

# Developing a Marketing Plan and Strategy

By Brian Jud

If you were considering driving to an unfamiliar destination, what is the first thing you would do? You would probably consult a map to chart the best way to reach it. When getting the word out about your book, a marketing plan is your map, describing your journey from where you are now as an author to where you want to be. It sets your direction, guides your thinking, and lists the actions you will take to get there.

Marketing planning is simply deciding what you want to accomplish with your book, setting an objective to keep you on target, and then asking yourself a few questions about what you need to do to reach your goal. Organize these questions and your answers to them in two parts. Part one sets your direction, during which you'll ask the following questions: What do you want to accomplish by writing your book? Who will buy it? What's in it for you? Part two answers the following questions: What information do people want that is not already available? Where will you sell your book? At what price? How will you let people know that it exists?

## Part One: Direction

Your initial marketing plan is a *wish list* of what you would do if you had sufficient resources. You might consider developing this list in a creative brainstorming session with a group of people, which could include friends, family members, or fellow writers, to name a few. Initially, focus on *quantity* of ideas, not *quality*, and include some that may at first seem illogical. Such big ideas may stimulate better ones as you get started with your marketing. So, wait until later to apply judgment and eliminate any programs you determine are not currently feasible.

Begin your marketing plan with a sentence stating your overall objective for the upcoming period. Next, make a list of your strategies that outline your general game plan. Finally, describe your tactics that are the specific actions you will take to fulfill your strategies and achieve your objective.

## What Do You Want to Accomplish by Writing Your Book?

Why did you write your book? What do you want to accomplish with it? Answers to these simple questions form the basis of your mission statement. This will direct your thoughts and actions, serve as motivation during tough times, and keep you focused on what you need to do to reach your goals.

Because it is so simple, most authors skip this step. They "know" what they did and why they did it, so why bother to write it down? From time to time, you may need to be reminded of your vision; your mission statement does that.

Do not get bogged down trying to come up with a flowery statement suitable for a greeting card. No one need see your mission statement but you. Just think about why you wrote your book in the first place, and then write your thoughts. Begin with one sentence that describes the "3Ts": your **T**ask, **T**opic and **T**arget. Here are three examples:

<b>Task</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Topic</b>
1. Educate	seniors	on retirement
2. Entertain	children	with stories.
3. Show	unemployed people	how to get a job quickly.

Write one sentence describing your book using this formula. Then follow it with a statement on why you want to do that. Think of your mission statement as the 20-second elevator speech for your book. Ask questions like, "What are the most important points that demonstrate what your book will do for readers?" It will help define your business as an author in the mind of your target audience. For example, if you are publishing a book about gardening, you may think you are in the business of flowers and plants. But really, you are in the business of helping people enjoy and appreciate the beauty of outdoor life.

If properly developed, your mission statement will impact every aspect of your marketing: the price of your book, where you will sell it and how you will promote it. Write it, keep it handy, and refer to it when you need a reminder of your mission.

### **Who Will Buy Your Book?**

The "3Ts" technique serves another function: it helps you focus on your target reader, or the person who is most likely to buy and benefit from reading your book. Knowing the prospective buyers of your book and their decision influencers - such as a child's preference for a picture book - helps you price, distribute, and promote it effectively, efficiently, and successfully.

Try defining your most likely buyers in descriptive terms such as 'college-educated empty nesters who are above-average wage earners.' In this case, you could publish a hardcover book and price it on the high side of average. You might sell it in specialty stores, airport stores or on cruise ships, and not in convenience stores or discount retailers. The vocabulary you use in your promotion would be different depending on the target reader.

Also, try not to be too broad in defining your audience. Marketing to everyone is not practical and will lead to spinning your wheels on non-productive activities and audiences.

Marketing strategy evolves from a good understanding of your prospective customers. Think about the answers to the following questions. After you get a good feel for who could buy your book, your marketing strategies and actions will start to fall into place.

