



“It’s better to have a good plan that gets executed than a great plan that sits on a shelf.”

This Executive Guide is designed for leaders of small and mid-sized (\$5M – \$20M revenues) Business-to-Business (B2B) companies that are expanding the marketing function within their organizations. For companies that don’t have a lot of experience with strategic marketing, creating a plan that works can be a challenge. The biggest struggle is to develop something that’s clear and ACTIONABLE, with an approach that won’t take hundreds of hours or many months to develop – and won’t end up just sitting on a shelf.

Building a plan in a straightforward way and then putting it into action is something every B2B company needs to learn how to do. So far, relatively few have mastered it. In this Executive Guide, we share what we've learned over 15 years of hands-on experience, so that you can put the lessons to work for your company.

In this Executive Guide, you'll learn:

PART 1:

Best Practices for Creating an Actionable Marketing Strategy

Gives you all the information you need to build a simple, actionable and effective marketing strategy that you will actually execute.

PART 2:

What to Include in Your Actionable Strategic Marketing Plan

Covers the 'What' – the specific elements that should go into a marketing plan to make it strategic and actionable.

PART 3:

Dos and Don'ts for Your Actionable Strategic Marketing Plan

Delivers essential advice on what to do and what not to do, including practical tips for developing a plan that you can truly manage.

Putting together a marketing strategy is not as time- and resource-intensive as you think. The key knowledge you need to build an actionable plan usually exists within your company.* The knowledge and fact base you need are in the heads of your company executives, which means they don't have to be invented; all you have to do is extract that information, distill it and capture it.

* This is true for 'going concern' businesses where the sales team and management have been selling a given service or product to a given market for a number of years. If your business is a start-up or is pursuing entry into a new market, this is not the case, and using only internal knowledge to develop the plan will be ineffective at best, dangerous at worst.

PART 1: Best Practices for Creating an Actionable Marketing Strategy

Does this sound familiar?

"We spent \$100,000 on marketing last year and I feel like all we got from it was a bunch of pens with our logo on them." That's a statement from the CEO of a software company with about \$5M in revenue. The CEO had made a financial commitment to marketing because he knew his company needed it to grow sales, but he wasn't seeing results and he was frustrated.

After he explained the types of marketing his company was doing, it became clear that they were 'doing marketing,' but it wasn't strategic marketing. They were relying on off-the-cuff, tactical marketing, when the whole point of strategic marketing is that it's backed and driven by a plan.



"What's the use of
running if you are not
on the right road?"

– German Proverb

Here are 5 best practices for developing an actionable marketing strategy that will get results:

1

Get buy-in for the plan by including key people in the planning process.

Gather your executives, your sales team and anyone else who will be involved in implementing the marketing plan and involve them in a marketing planning workshop. Yes, they're all busy people, and if you really have to, you can speak to them individually to get their insights. However, getting everyone together in one place to share knowledge and hear different perspectives and approaches is incredibly valuable. We recommend doing everything you can to make it happen.

Designate a certain number of hours for your planning session. We find three hours works well because people stay focused and productive. Beyond that, they start to lose energy and interest. Making it an off-site session is great if you can, because participants are less likely to be distracted by day-to-day interruptions.

2

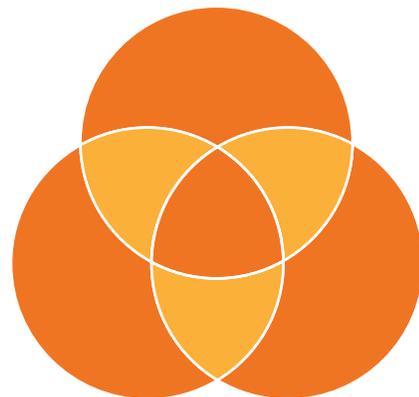
Where are you now – really? Be realistic about your starting point.

If your company has a 'head in the clouds' idea that everyone knows about you and everyone thinks you're great, you're likely to miss the mark. Being brutally honest about your current position in the marketplace is the right way to go.

