



Marketing for Irish SMEs



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Marketing for Small and Medium Enterprises

In this guide, we will look at how marketing can help your small or medium business and highlight key issues of which you should be aware. If you have any queries on any aspect of this, please feel free to contact us to discuss.

In particular we will look at the following topics:

- What marketing can do for your business?
- Decide what you want your business to achieve from marketing.
- Hire an expert (consultant or agency) but choose your expert wisely
- What is in a marketing plan?
- Get company – wide involvement in marketing from the beginning.
- Explanation of Terms



What can marketing do for your business?

Marketing can help you sell more and/or reduce your costs. Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? Provided it is done right, of course and there's the rub. Many companies will gleefully dive into digital marketing activities without a properly thought out plan and we know it's a cliché, but it's still true – “if you fail to plan, you plan to fail”.

Digital marketing when combined with traditional marketing and integrated properly with your sales activities can be fantastic for increasing your revenue and/or cutting your costs. As with any project, it needs to be planned, properly implemented, correctly controlled and reviewed and any necessary changes implemented. Provided you have implemented your marketing activities properly, it can achieve a myriad of business goals such as:

- Improve the leads from your website
- Improve customer service
- Cut down on customer service time
- Build awareness of your company
- Provide channels for ongoing customer and prospect engagement
- Get your company found on “Google searches”
- Build an image of your company as a reliable, knowledgeable and credible company
- Drive more visitors to your website and many other goals



Decide what you want your business to achieve from marketing.

Write down what you hope to achieve by investing in marketing

A good way to crystallize these thoughts is to ask yourself this question:
What do I want to be different in my company after having done marketing for one year?

A few of the common answers are as follows:

- I would like better quality leads coming from our website – at the moment, it produces very few leads/poor quality leads
- I would like to increase the awareness of my business in the market– at present I don't have time to get “out there” and spread the word about my business
- I would like to have an updated, good-looking, mobile-friendly website
- I would like to increase the volume of sales





Hire an expert (consultant or agency) but choose your expert wisely.

For most SMEs, creating a comprehensive marketing plan will require outside expertise such as that from a marketing consultancy or agency.

Most consultants/agencies offer a free, no-obligation first consultation. However, some may have a minimum monthly spend or may not be interested in working with you unless you spend a minimum amount up-front.

My suggestion would be to check their website to see what type of companies they have worked with before – if their clients are large semi-states and publicly quoted companies and your business is a SME, it is likely that they may not be a good fit for you.

On the other hand, make sure the expert really is an expert – somebody who “dabbles” in digital marketing or is permanently scrolling on their mobile phones, posting their every move to their Facebook page does not necessarily make them an expert in digital marketing. The goal of any digital marketing will be to ultimately increase the profitability of your company by increasing sales. Therefore any person or consultant that you contract must understand how sales and marketing work first and foremost. We recommend having an initial consultation with three different marketing consultancies. Afterwards, you will undoubtedly have learnt a lot of useful information which will make deciding how to proceed a lot clearer. If and when you do choose a marketing consultancy to work with, they should devise the marketing plan in conjunction with you and your staff. Such a plan will contain a number of elements — among other things it should answer all the “who, where, why, what, when, how, what if” type of questions. Below we look at the key elements of a marketing plan.



What's in a Marketing Plan?

Diving into marketing of any type, whether it's digital or traditional marketing without a thorough plan means you are unlikely to get the results you want.

Most of us will have seen a business Facebook page, for example, where the page had a flurry of posts when it first launched, only to become less and less frequent reaching a point where the last post was 6 months ago. This will not create a good image of a company to anyone who views such a page. Marketing is not simply a case of setting up, say, a Facebook page or a LinkedIn Company Page and then sitting back and watching your revenue grow. Therefore your marketing consultant should provide you with a detailed, understandable, written plan for the next 12 months. In brief, the marketing plan should include the following elements:

- Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT)
- Objectives
- Strategy
- Tactics
- Actions
- Control and Review



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SWOT (also known as Situation Analysis – examining the strengths and weaknesses of your company, the opportunities and threats that the external environment present to your company)

Objectives as described above but refined into specific, measureable, actionable, realistic and timely objectives (known as SMART objectives)

Strategy includes segmenting the market, choosing target markets and deciding how you will position your company versus your competitors

Tactics (which tools you will use, including digital tools such as SEO (i.e. optimizing your website), Blogs, Email Marketing, Social Media, Link Building, Pay-per-Click advertising, Display advertising and traditional marketing, such as networking, telephone prospecting, sponsorship etc. and how these will integrate with sales activities)

Actions (detailed specific actions)

Control (benchmarks, schedule and review)

While a document like this doesn't have the scope to examine in detail each aspect of a marketing plan, I have highlighted below important aspects of the plan of which companies need to be aware.



