

Tricks of the Trade : Perfect Planning

A lot of people think that planning is a waste of time. In my opinion, if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. A plan doesn't need to be a 40 page document to be worth its weight in gold. In this case, the No Nonsense approach is a matrix. First, some homework.

1. Know your customers, know yourself

Here are some basic questions about the customers you are trying to target and the way you think they would like to do business with you. How you market your business is about meeting - and exceeding - your customers expectations, so firstly we need to understand more about what *your* customers expectations are.

Please answer the following questions - and ask other people who know your business to do the same. The opinions of a few trusted customers would be useful, if you can speak with them in confidence. Be as non-politically correct as you like in your responses and if you're struggling, trust your instincts; they're invariably right.

1. **Who** are your customers? Describe them as accurately as possible. What do they do for a living? Where do they live? What kind of house do they live in? How old are they? What do they look like? What circles do they move in? What's important to them in life?
2. **What** do these customers want from your business? What are their expectations? Will they pay for good service or are they cost sensitive?
3. **Where** can you find them - geographically, socially, intellectually, emotionally?
4. **When** would they buy from you? Would they come back to buy from you again and if so, how frequently? All the time? Once a year? Once in a lifetime? Do they expect a follow up service or is this just a one-off transaction?
5. **Why** would they buy from you and not someone else? What makes your business special to your customers? If you don't know, ask them!
6. **How** do they want to buy, practically? What do they want to experience? Are they looking for face to face service with a smile or simply a properly functioning website? Do they want to have an on-going relationship with your company or is your interaction with them usually a single transaction?

If you have more than one type of customer, complete the profile for each type. Each profile should reveal two fundamental descriptions vital to the future of your business:

1. A profile of your ideal customer/s.
2. A description of the product/service you are offering to them

2. Group our customers into levels

Now you know who your customers are, group them into these three levels:

1. **Level 3:** every possible person you can think of meeting the profile you have just written. This represents the total number of people you feel your business is relevant to, which in marketing speak is your "target audience". Only you as the business owner can assess whether the volume of people in this level is sufficient. An upper class kitchen designer may only need to reach 5,000 people in a year. An internet based soap seller will need to reach tens of thousands. The point is that if you don't think the volume of potential buyers in level 3 is sufficient, you need to cast your net further afield.
2. **Level 2:** people within level 3 who are highly likely to buy from you. They could be groups and communities with a genuine interest or need for your product/service. Depending on the nature of your business, you may be trying to reach people at a certain time; when is this? Or you may be trying to reach people in particular locations: where are they? Try to think how you can narrow down "the great unwashed" volume of people in level 3 to people who are likely to buy from you in the next six to 12 months. Your level 2 target audience should be ready to hear from you right now.

3. **Level 1:** people who will definitely buy from you. In this level, the category that is often missed is your *existing* customers. Remember, they're the ones who are most likely to bring in more business for you by recommendation. Happy customers are one of your business' most important assets. It's the way of the world that a happy customer will tell three other people about you - but an unhappy customer will tell ten. That makes happy customers much more important to your business.

3. Fill in your company's marketing matrix

By now you should have the beginnings of a matrix which you can summarise into something like the table below. The business in question is a marketing consultancy not unlike No Nonsense:

| Description | Businesses less than two years old | Medium/large companies |
|------------------|--|--|
| Service offering | Outsourced marketing director & marketing department | Case study writing, customer reference programmes and copy writing |
| Level 3 | In the UK | In the UK |
| Level 2 | In the North West | In the North West |
| Level 1 | In Cheshire and Greater Manchester | In Cheshire and Greater Manchester |

This business has two distinct types of customer and two different service offerings, but the common theme is that its customers are based in the North West of England. As a result, the way this business markets itself will be very regionally focussed.

Your business may have one product/service offering but many different types of customers. That's fine. Fill in the table with as much information as you can. You may have lots of products/services to offer and a single customer profile. That's fine too. My point is that there is no right or wrong answer; the results will be specific to your business.

4. Assign marketing activities into each level

To put together a marketing plan that works, you need to plan in at least one marketing activity aimed at each level for each customer profile. Using the example above, PR would be a good choice for level 3; direct mail would be a good choice for level 2; and a referral scheme would be a good choice for level 1. The important thing to remember is that the mix of activities will vary from business to business - which is why having your own marketing plan is so important.

In the Services section of No Nonsense's website, you'll find information on a variety of marketing activities and an indication of which level they are usually most appropriate for. It's not an exhaustive list of activities, so if you have a query, feel free to use the enquiry form on the Contact Us page of the website at www.no-nonsense-marketing.co.uk.

Once you've completed the matrix, congratulations! You've just created your own marketing plan. To get the best out of it, remind yourself of No Nonsense's Golden Rules on the website.

For more information

Overleaf is are two example plans to help you. If you'd like more help with planning your marketing, please contact experienced marketer, Penny Lines, at No Nonsense Marketing. Tel: 01625 410681 or 07932 158845. Email at penny@no-nonsense-marketing.co.uk or use the enquiry form on the Contact Us page of the website at www.no-nonsense-marketing.co.uk.

Wishing you all the best in your marketing planning - and no nonsense!

Example marketing plans

1. Top quality, bespoke kitchen designer

This company usually has enough business to fill its workshops to capacity, but it is facing increasing competition. The marketing plan is largely defensive to remind people that the company is still trading. Most new business comes from existing customers who recommend the company to others. Activities at Level 3 and 2 are designed as “background noise” to keep the company in the public eye and show off some of its latest beautiful kitchens.

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Description | “AB” demographic types, wealthy homeowners looking for a unique kitchen, top quality fitting and service |
| Service offering | Top quality, hand made, hand fitted kitchens, designed and project managed by the business owner himself |
| Level 3 | In the region |
| Level 3 activity | PR: editorial opportunities in regional newspapers and glossy regional magazines |
| Level 2 | In the county |
| Level 2 activity | Advertising and online directory listings in regional and local glossy magazines |
| Level 1 | Within a 25 mile radius of the company’s location |
| Level 1 activity | Customer referral scheme: Rewards offered to existing customers who make a recommendation. Launch parties for customers to open their new kitchen to family and friends. |

Costs and the frequency of each activity need to be factored in, but this is a very acceptable working outline for the marketing plan of this regionally based kitchen design and installation business.

2. Holiday letting company with 20 properties throughout Scotland

The business can be sustained on a 50% occupancy rate for each cottage per annum. 5 additional bookings per annum will more than pay for the marketing activities involved. Competition is fierce and image is everything, from the styling of the company logo to the emotional experience of a luxury self catering holiday in Scotland.

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Description | “ABC1” demographic types, middle class couples and families who love Scotland and who can afford to spend “a little bit extra” |
| Service offering | High quality, friendly service and beautifully presented, well located cottages in some of Scotland most desirable tourist and walking areas |
| Level 3 | UK based couples and families seeking a top quality, self catering holiday |
| Level 3 activity | Online based marketing activities directing potential customers to the company’s website based on the “luxury self catering” holiday requirement |
| Level 2 | UK based couples and families with a genuine love of Scotland |
| Level 2 activity | Listings in relevant online directories Independent reviews of the cottages in Scottish based papers and magazines |
| Level 1 | Previous customers and their circle of friends and family |
| Level 1 activity | Customer referral scheme: special rates for repeat bookings and the offer of preferential rates for the family/friends of existing customers. Email marketing activities to distribute offers |

Having won a customer, this marketing plan ensures that they are never lost. A personal relationship between the holiday letting company and the customer begins.