



BDG COMMUNICATIONS

MARKETING FOR SMALL BUSINESS START-UPS

A practical step-by-step guide



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INTRODUCTION

The following is a brief outline highlighting a few of the essential steps in effectively marketing a small business start-up. It is primarily geared towards smaller, self-funded new business owners who are ready to present their products or services to the marketplace. Much like building a house, there is a definite sequence and “order of events” for what needs to take place. It wouldn’t make sense to bring out a roofing contractor before you have laid the foundation, or cut and paint your molding before installing new windows. In the same way, it makes little sense to build a company website before establishing your branding, or run a direct-mail campaign before a solid response infrastructure is in place. To build a house, you follow a sequence of defined steps. Marketing for small business start-ups is no different.



At BDG Communications we have launched many companies through the years. In almost every case those which have failed did so because they either failed to follow this sequence or skipped steps entirely. As a new business owner the deck is stacked against you, most new companies fail within the first year. By following an effective marketing process with a proven track record you can dramatically increase your chances for success.

Too often start-up companies spend thousands of dollars on product development, inventory, overhead expenses, capital equipment and yet balk at spending a few thousand dollars on a marketing strategy to get their company off the ground. In today’s saturated markets it is unrealistic to think by simply opening your doors, customers will fall out of the sky and land in your lap. Growth takes effort, but the process doesn’t have to be outrageously expensive or complicated. With advancements in media and technology there are many ways to minimize marketing costs and maximize impact, all it takes is time and commitment.



INTRODUCTION

WORDS OF CAUTION:

One: a wise person counts the cost before laying a foundation. The majority of this guide is dedicated to helping you build that foundation. You might want to consider jumping to the “marketing strategy” section at the end of this guide to begin thinking of how you are going to grow your business once that foundation is in place.

Two: this is not meant to be a one-size fits all formula, depending on your business context you will want to focus more on some areas discussed and less on others. Here are a few examples of how you might tailor this guide to fit your specific needs.

SELLING PRODUCTS (DIRECT TO CONSUMER OR BUSINESSES TO BUSINESS)

- Selling informational or software based products

Your primary focus will be establishing brand credibility and gaining exposure through strategic marketing

- Selling tangible products in a physical retail environment

Your primary focus will be brand, product and packaging design along with in-store placement

- Selling tangible products online

Your focus will be creating an effective online store / website and marketing it well (or marketing your products via affiliate websites and resellers)

- Selling functional products

If style is not an issue and your products merely meet a functional need then branding and packaging are less critical and you can move more quickly towards developing and executing marketing strategies.

- A word of caution to those selling *PRODUCTS*. With the advent of Ebay and Amazon there are many inexpensive ways to sample and test consumer response on your product(s) before working through an entire marketing plan. The feedback you gain from testing will provide a stronger foundation for more effective plan. The book “4-hour work week” by Timothy Ferriss would be a great resource for those interested in testing their products before committing to a full marketing plan.



INTRODUCTION

PROVIDING SERVICES TO CONSUMERS

If this is you, chances are you are providing highly localized services either onsite or at a retail location. Examples would be a plumbing company, hair stylist or cafe. While branding and primary marketing materials are important you will likely focus slightly less on these and more on promotional marketing materials and strategies to generate local awareness of your new company.

PROVIDING SERVICES TO OTHER BUSINESSES

Examples might be a graphic designer, bank, accountant or corporate law firm. Either way a fair amount of time should be invested in your corporate and personal brand, (as the image of your company is often highly tied to your credibility as an individual and vice versa) Professional looking marketing materials (business cards, website etc.) will be key in building your credibility.