**Who will buy your books?** Without being too specific, would your content most benefit a male or female? Approximate age level? High or low wage earners? What is the general level of education?

**How many of them are there?** Is it a niche or larger group? This helps you gauge if your marketing plans reach wide enough and gives you a sense of the potential income that could be generated with a successful marketing campaign.

**Who will influence the purchasing decision?** The answer to this helps you target your promotion. Would the parents of graduating college students help the student choose a job-search book? If so, include the parents in your marketing plan.

**What information do they need?** What does your book give people that they don't already have? How will you fill a need for your reader? For example, if you wrote a book about finances, you may know people want to have more money in their savings account. Do they want to make more money or save more money? Answering questions like these helps you write a more effective press release.

**Is any other book serving the same need as yours?** Is there a dominant competitor in your field? If you want to write a book about getting a job, you will have to know the answer to the question, "How is your book different from *What Color is Your Parachute?*, the perennial leader in that category?"

**In what form do they want it? In what format are your target buyers most likely to read?** To cover your bases, you may choose to make your book available in a variety of formats, including both print and eBook.

**Where do they buy?** Does your target reader shop online? In supermarkets? At Home Depot? In Petco? If so, that is where you should try to have your books available for sale.

**How much will they spend?** Knowing this answer will help you price your book most profitably. Potential customers in a higher income bracket may be willing to pay more than would frugal patrons.

**When will they buy?** Books on gardening, about holidays, gift books, or books about travel destinations may have an increase in sales at certain times of the year. This will help you plan the timing of your promotion.

Read more in [Guide to Targeting an Audience](#).

## What Do You Hope to Achieve?

Goals are part of the foundation of a solid marketing plan. They provide a target at which to aim, and a standard against which you can gauge your progress. They create manageable steps after your mission statement. Written goals provide something to aspire to and also a means for looking back to see how far you have come. Your goals should be clear so there is no misinterpreting their intent, specific so there is no doubt about reaching them, measurable in their objectivity, and attainable in a limited time period. They should be set within the realm of what is possible for you to accomplish and arranged from the most important to the least important. Use goal setting as the tool it was meant to be: part of the process that transforms your mission statement into reality.

For example, if your "3Ts" analysis defined your mission as 'Showing unemployed people how to get a job quickly,' your objective could be something like this: *By December 31, 201X, sell 1,000 copies of the book directly to career development offices at four-year colleges and 1,000 copies via online retail channels at list price, generating \$X in gross revenue.*

## How Can You Use All That Information to Sell More of Your Books?

Now you know who will buy your book, in what form, why, and when. Now, how will you use that information to reach your objectives? As you answer that question in general terms, you begin to create your marketing strategies. These help you focus on doing the right things (becoming more effective) and on doing things right (becoming more efficient). Here are seven hints to help you plan your strategy before you begin taking action:

1. There is a proverb that declares a journey of 1,000 miles begins with one step. But what if that step is in the wrong direction? Strategies make sure you are headed in the right direction before you take action.
2. You cannot be *all things to all people*. Your strategy creates an important and unique selling proposition for your titles among a particular set of customers. You can be more successful if you perform activities that are different from those of your competitors or perform the same tasks better than your competitors.
3. Coordinated marketing activity is much more powerful than a hit-or-miss approach. Your strategic choices harmonize the ways in which you conduct your product development, distribution and promotion tactics to ensure your efforts pay off.
4. If you try to do a little bit of everything, you will not be able to create and maintain a distinct competitive advantage. Strategic thinking helps you establish the boundaries within which you can make the choices that maximize the return on your available resources.
5. Your distribution strategy reflects your target-market decisions. You'll want to be mindful of where your target buyers will be purchasing your book to communicate sales information properly.
6. Strategic planning recognizes that unique titles respond to various promotional tools in different ways. For instance, sales of Title A may be more responsive to print and online media exposure, while social media marketing and blogging might be more effective in stimulating sales of Title B.
7. Strategy creates consistency of performance, which in turn defines your success as you have defined it. Frequent reinvention is usually a sure route to mediocrity. Continuous improvement is a necessity, but it must always be guided by strategic direction.

