

# Guide to Marketing

This report was born out of my own, ongoing, appraisal of the marketing tools and ideas employed in and on my own businesses. To ensure opportunities are maximised through optimised and sustainable marketing approaches, I believe it is essential to regularly analyse and appraise marketing strategies that are employed, and revisit any that have previously been dismissed or overlooked.

What follows is not intended to be definitive or authoritative, but instead to serve as a reminder or overview of a range of the marketing tools which are, or could be, used; essentially providing a starting point from which to evaluate marketing activities and plan the route ahead. There is a strong focus on direct marketing (rather than brand development), where marketing and sales are working closely together.

**“I hope there is something here for you, whether you are a sole trader, an entrepreneur or a corporate marketing executive”**

Your own approaches may be refined to levels light years ahead of what I have written here. I do hope, however, that this report gives you new ideas or simply confidence in your own approaches. I hope there is something here for you, whether you are a sole trader, an entrepreneur or a corporate marketing executive.

## Evaluating the offering

You may be lucky enough to have a product that everyone wants and have no competitors (if you are, then a host of competitors are sure to follow you into the market!), but most businesses have strong competition. I have always endeavoured to give customers what they believe to be the best offering, the best service and the best experience to differentiate my products from those of my competitors.

Before evaluating my marketing, I start by analysing my products and services and carrying out a competitor analysis. What new innovations do they have? What features and benefits are they promoting? It is important not to imitate the competition, but to:

- Accentuate what makes my products and services unique (a strong USP)
- Consider whether competitors' strengths can be turned into weaknesses

There is a strong argument for looking to add value rather than selling on price (which in most markets isn't the most important consideration for the purchaser. Besides, someone will always be cheaper). Whilst adding value through excellent delivery of service often adds cost and increases the size of the required structure, the increase in return can be far larger than the extra cost of delivery.

**“There is a strong argument for looking to add value rather than selling on price”**

## Evaluating existing marketing tools

Ideally, there should not be a need to undertake complete appraisals of marketing strategies and tools, since each should be constantly monitored and regularly evaluated. However, as staff come and go, acquisitions are made or the marketer has other concurrent obligations, a complete

**“What return are you getting for each pound you spend?”**

review may be required. For example, do you have any advertisements running for which you have absolutely no idea if they generate large, small, or no revenue or enquiries (directory entries, press adverts, etc.)? So, what is the cost of each existing approach? What return are you getting for each pound you spend?

Having created new product lines for niche markets (or new variations on existing products and services) I have, over the past fifteen years, moved from direct mail (with no sales function), to direct mail with a sales function, to a comprehensive multi-step sales and marketing approach in response to growth and what have become mature markets.

## Selling the benefits

It is extremely important that customers understand the benefits of our products or services, and this is equally valid for most marketing communication tools, from website to direct mail. Dry lists of features are a waste of time and opportunity. It is about what it will do for your customer, not simply what it will do. So, what are the most important benefits?

First, it is important to be confident in what influences the buying decision. Is price the most important factor in the buying decision? Most people do not

buy on price alone. Those that do are often the most disloyal and hardest to please – arguably a waste of your valuable resources.

**“Most people do not buy on price alone. Those that do are often the most disloyal and hardest to please – arguably a waste of your valuable resources”**

Much more important is selection, with clear additional benefits being added with increasing price. Delivering an outstanding level of service is more important still. Customer loyalty is crucial, and satisfied customers are also our greatest advocates and trusted sources for new customers. People are quick to spread bad news when things go wrong, but I believe people are equally quick to spread the word when they've experienced customer bliss. Part of what achieves that extra level of customer service is to take the time to fully understand the customer's needs and add a level of expertise which moves them from what they think they want, to what you, with your knowledge and experience, know they need. Thinking as a consumer, I can be equally disappointed with a purchase if allowed to buy what I thought I needed as when the seller changes my mind and I'm disappointed. Conversely, I'm extremely happy with the service if the seller stops me making a purchasing error or leads me to a product that exceeds expectations.

**“If a customer has a problem with products or services delivered, I would want to put it right, so why not make this clear up front?”**

I believe that trust and confidence is, in most cases, the biggest influencer in the purchasing decision. Wherever it is possible to do so, I offer guaranteed service levels and quality assurances to engender trust and confidence. If a customer has a problem with products or services delivered, I would want to put it right, so why not make this clear

up front? I have no evidence so far that stating clear guarantees increases the rate of complaint/returns, but it does increase sales!

So, all direct marketing tools need to explain the benefits, and the most important benefits are those which influence the key buying factors. The prospect or customer needs to be taken on a journey (AIDA – Attention, Interest, Desire, Act – and all its spin-offs). I personally love Drayton Bird's book, *How to Write Sales Letters That Sell*.

Your website also needs to take customers and prospects on that same journey, which is potentially harder since the entry point doesn't necessarily have the same focus as a direct mail piece with a particular aspect of the offering in mind. It is also the case that you often can't control the customer's entry point to a website. It can, therefore, be extremely effective to use landing pages and micro sites which have the specific objective of supporting an offline marketing campaign.