OVERVIEW

Ready to get started? Here's what you will learn in the following pages:

- How to craft a solid brand
- How to develop an effective corporate identity and logo-mark
- The least expensive but most critical marketing essentials for your business
- How the design and marketing process works
- How to get the most from your graphic designer or marketing firm
- How websites are designed and built
- The core elements in crafting an effective strategic marketing plan

BRANDING

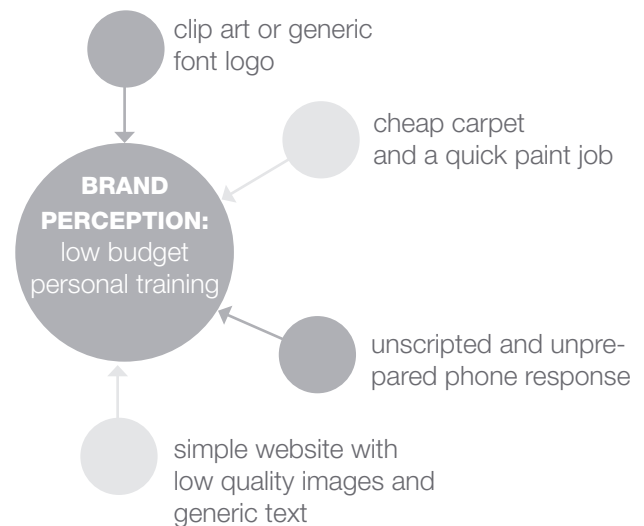
Your branding will serve as the foundation for all of your marketing efforts, so as such, it should come before all else. Here's a working definition of it. A "brand" is the comprehensive experience a customer has with your organization, at all touch points. Note a brand is not: a logo, a product, or a design system, these are merely *representations* of your brand. When a customer engages you in a phone call, uses your company's products or services, visits your company website or retail location they build a perception of your company based on the combination of their experiences. Hence a brand is not what *YOU* say about your company, it is what your *CUSTOMERS* say about it.

Successful companies are very intentional about what they want that combined customer experience to look like. For example, let's say your goal is to present your company as the premier high school athletic strength and cross training facility in north orange county. Does the "look" of your studio communicate this? Does your apparel, or the way you present yourself in a phone conversation communicate "premier facility?" Does your company logo, signage, on-site brochures convey this? In viewing your marketing efforts including website, promotional videos, flyers etc will your customers come to believe your company is "the premier high school athletic strength and cross training facility on north orange county?"

CONSISTENT BRAND MESSAGING



INCONSISTENT BRAND MESSAGING





BRANDING

Before developing consistent brand messaging your first must establish what message you want to communicate. In a world of steep competition and saturated markets it is not enough to merely offer a “better” product or service than your competition. Today’s customers want to know what makes your brand the “best” or least what makes it distinct. They also want to know “why” you do what you do. The goal of good branding is also to connect with customers who believe what you believe, when your “why” matches theirs, it’s fertile ground for a lasting customer relationship. The following questions should be helpful in establishing a brand.

BRAND AUDIENCE

Describe your various target customer bases, business to business and consumer.

What are the priorities, concerns, values etc. for customers within each category?

Describe your “dream” client / customer.

What is the age range of your target audience?

Will your brand focus on a specific gender?

What would you like your customers to say about your brand?

How can you connect emotionally with your target audience?

BRAND PROMISE & DIFFERENTIATION

Who is your direct competition?

Who is your biggest competitor?

What are your competitors strengths and weaknesses?

What key competitive advantages make you distinct?

What needs do you meet that they do not?

What can you do better than they can?

BRAND ESSENCE AND PERSONALITY

What is the driving passion behind your company?

What are your corporate values?

What are your beliefs about your industry?

If you were the best in the world at one aspect of your field, what would it be?

What makes your company great?



BRANDING

BRAND ESSENCE AND PERSONALITY (CONTINUED)

where do you expect the company to be in 5 years?

If you could describe your company in one word what would it be? why?

what would you like your company to be known for?

what problem does your brand / product solve?

what size is your company?

What marketing channels do you initially plan on using to launch your company?



ACTION STEPS

Out of this discussion follows the initial development of your brand.

