** – Unlike the overwhelming majority of marketing outlets, social media marketing is interactive. As a result, you can obtain valuable information from your customers without the difficulty and expense involved in auditing your marketing activities, as people won't hesitate to share their thoughts and opinions with you online.

The cons

- **It's difficult** – Successfully marketing your brands, products and services via social media isn't easy, and because it's free, you'll be confronted with unprecedented levels of competition. Online audiences are more discerning than their traditional media counterparts, so your marketing activities need to be of a higher quality if they're going to get noticed online.
- **It's dangerous** – The problem with an interactive form of marketing is that customers won't hesitate to make their opinions clear if they think you've made a mistake or done something stupid. A social media marketing exercise can backfire spectacularly if you're not careful, as many big companies have discovered to their cost.

- **It's hit-and-miss** – The promise of a social media marketing campaign going 'viral' is enough to whet the appetite of any would-be marketer, but the truth is, few attempts ever achieve that level of popularity. It's far more likely that your brand's marketing activities will simply slip beneath the radar, lost in sea of similar competition.

Social media marketing can be extremely rewarding, but it isn't easy to perfect. If you want to make the most of the online opportunities available to you in the 21st century, you'll benefit from some expert help.

T: Trends

The marketing industry is one of the fastest moving industries in the UK, driven as it is by emerging technologies and unpredictable audience trends. Over the past few years we have seen a host of new marketing memes sweep through the industry, some of which businesses were happy to include in their marketing activities and others that were more problematic. With that in mind, we've taken a look at some of the marketing trends which have had an impact recently. Is your brand prepared for these five marketing memes?

Written content – Content marketing is becoming increasingly relevant as the top brands look for more innovative ways to engage audiences through digital media marketing. The days of mindless keywording to increase Google ranks are behind us, and these days, anyone who is anyone has a dedicated corporate blog with which to bring engaging content to potential or existing customers. If you don't already have one, trust us – you will soon.

Visual content – Content marketing isn't just about the written word, however. A large number of modern businesses are looking to visual content as a means of engaging audiences, too. Sites like Pinterest, Instagram and YouTube allow companies to share and distribute exciting visual (and frequently viral) content, reaching all new markets and encouraging engagement with the brand, its products and services.

PR disasters – Gone are the days when a PR blunder could be swept under the rug and simply forgotten about. These days, if a company makes a mistake it only takes a couple of hours before it's trending on Twitter. The ability to share and disseminate information instantaneously means that PR blunders can go global in mere moments – social media can be more damaging for modern businesses than the traditional press.

PR stunts – There are two sides of the PR coin, and modern marketers are beginning to come to terms with the fact that social media exposure can work in their favour, too. The greatest example of a PR stunt in 2012 was Felix Baumgartner's record breaking freefall attempt – watched live by 8 million people and organised, sponsored and branded by Red Bull. We can expect to see this trend continue, as image and reputation becomes increasingly important to brands' marketing activities.

Social influence – Social media is integral to 21st century digital marketing, and it's a tool that cuts both ways. Social media has the power to influence a brand – audience sentiment analytics have never been easier to come by, so reacting to audience trends is now a quick and easy process. The most enterprising brands are now looking to exert their own influence via social media, however – instigating trends, communicating with customers and taking an active role in social and environmental responsibility.

U: UBP (Unique Buying Proposition)

In many areas of business we can often get stuck in our ways of thinking, leading to us doing things the way we've naturally become accustomed to. This is even more commonplace within SME's where there might be an individual running the business who lacks the opportunity to bounce ideas off anyone or get a new perspective on things. With this in mind – try and apply this new marketing philosophy within your business. Rather than trying to focus on communicating your Unique Selling Points (which is what most businesses do), flip it on its head and establish what your UBP's are (Unique Buying Proposition).

The main problem with a USP is that the whole communication is coming from the sales person's perspective – the business. It is what makes them unique from a sales perspective. However as a prospective customer I don't really want to know what is unique about you (if there really is anything unique at all – and "excellent service" isn't unique). What I want to know is what's unique about what you can do for me, from my perspective. What is it about your offering that I am going to buy into?

Switching the focus from your USP to your UBP will instantly mean you'll be taking on a more consumer orientated approach. This will require you to fully understand your target audience along with their key purchasing drivers and benefits which ultimately influence their choice of whether to buy or not to buy. Once these elements have been distinguished you can move onto attempting to make their buying decision easier – thus improving your own conversion rates and sales cycle.

