

Making Marketing Simple

Mandy Minor, J Allan Studios

When your marketing options seem endless it's hard to decide what's best for your business. One easy way to do so? Just answer these four questions! They'll point you in the right direction.

I'm sure you're aware of the hundreds of marketing and advertising messages you're exposed to everyday. TV ads. Billboards. Junk mail. You can't even watch a basketball game without the announcer working in a Coke Zero ad!

Sure it's annoying, but that's not the problem. Marketing is all about the carefully planned interruption, after all. The problem is that your prospects are deluged with this same non-stop advertising and marketing, so getting them to notice and remember your marketing is pretty tough.

So what to do? Hire the Goodyear Blimp to patrol the skies for you? Probably not in the budget. And that leaves you wondering how you can effectively market on a budget that is decidedly less than, say, Apple's or Target's.

It would be nice if there was a one-size-fits-all answer to the question, "What marketing is going to work for my business?" But as we all know, there's not. Every business is different and therefore needs a unique marketing plan.

But there are five questions that, once answered, will tell you what kind of marketing you can pursue with reasonable expectation of good return on investment (ROI). They are:

1. Who is my target market (TM)?
2. Where does my TM look when they need products/services like mine?
3. What kinds of media is my TM seeing, reading, and watching?
4. Where can I put my messages so they will stand out and be remembered?
5. What kind of marketing can I comfortably continue to do?

Let's explore each further.

Question 1: Who is my target market (TM)?

Identifying your TM is Job Number One in creating effective marketing. You might have one, ten, or 100 TMs, and you need to know the details about each. Be a private detective investigating your business and ask:

- Who buys my stuff?
- What are their demographics (age, sex, marital status, address, religion, etc.)?
- How did they find me?

You can get as detailed as you want, asking more questions. And the more you know the better – that way you can create images of your TMs and know what types of marketing they will likely see, internalize, and respond to.

For example, it's rumored that Volvo personified its TMs by creating a character to represent each TM, naming them, and hanging them on the wall for fast reference. This helps Volvo's marketing team stay focused when they're creating the imagery, words, and ads that will speak to each TM.

This is also a good way to help you remember that not all marketing is going to appeal to all of your TMs. If you have a picture of your TM hanging on the wall – say a 50+ Baby Boomer – it will be easier to design campaigns that he or she can relate to.

Question 2: Where does my TM look when they need products/services like mine?

Find out exactly where your TM looks when it needs what you offer. To do this you really have to know your TM and research them down to the level of what they read, what they watch, and where they go. But the effort is well worth it.

For example, if you sell microscopes an ad in *People* isn't your best bet; lower-priced ads in specialty trade magazines are. If your TM lives mainly in three zip codes, an ad in the Flyer is more cost effective and targeted than a TV ad. And if you're a plumber maybe the Yellow Pages really is your best bet.

Question 3: What kinds of media is my TM seeing, reading, and watching?

This question helps you identify the specific places your advertising and marketing is likely to be seen. The key is to pinpoint the media that your TMs actually interact with – and skip the media they don't.

Does your TM watch TV? If so, what shows? Even if you're not ready to drop big bucks on TV ads, this will help you determine the overall tone your TM is receptive to. Same for radio, magazines, and websites.

This works for both consumer and business TMs because regardless of whether you're selling to a Baby Boomer or a business, a person is at the end of the buying decision. Find out what they like and use it to get their attention!

Question 4: Where can I put my message so it will stand out and be remembered?

It's all about context: the setting in which your message is seen. You might be thinking, "But there are literally hundreds of places I could put my message!" Don't focus on the myriad possibilities; instead use your TM evaluation to eliminate the places your message likely would not be seen. This will leave you with a much slimmer, more manageable list of possible placement opportunities.

Think frame of mind, too. Will your prospects respond more favorably to your message if they see it on a billboard as they're stuck in traffic or on a Saturday night date? Depends on what you're offering – satellite radio or teeth whitener? This is admittedly an overly-generalized example, but it makes the point.

And don't forget the context of the message vehicle itself. Is a flyer tacked to a bar wall the best way to advertise for life insurance? Probably not.

Question 5: What kind of marketing can I comfortably continue to do?

To answer this one consider frequency, time, and budgets. More specifically, ask yourself these questions about each potential marketing method you're considering:

- How frequently can I use it?
- How long will it take to plan and implement it? How long will it be effective?
- How much will it cost? (Don't forget to budget it your planning time!)

Make a grid that lists each potential activity and how it measures up on each of these three questions. This will make it very clear which options are ones you can stick with over a six- to 12-month period of time. And that's the amount of time you'll need to determine their effectiveness!

With all of this information your list of possible advertising and marketing vehicles should be a small and manageable group of activities. Now all that's left is to figure your ROI for each and decide which avenues to pursue.

The real beauty here is that if you've gone through this process you don't have to worry too much about your results. Just test, track, and adjust as necessary. You *will* get positive results!