Materials developed might include:

- A paragraph summary of your company
- A one-sentence tag-line / mantra concisely defining your company
- A list of programs, products or services offered by your company



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For information on branding as it relates to creating and expressing unique, remarkable products or service offerings the following books should prove helpful:

- “Blue Ocean” by W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne
- “Crush it” by Gary Vaynerchuk
- “Purple Cow” by Seth Godin

For information on the importance of taglines and mantras check out the following:

- “The art of the Start” by Guy Kawasaki



CORPORATE IDENTITY

With a firm grasp on your brand positioning and a clear vision of how you intend to present your company to the marketplace you are now prepared to develop a public image or corporate identity. This usually starts with developing a company logo-mark. Graphic designers can charge anywhere from hundreds to thousands of dollars for creating this, variables include complexity of design, number of concepts you would like to see and volume of revisions and color palettes etc. The good news is, the more information you provide your designer, the easier the process will be for the both of you. Research examples of logos from your competition or other vertical markets, keep notes of your likes and dislikes. Descriptive words like modern industrial vs. raw and organic, bright and saturated vs. muted and earthy or corporate professionalism vs. approachable friendliness can greatly help your designer understand the look you are going for. Be aware that while as an art form design can be highly subjective, there are some concrete measures of what separates the good from the bad or what works and what doesn't. Once you begin working with a designer to develop your logomark, here are a few questions to be asking:

- **Is it simple?** If in sharing the logo, you have to explain it then it's probably too complicated
- **Is it memorable?** Does the logo look generic or unique?
- **Is it timeless?** Will it work with a variety of future design pieces, campaigns, fonts colors etc?
- **Is it versatile?** It should be just as readable on a banner as it is on a black and white Xerox.
- **Is it relevant?** Does it tell you anything about the industry / organization it represents?

HELPFUL TIPS

- Provide your designer with as much information as possible
- Establish how many rounds of concepts you will be seeing. This will set clear expectations and force you to make decisions to keep things moving.
- Start with black and white logo concepts first for two reasons:
 - one: your logo will have to “work” in black and white contexts like Xerox.
 - two: this forces your eye to focus on the composition (shape) of the logo.
- Once you have 2-3 finalists then introduce color
- Get feedback. An email survey can be an invaluable way to ensure you are choosing a logomark that will represent you well for years to come.

MARKETING ESSENTIALS

With a solid brand and an effective corporate identity, the next order of business will be to establish your marketing essentials and basic marketing infrastructure. After painstakingly architecting a perfect blueprint, carefully laying the foundation of branding, and erecting the “framing” of a great corporate identity, it would be a shame to install the used, damaged wood of a weak marketing infrastructure. Things like professional headshots, separate corporate email accounts like “billing@abc.com, info@abc.com, dave@abc.com, professionally designed corporate stationary can be extremely inexpensive investments that reap massive dividends in how your brand is perceived. Here are a few essentials you should consider:

MUST HAVES FOR ALL INDUSTRIES:

Business cards. With the advent of gang printing (where a printing vendor lays your card design out on a sheet with other companies cards to save cost) high quality business cards have become relatively inexpensive. When it comes to designing the cards, the more information or examples you can provide your designer with, the faster and more efficient the process will be.

Coming soon website. At BDG Communications “I need a website” is probably the most common request we hear from new business owners but it is often the least strategically important of their marketing needs. Companies redesign their websites all the time. There is nothing wrong with temporarily posting an “under development” page. Often the most difficult part in setting up a website is choosing your URL. Unless you are willing to use a .co, .net, or .org domain your options for .com domains will be fairly limited. Also keep in mind the two aspects involved in setting up a website.

step one is registering your domain *NAME* (abc.com) with a company like godaddy.

step two is selecting a *HOSTING* company that will provide the servers for you to store your site on.

HELPFUL TIPS

DNS and HOSTING are almost always provided by two different companies. Before setting up either it is highly recommended that you consult with your website designer or marketing firm. They should have expertise in both areas, it’s in your best interest to hear their advice.