Get workshop participants to talk about the 3Cs:

- **The Company** (what are you good at?)
- **The Competition** (what are they NOT providing?)
- **The Customers** (what are they asking for?)

Create a Venn diagram with the three areas; at the centre you'll find your best marketing strategy. We like to call this the 3C model of marketing strategy. It isn't fancy or complicated, but it works.

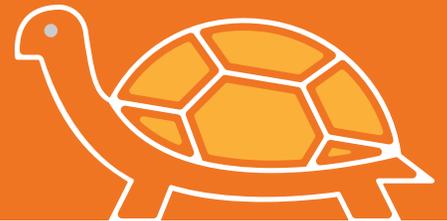


3

Where do you want to go? Align your marketing goals with your business goals.

Marketing isn't an end in itself; it's a business function that supports your strategic objectives. The only way to create a marketing roadmap is to know your destination. To do that, determine what your goals are, then reverse-engineer your activities based on where your company wants to go. Determine what your goals are, exactly. Do you want to double your revenues? Grow your company by 10%? Diversify into new markets or customer types? Increase profits while maintaining a stable revenue base? All of these objectives dictate different marketing tactics.

“Finished Last will always be better than Did Not Finish which always trumps Did Not Start.”



4

Do it workshop style! Get all stakeholders in the room.

A workshop is a great way to level set among all your stakeholders, to share a discussion about marketing and ensure that people have a consistent outlook on where the company is at and where it's going. The alternative is holding individual interviews or conversations where you might receive widely ranging opinions. Don't put yourself in a position to become the political middleperson; if you throw everyone into a room together it becomes a group exercise to get alignment.

When conducting your planning workshop, it's essential to have a framework of what topics you're going to cover and what decisions need to be made. This is a powerful opportunity to gather and tap the best minds in your company, but unless the session is highly structured, it can quickly devolve into chaos.

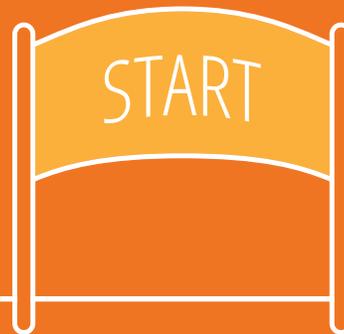
Your agenda should identify all the key topics you want to cover, with a specific amount of time allotted to each one. Then when the time is up, move on. Being strict in this kind of situation, however, isn't always easy, especially when you're dealing with senior people. One useful (and diplomatic) tool that I use to keep discussions focused is the "parking lot." Put a big piece of paper on the wall, and any idea that people would like to continue talking about beyond its time limit is "parked" so they can return to it later.

5

Aim for good, not perfect.

The most important thing to do is START!

If this is the first time your company is attempting marketing planning, you won't be perfect out of the gate. It's okay to not be perfect. The most important part of strategic marketing for most B2B companies is starting. While a lot of companies are currently doing ad hoc or tactical marketing, the whole point of strategic marketing is that it's backed by a plan and it's guided by a plan. If you aim for perfection you'll never get going. And if you never start, you'll never improve.



The key to successful strategic marketing is knowing where you're starting and where you want to go. You may still be determining the emerging needs of your target market, figuring out what your customers think of you, or deciding where you stand in reference to your competitors. That's just fine. What's important is being open with yourself and your team about those gaps.

If you need more information, do some additional work (customer research, competitive intelligence, and understanding what your company does best) to figure out your 3Cs. But research doesn't have to be all-consuming; you can get tremendous insights from relatively informal efforts. For example, you could talk to a handful of customers to understand how they would describe your company and how they think it compares to the competition. It doesn't have to be exhaustive, just a way to flesh out the knowledge you've gathered in your workshop.

