

The Importance of a **Solid Marketing Foundation:**

Building a sustainable
sales & marketing ecosystem

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WHAT IS A SOLID MARKETING FOUNDATION?

Consistent branding, messaging and communication through a single cohesive ecosystem is critical to building brand awareness, attracting the right personas, converting quality leads, and creating highly engaged fans of your products or services. Too often, a busy entrepreneur with a thriving new business has a vision and doesn't know how to articulate or execute these objectives.

Some business owners find that they are moving along just fine and then they hit a plateau or get to a place where status quo isn't working anymore. Another example we tend to see quite a bit are SMBs who have consistently worn all (or most) of the hats and with grit and some glory have been successful yet are ready to level up and aren't sure where to start.

Creating a solid marketing foundation is one of the most important things you can do as a business owner. Designing and building a stable foundation for your sales and marketing ecosystem will provide the base you need to tell the world who you are and why they need your products or services. If you were building a house, you wouldn't start with the walls and the ceiling, you start with the foundation and build from there. Just like that house, the foundation is the key to the long-term stability of your business.

So, ask yourself is your sales and marketing ecosystem built with the foundation in mind?
If so, how strong is that foundation?

Do you know how you stack up and your percentage for each of the four core marketing foundation pillars – BRAND IDENTITY, CRM, ONLINE PRESENCE, OUTBOUND [EMAIL MARKETING]?

BRAND IDENTITY	CRM
__ %	__ %
ONLINE PRESENCE	EMAIL MARKETING
__ %	__ %



EVALUATE YOUR CURRENT STATE

The first step in building a successful marketing strategy is understanding where you are today. Do you know what is working and what is not? Are you aware of any existing gaps in your marketing foundation? Understanding your current state will help you build a stronger program. So, what is the best way to begin to evaluate your business? Ask yourself the hard and important questions. Not sure what those are? Find a good strategic assessment.

An assessment will help you understand exactly where you are today and identify those gaps keeping you from where you want to go. To do an assessment of your program, you'll need to ask yourself a series of questions that help you find where your strengths and weaknesses lie within your sales and marketing ecosystem. You will also need to look at your current ecosystem and workflow processes.

Examples of areas that you will want to review to gain a better understanding of your current foundation include:



YOUR PURPOSE (PLUS VISION & MISSION)



YOUR SUPERPOWERS (AND YOUR WEAKNESSES)



OPPORTUNITIES & THREATS



TARGET MARKET



GOALS & OBJECTIVES



YOUR ECOSYSTEM OF TOOLS



IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES

It's often the everyday challenges that keep organizations from building sustainable, strategic solutions that have the potential to maximize their success. Many business owners and their teams who are committed to growing their business have challenges with the following:

- Knowing where to start
- Identifying the best path forward
- Understanding the necessary tools
- Defining their message

Moreover, small to medium-sized businesses:

- Don't have enough resources / time to effectively evaluate and execute a strategic plan.
- Have trouble identifying gaps in their systems.
- Don't have a trusted resource to assist in the planning & execution.

Unfortunately, many strategic sales and marketing plans are complicated, difficult to follow and difficult to execute — especially when you have a small staff and limited resources. Knowing where to start and how to evaluate success can be difficult unless your marketing foundation is clear and easy to understand.

Here are some questions to get your started:

1. What is the story behind your brand?

2. What value or need does your product / service provide or meet?

3. What do you do better than the competition (your superpowers)?

4. What objections do you most often hear from potential prospects?

5. Where are there opportunities to offer more or break into a new market?



After you complete the evaluation and have discovered the main gaps in your systems or processes, it's time to focus on using what you've learned to develop a cohesive sales and marketing on-boarding strategic plan.

In other words, this is the time for you to create your marketing roadmap that will guide you toward achieving your goals in easy, understandable steps.

First, be sure to align your brand with your purpose, vision and mission. Next, define the objectives based on the SWOT that you uncovered during your evaluation. Your roadmap will include the items that you've identified in the assessment or evaluation of your current state and will layout the path you need to meet your established goals.

Additionally, your new strategic plan should ultimately establish a direction for your small business:

- Align your brand with your purpose, vision and mission.
- Develop goals and objectives to capitalize on opportunities for growth.
- Provide a foundational guide to agencies, freelancers, and team members for seamless execution.
- Strengthen operations and processes where needed.
- Give your company / team common goals to work toward together.

Your final plan becomes your roadmap for the future state of your small business. The roadmap should empower you and your team to build a stronger sales and marketing foundation, accomplish your goals and see sustainable long-term success.



EXECUTION OF YOUR ROADMAP

At this point, you have evaluated your current state, engaged your team (or perhaps just yourself) and developed your roadmap to success. Now comes that final piece of the journey – developing the systems and integrating the tools you will need to execute your sales and marketing objectives.

There are four basic elements that make up the foundational ecosystem of a successful sales and marketing foundation. When you're ready to execute, this is where you should start:

1 **BRANDING / IDENTITY**

Brand is a business's biggest asset. Branding is what people say about you when you are not present. A strong brand identity helps differentiate you from your competitors and can positively impact your customers' purchasing decisions. Tell your story and set yourself apart from the others!

Furthermore, a clear and concise brand identity and the way in which you deliver your brand's message are essential to the success of your business. Here are the integral parts to building your brand:

Determine Your Brand Promise

Your brand promise is a shorthand for your customers expectations. What promise(s) do they believe you're making? What do they expect when they partner with you, meet with you, or hire you? This promise is part of your brand.

