

Marketing Plan – Sample Outline

This is a very generic style plan that will get you started in most scenarios.

I. Executive Summary

The Executive Summary highlights the main goals and recommendations of the marketing plan. It should also briefly address budget requirements and how success will be measured.

II. Business Overview

This section is sometime referred to as the Situation Analysis segment. In a typical marketing plan, it contains relevant background on the market, product, pricing, and distribution situations as well as on competitors. Information Centers can describe their business in these terms as well. Assuming the planning process takes place at the end of a fiscal year, this section may be a recap of the business for the past 12 months. Consider describing your customer base, services required by your customers, and environmental factors affecting your operation.

Some marketing plan templates include the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) or PEST (Political, Economic, Social, and Technological) Analysis in this segment. Others insert a separate segment devoted to the SWOT/PEST Analysis. In the light of the business situation just described, you must now reflect on strengths and weaknesses of your operation, as well as opportunities and threats to be dealt with in the coming year.

III. Target Market

How well do you know your target market? How well do you understand their information needs? Can you articulate what your customers and potential customers need as opposed to what you offer? Are there groups to whom you should be “selling” who are not now “buying” your services? Are there ways to segment your market so that you can offer highly specialized products and services to various groups, reflecting their business priorities? What kind of products should be offered to a broad base of users? Answering these questions will help you define your target market.

IV. Goals, Objectives, & Tactical Plan

Once you have developed your vision, mission and core values, you can then develop the goals and objectives needed to achieve your vision.

Goals - Goals are general statements of what you want to achieve. So they need to be integrated with your vision. They also need to be integrated with your mission of how you are going to achieve your vision. Examples of company goals are:

A goal should meet the following criteria:

- *Suitable*: Does it fit with the vision and mission?
- *Acceptable*: Does it fit with the values of the company and the employees?
- *Understandable*: Is it stated simply and easy to understand?
- *Flexible*: Can it be adapted and changed as needed?

Make sure the goals are focused on the important properties of the business. Be careful not to set too many goals. You run the risk of losing focus. Also, design your goals so that they don't contradict and interfere with each other.

Objectives - Objectives are specific, quantifiable, time-sensitive statements of what is going to be achieved and when it will be achieved. They are milestones along the path of achieving your goals. A business normally creates both one- and three-year objectives. Examples of company objectives are:

- To earn at least a 20 percent after-tax rate of return on our net investment during the next fiscal year
- To increase market share by ten percent over the next three years.

Objectives should meet the following criteria:

- *Measurable*: What will happen and when?
- *Suitable*: Does it fit as a measurement for achieving the goal
- *Feasible*: Is it possible to achieve?
- *Commitment*: Are people committed to achieving the objective?
- *Ownership*: Were the people responsible for achieving the objective included in the objective-setting process?

Types of Goals and Objectives - Most business goals fall into one of four categories. A variety of objectives can be constructed to meet the goal in each category. Examples are given below. Each of the objectives can be described with a quantifiable outcome to be achieved by a predetermined deadline.

Table 1. Goals and objectives.

Goals	Corresponding Objectives
Improve Profitability	Net profit as a percent of sales Net profit as percent of investment Net profit per share of common stock
Increase Volume	Market share Percentage growth in sales Sales rank in the market Production capacity utilization
Provide Stability	Variance in annual sales volume Variance in seasonal sales volume Variance in profitability
Non-monetary	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve company image • Enhance environment • Enhance quality of life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contributions to community activities Meet specific environmental requirements Increase number of jobs

Examples of Goals, Objectives and Strategies/Action Plans

Below are example goals, objectives and action plans (strategies) Note how the action plans accomplish the objectives and the objectives accomplish the goals. The goals support the fulfillment of the vision and mission.

Goal 1: *Build a team of local farmers interested in business development.*

Objective: *Create a team of ten farmers by February 1.*

Action Plan: *Identify twenty farm leaders in the area. List them in order of qualifications with most qualified first. Contact them in order of listing until ten have accepted*

Goal 2: *Recruit experienced and reliable consultants.*

Objective: *Identify and retain legal, accounting and industry consultants by March 1.*

Action Plan: *Talk to Prairie Ethanol, Peterson Organics and Valley Bio-Diesel about who their consultants are, select a small group to interview and hire an attorney, an accountant and an industry consultant.*

Goal 3: *Identify and analyze market opportunities for possible business ventures.*

Objective: *Conduct market scanning activities to identify three potential market opportunities by June 1.*

Action Plan: *Contract with an industry consultant (goal 2) to conduct an industry scan.*

Goal 4: *Build a membership base*

Objective: *Have 500 members by August 1.*

Action Plan: *Conduct 10 membership meetings at specified locations on the following dates in June and July.*

V. Marketing Strategies

Here strategies and programs are outlined which will help us reach the goals outlined above.

VI. Budget

How much will the activities defined above cost? Can you provide a revenue forecast? Explain the assumptions on which the forecast is based and consider various (best case, worst case) scenarios. Since many Information Centers now operate as cost centers, if not profit centers, this component of the plan is extremely important.

VII. Evaluation of Results

What are the success criteria? How will you measure success of the plan? By monitoring progress, you can judge the success of the marketing plan. If some of the strategies are not working out, try to determine why. Is the strategy flawed? Is there a problem with implementation or timing? How can you refocus and move on?