



By Randy Wootton  
Wootton Marketing Associates, LLC  
Guest Columnist

## Start planning now! Hit the ground running with your annual marketing plan

**D**o you want to get the jump on your competitors? You can leave them in the dust if you hit the ground running with a marketing plan that's fine-tuned and ready to implement.

Most businesses understand the value of a marketing plan. Tied closely to a company's business plan, it's an annual blueprint for attracting customers and making sure your products and services are meeting their needs. Your marketing plan puts your business plan into action.

You can maximize the value of the marketing plan by having your sales material, public relations and advertising ready to go. With a plan in place and promotional materials finalized, your sales force can hit the ground running.

Even if you're a small company with a small sales force, you'll still gain positive results from planning ahead to organize the direction of your company. You'll see a big payback as your company builds momentum, forcing competitors to play catch up.

### What's in a plan?

Your marketing plan should include goals, objectives and tactics for achieving anticipated business results. For example, your company's marketing goals set the direction for the desired business results one or more years from now. Objectives are measurable targets that will help you track progress toward achieving these goals. Ideally, objectives are tailored to each of your market segments, are quantifiable and are time specific.

Tactics include specific activities designed to help achieve your objectives. Depending on your company and industry, tactical programs can involve advertising, public relations, direct marketing, promotion/events and product/company marketing materials.

A good marketing plan involves input from every part of your company - sales/marketing, operations, finance/accounting - since all are impacted by your marketing efforts. Key people in these departments, especially sales and marketing, have valuable insights into what customers want and the ability of your company to deliver.

### Now's the time to fine-tune

The second and third quarters are excellent times to review results of your current year as compared to forecast. Take some time to analyze the marketing mix and its impact on sales and revenue. Determine whether your sales are coming from existing customers or from new ones. And, it's important to find out what's new with your competition.

As you draft your marketing plan, you might:

- Review dollar and unit sales
- Analyze profitability compared to forecasts
- Identify potential new markets
- Pinpoint market erosion
- Refresh your product line
- Conduct new research

It's critical to meet with your sales force and other key personnel as you develop your new marketing plan. Their input will be valuable if you need to:

- Refine key messaging
- Plan a new product launch
- Update your Web site
- Develop a new promotional campaign
- Upgrade print collateral
- Plan activities for a trade show
- Review editorial calendars for media placement opportunities

After rethinking your approach and possibly redefining some goals and objectives, you will be in the best possible position to meet evolving customer needs. You will be at the top of the planning game and one step ahead of your competition.

*Randy is President of Wootton Marketing Associates, LLC, a marketing consulting firm that helps companies seize market opportunities, increase revenues and profits without increasing permanent staff. Randy is also an Adjunct Professor at Georgia State University, Southern Polytechnic State University and local colleges. For more information, call 770-953-6465 or visit [www.woottonmarketing.com](http://www.woottonmarketing.com).*