Look at providing them with the key benefits of your specific offering and why they want it /need it. However, be careful not to be sucked into focussing too much on your product or service features. For example if you are selling a gadget of some sort - your consumer may not be concerned about the size of the memory or if it's the first on the market to feature a certain piece of technology, instead they want to know how that extra memory space or piece of technology will actually benefit them (save them time, longevity of product, response speeds etc).

No-one likes to be sold to, we have an inbuilt resistance to slick sales patter and the possibility of being sucked in to buying something we don't really need or want. So instead of focusing on your business and your product which is what a USP centred approach does, put yourself in your prospective customer's shoes and understand what exactly they want to know which will sway them to make the purchase. Outline the direct benefits that they will experience from choosing your product /service and you'll soon find that they are more open to making the purchase.

To sum up, your UBP should be short, sharp and to the point. Get across how it will benefit the buyer in a way which the competition maybe isn't and you will soon find a greater number of enquiries coming in and, arguably more importantly, a much higher conversion rate.

V: Viral

Thanks to the emergence of digital technologies, the internet and social sharing websites, the face of global marketing has changed dramatically over the last twenty years or so. These days, no company is going to throw huge chunks of their marketing budget at expensive, traditional advertising forms when they can produce a successful viral ad for a fraction of the price. Virals, as the name suggests, have the ability to spread to millions of different people in a very short space of time, while their cost-effectiveness means that they hold considerable appeal for cash-strapped companies looking to create a marketing sensation. So, how can you make a viral video capable of generating millions of online hits? As you may have expected, it isn't as easy as it looks...

Don't write an ad

Viral adverts aren't like conventional marketing activities. The more you try to 'sell' a product or service in your viral, the less likely it will be to take off online. Some of the most successful viral ads have only a very tenuous connection to the thing they're designed to promote, but the fact that millions of people will be exposed to the associated brand is enough to guarantee their marketing success.

Do something different

Viral ads are all about thought leadership – no-one is going to share your video if it's something they've seen before. While you may be tempted to follow a template set out by others before you, you're unlikely to make much of a splash if you're simply retreading a well-worn path.

Be visually engaging

Online video is primarily a visual medium, so if you want to keep your viewers watching until the end before reaching for those social share buttons, you need to do something visually bombastic. If your idea is suitably amazing, you're likely to see that YouTube view counter creep up and up...

Invoke an emotional response

The best viral ads make people feel something – whether it's the 'aww factor' of a cute animal, the jaw-dropping dynamism of an incredible stunt or the sudden shock of an unexpected scare. Doing something new, engaging and unexpected is a sure-fire way of getting people watching your video, sharing it with their friends and spreading it around the world.

W: WOM (Word of Mouth)

As an SME it's important you make the most of every avenue available to get your brand noticed and increase awareness and trade. Word of mouth presents a great opportunity to achieve this and should not be overlooked. It's cost effective as it is completely free and the potential coverage could be expansive if you're communicating with the right people. In addition to this one of the best advocates for trusting a new business is hearing positive news about it first hand from a trusted individual or friend/family member. However you can't just reap the rewards of word of mouth without putting in some work beforehand.

Effective broadcast through word of mouth requires key bits of information to be communicated clearly. This involves the three W's, which are:

- **Who**
- **What**
- **Why**

The 'who' is about who you're looking to speak to in term of your target audience. People need to have a clear idea of this as there isn't much point if people are sharing your brand with those who aren't interested in what you offer and don't fall within your target demographic.

The 'what' refers to the products/service you are offering. Consumers need to have a clear idea of what it is you do in order to share it with other people. This is where communication is key in getting across what your core product or service offering is.

Lastly is the 'why', with this being the most crucial of the three points. Consumers need to know why they should firstly share what you do with other people and in turn why people should use your business. You should be looking to really hone in on how your product/service can directly benefit your target audience as this will be the defining factor in driving them to actually make a purchase.

Getting referred

While it's one thing knowing what pieces of information need to be provided, the process of actually networking and being referred is another task in itself. There are however a few things you can do to increase the likelihood of people talking about you.

In order to help yourself be seen in a more favourable light and aid the process of gaining more referrals you should also look to help people. Spending time helping others will undoubtedly work towards

people returning the favour. Additionally you don't want to develop a reputation of solely taking and not giving back, while that might work in the short term, over time people will be discouraged from referring you.

While we recommend helping others, we'd also warn against developing too large of a network. Having too many contacts can often lead to you never really developing ties with any of them due to the sheer number so always think of quality over quantity. Similar to Dunbar's number theory that states we can only physically maintain meaningful relations with no more than 250 (between 100-250) people, quality contacts will soon become distant acquaintances if your network grows too large. It's down to you to gauge what you feel to be a reasonable size depending on you work and other social commitments.