PART 2:

What to Include in An Actionable Strategic Marketing Plan

So, what should you put into a good B2B marketing plan? It's not as complicated as you might think. While you can certainly buy a 300-page guidebook or take a course that will identify dozens of different components to include, most experienced marketers and business managers know that keeping it as simple as possible is the best path to success. In fact, there are just five things you should focus on to build a great plan. If you want to put together a strategic marketing plan that is likely to deliver solid results, here are the five things to cover – forget everything else.

5 things we always include in a strategic B2B marketing plan:

1 Strategy

Strategy doesn't have to be complicated or take forever. For most companies, strategy is about confirming their direction. Here are the three main areas we focus on in marketing strategy:

- **Define your target market.** Who are you selling to, exactly? Specify the industry or industries you sell to, the geographies you operate in, and the kinds of companies you sell to and the individuals, by role, responsibility and needs, that you sell to. Your marketing should be laser focused on these target markets. Everything that doesn't speak to these people should be eliminated.
- **Figure out your positioning.** Are you the premium offering in the market? The low-cost player? The service-oriented company? No business can be all things to all people, and you'll be a much stronger company if you identify how you want to be differentiated and make all your marketing line up to that position.
- **Determine your messaging.** Why should customers buy from you? Your messaging is the medium through which you'll convey your position (described above) to your target market. What are the statements or phrases that will capture their attention and illustrate your company's ability to solve their problems? B2B companies with strong, articulated messages that resonate with their target customers are always more effective in generating sales.

The 'strategic' part of a strategic marketing plan is very important, but it doesn't require a cumbersome process, navel-gazing or reinventing the wheel. It's about capturing what's already in the heads of your executives, distilling and refining that knowledge and doing some external research if necessary. The toughest aspect of strategy is that it requires a company to do a little soul searching and to say 'no' to some lesser options that don't serve its goals.

2

Marketing Tactics and Tools

Deciding on the marketing tools, technologies and tactics that will work for your company is one of the more difficult aspects of creating a strategic marketing plan. There is a growing range of options every year. You have traditional tactics (trade shows, direct mail, catalogues, sales collateral, etc) and a dizzying array of new digital marketing options (AdWords, webinars, social media, email marketing, SEO and more).

If your company has been marketing in the past, you have some knowledge of which tactics work and which don't. If your company is new to marketing, you'll be on the learning curve. The most important aspect of deciding on tactics is to understand your audience, how they would prefer to communicate with you, and how you can integrate tactics to get good mileage from your marketing. You can find more pointers on choosing tactics in our eBook, [Coming from Experience](#).

Every B2B company wants a standard prescription for which tactics to use. I wish there was a single, simple answer. But there are some rules that will guide you in choosing the right tactics.

The first marketing tactic for a B2B company should be sales support tools. If you have a sales force (even if it's just the CEO), but don't have effective tools for presenting your solution to customers and demonstrating the value you provide, the sales team is not able to do its job and the company's investment is squandered. The basic sales support tools vary by industry, but some to consider are a website (that accurately reflects the company's solutions and value), a company overview, and product technical specification sheets. Other sales support tools that can be helpful include product demonstration videos, case studies and testimonials.

Beyond these basics, tactics should be chosen based on the results they can deliver, starting with the biggest potential ROI to the lowest. How do you figure out which tactics will give you the biggest bang for your buck? The highest value revenues usually come from selling existing products or services to existing customers, and the lowest from selling new products or services to new customers.

		Products	
		Existing	New
Customers	Existing	1	2
	New	3	4

With this in mind, what can you do to promote existing products to existing customers? Those activities will produce your #1 ROI. Tactics like email are a good choice for keeping customers abreast of technical improvements, telling them about new applications for your solutions, and generally reminding them that you exist.

- **Next up** is selling new products to existing customers. Your existing base should be the target for selling more of your full product line. They should also be the starting point for product launches. Invite them to upcoming “lunch ‘n learns,” webinars and trade shows to showcase your latest innovations.
- **Then come the tactics** for promoting existing products to new customers. Here is where you’ll consider tactics like SEO, PR and executive seminars.
- **And finally**, pursue new revenues among new customers. What’s interesting is that most companies start with this last category when they think about marketing. But as you can see, this isn’t where to start if maximizing ROI is the goal of your marketing.

