

Based on: "The Very Model of a Marketing Plan" by Shelly Reese

Shelly Reese gives an excellent introduction to the art of writing a marketing plan that does not essentially become a piece of paper collecting dust on the shelves of the company's managers. She advocates its constant use and revision, which are very important for a company bent on success because in today's marketplace, if a company does not have a clear direction in which it is headed, or, equally serious, if the plan is in the books but not clear to the entire staff, the company is not very likely to enjoy the success it would like and could with careful direction.

Reese suggests that there are two crucial and fundamental points that a good marketing plan should cover: it should be "a dialogue between customer and supplier," and companies should "prove they are listening to their customers by acting on their input." That is, a marketing plan needs to be both interactive and integrated into every activity of the organization, every contact with a customer, every deal with a supplier.

These ideas make it evident that Reese does not think an organization's marketing plan should remain internal to the organization. Of course, if this article was important enough to print in *Marketing Tools*, then most companies probably do not have an effective marketing plan that its employees are acting on, so the idea that suppliers and customers know about it is out of the question. But the fact is, public display of a company's marketing plan, especially one that openly emphasizes the importance of its customers, can be used as a marketing tool itself—if written properly and actually used.

Reese compares the recommended and logical Section I of a successful marketing plan, goals, to a New Year's resolution: "a constant reminder of what you want to achieve." She goes on to say, "The key difference between a New Year's resolution and your marketing goals, however, is that you can't achieve the latter alone."

However, the fact remains that most people give up on their New Year's resolution in a few months, if that. Achieving the goals set forth in a marketing plan requires focusing on them everyday, and just as it helps to tell friends about your New Year's resolution so they keep reminding you to stay on track, it certainly helps if the entire organization is in on the implementation of change. Too often, many companies try to cure this problem by having management give a lecture or two on the new directions the company is about to take, but that's the end of it. In order to successfully fulfill the goals, they must come out of the paper and become integrated into the everyday goings-on in the very way that the company conducts its business and attempts to satisfy its customers.

Section I also includes researching what customers expect of the company, and the simplest and most effective way to do this is to ask them. Section II: The Strategy is a step many companies tend to neglect all together; they figure that if they have done their research, know what their customers want and what they have to offer, then they are ready to begin interaction with their customers. They lack, however, a methodical and mutually agreed plan on exactly what they will say and do when they reach the customers in their target market, and the situation becomes eerily similar to going into a presentation cold but overconfident, especially if it is a group effort as a company should be. Even the simplest things, such as which member of the group will present which section of the presentation, may not be clearly delegated, and this leads only to confusion,

embarrassment, and overall disaster. And it's not pretty in the bottom line of the company either.

Within Shelly Reese's article, there is a sub-article entitled "Getting Started" by Carole R. Hedden. From the very beginning, it chooses to remind readers of the ultimate goal of virtually any for-profit organization: to make money. Yes, making the best products and having the best delivery time may be a goal, but it only helps to achieve the bigger goal to make money. With this in mind, Hedden goes through a nine-step process, which is outlined below:

- ❖ Describe the business. This is an extremely important first step because the fact is, if your company does not have a clear image of its place in the marketplace on a whole, it cannot possibly realistically set a goal for where it wants to go. Image is a very important factor, and the key is to not only know what you want to be, but also the current perception that customers have of you, and then try to merge the two into a mutually satisfying vision.
- ❖ Analyze the market. Every company needs to clearly identify its target market before it creates a plan to reach it. This requires more than simply saying that a certain group of people are your target; it requires knowing in detail what this group wants, what it is currently getting, how happy it is with what it is getting, what it values, what threats it faces, and other qualitative information that can only come as a result of thorough market research. Of course, this section also calls for in-depth research of the competition and its degree of success with certain tactics. It is much easier to market a product when you know who you are marketing to.
- ❖ The marketing strategy. In order to make customers pay attention to your product and drive sales up, what can you do that is reasonable enough not result in a major fiscal failure but is likely to stand out from the competition?
- ❖ The marketing and sales organization. This is the step when you decide who you will hire for which department and why. You have to decide what kind of people fit your profile as ideal job candidates; for example, Journeys, a shoe store discussed in "The Old Pillars of New Retailing," also part of the Richardson text, hires store managers whose average age is 25, in the same range as its target market. It only makes sense.
- ❖ Revenue and expense. This is the section in which you realistically try to predict how much you will be able to earn selling your goods or services.
- ❖ Management issues. According to Hedden, "this section represents your chance to let management know what keeps you awake at night." If you have the slightest doubt, it should be investigated before it is too late.
- ❖ Executive summary. This is the resume of the plan. It should contain all of the basic elements: objectives, budget requirements, revenue projections, and any management issues you have come up with.
- ❖ Sell the plan. Now that the plan is written on paper, it is time to give it some ownership. Otherwise, as Reese warns, "no one owns it, except you." The people who helped provide data for it should feel a sense of ownership when the final draft is presented to them. And the effect should go all the way to the employees at the frontlines.

- ❖ Measure and review. Feel free to change parts of the plan as market conditions vary and other factors change. Of course, every time a change takes place, everyone even distantly involved needs to know about it; otherwise it's just another tiny change saved into a document getting ready to gather the dust.

The marketing plan, in short, should be treated as a living document that grows as it learns, and its presence should be felt all over the company, both internally and externally.