Finally look to keep in touch with your contacts. Often an occasional email to ask how things are going can work wonders in not only maintaining the link but also keeping you on their mind for potential referral opportunities. This should be a lot easier if done alongside the previous point and you maintain a reasonably sized network.

X: X Marks the Spot

The marketing industry is moving fast. New technologies, new techniques and even new audience theories are driving marketers forwards, allowing them to communicate with their customers and potential customers in increasingly intimate ways. Personalised target marketing is just one such development, combining emerging technologies with improved marketing knowledge in a very progressive way. Personalised target marketing is taking the industry by storm, so what do you need to know about this increasingly important form of marketing? We've endeavoured to answer a few of the most common questions about personalised target marketing to give you a little more information on the subject...

Q: So what is personalised target marketing?

A: Personalised target marketing is a technique in which marketers customise their strategies in order to appeal to the individual, rather than the masses. Taking a scattergun approach to marketing isn't very cost-effective when it comes to some products and services, so targeting only those people who might have a vested interest in those products and services allows marketers to experience a greater success rate at a lower cost.

Q: But how does it work?

A: In a nutshell, personalised target marketing is a data capture exercise. Marketing companies will amass data on their customers and potential customers alike in order to determine their interests and buying habits - thus giving them a greater chance of reaching them with marketing material they'll approve of. Social media is a particularly lucrative resource for data miners looking to learn as much as possible about their customers.

Q: What does this mean for my business?

A: Thanks to social media, gathering data for personalised targeted marketing is quick, cheap and accurate. With that data you can then send out mailers with a far higher chance of generating positive read-through and click-through figures. Why spam thousands of disinterested people when you could reach out to those who are more likely to take an interest - for a lot less money - instead?

Q: Is it just social media, then?

A: No, it's not just social media. Marketing data can be captured by cookies - online tools that record page views and browsing habits - in order to target pop-up and banner adverts to those who are more likely to pay attention to them. Cookies aren't alone either. Ever wonder why sites such as Facebook seem to be covered with adverts related to your favourite bands, TV shows and sports teams? That's personalised targeted marketing in action! There are even some experts looking to harness the power of the human genome in order to make personalised target marketing even more accurate and effective in future...

Y: Your Staff

A couple of “reality” TV shows have graced our screens over the past few years which hammer home the message of how important people are within the marketing mix. Ramsey’s Kitchen Nightmares and Undercover Boss are perfect examples of how good people can elevate a brand above its competitors whilst bad people (or I should rather say unmotivated people) can ensure that a customer never buys from your company again. And if you work for yourself as a sole trader then this is still relevant because you are still a key element of your marketing mix.

Leading from the top

OK let’s start with Gordon Ramsey and his Kitchen Nightmares. You could argue that 9 times out of 10 it is the ‘product’ that is wrong with the featured restaurant (i.e. the food) and to a certain extent you are right – this does always need addressing. However if you watch any episode you will notice that there are always 4 key marketing elements that Gordon addresses – the product is the first one, the physical environment (the décor), the processes, and finally the people. However it is the people that are the most important element and we will explain why.

When ever ‘Chef Ramsey’ turns up at the latest disaster zone you will notice a common similarity between the restaurant owners who are always in one of two camps:

1. They are at their emotional wits end and have lost their drive and passion to make it work.
2. They are in denial that there is anything wrong.

Throughout any organisation the staff are led by the people at the top and if there is no passion and direction coming from the leader then this will filter through to the customer facing staff. If the person at the top is demotivated or delusional then not only will the standards of the people drop but subsequently so will the quality of the product, the slickness of the processes and systems and the physical environment – which in this show is both the dining area and the kitchens. Everything stems from the people.

Although every episode ends with a restaurant and menu makeover, the main key difference that Gordon makes is getting the staff believing in themselves and the restaurant again and taking pride in the service that they are delivering. If he doesn’t achieve this, the rest is purely cosmetic and will just delay the inevitable.

Brand Consistency

Whereas Kitchen Nightmares focuses on a one location business, Undercover Boss tackles the problems of how to maintain control over businesses across multiple geographic locations. However what is

strikingly obvious again is that the key element to the smooth running of a successful business is its PEOPLE.

Again there is a key repetitive theme throughout this series and you can see that when a badly wiggled boss visits different outlets – although the brand, product, price and interiors are almost the same they still have a completely different feel and operate at different levels of performance – and this is purely down to the people. Those people who love the company that they work for and what the brand stands for, enthuse passion and customer service and this is what makes customers return again and again.