Admittedly, the matrix isn’t as black and white as it might suggest. Many tactics cross between quadrants. A trade show might touch all 4 — from existing products to existing customers right over to new products to new customers. All the same, it’s good guidance for evaluating the right tactics for your company.

66% to 90% of the buying process happens before a potential customer or lead even contacts you.¹ Marketing matters more than ever for B2B companies.



3 Calendar

After you’ve determined which tactics you’re going to use, put them on a twelve-month calendar to identify what will happen when. One of the most important ways to ensure you can actually implement your marketing plan is by using a calendar. Some things, like tradeshow, will be externally dictated. Others will follow a natural sequence (for example, you can’t promote your new company video until after the video has been developed). Planning your calendar will also force you to acknowledge when you have too much going on.

One word of advice based on our experience – many companies overestimate how much can be done in a certain amount of time, so be conservative with your calendar. If this is your first time undertaking marketing in a significant way, approach it as a learning-curve process. Use the year to learn how long things actually take, and you'll have a much better baseline when developing your strategic marketing plan for the next year.

The secret to understanding how long things take is this; either track your hours or use a project management tool that will allow you to look back on the year and see how long each initiative required. Memories have an amazing way of getting cloudy – and overly positive – after a year.

4 Budget

I can't overstate the importance of having a committed marketing budget for a full year. If marketers don't know where their next dollar is coming from, they can't plan anything significant. So, to all the company leaders out there, here's my advice: set a budget and stick to it. Don't take it away if the going gets tough. And be realistic about how much tactics actually cost.

The biggest problem in B2B marketing is that it is perceived as a sexy and fun function. Sure, it can be all that, but that perception can cause companies to waste an awful lot of money. Companies will often jump on 'interesting sounding' marketing tactics because they've heard about them from a fellow business owner or read a story about them. They believe that because the tactic delivered great results for another company, it will do the same for them. What they don't realize is that there are often a dozen other elements that lead to the success of that particular marketing initiative for the company. And without having a plan for integrating that tactic with the rest of the company's marketing activities, and fully understanding how it will work for them, it often leads to wasted dollars and shattered expectations. Don't cast about for shiny marketing objects, they will drain your budget like nothing else can.

Committing to your marketing budget is the same as committing to your marketing. It will show your team you support them, which will give them the confidence they need to succeed.

Repurpose your content to save money. 60 – 70% of content goes unused.² Use your content and repurpose it (i.e. turn a white paper content into a blog series) to impact your bottom line with low spend.

“However beautiful
the strategy, you
should occasionally
look at the results”

– Winston Churchill



5

Goals and Metrics

Lastly, but probably most importantly, are goals and metrics. What do you want your marketing to accomplish? Based on the investment you're making in marketing, what's a realistic return? How many qualified leads did you generate last year and how many do you want to generate next year? How much business is currently in your pipeline and where do you want it to be in a year? It's vital to know where you're starting from in terms of pipeline and revenue, as well as your recent growth rate, then you can forecast a realistic expectation for marketing.

