

CATALYST



Business Strategy | Marketing Communications

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Conducting a Marketing Audit

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The two questions we hear most often are

1. "How do we know if our marketing is effective?"
2. "Are we maximizing the return on our marketing investment?"

Very powerful questions indeed.

Conducting a thorough investigation of your marketing initiatives will keep your team sharp and improve collaboration within departments. Here is a simple but effective guideline you can use to conduct your own Marketing Audit.

A Marketing Audit* will help determine how well your marketing initiatives are working, as well as help to identify your most urgent marketing challenges:

1. From a historical perspective, what has and has not worked?
2. From a current perspective, what is and is not going well?
3. From a future perspective, what changes are needed so that your marketing and advertising efforts are going in the right direction?

We recommend the Marketing Audit be done each year, prior to your planning/budgeting season. Also, should you decide that it's time to hire a new, or replace your current, advertising or PR partner, it's very useful to conduct a Marketing Audit *before* you start the interview process.

Below are steps you can take -- a guideline -- for conducting your own Marketing Audit:

Who is involved?

Bring together the key people from brand management, marketing, sales, product management, product development, public relations, promotions, eCommerce, cataloging and finance. It's also very smart to include a representative from your outside marketing or PR agency.

The process needs to allow for sufficient debate. Depending on the size of the company and the complexity of the marketing strategy and tactics, this process will take from a half-day to two days. The time spent gaining alignment from your decision makers at one time will pay off throughout the year.

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Still, you might be thinking: "That's a huge list of people and a lot of time – how will we ever accomplish anything?"

Follow the Yellow Brick Road

Here are the key questions you'll want to cover.

1. Accomplishments: What have we done well?
2. Disappointments: What did not happen as planned?
3. Critical Actions: To improve results what needs to be done the same/differently next year?

For each question above, consider the following:

1. Markets
 - a. What changes are happening to current and future markets that could impact sales?
2. Customers
 - a. How does our performance compare to competitors?
 - b. What do customers want that will help differentiate our company from others?
3. Competitors
 - a. Who are our major competitors and what are their strengths and weaknesses?
4. Environment
 - a. What are the changes happening from a variety of perspectives, such as cultural, demographics, technology and politics?
5. Marketing systems
 - a. Are we achieving short- and long- marketing objectives?
 - b. What training or support is needed?
 - c. Does everyone understand the marketing goals and various activities?
 - d. What changes should be made to improve the results from our marketing and/or PR agencies?
6. Review of marketing activities
 - a. What are our main products and how well is marketing supporting them?
 - b. What are our main marketing activities?
 - c. How effective are we in implementing our marketing activities?
7. Distribution
 - a. Compared to competitors, how are our prices?
 - b. How well are we supporting our distributors?
8. Sales
 - a. How well are marketing and sales aligned on key initiatives?
 - b. What can be done so that marketing can best support the sales organization?
9. Advertising
 - a. Does advertising support the mission of the brand?
 - b. Are key messages getting across?
 - c. Are the themes and visuals used effectively?
10. Publicity
 - a. Is our PR program effective?
11. Promotions
 - a. Are our promotions well conceived, well implemented and effective?
 - b. Are we responding to our customers' needs in a language they understand?
12. Online
 - a. Does our website also reflect the branding of the company and products?
 - b. What key initiatives are needed?

Good Listening is the Key

Take care to honor each person's opinions and comments, and use The Parking Lot (read about The parking Lot in our recent article: Don't Panic, It's Organic!)(http://www.themarxgrp.com/knowledge/A_View_From_The_Bay_Dont_Panic_Its_Organic.pdf) to temporarily 'park' those inevitable 'good ideas' that come up during the session, and that you can return to after the more pertinent issues are handled.

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Who facilitates the audit?

A strong, focused leader must lead the meeting. If no one on the team qualifies, then bring in an outside consultant to be facilitator.

(This is one of the core competencies of The Marx Group – we'd be happy to explore being your partner in this process.)

What do I do next?

We have found that much of the great ideas, astute opinions and experienced commentary that come from a collaborative meeting such as this are often pretty juicy! In fact, many of the great ideas are ready to take to the next level of implementation and can even be used as a foundation for the next phase of planning.

Keep the final report be a brief overview of high-level observations and decisions. Every department and function will benefit from the process. Done on an annual basis, you will have a benchmark established to see whether or not marketing is raising the bar.

With this level of accountability and across-the-board communication, you cannot help but experience improved effectiveness, efficiency and results.

** Thank you to Tony Mikes at Second Wind Network, for his contribution to the Marketing Audit process. Second Wind Network is an organization comprised of over 700 advertising agencies nationwide and provides its members valuable insight and research. www.secondwindnetwork.com.*

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