


13

WAYS TO
CREATE
A
KILLER
MARKETING
PLAN

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A lackluster marketing plan can be deadly to your business. No one will buy your product or service if they don't know you exist, but these days your marketing efforts must go beyond that. You must create a plan to keep your brand relevant, your message consistent, and your company at the forefront of every potential customer's mind. How do you achieve that lofty goal? A killer marketing plan.

Here are **13 ways to slay your marketing goals** and create a strong strategy that will not only keep your business alive, but also allow it to thrive.

1. Work in advance. A good marketing plan is hashed out and strategized months, even a year in advance. "We create a marketing plan annually, which looks ahead to the following year," says Jennifer Henry, director of marketing for The Spa at The Hotel Hershey in Hershey, Pennsylvania. "Then, throughout the year we revisit the messaging, channels and tactical pieces so we can evaluate and learn from the metrics we see throughout the campaign."

Working through a marketing plan well in advance allows you to present a clear and cohesive message throughout all channels and team members. Diane Hibbard, vice president of treatments and development at Burke Williams Day Spa in California completely agrees. She suggests developing plans annually and referencing it daily to stay on top of all strategies. She says, "Staying involved with your plan will naturally dictate when updates are needed, and create more room for progress and innovation."

2. Don't be afraid to adapt. Speaking of innovation, you can't be afraid to roll with the punches in marketing. Trends change daily and it is up to your team to adjust. So, while planning an overall plan in advance is key, you must leave room for adaptation. "At Millennium, we are constantly reworking our marketing plan based on the performance of our various assets," adds Colleen Lemos, senior public relations specialist at Millennium Systems International. "Marketing trends and consumer behaviors are changing so quickly that it's important to be able to adapt as needed."

3 Revisit often. Now that you're over your fear of change, be sure to check that marketing plan monthly, maybe even weekly or daily, to make appropriate updates and make sure everything is on track. Kate Wind, spa manager at Spa Mio at the M Resort in Henderson, Nevada, is constantly revisiting her marketing plan to remain relevant to her target customer. "Since most of our clientele is local, we like to keep things fresh and update our marketing plan monthly," she notes. "Creating consistency with our clients gives them something to look forward to each month."

4 Be everywhere. "From email blasts and blogs, to white papers, to print and digital ads, we have a wide variety of marketing initiatives that all must work in harmony towards a common goal," says Lemos.

Being available to your potential customers on all possible channels not only keeps your brand at the top of their minds when it comes time to make a purchasing decision, but also builds trust and comradery between your brand and your customers. So, while it may be time consuming, be sure to include space in your marketing plan for every channel you work with.

"When one area is re-worked, it affects the rest, so it is always a balancing game to keep your marketing plan as successful as possible."

5 Involve other members of the team. Being ever-present is time-consuming. Plus, you'll get more ideas and excitement around marketing if you open the planning process up to other members of your team.

"Burke Williams is a team and we keep our marketing conversations on the table for all feedback," says Hibbard.

"From our founders or myself to our GMs and our therapists, we're always looking for and open to great ideas."

Lemos agrees by saying, "Don't be afraid to ask your team for input. They spend a lot of time hearing about the lives of your clients, and may have a few marketing ideas of what will entice your customers."

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6 Go with the seasons. If you're stuck in the idea department or can't figure out where to start your plan, pull out the calendar. "Start with simple marketing campaigns and let seasonal trends and holidays do the work for you," suggests Lemos. "While you think this may be overdone, there are always times of year when consumers are looking to spend more money and it's up to you to put your own unique spin on it."

Think: Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, graduations, wedding season, summer vacations, Black Friday, the holiday season, etc. Start with this framework and fill in what is relevant to your company.

7 Look for outside inspiration. If you're still in a planning rut, try to

look outside your company, or even outside the spa industry for inspiration. "When creating marketing plans, I look to other successful companies outside of the spa and salon industry," reveals Wind. "Some of our most successful marketing plans have been modeled after strategies from car dealerships or furniture stores. I use marketing ideas that catch my attention and cater them to our industry."

Being original is important, but you don't always have to reinvent the wheel. Listen to the radio or watch commercials to see how other people sell their product and apply it to your plan.

8 Create excitement. We know creating a killer marketing plan is work, but don't forget to have a little fun! If you're not excited about your marketing plan or messaging, there's no way your customers will be. Wind continues her suggestions by saying, "Think about walking into the grocery store and seeing a sign stating: 'Four for \$5.' Most people get excited and start to stock up, not realizing that they're only saving a couple cents per item. Think about how we can recreate this same idea in the spa industry: creating excitement without necessarily discounting."

9 Know your strengths. When creating a marketing plan, you've got to figure out your brand and your team's strengths. "Take time to understand your unique selling proposition (USP)," advises Henry. "What differentiates you from the other spas in your area? Who is your competition? Ensure you are communicating that USP through marketing channels and especially on your website, which is where marketing efforts should push to."

Realizing your strengths can give your marketing plan an edge and help your brand stick out in a very crowded world.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 60)

13 WAYS TO CREATE A KILLER MARKETING PLAN

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 58)

10. **Don't be afraid to rely on social media.**

"Every marketing plan needs social media spend," states Hibbard. "Considering most web users go to a company's social media pages for information before visiting the actual website, it's integral to have a social media strategy that includes a budget for social media ads and customer support."

Social media should be a huge part of your marketing plan and support your more traditional marketing efforts like print advertising. Creating a robust social media presence will improve everything from search rankings to brand imaging. As Hibbard says, "Social media is king and it's important to include those platforms in your marketing budget."

11. **Make your mission your mantra.**

When laying out your marketing plan, it's important to keep your messaging consistent across all platforms. How can you achieve this goal? By creating a mission that resonates with every member of your team. From the person performing

a massage to the person packing products to ship, everyone should understand and live your mission.

"When it comes to brand marketing, it's vital to keep your company mission statement at the forefront," advises Hibbard. "Once you have a clear understanding of what you're offering and why you're offering it, marketing needs will begin to have a purpose." At Burke Williams, for example, the company's philosophy is "we exist to transform your day," and is used in marketing, customer service and day-to-day operations. When the marketing team gets together to develop marketing plans, their aim is to transform the guests' day through all marketing messaging.

12. **Include end goals.**

"Looking at the big picture is key," suggests Hibbard. "It's important to look at what your goals are and work backward from there. When you know what the end game is, it's easier to decide what's needed for various promotions."

Lemos agrees by saying, "Every marketing plan should include a mission and goals. What are you trying to achieve

through this campaign? Increase sales? Nurture existing clients?" She suggests including a time frame, necessary assets (email blasts, social media posts, ads, etc.), costs, and how your plan will be executed. Most importantly, Lemos advises to decide prior to implementation how you will measure your plan's success so you can continue to improve your strategy and know how to achieve those goals.

13. **Be familiar with important metrics.**

As Lemos suggests, it's important to include how you will measure your plan's success to properly plan for the future. At The Spa at Hotel Hershey, Henry looks at where guests are coming from, the number of treatments per visit, and what packages or services were the most popular and made the biggest impact to the bottom line. "We also consider email open rates and click-thru rates, online advertising statistics, web traffic, etc.," she adds. "We use this information to ensure that we are delivering the right message to the right person at the right time." Which, of course, is what your killer marketing plan is all about. ■

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