### **(Personalised) Multi-step Marketing**

Different approaches will attract different customers, but simply employing different approaches for successive campaigns is really no different to the traditional 'one-size-fits-all' approach; which is, for most companies, yielding lower and lower returns on investment as customers become more media savvy and competition increases.

Some time ago, I realised that although we were employing a broad range of approaches, no individual customer or prospect was exposed to more than one or two approaches in the sales cycle, and so the attrition rate was much higher than it would have been had more tools been used during the life of the enquiry. For example (B2B, bespoke product/service):

#### **Step**

1. *Direct mail piece or website*
2. *Customer requests information*
3. *Follow-up call after 3 days*
4. *Follow up call after 14 days*

**“An effective multi-step marketing approach could use a broad range of tools concurrently on the same enquiry”**

Simplistically, the prospect only requests information if they have a current requirement, so attrition has already begun. Follow-up calls are often hit and miss. It could take weeks to get through to the prospect and they may feel that any such approach is threatening (they want to be in control of the dialogue). So, whilst a percentage of prospects will respond to this approach, attrition has increased through inability to make contact or the nature of the medium itself. It also becomes easy to assume that if the prospect doesn't order quickly, they won't become a customer or place their next order. In the example above, the lead could end without success after just a few steps, though the average number of steps required to capture an order was between four and ten.

An effective multi-step marketing approach could use a broad range of tools concurrently on the same enquiry. There is great opportunity to drip-feed short messages, either by email, post or SMS to the prospect to give them an increasingly detailed understanding of the benefits, freely give tips and advice (positioning you as the expert in your field) or change and refine your offer (if you are looking to make direct sales). All these interventions can run concurrently and independently of your direct attempts to close.

Taking a step back, return on investment (ROI) needs to be optimised for the tools that capture the enquiry. As the saturation level of marketing messages increases and customers become increasingly selective about how they choose to engage with those messages, the number of steps required to gain an enquiry is increasing, making the timing even more difficult to get right. Permission-based marketing can be highly effective. You offer the prospect something that will be useful to them, for free, in return for their contact details. You then have the opportunity to begin the drip-feed of

relevant and useful messages which, at some point, will coincide with the point of actual requirement. These follow-ups can be fully automated. So, an advert, direct mail piece, email campaign or pay-per-click campaign can be used to promote your giveaway.

The next level of detail is to use truly personalised multi-step marketing. Lists (including existing customers, who certainly will want to believe you understand them and their needs) should be segmented, based on carefully selected criteria so that each group gets a communication highly relevant to them. This segmentation can be further refined at every touchpoint, where each successive communication is in response to the outcome of the previous step (or lack of response!).

**“New customers have to trust us, believe us, want our offering, and be in a position to buy now”**

Moving in this direction should help maximise the life-value of customers, so it is important that existing customers get the same level of attention. New customers have to trust us, believe us, want our offering, and be in a position to buy now. This is many times harder to achieve than selling to existing customers.

## Summary

This report is intended to broaden thinking about the scope and range of marketing, particularly for those companies looking to optimise spend or re-examine long standing practices. If you are going to try something new, I can't stress enough how important it is to constantly test (initially on a small but statistically significant scale) and to not take large-scale risks. Drill down into the detail to indentify segments and what message you have that is important to that small group. Ensure copy really explains the benefits and has enough detail to satisfy the detailed thinkers, with key points easily discoverable by the global thinkers. Ensure each prospect is exposed to a

sequence of messages across different media and keep them interested whilst you wait for them to reach the buying window.

**“I believe that most, if not all companies should be able to identify and develop new strategies to become secure in difficult markets”**

Website, search engine optimisation and pay-per-click is too big to cover here but is crucial to the marketing strategy for most companies. As with print advertising, are you able to evaluate your return on investment? Do you have to cap your Adwords daily spend or can you confidently let it run with a known return? Are you effectively using social media and responding to shift in power in the social web? Developing a good online

strategy is crucial, and it easy to task partner companies to do this for you while you evaluate whether it is beneficial to bring it in-house.

I believe that most, if not all companies should be able to identify and develop new strategies to become secure in difficult markets and strong in improving markets. Companies which have not proactively marketed themselves have the opportunity to do so in an economical way, and companies which large marketing budgets have the opportunity to rationalise and optimise with new techniques.

**Nick White**  
Business Development Director

Type	Online	Offline
Advertising	PPC (Pay Per Click such as Adwords or Yahoo)	Magazines, Newspapers, Radio & TV
Direct Mail	Opt-in emails using e-newsletters. Permission tools using auto-responders	Marketing mailers, surveys
Exhibitions	Virtual Exhibitions, web conferences	Stand space, conferences, events
Merchandising	Advertising on retail sites, personalised recommendations	Branded products
Packaging	Real packaging displayed online	Promotions on real packaging
PR	Editorial, articles, newsletters, social networking	Offline editorials and articles
Sales promotion	Incentives, discounts, rewards, loyalty schemes	Incentives, discounts, rewards, loyalty schemes
Selling	Affiliate Marketing, "Talk About Us" (drive traffic to our site)	Telesales, one to one
Sponsorship	Sponsor an online event or site	Sponsor an offline event
Word Of Mouth	Affiliates, leads from trusted sources, viral	Networking, referrals