

by Debra Kahn Schofield

In their excitement to launch a new business, some entrepreneurs neglect to delineate a thorough [marketing plan](#). Guerrillas know that a strong [marketing plan](#) helps you create, guide and coordinate your marketing efforts. Preparing the plan encourages you to examine and appraise the current state of your industry.

Think of a marketing plan as a road map to assist you in setting and realizing goals and keeping you on course. Your marketing plan is a crucial element of a business plan. It consists of information about your company and its products or services, marketing activities objectives and strategies, and your method for measuring success. Typically, it outlines the marketing activities you'll perform during a designated time period (generally six months or one year). In it you'll document the costs of your planned marketing activities as well as the measurements used to determine success.

Before you sit down to create your marketing plan, make sure you have a clear idea of the following:

- your products or services and their benefits and features
- your target market and its buying habits
- competing products or services
- the problem, need or desire your product or service solves

Guerrillas know that marketing objectives should lead to sales. They should be distinct, measurable, and have a time limit for accomplishment. If you have multiple objectives, ensure that they are consistent and don't conflict with each other. Also, be sure that all parts of your marketing plan --from strategy to budget -- support these objectives.

In your marketing plan you should provide a Promotional Plan. For example, if your marketing objective is to expand book sales among school age kids, you could:

- contribute books to school libraries
- provide book stores with discount coupons
- sponsor a literacy event for kids

Another essential section of your marketing plan is the Action Programs section. Here you detail the steps that need to be taken, when they should be accomplished, who will do them, etc.

In the Placement section, you describe how your products and customers fuse together through sales and distribution. Define your sales method. Are you more concerned with quick sales or slowly building up relationships with customers? Do you employ contract sales people or employees? When you illustrate your distribution system, explain where your product will be placed in order to attract customers. Your business plan probably already describes your production and inventory capacities. Another question to deal with is whether you sell to individuals or to re-sellers? Many businesses utilize both methods.

Although it is helpful to research other business plans, no two businesses are identical (variables include industry, company size, location, product, budget, competition, staff, and inventory). The process of creating the plan compels you to think about your business goals and how your marketing strategy will facilitate realizing those goals.

Remember to update your plan on a regular basis. The tactics that proved successful one year may fall flat if market conditions alter drastically. Plan to review and update your marketing plan frequently. Reviewing every quarter would be ideal, but if that's not feasible, do so at least once each year.