Internal Branding

Your internal brand brings your purpose, vision, mission, and core culture to your team and your customers.

External Branding

Your external brand typically includes a company logo, tagline / slogan, colors, fonts, public relation communication guidelines, print / online advertising, marketing collateral material, online presence, social media presence, brand story, and brandscaping.

Competitive Analysis

In order to better understand how your products and services compare with similar businesses and how to best position yourself, you'll want to complete a [competitive analysis](#).

2 CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT (CRM)

The purpose of having a CRM tool or database is to manage all your customer data in one central location while committing to use the information to better serve your customer and increase your bottom line.

Managing all your customer data in this way will keep your efforts organized. A CRM can also provide a platform for all your inbound and outbound marketing efforts.

Studies consistently show that it costs five times more to cultivate a new customer than to keep an existing one. A good CRM system can make your business more profitable. Your CRM tool should:

- Increase efficiency and lead generation while also providing simple, understandable metrics.
- Increase customer retention through consistent communication.
- Increase company profits by creating new leads (lead generation through inbound marketing) and managing them through the sales pipeline.
- Identify and sell to the low hanging fruit (i.e. current customers that can benefit from other services or products).

3 ONLINE PRESENCE

Having an online presence—a website—is an essential piece of your sales and marketing ecosystem. Your website provides the homebase for anyone who might be searching for you online and is the place where people can interact with your brand from anywhere in the world. In fact, all of your marketing efforts and messaging should direct interested individuals back to your site.

Here are a few examples:

- Your CRM and website should be integrated to avoid missing any potential lead generation opportunities or having to manually input lead data.
- Your email marketing system should be connected and should send recipients back to your site for calls-to-action and to learn more (i.e. discounts on products, blog content, etc).
- Your social media posts should send engaged visitors back to your site for more information (i.e. service pages, product purchasing, landing pages, etc).

Your website provides a landing place for current and potential customers to learn more about you, reach out to you and buy from you. And when you understand your customers' goals and buying behaviors, you can create individualized online experiences. Additionally, your website captures data to help you learn more about your visitors.

If you have a website, does it have the following:

- A consistent navigation that allows users to find what they need in 3 clicks or less.
- A homepage that effectively communicates what you do and the solutions you provide.
- A working contact page that allows visitors to get in touch with you and find your location(s).
- An opt-in form asking visitors to sign up to receive information via email marketing.
- Site analytics tool that can be used to run reports consistently and often.

By understanding your audience's buying behaviors and creating custom online experiences, you can improve conversion rates and therefore increase revenue.

4 EMAIL MARKETING

Email marketing is a cost-effective targeted and data driven marketing tactic that provides recipients with desired information (no spamming). Targeted email marketing is a great way to engage with your customers and build brand awareness through measurable interactions. The engagement data generated can be used to refine messaging and calls-to-action allowing you to be more agile and avoid costly marketing strategies.

With that said, not all email marketing is created equal. If you don't have an existing email marketing agency relationship and want to attempt to carry out this marketing tactic in-house, consider the following:

- Do you have the time and energy to optimize the effort and be consistent?
- Do you have an internal resource that is capable of utilizing this tool in a way that will drive sales, build loyalty, and potentially reduce marketing costs?
- Will your email marketing plan be founded on historical data that you will review monthly (at a minimum)?
- Does bringing this tactic in-house save or cost you money?

On the other hand, if you already have an external resource to help:

- Do they specialize in email marketing?
- Are they proactive in producing email marketing on your behalf?
- Do they understand your marketing goals, target market and sales journeys?
- Does their work excite you?

A successful email marketing solution should support CRM database integration and contact list segmentation as well as build brand awareness, strengthen trust and loyalty, and support inbound marketing efforts.



INTEGRATION & REFINEMENT

When these four powerful platforms – brand / identity, CRM, online presence and email marketing – are successfully integrated, they will form the foundation of a strong sales and marketing ecosystem. You will find they move information and customers through the system and allow for more purposeful attraction, conversion, and refinement of your target audience.

ATTRACT:

How well does your system attract and identify prospects and current customers?

CONVERT:

How well does the system move them through your marketing funnel and ultimately close deals?

REFINE:

What metrics are being used to analyze the effectiveness of the customer journeys and refine the strategies as needed?

By measuring these qualities of attraction and conversion, you can get a sense of the overall health of your ecosystem and consistently refine the systems and processes where needed.





CONCLUSION

Too often, busy small to medium-sized business owners find they are not making progress in their sales and marketing efforts. Sometimes this happens in spite of having hired an agency and paying substantial amounts of money for an elaborate plan with guided execution. In fact, according to McKinsey & Company, 70 percent of all business transformations fail and in another study cited in Forbes, an average of 50% of strategic planning executions fail.

“The best-laid schemes of mice and men often go askew.” ~ Robert Burns

There are some fairly common mistakes that get made. But there is good news! Knowing what those mistakes are in advance will help you increase your success rate, so here they are:

1. Start from the top down with clarity and communication to your team.
2. Get your team on your team.
3. Keep it Simple.
4. Invest in adequate resources.
5. Know and be clear about who is responsible for the success of the plan.

Lastly, once you've determined this year's goals and objectives for your business and how the ecosystem will work together, be sure to establish a set of metrics. Determining your metrics early gives you the guideposts you need to stay on track and will ensure you are moving the needle forward.

① EVALUATE ② ENGAGE ③ EXECUTE ④ REFINE & REPEAT