

# A LITTLE PLAN CAN GO A LONG WAY

As we are firmly into the start of the new financial year, many small businesses should be coordinating with their marketing company to rethink the year's strategy, writes **Michael Kava**.



**S**mall businesses need to allocate a set budget for the entire year's marketing plan – this allows you to tailor the strategies that will trigger the strongest results.

As a marketing consultant, creating marketing plans for my clients has filled the last couple of months. As most of my customers are small businesses, the budget is usually based on achieving revenue growth. That's why my main goal is to create a plan that has activities that will achieve direct results. There is no point in wasting half the budget on actions that may not have the desired effect just because it may have a higher audience reach.

As a small business, the aim is to create multiple touch points to get your brand out there with existing and new clients. There are many low-cost activities a business can conduct to achieve exposure, you just need to map out what suits your business best.

Offline marketing can help open doors to new clients. By direct-marketing your services or products, there are no grey areas and it shows people what you are about. Activities you can try are:

- Direct mail campaigns to a database
- Register for conferences to carry out networking
- Join your local chamber of commerce
- Plan a workshop for your current and new clients

These simple activities are cost-effective because you are reaching your target audience immediately and

are putting a face to your business' brand. Some of these solutions, such as joining a chamber of commerce, may take some time – there may be multiple networking events to attend throughout the year. However, if you head to these functions with a structured idea of what you want to achieve and you have a clear understanding about what you are going to tell people about yourself and your business, you can succeed. You shouldn't try to 'sell' them who you are, you should 'explain' to them who you are.

Online marketing is another cost-effective exercise you should include in your marketing plan for the year. Activities you may want to include are:

- List your business on Google Places
- Start a blog on your website
- Start a Google AdWords campaign
- Upload a video onto YouTube
- Set up a Google Analytics account to track your website and blog
- Create a Facebook page (only if it is relevant for your business)

No matter the size of your company, a major objective for the business (besides the obvious target of increasing revenue) is to build a positive relationship with your audience. Your audience expects you to treat them as an important entity at all times and not just in your one-off interactions. Before a consumer gives you money for services or products, they want to feel as if what you are supplying them is something they need – it's not just something they want. This mutually beneficial relationship starts at the marketing stages. Relationship-building activities you can include in your marketing plan are:

- Provide feedback forms to display your desire to satisfy their needs
- Sponsor a local sports team
- Send birthday cards to your clients
- Become an adviser in your field by constantly providing industry-based knowledge to your clients that will benefit them

Ultimately, customer service is about building a constant and long-term relationship instead of looking to make some quick cash from your clients.

By implementing various exercises across the financial year you can evaluate plans you have carried out and decide what worked and what needs to be tweaked in future month's plans. Creating a monthly plan allows you to evaluate the progress and ensure there is somebody accountable for the implementation.

A marketing plan is essential to any successful business, but it doesn't need to be expensive – it just needs to be happening all the time. You need to saturate your market with effective communication so you are always on their mind.

Do your research, create a budget and find out what works for you. Then get out there and target your audience with effective activities outlined in an organised and structured plan. ■

*Michael Kava is the director of Little Marketing, which provides leading marketing advice for small businesses.*