Make sure that the marketing plan you receive is a plan that covers all types of marketing.

A marketing plan that only covers “digital” – (such as doing social media or upgrading your website) may mean you are possibly missing out on major growth opportunities for your business. Check that the plan reviews all your current traditional marketing and sales activities and if possible,



suggests other traditional activities that would benefit your company and be integrated with digital activities. For example, a previous customer of mine had 3 excellent sales representatives working in the field. These sales representatives found business by telephone prospecting, word-of-mouth and by enquiries that came in unsolicited from their website.



However, none of the sales reps or senior management ever attended the many industry events that their prospects frequented. This was an opportunity for the company to network and meet prospects in a sociable but professional environment. In this case, I suggested that each rep be given an opportunity in turn to attend these events to network (Traditional marketing) and that if they met any suitable prospects at these events, to invite them to connect on LinkedIn and (where appropriate) invite them to follow the company's new LinkedIn Company Page or receive the company's new eNewsletter. (Digital marketing).





Tactics

Your plan should explain why the chosen tools and methods listed in the plan have been selected and why any other prominent tools have been left out. For the digital part of the strategy, the following are the main types of tactics that can be used. These are Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Blogs, Pay per Click (PPC) advertising, online (display) advertising, Email Marketing, Affiliate Marketing and Social Media Marketing.

For example, for a recent business-to-business client, we decided on a LinkedIn Company page as their prospects and customers are professional buyers, mainly in larger food companies. However, as customer confidentiality was a key issue, we did not use a Facebook page as this is an open social media tool, where followers of a Facebook page can see other followers' posts. Also, although it sounds obvious, it is worth stating that there is no point being on a social media platform if your prospects don't use it. "Be where your customers are" is sound advice.





Actions

This is clearly a very important part of your plan. It is the nuts and bolts of your plan. After reading the actions part of your plan, you should be able to answer the following questions:

What exactly are we going to do? How often? Both traditional and digital activities for each tactic chosen above need to be listed.



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A simplified example is shown below.

Type	Channel	Action	Frequency	Measurement
Digital	LinkedIn Company Page	-Create content for updates -Ask staff on LinkedIn to share updates	3-5 per week	-Website traffic from LinkedIn -Shares -Likes -Comment
Digital	Email Marketing	Create content for regular eNewsletter	Monthly /Weekly	Email Open Rate Links Clicked
Digital	Links Building	Request that the industry associations of our customers show a link to our site. List of associations.	Ongoing	Links Achieved – measure with www.prchecker.com
Traditional	Networking	Create list of events to attend	At event times	Number of Prospects connected to at these events
Traditional	Sponsorship	Sponsor local football club	One-off	Word-of-mouth referring to seeing sponsorship

Content Calendar: A content or editorial calendar listing what content will be posted and in what channels for the next period of 6 or 12 months is a must to maintain control.



What sort of “content” will we create?

(Content is the information that you will post on social media, in eNewsletters, in print media etc.)

The guru of content creation, Joe Pulizzi, founder of the Content Marketing Institute and author of the book “Create Content, Get Customers” said the following: ***“Content must either help your customers (or prospects) to do their work better or live their lives better”*** This is an excellent yardstick by which to measure your content. Constantly posting about how wonderful your company is or bombarding them with photos of your company’s staff does not measure up against this yardstick. A good way to generate content is think of all the customer “pain points”, the things that customers don’t understand, the things that customers complain about, the things that went wrong with customers in the past year. Yes, it is painful to sit down and go through all the negative stuff- but it can generate some very helpful content.

Think about what your customers are trying to achieve – for a packaging company that I worked with, they realized that their customers’ products were on retail shelves and their main challenge was to stand out from other products. Therefore any content relating to creating eye-catching or unusual packaging design was of great interest to their customers.

The best marketing results when there is company-wide involvement in creating the information (i.e. “content”) that you will post on your social media outlets. You will not achieve optimum results when, for example, the MD of your company works with a marketing agency or consultancy in isolation from the rest of the staff. All staff who deal with customers at any stage should be included.

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Who will do this work?

Will this above work be completed by the marketing company you have contracted? Is your long-term goal to have an internal staff member do this work? If it is, is there a staff member who is qualified? If not, will the marketing company provide training? Details of this training would need to be defined. Does the staff member has sufficient time to complete the work and respond to any comments/queries from social media, blog page comments etc.?

