

Don't Let a Marketing Plan Scare You

Last Modified on 11/02/2020 4:29 pm CST

Some customers are going to find you by chance. They may drive past your store or they may have been referred by someone, but we know for the most part you've had to constantly market your dealer to remind the world you exist.

But do you have a plan to make this happen? We're not just talking about a having a "marketing budget," but having a list of desired outcomes and marketing-things to do months ahead of time.

Maybe it seems like you have a strong customer base, your service department is busy, and sales are doing well, so why do you need a marketing plan? Well, we are sure you know how fast your competitive landscape can change, how much customers' needs can fluctuate, and how much of your time can be eaten by random issues. All of these things are a formula for missing sales opportunities and losing your brand identity.

If you create a marketing plan, you're going to be in a little better shape...just for fact that the exercise forces you to think—and think into the future. **It sounds simple, and it is, so don't let a marketing plan scare you.**

The bottom line is from consulting with a huge variety of powersport and Harley-Davidson dealers, we have seen the most successful organizations spend time creating marketing ideas, writing them down, and executing them consistently over time. If you're already doing this, congratulations. But if you're not, you'll find this blog particularly helpful in how to form a marketing plan for the first time.

Always Be Thinking Ahead

I'm fairly sure you've heard sales people repeat their key phrase "always be closing." Well, in the marketing world our mantra is "*always be working ahead.*" There is nothing more invigorating than a well-calculated, successful marketing campaign.

We have found that a powersport dealer should be always planning three months —an entire quarter---ahead. This timeframe works well because it matches the buying habits of customers and the various seasonal events and offers. For example, in January you'd be planning for Spring, and in September you'd be looking at what to do for the holidays.

A *three-month period* allows enough time for any media buying, producing print pieces, designing e-newsletters, coordinating with vendors, increasing staff, and changing direction if something is not working. If you decide on marketing something a couple weeks before launch, you may not get the best prices, you may be missing advertising opportunities, or you might not have the time to proofread materials, etc.

Save yourself some stress and money and think ahead! But just thinking isn't the end...

Write Stuff Down

Creating a marketing plan can be a daunting task. Some people have even told us it's "scary." If you don't have a dedicated marketing professional or firm to help create your next quarter's marketing plan, don't worry—you can still get this done! Our eight simple guidelines will help you get you started.

1. Create at least two or three overall goals for the next quarter and how you'll measure their success. A goal could be as simple as "sell five more bikes this March than March of last year."
2. Brainstorm past, present, and new marketing tactics and campaigns. *Do you have some benchmarks for success, or do you know what hasn't worked, and why?* Involve other creative minds if you have to. Write everything down, and don't be shy about it; no idea is a bad idea at this point.
3. Define the "Four P's of Marketing" for any substantial idea to keep everyone on the same track. Remember—that's your *Product, Price, Promotion, and Place* questions.
4. It will be very beneficial to know what your competitors are doing. If you can find some examples of their work, research them online, or subscribe to their e-newsletters, it'll help you understand how your marketing will be perceived by customers. *Are you standing out, or will you appear as more of the same?*
5. What sort of budget do you have in terms of money and available employee time? You can probably get some things done with internal staff, but it's not always the best solution. They might not have the capabilities of writing compelling copy, doing graphic design work, or negotiating prices.
6. What are your vendor resources? Take a quick inventory. If you are using a printer to produce and send post cards, do they have any special offers, bulk discounts, or time restraints you should be aware of? Along with this step, think about your manufacturer resources. Are there co-op program materials, digital media, or extra budgets you can use?
7. Next, decide what marketing campaigns you want to do based on your budget, available time, goals, and competition. This can be the most difficult part.
8. Finally, put each marketing piece on a calendar and block off times for when you have to first start the project to when it's due. Even a simple Outlook or google calendar can also work great to plug in reminders of tasks, organize meetings, and sort your vendor communication. Write down hard deadlines and due-dates on a paper calendar at the very least.

Limit Yourself

To help get a better scope on what you should do: From the top down, list the marketing items you want to do in terms of those taking the most time and budget to those ideas taking the least amount of energy. Give each idea a one-to-ten score on how effective you think it will be towards reaching your two or three established goals (with "ten" being the most effective).

After everything is scored, the "big marketing items" at the top of your list should have the highest weighed numbers in the 7-10 range. If not, those ideas probably involve a lot of money or work for the smallest outcomes, and you might want to rethink your approach.

Now, it's up to you and your team to complete each task, making sure they're on time and within the budget. After your marketing kicks off, you can pivot to start measuring the results and discovering what sources generate the most business. Keep a record, and next quarter you'll have something substantial to talk about in the next marketing meeting.

Isn't it nice to not have to measure and plan at the same time?

Enjoy The Benefits

You will create better marketing plans over time, so in the beginning just focus on building consistency. Just don't skip planning for even one quarter, and if you start to fall behind, get someone to help. Sometimes your most creative, motivated people are the quietest (as well as the best writers). It might be time to give them opportunities to show their skills—especially if you are short-staffed or don't have a dedicated marketing team.

Even if you don't have the perfect plan, it's better than having no plan. You will eventually save some money, your campaigns will become more effective, and everyone involved will become more efficient—we promise!
