



MARKETING STRATEGY & PLANNING:

THE ROAD MAP

BARTLES & ASSOCIATES  MARKETING & BRANDING STRATEGIES

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TRAINING



IMPLEMENTATION



PLANNING



DESIGN



RESEARCH

Many small to medium sized businesses face a common struggle; a balancing act of plans, strategies, departments and decisions.

All of the elements are present, all of the gears in working condition, but business isn't exactly booming at the pace it had anticipated or forecasted for. What exactly does this growth and sustainability require? In a turbulent economy teeming with congested airwaves and aggressive business practices, it's about **standing out from the crowd**. And surprisingly, your marketing strategy has a lot more to do with it than you might realize.

Conflicted business owners can overcome the masses and draw the customers that are right for their product by executing a stellar marketing strategy, not by yelling louder than their competitors or using neon banners on their storefront (or banner ads on your website). My point is, you don't have to be throwing yourself out there with a bunch of noise all the time. What you need to do is paint a vision for your business, your employees, and your customers. Make promises that nobody but you can keep, and then blow them away with your admirable businesses practices and superhuman skills.

Take a moment to consider this: marketing strategy is the single most important factor in determining the prosperity or deterioration of a business. That's a pretty substantial claim and I'm willing to prove its legitimacy. Marketing strategy distributes itself throughout all the facets of a business, whether intended by its creator or not. This is possible because the strategy is created and defined by the overall objectives of a specific business, and integrates these objectives with a company's unique vision and mission. Put simply, every level of a business should be oozing marketing strategy. Really!

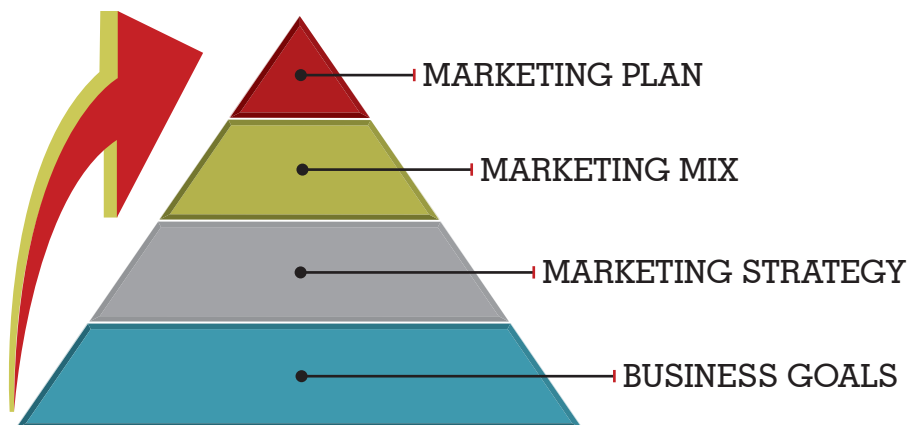


Marketing Strategy

Does it seem far-fetched? Let's examine the relationship between marketing strategy and four key aspects of *any* business: **market research**, the **marketing plan**, **corporate identity**, and the **economy**. First, let's get the formalities out of the way and set forth a definitive explanation of what marketing strategy actually is. After scouring several websites for the official definition, I settled on a less-official but more effective description of marketing strategy:

MARKETING STRATEGY:

A strategy that integrates an organization's marketing goals into a cohesive whole. Ideally drawn from market research, it focuses on the ideal product mix to achieve maximum profit potential. The marketing strategy is set out in a marketing plan.



While your marketing strategy is, essentially, a document; its purpose is far more load bearing. Included in the strategy should be your mission statement and business goals, an exhaustive list of your products and services, a characterization or description of your target clients, and a clear definition of how you integrate into the competitive landscape of your industry.