MARKETING ESSENTIALS

MUST HAVES FOR ALL INDUSTRIES:

Corporate email accounts. if you don't take your business seriously enough to ditch that @yahoo.com email and trade up to an @"mycompany".com account why should your customer take you seriously? Once you have secured a DNS / URL I recommend using hosted gmail (google apps) or Windows Exchange. Both are rock solid, flexible and scalable. Google apps is the less expensive of the two (google even offers free options) and with a little reading and the investment of a day's time you can set it up yourself. If you have an IT resource, or if your web designer has experience setting this up, you might want to consider hiring them since it can get technical. Ideally you will want to set up multiple accounts, one for billing (billing@mycompany.com) one for general inquiries (info@mycompany.com) and one for yourself personally and each of your key staff. Having separate accounts can help you streamline your business processes and better organize your company.

INDUSTRY SPECIFIC "MUST HAVES":

Corporate Stationary. if part of your businesses includes corresponding with customers, partner companies, distributors, donors etc via mail, then professional letterhead and envelopes are in order, professional invoicing statements at a minimum.

Professional Headshots. No these are not just for actors anymore. If the product or service you are offering leverages your personal experience or expertise then you need a professional photo of yourself. You shouldn't have to pay more than \$300 for a set of professional headshots and it is money well spent.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- If you are looking for extremely high quality cards at a reasonable price check www.tasteofink.com
- [www.vistaprint](http://www.vistaprint.com) is a more inexpensive solution if you are looking to keep costs to a minimum
- For information on setting up email accounts with google apps here is the link:
<http://www.google.com/apps/intl/en/group/index.html>
- when it comes to billing and invoicing the latest versions of Quickbooks allow complete invoice customization via an easy to use layout design interface.



PRIMARY MARKETING MATERIALS

You have drafted blueprints to chart your course, laid a foundation with branding and crafted your framing with a solid corporate identity and professional marketing essentials. Now it's time to put a roof and some walls on this house. Your primary marketing materials will vary depending upon which type of business you find yourself in. Here is a breakdown of the two major categories of business owner.

FOR BUSINESS OWNERS SELLING **PRODUCT(S)**

If you are selling an informational or software based product then layout or user interface (UI) design will be one of your first priorities. If you are selling a tangible product, your focus will be packaging. In either case research should be done exploring design approaches used by your competitors, sourcing designers and in the case of packaging, print vendors. Packaging design becomes increasingly important if you are selling your products at a physical retail location. Subtleties like which side of a box the ingredients go on or label readability from a distance can dramatically affect consumer response and should be taken into consideration. Whether you are selling your product globally (online) or locally (at retail) you will also need a website. For business owners selling their products online, time should be devoted to setting up effective shopping cart systems, landing pages etc. For those selling their product at physical retail locations packaging, in-store placement and promotion is the critical issue.

FOR BUSINESS OWNERS OFFERING **SERVICES**

If your business is offering a service, one of your first marketing objectives is to produce effective collateral. The term "Collateral" marketing is used to describe materials which tell clients about your business and the services you offer. This could include a brochure, postcard, presentation folder, media kit, website or any combination of the above. If you are offering on-site services at your location, time should also be invested in facilities presentation, the internal and external "look" of your office / studio / warehouse etc.. can have a significant effect on your clients experience. Whether offering your services online or onsite, a website is also a must.

CREATING YOUR PRIMARY MARKETING MATERIALS

Now that we have established which primary marketing materials are essential for your unique business environment, the critical next step in our journey is to walk through how they are created. Whether you are creating packaging for a product or a brochure or website for your service based business, you will need to put together **content** (text, images and graphics) and you will need to have your materials or packaging **designed**. Often clients assume these objectives are one and the same, they are quite different.

CONTENT

consists of text, images, spreadsheets, charts, that you put together usually in Microsoft Office.

All of the following pieces of information would be considered “content”

- ingredients in a beverage
- client testimonials
- company address
- product photos

DESIGN

speaks of the finished style and “look” of your marketing materials.

When working with a marketing or design firm it’s critical that you establish which party is responsible for gathering or producing content. If this responsibility falls with the marketing or design firm, as business owner, you should be prepared to spend a fair amount of time providing them with comprehensive intelligence on your business.

