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Everything supports the vision. That's the key in retailing. Everything must reinforce the central concept you are trying to convey to your target market, including your product lines, the customer service you offer, architectural design, the hours you're open, even the type of bags you use.”

Nancy Glaser
Business Strategies Consultant

Sometimes, unfortunately, a company sends out mixed messages — for example, having nicely dressed salespeople but poorly printed sales material. How will you convey an image to your customer that reinforces your direct message? How will you add value to your product or service through design, packaging, and presentation?



The Five Fs worksheet on page 160 helps you organize your answers to these questions; the information then can be incorporated into the Marketing section of your business plan. This worksheet helps you summarize how you reinforce your company's image and what you are trying to tell customers about your product or service. Use the information for internal planning as well as in your business plan.

Marketing Strategy

Once you have clarified what you want to tell customers about your company, you must describe how you disseminate that information.

How do you reach potential customers? Do you advertise? If so, where?

Do you send an email newsletter? If so, to what mailing lists? Do you optimize your website for search engines? Do you participate in trade shows? If so, which ones and how frequently?

Since every marketing vehicle costs money, carefully plan how you intend to spend your marketing dollars. In devising your overall marketing program, be sure you look for:

- **Fit.** Your marketing vehicles must reach your actual target customer and be appropriate to your image.
- **Mix.** Use more than one method so customers get exposure to you from a number of sources.
- **Repetition.** It takes many exposures before a customer becomes aware of a message.
- **Affordability.**



Use the Marketing Vehicles worksheet on page 162 to document how you employ various marketing vehicles in your business.

SEO and SEM

With **search engine optimization (SEO)**, you design a website that is optimized for search engines to find you quickly and easily. The goal: your website listed high on the “results” page when a user searches for relevant keywords. With **search engine marketing (SEM)**, you buy keywords so that your advertisement appears every time a user searches the Internet using them.

- **SEO.** First, you need to figure out which words your target customers are most likely to use when searching for the types of products or services (or content) you offer. You’ll need to repeat your keywords throughout your site so that search engine crawlers are likely to associate your website (or certain pages within it) with those keywords. As you develop and update your site, keep these keywords in mind.

Be aware, however, that SEO is as much art as science. Since search engines frequently change their search algorithms, the optimization rules that kept a company in the top spot one month might not apply the following month.

- **SEM.** This broad term could apply to any type of marketing activity aimed at associating your company’s name and website with search engine results; however, to distinguish it from search engine optimization, the term SEM has come to mean those activities in which you pay to have your site appear high within search results. SEM can also be called search engine advertising.

SEM is very popular for two reasons. Searchers are often highly qualified prospects — especially for the most narrowly defined terms. And advertisers are charged only when a searcher clicks on their ads (called a click-through). They do not pay just for the ad being displayed.

Email Newsletters

Like their print counterparts, email newsletters offer an extremely effective way to build your business and stay in front of your customers and prospects. They also have the advantage of being fast, easy, and inexpensive to produce.

In an email newsletter, you can include information and tips your customers can use, short articles, business updates, special announcements, or coupons and special offers. Avoid filling your newsletter with sales information about your products and services — instead, provide recipients with some benefit for opening your email. That way, they’re more likely to open the next one you send.

But a word of caution about all email marketing: Be careful not to abuse it. Send email only to those who’ve signed up to receive email from you or have had some dealings with you (including giving you their business card), otherwise you may be breaking the law. Limit the frequency of your messages; generally once or twice a month is enough for an email newsletter. Try to use a compelling “Subject” line to increase the chance that people will open and read your mail. And make sure your mailings are meaningful, are valuable, and don’t contain offensive content or language. If not, recipients will soon block your email as spam, and if enough people do that, email filters will block your messages to many larger servers.

Online Advertising

Even if you find most online ads bothersome, it’s a good bet that there are others you’re happy to see. For instance, if you’re looking for environmentally sensitive products — solar-powered heating, energy-efficient lights, recycled building materials, and so on — and come across a website listing and describing suppliers of such products, you’ll be thrilled. You won’t care that these companies paid to be listed; you’ll just be glad to find all of these resources in one location.

What’s important is that you design your own online ads to attract (not annoy) your target customers and then place them where potential customers are most likely to see them.

Some major types of online website advertising opportunities are:

- **Portal Sites/Directories.** Portals and directories serve as online hubs — usually grouped around a common theme, topic, product, or location — where users come to look for information, products, and services. As such, portals can provide effective (and affordable) places to advertise your product or service.
- **Website Ads.** Banner ads typically include graphics or photos as well as text, and are placed adjacent to the content of the webpage itself. Interested viewers can then click through to the advertiser’s website.

