

Marketing essentials for you and your business

Marketing literally means understanding your market and acting accordingly. It is not just advertising or PR. It is not just events. It is an integrated business function that, through complete understanding of your customers, your business, your competitors and your environment you are able to gain a competitive advantage, loyal customers and a valuable brand.

Ask yourself ...

- Is your product/service something that you want to make/do or something your customers want to buy/use? (Ideally both!)
- How do you know your customers want this product/service?
- How do you know how to promote the business?
- Are any other businesses doing the same thing?
- What makes you different to them?

Starting out with marketing can be really scary. It is a big job to make your customers aware of your business and drive your sales; where do you start?

Know your customers and then the rest will follow!



Push Theory

Joanne Bloggs decides to open her own hairdressing salon in Truro. She particularly enjoys using blue hair dye as she thinks it looks nice and people will want to have blue hair. There are lots of other salons in Truro that have a good relationship with their customers. The current fashion is for red hair. Joanne thinks that by selling the blue colour will make her stand out and get more customers. Joanne spends a lot of time and money producing flyers and special offers to bring people in to her salon – she even hires a salesperson to go out door knocking to drum up some business. She does get some customers, but they were expecting to have a nice clean waiting area, a cup of tea and some magazines which Joanne decided not to have as that would take up valuable space and every other hair dresser did that! They tell their friends that the experience wasn't what they had hoped for.

Key errors/problems with this method?

- She did what she thought customers would like and didn't take the time to research the current trends or customer expectations
- No real understanding of competitors and what they offer
- Takes lots of effort to literally 'push' people into the salon and hope that they like the service enough to come back

Lots of people fall into this trap of pushing their business on their customers without fully understanding customers wants and what competitors already offer. This is a very old fashioned way of doing business and it wasn't until the recession of the 1980's when businesses started developing products and services in response to customer demand rather than trying to generate demand through sales teams. Generating a pull for your products/service meant that you had a captive audience who 'wanted' what you offered and it was far more cost effective. More focus was also placed on branding in terms of trust and values.

Pull Theory

Joanne Bloggs wants to open her own business. Her skills lie in hairdressing and talking to people. Having spent some time looking around her local town, she has noticed that there are lots of hairdressers already and many of them have great relationships with their customers. She understood that she would need to offer something different to make customers come to her, but what did they want? She starting asking local people what they thought was missing from Truro in terms of hairdressers, and almost all said that they had trouble finding a salon that specialised in wedding hair. She starting talking to the other salons in the town and most of them agreed to refer customers to her if they wanted wedding hair done so Joanne set about designing her business. She attended some wedding shows with a questionnaire and asked the brides to be what they wanted from their wedding hairdresser. Having noted it all down, she set about opening the business that her customers wanted.



On average a customer will tell 3 people if they like a service and 10 if they don't. Bad news travels fast so a bad experience can really damage your business's reputation. Customer expectation has never been so high that means understanding your customers has never been more important!

Do you feel you know what your customers want? ,

Do you feel that your business delivers that?

Have you researched;

How much customers are prepared to pay for your product/service?

What sort of marketing communications your customers will best respond to?

What level of service your customers would like? (free cuppa or a certain type of after sales care?)

What your competitors offer?



If you know your customers well — you have a better chance of getting it right.

Marketing and the 7 P's

Marketers use the following as a tool for brainstorming and a prompt for designing their marketing strategies. When you come to write your strategy, strengths and opportunities are used to overcome weaknesses where possible, and threats are to be mitigated wherever possible through careful planning and the building of a strong brand.

1. Product:

What is it that you are marketing to customers?

Product strengths:	What does your product do well (ideally better than competitors)?
Product weaknesses:	What does your product not do that other products may?
Product opportunities:	What opportunities are there for growth, expansion and development?
Product threats:	What is happening in the big wide world that could affect the success of this product?

2. Place:

Where are you selling your product or service?

Place strengths:	What is good about that (ideally better than competitors)?
Place weaknesses:	What could be better?
Place opportunities:	What opportunities are there to improve??
Place threats:	What is happening in the big wide world that could affect this?

3. Price:

How much does your product/service cost? What profit are you making? What is your marketing budget? Do you have any debt? Is your cash flow realistic?

Pricing strengths:	What advantage do you have over competitors in terms of pricing?
Pricing weaknesses:	What disadvantage do you have?
Pricing opportunities:	What opportunities are there for improving your pricing or financial situation?
Pricing threats:	What is happening in the big wide world that could affect this?

4. Promotion:

How do you promote your product/service?

Promotion strengths:	What do you feel you do particularly well, perhaps even better than your competitors?
Promotion weaknesses:	What do you not do so well
Promotion opportunities:	What opportunities are there for improving the way you promote your product/service?
Promotion threats:	What is happening in the big wide world that could affect this?

5. People:

Who do you have working for the business? What qualities/qualifications do they have?

People strengths:	What are your people particularly good at? What do they bring that may give you an advantage over your competitors?
People weaknesses:	What do you feel you are lacking within your workforce? What does your team not do so well?
People opportunities:	What opportunities are there for improving the type and level of skills and qualities?
People threats:	What is happening in the big wide world that could affect this?

6. Process:

Consider the process that your customers will go through from the first time they hear about you to receiving any after sales care? Think about the opportunities you may have along the way to promote or reinforce your brand message and make the customer experience as pleasurable as possible.

Process strengths:	What is good about the process that customers go through? ?
Process weaknesses:	What is not so good about this process?
Process opportunities:	What opportunities are there for improving the process? Any opportunities for more or improved promotion or customer experience?
Process threats:	What is happening in the big wide world that could affect this?

7. Physical Evidence:

What tangible things do you have which reinforce that you are a good company? (e.g. uniforms if appropriate, branded paper, clean offices etc)

PE strengths:	What is good about your PE?
PE weaknesses:	What is not so good about your PE?
PE opportunities:	What could you improve about your PE?
PE threats:	What is happening in the big wide world that could affect this?



You now have a lot of information about your business. You have thought about your product/service, how you price it, how you promote it, the process customers go through, how customers could perceive you and a long list of opportunities which can be converted into an action plan.

Before you start writing an action plan you need to have a clear idea of what you want to achieve. Do this by writing a list of clear aims and objectives. Perhaps you want to boost sales, drive traffic to your website, obtain PR etc. Once you have these, think carefully about how this could be achieved.

For example: At Outset we know that our most likely customer is someone who has had a career already and is looking to now use the skills that they learnt to start up on their own. We would like to target women and harder to reach groups as well (due to our targets set by our funders) so we promote ourselves in community magazines, work with local housing providers, Jobcentres, slimming and community groups, women's networks, homeless and drug rehabilitation centres. We know that these groups will have less confidence than those who have been in business a long time so we make the tone of our communications very friendly and in plain English inviting enquiry and using the strap line 'be someone who can say I'm glad I did rather than I wish I had'. We also attend lots of events and give presentations to groups and partners who will refer customers to us.