Who will actually write the content?

Will this be the marketing company or will it one of your staff? If it is one of your staff, have they any knowledge or experience of writing?

What will happen to any new leads generated from marketing?

Think carefully about how you will handle new leads generated – which staff will receive them, how will you monitor if they have been followed up etc.





Control and Review

As with any project, you'll need to review progress and make adjustments to your strategy depending on results to date. The table below is a good example of a format for measuring results and controlling the digital aspect of your marketing project.

Channel	Measurement tool and metrics	Objectives	Decisions-making based on analysis
Website	www.statcounter.ie and Google Analytics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unique visitors Visit Length Bounce rates Downloads Pages Viewed eNewsletter subscribe rates Visits from linking sites Device used Search engine used 	Reduce bounce rates to <23% Increase % who spend 30 secs to 5 minutes by 10% Increase referrals from linking sites Create mailing list from subscribes	management
Email Marketing	Mailchimp reports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> open rates > 20% links clicked bounce rates unsubscribe rates forwards to friend CTR to website > 2% CTR to enquiries sent 1% 	Engage prospects Generate enquiries Maintain Brand Awareness	management
Social Media (LinkedIn)	Number of Leads from LinkedIn contacts Number of Followers No of Profile views	Brand Awareness Generate leads Share content Improve SEO	As above
Link Building	Google Analytics– incoming traffic links	Generate referrals	As above
Blog on website	Visits Inbound links Referring websites Shares	Engagement with prospects Referrals to website	As above
PPC	Google Adwords <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost per click Conversions(=quotation request) Number of clicks CTR Number of Impressions 	Generate enquires Increase Brand Awareness Assist SEO by using long tail keywords	As above



Get company – wide involvement in marketing from the beginning.

The staff of your company or anyone who knows your business are an asset to your business. As was discussed above, the creation of good content is a key element of modern day marketing. The more staff that are thinking about content and taking notice of relevant articles that they come across, the better for your business.

However, content marketing is a relatively new concept and you will need to explain to your staff or family or friends who help your business how this can benefit your business. I would recommend that once you have agreed a contract with a marketing consultant, you arrange to meet all relevant staff to explain that the company is embarking on a marketing project and how it all will work.

Each staff member will have untapped knowledge and experience that can possibly be translated into excellent content. Include as many staff as possible. The sales staff who deal directly with customers usually can provide very useful content ideas.





Explanation of Terms

SEO When building a website, owners/developers select keywords and phrases that best explain what their company does. (This selection process is extremely important to the visibility of website on the Internet and needs to be based on research into the terms that your target market use) Having selected these keywords and phrases, they are inserted into the page coding of the website and content by the website manager. It would be very important that the web developer understands what your important keywords are and uses them in the coding (Title tag and the Description tags.) This is very important because the title tags tell users and search engines what the topic of that page is. The page title is given an important weight in the algorithms of the largest search engines.

Social Media is marketing your business on internet platforms (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter etc.) and mobile-based channels that allow users to interact with each other and share opinions and content. The type of content that can be shared can be visual, audio, written, audio/visual.

Email marketing is sending emails to subscribers with either a promotional message or providing information of some value to them. The goal is ultimately to drive traffic to your website or increase “conversions” in some way. Conversions can be considered as any action that brings a prospect closer to buying from your company – this could be following your company’s page, sending an enquiry etc.

Online advertising is a broad term that means advertising your offering online – therefore it can include display advertising and Pay-per-click (PPC) Display advertising are ads displayed on website and social media



Display advertising are ads displayed on website and social media sites that users can click on to interact or be taken to landing page on the company's website or elsewhere.

Pay-per-click (PPC): PPC is advertising on search engines such as Google, Yahoo and Bing. It works as follows: It allows you to advertise your business in a targeted way on Google and partner sites by matching your ad with relevant search terms and you pay only when a user clicks on your ad.

Link Building: A "link" to your website is where another website features your website address on their site. Users who click this link are brought to your site. Links are a useful way to send traffic to your website. However, other websites will naturally only feature your website address if they think it will be a help to their customers.



About Yellow Ruler Marketing

Yellow Ruler Marketing is a small and flexible marketing consultancy that can help you achieve business goals through marketing. We have experience of working in many different sectors and have particular knowledge of new business prospecting and sales.

Contact us today for a free consultation

Contact Us

If you would like to discuss marketing for your business, please contact us for free consultation. Thank you.

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