Another form of website advertising is interstitial ads — that is, ads that appear between (or before) other content and websites. With this type of ad, viewers become a captive audience. After they type in a website address, an ad appears before the actual site they want to visit opens.

- **Sponsorships.** With a sponsorship, an advertiser pays to support a website, portion of a website, content within a website, or the organization behind the website. In return, the website gives the advertiser visibility and recognition. Often, this visibility takes the form of a static banner ad; however, it can also mean displaying the sponsor's name, logo, or tagline in immediate proximity to content.
- **Online Classifieds.** Some of the most effective ads are pure text (or, perhaps, text augmented with a few pictures) — the equivalent of online “classified” ads.

The best known is Craigslist (www.craigslist.org). While most people look for jobs or used goods on Craigslist, many businesses also use the site to advertise their products or services. Advertising on Craigslist takes time (you have to continually update your ad to stay visible), but, in most cases, it's free.

- **Affiliate Auction.** Online auction sites, such as eBay, are more than just places for individuals to auction off used goods to the highest bidders. Representing huge online marketplaces, such sites have created myriad marketing opportunities for entrepreneurs. Since you can set up “stores” on these sites or list products as “Buy It Now” without conducting an auction, you can use auction sites as an advertising medium — just as you would online classified sites.
- **Affiliate Programs.** You can advertise your products or services on other people's websites by setting up an affiliate program (which can also be thought of as pay-per-sale advertisements, since the hosting website only gets paid if the ad results in a sale).

Affiliate advertising offers incentives for others to place your ads on their sites in exchange for a piece of the action. For instance, if one of their site visitors clicks your ad, goes to your site, and makes a purchase, the originating site gets a commission on the final sale.

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What's your ‘go to market’ plan to let potential customers know you exist? If people don't know you exist, you're not going to scale. How will you let people know you have a solution to their problem?”

Lauren Flanagan

Cofounder and Managing Director, BELLE Capital USA

Online Marketing Tactics

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Website: How will your website promote your products or services or add credibility to your business? What are the primary objectives of your website in marketing and selling your products and services? _____

SEO/SEM: Will you drive traffic to your website using either unpaid or paid search engine marketing? If so, how? _____

Email Newsletters: Will you create an email newsletter to connect with your customers and prospects? What type of content will you include? How often will you send the newsletter out? How will you build your mailing list? _____

Blogs: Will you write a blog? What blogs will you actively participate in to increase your visibility? _____

Social Media: Will you use social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and the like, to spread the word about your products and services, and to engage customers and prospects? _____

Other Online Advertising: Will you use paid advertising on other websites or portals? If so, which ones? _____

Other Online Tactics: Will you use other online vehicles such as podcasts, video, daily deals, or review sites? If so, how will you use them? _____

Marketing Globally

In today's connected world, it's far easier to find and serve customers worldwide than ever before. While your domestic market may seem like a large enough target market to pursue, especially if yours is a young company, you should also at least consider expanding your potential customer base internationally.

Even if you don't directly target global customers, it's likely that you'll have customers throughout the world, especially if you have an online presence. International customers may find you even if you are not actively seeking them.

Before you decide to market your products or services internationally, you must determine whether there's likely to be market demand from other countries, and if you can affordably and effectively fulfill orders should you receive them. After all, there's no point in marketing a product if it's going to be impossible or unaffordable to ship. So begin your global marketing evaluation by determining which — if any — of your products or services are appropriate for global sales. Are there customers in other countries who are likely to want or need your products or services? If so, in which countries?

Keep in mind that you do not necessarily need to have a physical presence in another country to be able to market to customers. You might, for instance, find a locally based company with which to partner that can import and market your products or that can license your products or intellectual property, adapt your offerings to meet the needs of the local market, and market them under either your name or its company name.

For most businesses, however, their online presence — particularly through their website or their sales through other websites — is going to be their major global marketing vehicle. So as you build or redesign your website, keep international prospects in mind, with considerations such as:

- Making your website friendly for international customers (for example, the use of multiple languages, prices in other currencies, use of the metric system for measurements, customer support for different time zones).
- Creating special websites or landing pages for each country or region you're marketing to.
- Making an attempt to understand cultural norms. For instance, in some countries, comparison advertising (e.g., taste tests of Coke versus Pepsi) is not done. In many Asian countries, red is a symbol of good luck.
- Using social media. Participating in social media — blogs, and social networking sites — where many or most users are from your target countries.
- Buying ad words to appear when searchers are from a specific country. Some search engines allow you to target particular countries. Keep in mind that in some countries, other search engines may be dominant — such as Baidu in China.