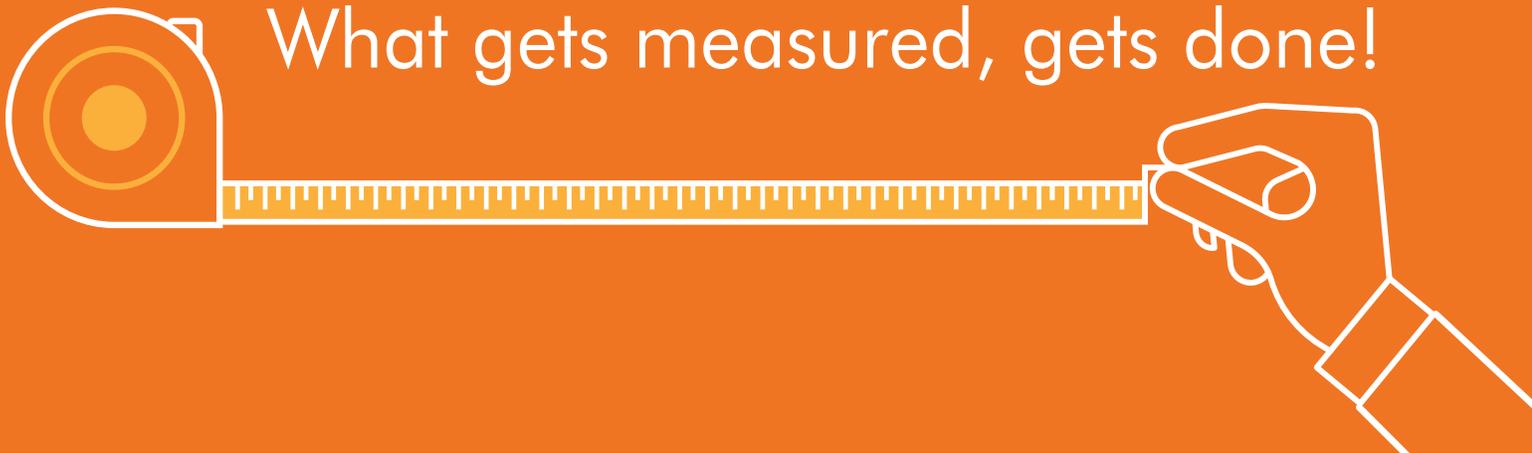
There are two kinds of metrics in good marketing: results metrics and activity metrics. The business owner or sales leader wants results metrics: How much revenue got added into my pipeline? How much revenue resulted from marketing activity? Those are heavy hitting things, and they're important. But marketers can't produce those kinds of results without first doing marketing activities, which produce important metrics, too.

Business owners often don't necessarily care about activity metrics, like number of blogs published or number of webinars held. But ignoring those things does a disservice to the marketers. Do put some metrics around marketing activities: Did we get 5 case studies built? Did we produce a blog per week and get a newsletter out every month? It's important for marketers to have those metrics. They're also shorter term and easier to measure, which will help provide motivation and direction on the path to results.

Like the calendar, goals and metrics can be tricky for a business that hasn't done marketing in the past. We suggest picking five marketing metrics (KPIs) to measure regularly. Combine marketing activity metrics (for example, sending out one email a month) with marketing results metrics (for example, the number of leads generated per month). In this way, you'll build an understanding of what you're undertaking in marketing, and what business results those activities are producing.

And although measuring number of leads per day, week or month may sound like a common-sense metric, it isn't common practice. You wouldn't believe how many companies I've worked with over the years who don't know how many leads they get in a month or year. You should also be measuring deals by source. You need to know where your business is coming from. It's a valuable exercise for a company to look at its deal sources on a semi-annual basis (or more depending on the sales cycle). It can be an excellent wake-up call to help identify where the best opportunities lie.

Address these five areas of strategic marketing planning, and you'll have a solid road map. The secret to success is to keep it simple and above all, to implement the plan. Check back on the plan regularly, and you'll see your marketing get better year over year. If you're interested in what you should expect in terms of marketing ROI, [read this blog post](#).



PART 3:

Dos and Don'ts for Actionable Strategic Marketing

DO

- Add 30% to the amount of time you think it will take to do things if you haven't been running marketing in the past. Like most new activities, it will take longer than you initially predict.
- Reduce your print budget and move it to digital.
- Leave some optional budget for things that go well and you want to do more of.
- Leave some miscellaneous time – things will come up!
- Set aside about 10% of your budget to experiment with new tools and technologies.
- Establish some immediate 'activity' goals so you can measure progress in the first 4 and 8 months, as your pipeline and results goals will take longer to materialize.
- Repurpose your content. You'd be surprised how much mileage you can get from one white paper – it can become a blog series, the stats can become tweets and you can even turn it into a webinar.