On one episode about Isuzu Trucks the head of the business commented that she was disappointed that they had invested a lot of time and money on creating a customer care programme which was not being efficiently filtered through to its customers. However this is no-one else's fault but the board of the company. There are two levels of customer care. Ultimately you are looking to service your external customers, so that they become repeat customers and potentially even brand ambassadors for your business. However, first you have to engage with your internal customers – your staff. If you fail to create brand ambassadors within your own business then it will never filter through to your clients.

Sole traders

So now on to those who cry “but I don't have any people to manage, I am a sole trader”. Well guess what, YOU are the people element of your marketing mix. You will have heard time and time again that “people buy people” and you hear this regularly because it is true. When anyone sets up in business they spend all of their time working on perfecting the product or service. This is the core element (they believe) that will make or break the business. They then spend money on getting a website and a brochure to promote the product or service and price their product accordingly to generate interest.

Now, OK, if you work in a commodity product industry where people are transacting online this probably won't apply, but any non-commodity product or service providers try this exercise. Think back to the last time a new customer bought from you. Was it purely the product they loved, was it your pricing, was it your brochure? Well even if they did love all of those things, if they didn't have confidence in YOU (or even like you) then they would have never have ordered from you!

Never lose sight of the fact that it is people that are crucial to the marketing success of your business – whether it is the people at the top or the people at the very bottom. They all communicate your brand values in some way. Remember on person's attitude, mood or communication style can undo years of brand loyalty in a matter of seconds.

Z: Zest

We end the marketing A-Z with where it all starts for many businesses, having the zest for a particular industry or a certain field of interest and creating a business out of this. 'Zest' refers to the passion and interest in what you do and this for us is something you should work to maintain for as long as you run your business. If you haven't yet started your own business then find that one thing which really interests you and you can see yourself working around for years to come.

Finding your 'zest'

It can often be tricky to find that point of interest which you can actually turn into a business, however there are a few factors which you can find your passion within and which have formed the foundations of many businesses.

1. An interest in a particular product/service

For many people their interest in a certain product or service (or even industry sector) is the main driving force behind their start-up ideas. This interest is usually developed through years of working within a field and gaining a deep level of understanding in regards to all of the workings within the sector. Alternatively people may just develop an interest as a result of using a particular product or service on a regular basis but finding a way in which it could be improved through the consumption of it.

2. A mission to achieve a goal

Having a goal you'd like to accomplish is also a great base for a business as it provides you with the impetus to continue driving forward to achieve whatever it may be. Social enterprises and environmental organisations are a prime example of this as their main pursuit is to serve a purpose and accomplish some sort of goal, whether it be tackling social problems or sustaining the environment.

3. Personal interests

Personal interests can make it somewhat easy to start a business or awfully tricky, and it's all dependant on the interest which takes your fancy. You must however remember that there is likely to be a business opportunity of some form regardless of what your interest is, so don't be put off in thinking that it might not appeal to everyone. For example a jeweller will most likely be heavily engrossed in jewellery in general along with emerging trends and crafting new designs, this shows the direct translation of turning a personal interest into a business. On the other hand someone who might be a football enthusiast but not skilled enough to become a professional could start a coaching school, a football based merchandise store or become a freelance football journalist, which is more of an indirect approach to creating a business out of a personal interest.

Maintaining your zest

Keeping the passion you have for what you do will help to ensure you get the best results out of what you offer and maximise returns as you will find yourself working harder. This invested interest is likely to lead you to finding opportunities to improve your offering, something which might not be seen if you're working lackadaisically.

One of the main reasons for losing an interest and the love for what initially spurred you to start is being separated from the core of the business. When a business grows substantially you can find yourself being drowned in tasks that don't really interest you. Things such as managing your accounts and conducting marketing might not be something which appeals to you and spending hours a week or even a day is only going to draw you away from the parts of your business that you actually enjoy and so you should look to either employ someone to conduct the duties or outsource them.

As the Thomas J Watson quote goes, "The great accomplishments of man have resulted from the transmission of ideas of enthusiasm", so find your passion and an idea which gets you enthused to set yourself on the path of starting a business which will hold your interest for the long term and with it bring you success.

Summary

So that is our A-Z of Marketing. By no means an exhaustive list but plenty of areas to get the old grey matter whirring. If you found this collection of topics useful we would love to hear your comments via social media or email.

If there is a subject area you would like to discuss in more detail, or even an area that you would like some advice on that is not covered within this E-book then please get in contact using the various communication methods outlined below.

Opportunity Marketing is a network of consultants scattered across the UK so if you would like to speak in more detail to any of us then please visit our website and book an appointment with your nearest marketing specialist.

All of our contact details are listed below so please feel free to subscribe to our blog feed, follow us on Twitter or connect with us on Linked In or Facebook.



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