Marketing Strategy v. Market Research

This relationship establishes an order of operations: the first phase in *any* marketing or branding initiative is research. (See *our white paper on this subject: Market Research for SMB's.*) No matter the scope of your research, whether it is a broad canvassing of your current client list or unveiling specific, detailed findings about your target market, the outcome will have a direct effect on your marketing strategy. It's imperative to find out *everything* about whom you are trying to reach. What generation are they in? How big are their families? Where do they live, eat, and hang out? How do they spend their free time and money? All of this information will influence and alter your marketing strategy.

Research alone will not benefit your business without a solid marketing strategy. Often, business owners narrowly define market research as the collection and organization of data for business purposes. And while that is technically an accurate definition, the emphasis lies not on the process of research itself, but the impact it commands on future decisions regarding all levels of a company. Every business decision presents different, unique needs for information, and this information then shapes a suitable and applicable marketing strategy.



Research can be a grueling, confusing, and tedious process. From establishing or cleaning out a database to creating surveys and conducting interviews, you can receive a lot of information about your clients and potential clients and wonder what to do next. Before beginning to formulate a strategy, the information and data collected must be organized, processed, analyzed, and stored. Rest assured, with a little creativity and a lot of effort, this will all be molded into a structured, effective, and easily adaptable marketing strategy. Furthermore, continuous and updated research will ensure your strategy is a current and relevant reflection of your target market, marketing goals, and future business endeavors.

Marketing Strategy v. Marketing Plan

In this relationship, the marketing strategy is essentially a guide to judge the performance and efficiency of a specific marketing plan. In simple terms, a marketing *strategy* is a summary of what you offer and how you are positioned in the market (in relation to competitors' products and services), and your marketing *plan* is an organized list of actions that you will enforce to achieve the goals outlined in your strategy. The plan will encompass the steps to a real-life application of a marketing strategy, bringing life to your mission and vision. It's your time to show and sell your products and services so that your target market can experience them in the presence that you truly imagined.

Often, businesses lack a balance of creative personality and logic personality. While a business owner might have the creativity to dream up a stellar product, business model, and brand, they may lack the entrepreneurship and discipline to bring it all to life through research, planning and execution. This is where a branding and marketing firm comes into play (ahem! B&A). As culturally grounded professionals in their field, they have the background, relevance, focus, and vision to transform ideas and concepts into practical applications, and soon enough, a profitable business (ahem! B&A).

Marketing Strategy v. Corporate Identity

It's no surprise that some of the most successful and recognizable companies in the world are those who establish distinguished, one-of-a-kind cultures that permeate through every channel of a business and reach customers on a human level. The culture of a corporation, its psychology, attitude, approaches to business, values and beliefs, lays the groundwork for a unique and compelling corporate identity. There is a powerful and undeniable connection between the health of these companies and the identities that their culture has provided.

These companies have discovered the delicate balance between a brand and a strategy, and how this symbiotic connection encourages visibility and growth. The relationship is simple: the marketing strategy represents where a company wants to go, and the culture determines how (and sometimes if) it will get there. Think of a corporate identity - the style, words, images, and colors - as the personification of your marketing strategy. The corporate identity is extended and applied in every phase of the marketing strategy, and plays a stylistic role in its execution.

Let's look at an example. Starbucks, until recently, didn't really have a marketing or advertising *budget*, per se. Starbucks started advertising in the New York Times and on TV in 2009, and very gingerly at that. Once a week it would print full-page ads in the Times, and on select channels it would air brief, lighthearted commercials. Prior to, the company was able to very successfully promote itself and its products through word of mouth and slapping the 25-year-old logo on every cup its baristas cranked out, proving that even



something as simple as a logo can deeply resonate with consumers. But it was the Starbucks' *identity* that its millions of customers were happily waiting fifteen minutes in line for. The infamous Starbucks cup rapidly became associated with wealth, leisure, high standards, and urbanites. From college freshman to corporate CEO's, people couldn't get enough.