Before you jump into the action phase of your marketing program, take the time to think about what you are going to do. This will coordinate your efforts, make you more effective and efficient, and help you create a solid reputation for conducting your business as an author professionally and profitably. Make a broad statement of the strategies you will take in each of four areas:

1. **Product mix.** Do you intend to publish only print books, or could audio and eBooks fit into your mix? If you publish a printed book, will it be a trade paperback? What size? Are you planning to write a sequel or a second edition at the appropriate time?
2. **Distribution.** Will you distribute both online and through channels like Ingram and Baker & Taylor (available via CreateSpace's [Expanded Distribution Channel](#))? Will you explore sales opportunities with non-retail buyers, such as corporations and schools?
3. **Pricing.** There are four basic pricing strategies: market, penetration, skimming and competitive. A market pricing strategy considers competitors' prices, distribution discounts, and promotional expenses to determine your book's list price. A strategy using penetration pricing would create a low price to increase sales by attracting price-conscious buyers. A skimming strategy would place your price at the high end of the continuum, most likely in a noncompetitive market. Finally, if you are already in a competitive arena, with similar books available on your topic, you might choose a price equal to or better than that of your adversaries.
4. **Promotion.** How will you combine sales promotion, internet marketing, publicity, and advertising to expose your title to the maximum number of people efficiently? And will you sell your books personally to close sales? If you are not skilled in any of these activities or do not have the time to do them all, will you enlist the help of outside service providers?

## **Part Two: Action**

Many authors cannot wait to start selling their books, so they skip Part One. That is like starting your cross-country vacation trip by saying, "I think I'll drive west and see what happens." Instead, use the information you have developed thus far to point you in the right direction. Your final step is to describe what you will do to implement your strategies, meet your objectives, and fulfill your mission.

### **Tactics**

Create a list of the specific actions you will take in each of the four areas of product development, distribution, pricing, and promotion. Those described below serve only as examples and should not be considered an exhaustive list of possible activities.

#### ***Product development tactics***

How many titles will you introduce? To what target markets will they be directed? For instance, if you are publishing children's books, will you specialize in preschool picture books or nonfiction for young adults? What will be the cost for editing? What about cover designs and internal layout? Will you use color or black and white artwork, if any?

The packaging for one title may be different for various target segments. For instance, you may decide to release a title in hardcover for the library market, trade paperback for retailers, and also release your book in large print. The same title might also be customized for your corporate prospects.

#### ***Distribution tactics***

"Divide and conquer" has proven to be a successful military tactic for centuries. It works in book selling, too. Instead of trying to sell to everyone, divide your total market into smaller groups of prospects (called segments), each with its own reasons and procedures for buying. For example, if you have a children's book, you might sell to toy stores, daycare centers, children's libraries, children's museums, schools, and the home-schooling segment. Each buys for different reasons and in different ways.

You may have chosen a dual-distribution strategy in which you will sell your books to both retail and non-retail buyers. Retail marketing includes "bricks and clicks." Sell online through Amazon.com, your CreateSpace eStore, a personal website, and other book retailers. Also sell through brick-and-mortar

outlets such as bookstores, gift shops (hotels, hospitals, museums, and zoos), airport stores, supermarkets, pharmacies, discount stores, warehouse clubs, and specialty stores. With CreateSpace's Expanded Distribution Channel, you have the opportunity to distribute your title through Ingram and Baker & Taylor, which will potentially make your title available for order from thousands of distribution outlets.

You may choose to also independently explore non-retail opportunities including corporations, small businesses, associations, schools, government agencies, military, and libraries.

### **Pricing actions**

The costs of production and distribution are two of the components to consider when pricing your books. If you choose a penetration (low-price) strategy, how can you reduce your costs to increase profitability? If you chose a relatively high price, how might you be able to offer discounts with direct sales to your customers?