DON'T

- Fuss over being perfect. Get your marketing out there, otherwise it will be wasted.
- Underpromote your content. Plan to spend twice as much time promoting your thought leadership content as you did producing it. If you spent 50 hours to create a whitepaper, spend 100 hours spreading the word about it.
- Spend months and months building your plan (unless you have to complete external research).
- Set overly ambitious goals in year one – you'll set up the marketing function to fail rather than thrive.
- Abandon your marketing budget and plan 6 months in. That is the surest way to waste money in marketing.
- Try to do every marketing activity yourself. Get specialists like writers and designers to execute parts of the plan. Specialists will be vastly more efficient than your engineers and sales people in executing all your marketing.

“There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all.”

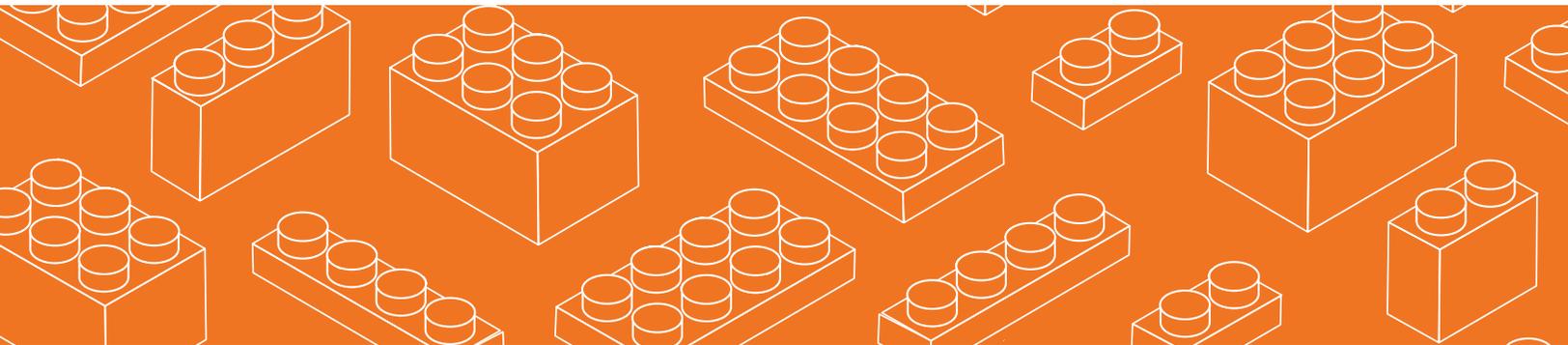
– Peter Drucker

Summary

An actionable strategic marketing plan is the bridge between marketing aspirations and marketing success for B2B companies. The most common struggle is developing something that's clear and that you can execute. Good marketing is all about getting things done. And remember that you don't need to be perfect. If you aim for perfection you'll never begin. And if you never begin, you'll never improve.

Creating a strategic plan doesn't mean you need to spend the next three months sequestered in a boardroom generating graphs and spreadsheets. Building something you can act on is deceptively simple. Harness the knowledge you have in-house to understand your audience and your positioning, and you'll have the building blocks for a rock-solid marketing foundation.

Do you have questions about building your plan? [Talk to us!](#) Mezzanine's marketing experts have been accelerating the success of B2B companies for over 15 years. How can we help your marketing be more successful?



About Us



The Mezzanine Group works with B2B companies every day and we know which tactics are needed to match different strategies and goals. Collectively, we have experience in every type of B2B marketing tactic and strategy, the experience of helping over 250 companies, and decades of knowledge. We lead the pack in strategy because we're experts at hands-on implementation.

1. MarTech, *Most of the Purchase Decision in B2B Happens Before Contact with Your Company*, 2014. <https://martech.zone/research-purchase-b2b-online/>
2. Business 2 Community, *7 New B2B Content Marketing Trends to Watch in 2017*, 2016. <http://www.business2community.com/content-marketing/7-new-b2b-content-marketing-trends-watch-2017-01618223-0xdzG1BhCMwI0dq.97>