Content and design can be worked through concurrently or at different times but they are distinct tasks and both should be handled thoroughly and effectively. Having your content prepared in advance before entering the design phase can be extremely helpful but is not mandatory. Often graphic designers can design the “look” of your marketing materials without any content at all (using placeholder images and dummy text)

Essential to a better understanding of these two distinct objectives is an understanding of the design process. On the following page is an explanation of the methodology we use at BDG Communications, it has served us well in developing solutions that capture the attention of our clients audience and deliver positive ROI (return on investment) We call it the 5-D approach.

DESIGN 101: THE 5-D APPROACH

Here is the ideal approach by which marketing materials are created. Note **CONTENT** development is distinct from **DESIGN** and can take place during the *discover*, *define* and even during the *design* stages.



Discover: This is where we get to know our client's unique business environment. We challenge assumptions, explore hypotheses, and establish tangible measures of success. In short, we immerse ourselves in our clients universe.

Define: With a solid understanding of our clients business context we begin to strategize solutions for their unique challenges. This can involve leveraging existing trends and technologies or innovating new ones. The define stage is all about establishing an efficient strategic solution that delivers the highest possible ROI.

Design: At this point in the process our creative team is armed with a solid understanding of the client, their audience, major competing brands, and our unique goals and objectives. This is fueled for creating powerful, engaging visuals, whether it's a brochure, a website, or the look of an entire company.

Deliver: Once we lock in the final design, the next step is execution. This could be developing and building a website, printing, fulfill and mailing a direct mail campaign, deploying a nationwide sweepstakes just to name a few. This is where our print designers get out their magnifying glasses and our development team spends all-nighters fine-tuning code. Our motto is strive for perfection and accept excellence.

Detect: Finally we measure the impact and success of our work. This can involve web analytics, looking at response rates on an html email campaign, or surveying users and consumers of their brand experience. All providing invaluable data to fuel future business decisions.



YOUR WEBSITE

In reading through the “primary marketing materials” section you learned about the differences between “content” and “design” in the context of website development a third concept emerges called “functionality” While content is what your website “says” and design is what it looks like and how it navigates, functionality is what it *DOES* for your business.

- Are you looking for a website that simply serves as an online brochure, providing collateral information about your company?...
- Or are you looking for it to generate leads or sales through search engines or online advertising?
- Will it serve as a centralized CRM or database solution integrating into your workflow and business processes?
- How often will you be updating your site, IE should it be built on a Content Management System (CMS) so that you can make frequent updates yourself?

A host of technologies are available and choosing the right ones for your business can be overwhelming. Ultimately it is the responsibility of your web designer or marketing firm to get familiar with your company and provide insights and recommendations as to which technologies might be right for you. However a firm understanding of the process involved is extremely helpful.

While building a website follows the same 5-D Approach as any other marketing venture, there are some unique aspects to it. Usually one of the earliest steps is to develop a site-map or flow chart diagram similar to a family tree that visualizes the structure of the website your are creating. On the following page is an example of what a site-map might look like for a graphic design firm.



