Most businesspeople agree that good planning is essential for success. Even so, it’s surprising how many companies don’t create a thorough plan to generate and manage their customers.

A marketing plan is a detailed roadmap that outlines all your marketing strategies, tactics, activities, costs and projected results over a period of time. The plan keeps your entire team focused on specific goals – it’s a critical resource for your entire company.

A good marketing plan typically includes:

- Financial goals
- Positioning strategy
- Brand strategy
- Product/service overview
- Detailed goals by product, distribution channel &/or customer segment
- Sales plan
- Major marketing campaigns
- Detailed budget
- Dates to review progress

It takes time to develop a solid plan, but it’s important because it ties all of your activities to tangible goals. It’s also a great opportunity to focus on the future, generate new ideas, and inspire your team. Even a simple plan is better than none, but when you invest more effort upfront, you’ll have a better roadmap toward your goals.
Key concepts & steps

Before you begin

A marketing plan should address all of your strategies, tactics and budget, so you’ll need to review your brand strategy, pricing strategy and distribution channels beforehand. You’ll also outline your major marketing campaigns for the year since they’ll be in your budget.

Set your annual goals

Build your entire marketing plan to achieve the goals that you define:

- Quantitative (numeric) goals such as total revenue, profit, number of customers, units sold, and breakdowns by product or channel as needed.
- Strategic goals -- for example, you may want to expand into a new market with a new distribution channel, or you may need to reposition your brand to reflect a change in your business.
Highlight your competitive position, value proposition and brand strategy

- Your positioning strategy defines how you’ll differentiate your offering from your competitors.
- Your value proposition defines the primary value you deliver: operational efficiency, product leadership or customer intimacy.
- Your brand strategy defines what you stand for and how you’ll communicate with the market.

Outline any plans for your products & services

If you need to do anything to strengthen your product line and better deliver on your value proposition, address those issues in your plan.

Develop your tactical sales plan

- The number of sales reps you’ll need and the markets they’ll target
- Whether you’ll need to hire, train, or develop new compensation plans
- Top priority markets, industries or customer segments; if you have a list of key prospects, include them
- Your plan for managing current customers
- Plans for launching any new distribution channels and driving revenue through existing channels

Outline your major marketing campaigns

You don’t need to list every campaign -- just outline your major promotional plans for the year. You’ll need to set your budget too, so the more planning you do now, the better. Your plans should include:

- The top three campaigns you’ll run to generate leads, nurture customers, close, and/or market to existing customers
- The media you’ll use (for example, email, online, print, telemarketing, trade shows, publicity, etc.)
- Tools, technologies or resources you’ll need – for example, a new website, an email service provider, a new piece of software
- Your ROI and other financial goals

Develop a budget

- Budgeting can be a difficult process. Many companies just estimate or base their budget on last year. An estimate is better than nothing, but if you’ve defined your major campaigns and needs, you can develop better numbers.
- You can also use ROI to determine the appropriate total budget for your marketing efforts.

Revisit your plan regularly

- The planning process itself is incredibly valuable, but if you don’t review the plan regularly, it’s easy to lose focus. Continually revisit the plan and measure your progress.
What’s next?

When you’ve finished your plan, it’s time to execute. You may need to create new messages, literature, website or other tools and processes for your campaigns, but after that, focus on generating and managing your customers.