### **Promotion tactics**

Divide your promotion plan into five sections. Four of these (publicity, sales promotion, internet marketing, and advertising) are better at creating exposure or awareness for books. Personal marketing (face-to-face selling or direct-response marketing) is better suited for making the sale. In general, if you intend to implement a retail distribution strategy, you are better off using promotion for exposure. If you have a more targeted audience, personal marketing may be more productive. Here are five promotional tools at your disposal:

1. Publicity, such as press releases, reviews, and media appearances, is perhaps the most economical element of the promotional mix. It can increase awareness and credibility. Now, what will you include in your press kit? To what media outlets will you reach out? On what shows will you schedule media appearances? Will you hire a publicity firm to do that for you?
2. Sales promotion utilizes items such as premiums, giveaways, brochures, and coupons for generating awareness and stimulating demand through short-term awareness campaigns. They can easily be tied in with other promotional tools. List those you will put into action.
3. Internet tactics include your website, social networking, and blogging as examples. Spend enough time on your website to make it welcoming, easy to navigate, and productive. Will you do it yourself, or have someone create it for you? How much time will you devote to social networking on the general sites ([Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)) or business sites ([LinkedIn](#) and [BranchOut](#))? Are there niche sites on which you can socialize? Will you create and maintain your own blog or contribute to others? If so, on which ones will you post?
4. Advertising can reach many consumers simultaneously, with the same message and with a relatively low cost per exposure. It can increase awareness of your titles and educate people about the benefits of buying them. Which titles will you advertise and in what media? You may consider choosing to advertise to mainstream audiences on social media sites like Facebook, or you might place an ad for a specialized book about classic cars in *Car & Driver Magazine*.
5. Personal selling can be one of the most persuasive selling tools because it allows two-way communication. What will you do to line up book signings, personal appearances and library tours? In your dual-distribution strategy, on what corporations, associations, and schools can you make sales calls?

You'll find that each promotional tool has a different objective. Those intended for creating exposure or awareness are more passive and written differently from hard-hitting letters designed to make the sale. For example, the goal of a press release is exposure by informing media that your book is available and telling them why it would interest their readers. The tone is more helpful and broadly describes the 5Ws: *who* you are, *what* your book is about, *where* the story takes place, *when* the information is relevant, and *why* the media outlet's readers should care.

On the other hand, direct marketing is just what it sounds like. Its objective is to close the sale. The tone of your letter or email is more specific and straightforward in telling potential buyers why the content of your book is important to them, convincing them why they should buy it, and giving them an incentive to purchase it now.

A good strategy is to begin with an awareness campaign followed by a direct response promotion. When target readers have seen media coverage and reviews naming you and your book, they will be more apt to buy. Then, conduct direct marketing to get them to purchase your book.

## Evaluation

Have you ever tried to set up a savings program? If so, you probably had a date in mind by which you would have a specific dollar amount. Then, you planned how you would invest your money. Periodically, you checked your accounts to evaluate your progress. If you were on target, you left your portfolio alone. If you did not make as much as you hoped, you changed your investment strategy. The same concept applies to marketing planning.

Book marketing is as simple as **PIE**: **P**lan what you are going to do, **I**mplement your actions, and **E**valuate your relative progress. After developing your goals and strategies and implementing your action plan to reach them, the next step is to measure your progress. Refer back to your goals (which may be based on sales, specific marketing tactics or other achievements) and ask yourself if you're on track to meet them. If you are on the right track, keep doing more of what you have been doing. If you are heading in the wrong direction, make changes in your implementation.

Writing a marketing plan is like laying track for a railroad; it establishes a solid foundation, provides a path to your destination, and controls deviation. But the track does not propel you forward, nor does your plan. Your passion and productive action provide the fuel for the engine taking you on your journey to success as you have defined it.

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