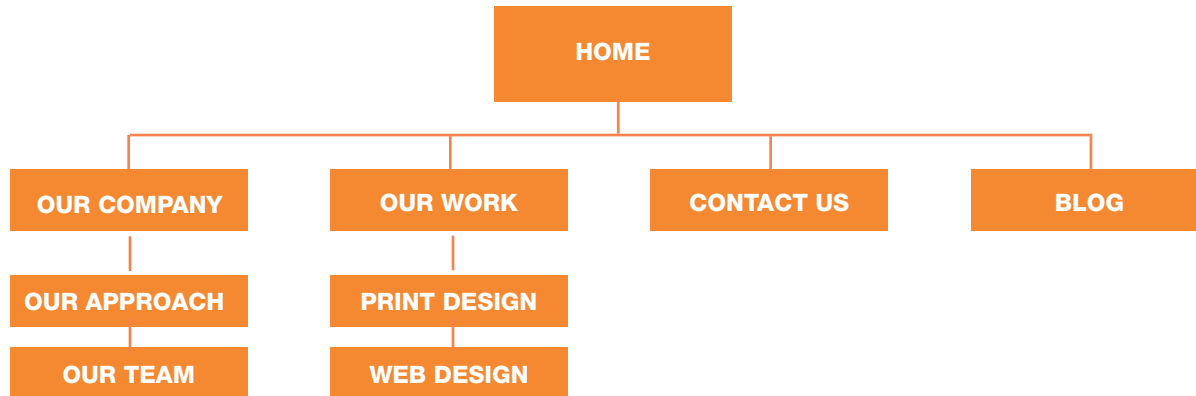
HELPFUL TIPS

When evaluating a website’s functional requirements the following questions should prove helpful

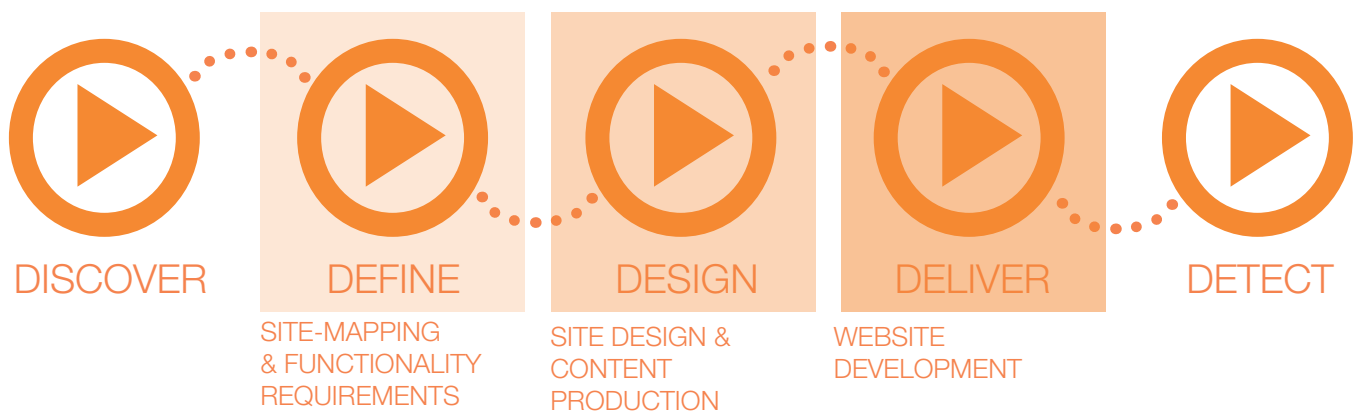
- Is the technology you are considering “business critical?”
- Does this technology streamline your business processes or make them more complicated?
- Is there a substantial anticipated return on the technology investment you are considering?

YOUR WEBSITE

EXAMPLE SITE MAP



Once you have identified what your website is going to do for your business and mapped out how it will be organized, your next step is to work with a designer to establish the “look” of your site. Unless choosing a pre-existing template the concepts you see from your designer will not be functional (click-able) they will merely serve as mock-ups to show you what the site would look like when finished. Once you have selected a final design for your website you will enter the development phase where it is actually built, tested and launched. Here is an overlay of the 5-D Approach in the context of building a website.





REVIEW

So far we have covered the following sequential steps:

- establishing your brand positioning
- crafting a corporate identity and logo-mark
- developing your marketing essentials including
 - business cards
 - coming soon page
 - corporate email accounts
 - corporate stationary if necessary
 - headshots if appropriate
- creating your primary marketing materials using the design process
 - packaging (if tangible products are involved)
 - collateral (if services are involved)
 - website

Note all of the above are merely *tools*. Apart from a strategy to utilize them effectively, in and of themselves they will not grow your business.

For example If the tool is a business card, then are you using them at business networking events or are they collecting pocket lint in your wallet? If the tool is a website, are you actively engaging in search engine marketing to drive traffic to your site or hoping people just “find” it?