Starbucks enforced its marketing strategy through clever, catchy campaigns, a genuine and human "front line" at the store level, and for the most part, acknowledging any mistakes or shortfalls that it might've run into. All of these actions are traits, portraying a deeply rooted culture that is exuded from top to bottom of the Starbucks hierarchy. And, love 'em or hate 'em, there's no denying their great success, even in a strained economy.

Marketing Strategy v. The Economy

The economy is an incredibly sensitive subject around the globe. What we've also noticed is that a lot of companies and business owners are using a depressed economic state as a reason (and in some cases, an excuse) for the shortcomings in their business.

For example, a big trend recently has been layoffs. Larger corporations are using weak economies as a reason to purge its staff and cut positions, when it knows just as well that that's exactly the opposite of what needs to happen. Or does it? It's become hard to tell. Is surviving a "depression" really as simple as, say, reassessing your marketing strategy? While an unstable economy is troubling, risky, and unpredictable, it's also an excellent test of the flexibility of your marketing strategy. Your strategy isn't set in stone...the whole purpose of designing a strategy in the first place is for smooth navigation through *any* given circumstance, whether good or bad. Unfortunately, many CEOs and CFOs target their marketing departments first in lean times, while the reality is that it should be *investing* in these areas so that its marketing managers can adjust their strategy to survive—maybe even prosper, through tough times. An excerpt from the blog of R. Bruer, the owner and head of a strategic communications firm in Portland, Oregon, lays it all out:

"Most businesses treat marketing as a discretionary expense, making it an easy target for budget cutters. It's as if marketing is a luxury afforded only when times are flush. Less customer demand, less we can afford marketing, or so conventional thinking goes.

But really, can we ever afford not to market?

It's natural to want to preserve cash during a downturn. I was an employer for nearly 14 years, so I'm sympathetic. But the tendency is to make deep cuts in marketing when sales head south. Companies often start by reducing or eliminating outside expenses, such as advertising, events, sponsorships, research. And when that's not enough, they lay off marketing employees, sometimes the entire department.

The net effect of gutting marketing is to stifle generation of customer awareness, demand and retention just when these things are needed most. It's a penny-wise, pound-foolish decision."¹

¹ R. Bruer, "Marketers Look Over Their Shoulder As Recession Hits." December 8, 2008.



Your Marketing Strategy

While marketing strategy isn't tangible, its role in business is just as dire as the product or service being offered. It's contribution bears significance through every phase of a business plan, from conception to execution and far beyond these four aspects of research, planning, identity and economy.

Marketing strategy will continue to fold itself into business plans as long as it is created and executed properly. Research on your industry and competitors will enable you to develop and formulate a proper, pliable strategy. From here, your marketing plan will act as a guide that will bring your strategy to life, attaining and exceeding the goals outlined, all while establishing your corporate culture and identity. Remember, the culture piece works two ways. Your culture helps to form the strategy, and following that strategy will reinforce your culture. Lastly, your strategy must be both strong and flexible enough to withstand the most difficult or unpredictable of circumstances, such as an economic depression, new trends or competitors in your industry.

Strategy is a small piece of a much larger picture. It can all be overwhelming at times, sure, but it's part of the adventure. With dedication, organization, and a champion marketing team (ahem! B&A), the pieces will come together with ease, allowing for the truly awesome personality of your business to shine, and profits to follow shortly thereafter.

About B&A

Based out of Charleston, SC since 2008, Bartles & Associates is a marketing and branding firm, which offers an ingenious and innovative blend of visual identity and effective marketing strategy. We employ a holistic approach to determining the specific needs for every client, which has proven to be a key aspect in our business model. Our combination of expert strategic planning and original, sophisticated design ideas is what differentiates us from the rest. We thrive on collaborative thinking to solve marketing and branding challenges, and strive to consistently create fresh, relevant, and flawless identities for our clients. Our five-phase methodology and holistic approach takes into account every aspect of a business. We research and identify a company's philosophy, transform philosophy into identity, develop a strategic plan to drive that identity, put the plan into action, and turn action into the efficient delivery of your brand and image to your customers.