In the next section we will take a 10,000 foot view of the basics of how to put these tools to good use and grow your business through strategic marketing.



MARKETING STRATEGY

While most of the previous sections are universally applicable to any start-up business, implementing them in a strategic marketing plan is a highly specific endeavor and will look very different depending upon the nature of your business. Since it is impossible to outline an effective strategic marketing plan for every possible business scenario, a brief discussion of key concepts should be very helpful as you create and evaluate various approaches and tactics. Here is a list of some foundational concepts.

RETENTION AND ACQUISITION

Essentially there are two forms of marketing and both are equally important.

Retention: keeping your current or past customers loyal to your brand and engaged with your company

Acquisition: attracting new customers

As a start-up your initial focus will be primarily acquisition but it is critical that the new customer relationships you develop becoming lasting ones. There are distinct marketing strategies for retention and acquisition and a well constructed marketing plan will account for both needs.

Examples of effective acquisition strategies might include:

- referral reward programs
- direct mail
- search engine optimization
- online advertising
- print advertising
- in-store advertising
- attending networking events

Examples of effective retention strategies might include:

- email newsletters
- print newsletters
- return customer / brand loyalty incentive programs ex: discount offers or free products / services
- cross promotion product or service recommendations
- even simply taking a current client / customer out for lunch.



MARKETING STRATEGY

INBOUND AND OUTBOUND MARKETING

Outbound marketing refers to billboards, magazine ads, and TV commercials. You might refer to outbound marketing as intrusive because it is unsolicited on the part of the viewer. Inbound marketing takes the opposite approach in identifying targeted groups with specific interests and making your content readily available and easy to find amongst such groups. Examples include blogs, social networking activity, Search engine optimization techniques. As a small business your focus will likely be inbound marketing since outbound approaches can be quite expensive and eat up valuable cash flow rather quickly. Outbound marketing efforts are generally more effective with brands who have already established a widespread reputation and are merely looking to re-inforce that reputation to a large audience.

Examples of inbound marketing strategies might include:

Blogging

Social networking on platforms such as:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Youtube
- Yelp
- sites like Digg and Delicious

Search Engine Optimization and Marketing

Connecting with Industry specific networking groups

webcasts and webinars

Podcasts

mobile proximity marketing

HTML Newsletter subscriptions

Examples of outbound marketing strategies might include:

Television commercials

Billboard Ads

Online Ads

Magazine Ads

Direct Mail Campaigns



MARKETING STRATEGY

ONLINE AND OFFLINE

These are merely fancy marketing terms for web marketing vs. print marketing. Online marketing could include search engine optimization, web advertising, social networking etc. Offline marketing could be anything from a direct-mail campaign, to promotional events or in-person professional business networking.

ANALYTICS

Any effective marketing plan should include a plan to track results and effectiveness. There are a host of solutions available for both online and offline marketing and your marketing plan should leverage them.

CREATIVE BRIEF

This is a document which serves as a reference for your marketing team or graphic designer. Creative briefs can be written for a-la-carte marketing efforts such as a direct mail postcard or product landing page, or for entire marketing campaigns. An effective creative brief will outline

- who the target audience is
- what the purpose of the marketing effort or campaign is
- information about your brand
- information about the tone or style that should be conveyed
- possibly technical specifications for document sizes, website requirements etc



ACTION STEPS

- Do your marketing efforts include both acquisition and retention strategies?
- Have you intentionally chosen to focus on specific in-bound or outbound strategies?
- If necessary and appropriate does your marketing strategy include online and offline approaches?
- Do you have a strategy in-place to track response and results?
- Have you prepared a creative brief to clearly communicate objectives with your team?



IN CLOSING

Hopefully this guide has been a helpful resource in educating and equipping you to build your business. There is no “magic” formula, each business will need to focus on more on some areas, less on others, but following a program like the one outlined in this guide will dramatically increase your chances of success. As this is a concise first draft input and feedback on how the course has helped you or what you would like to learn more about would be gratefully appreciated! For more information or to get in touch, please visit www.bdg.co