

Why effective marketing has never been more important.

We share simple steps to ensure you end 2020 on a marketing high.

In January 2020 most of us set out ambitious plans for our businesses after what looked like a period of economic stability, despite Brexit, only to have to hit reset multiple times as we grappled with lock down, furlough and dramatic changes in consumer behaviour.

In the gradual return to the new norm having an effective marketing strategy has never been more important.

Being clear how you attract new customers and keep existing ones is key to ensuring that your business has a strong quarter of growth as we exit the most challenging year of most of our lives.

The last weeks of the summer and the start of Autumn are excellent times to reset your marketing strategy and make the most of the remainder of 2020.

In this blog we give you a framework to start the process.

1# Why purpose and values should lead your messaging

Purpose and values help keep your marketing targeted, authentic and memorable.

Whether you have a small marketing team, or you are the marketing team, this starts with being super clear about seven things - get these right and the rest is easy. And even if you think you already have the answers to these questions you may be surprised if you write down the answers as if you were an independent observer reviewing your current marketing.

Is it clear;

1. What is the purpose of your business?

What impact does your business make on the world and what difference can it make in the future? At this stage you could consider doing some desktop research into the markets you are in, consumer habits, trends and forecasts. You need to ensure that what appeared relevant in early 2020 is going to meet a customer's needs in 2021 and beyond.

2. What are the problems you are trying to solve for your customers?

Write down as long a list as possible of the issues keeping your customers awake at night; where is their pain, what are their challenges. Expressing these in the exact words of your customers, verbatim, will make your marketing more compelling later.

Each time you come to deliver an element of your marketing strategy you can come back to this list and check that the way you are positioning your product speaks to one of these.

3. How does your brand or product solve these problems?

How will your customers' lives improve as a result of your product/service? Capturing real feedback from customers here will make your marketing copy even more effective.

4. How does your brand or product achieve this?

Back in the day when I was an advertising executive we'd have called this 'features and benefits'. Be really specific at this point which elements of your products achieve what customer facing enhancements. Writing this as precisely as possible will help when it comes to writing content in the next stages.

5. How are you different from your competitors?

If at this point there is little to help you stand out in your market from your competitors go back to point 1. I'd advise against having a price point as your only differentiator here, reliability, trust and value are stronger drivers when it comes to buying behaviours.

6. What are your brand values?

In today's world being clear about purpose and your ethical standpoint are nearly as important as the product itself. Consumers expect brands to be thoughtful and supportive of the wider environment in which they exist. These need to be genuine commitments which can be held up for scrutiny and survive a 'so what' test.

7. Who are your ideal customers?

Being laser sharp about this at the beginning will help you to both write relevant content and to choose the right marketing channels later in the process. In many of the organisations I've led the marketing teams have created personas - a thumbnail sketch of demographics and behaviours which best describe your ideal customer. This doesn't mean that you cannot, or should not market to a wider group later - remember that most of us are aspiring to be something which we are not currently..... I've even seen marketing teams go as far as giving their personas names like Penny and Peter, or whackier ones, this helps to keep the customer front of mind when it comes to the marketing strategy delivery.

Once you have worked through these 7 you will have a much better understanding of what your customer wants.

The next most important step in building an effective marketing strategy is your marketing content and how to shape content which converts.

2# Why content is key to your business uptick.

There's a reason why 70% of marketers are actively investing in content marketing in 2020.[Source:<https://www.hubspot.com/marketing-statistics>]

That's because there are major benefits to content marketing. It will help you build trust with your customers, suppliers and your wider stakeholder group.

When consumers read your content they start to develop an opinion of your brand. If the content they find is engaging, educational, and valuable then they will start to believe the same things about your products.

The pandemic has increased the focus for all of us on our virtual presence or ecommerce capability and trust has never been as important. So after investing in your website, content marketing is the most effective way to increase traffic and drive sales..

What do we mean by content marketing?

Well fortunately it's a bit of a Ronseal term [it does what it says on the tin]. For those who like an exact definition here it is; a type of marketing that involves the creation and sharing of online material that does not explicitly promote a brand but is intended to stimulate interest in its products or services.

What's the most effective form of content marketing?

Up until very recently the blog post or article was the most effective form of content marketing, however it has been recently overtaken by video [HubSpot, 2020].

However I recommend starting with the written word [unless your consumers are under 30].

Getting some words down on your laptop or paper can speed up, and provide structure for, video content creation later. It can also power your email marketing strategy which according to CampaignMonitor, 2019 has the highest return on investment for small businesses.

What makes an engaging content piece?

The first step is to revisit your consumer personas, and the issues that are keeping them up at night. Your content needs to be written to meet the needs of your ideal customer and where they are in the buying cycle for your products.

In the points below, I have listed a number of helpful tips for writing good content:

1. Have a great headline that announces your content and attracts readers

According to a study published in The Guardian you can improve the click-through rate of your headlines by 21% by using just 8 words and by 9% by using a hyphen or colon. Posing a question will also increase engagement.

2. Be interesting - ask why would your ideal customer give their time to read this?

What problem are you trying to solve for them which will make reading this piece worthwhile.

3. Laser like empathy - get into the head of your customer and show you understand them.

Talk to all your customer facing staff to understand your consumers questions, queries and objections. Talk to your customers too so you can write in a very genuine way, using real quotes as often as possible to demonstrate that you see the world from their perspective.

4. Say something unique

Whether this is the tone of voice you use, an original thought or the way the information is told; make it memorable.

5. Tell stories

Stories are how people make sense of the world and themselves. Along with relatability, stories provoke emotion. Whether it's anger, happiness or frustration, stories make people feel something and research has shown that buying decisions are 20% logical and 80% emotional.

6. Provide proof or evidence

Your story or point of view will be more likely to grab the readers' attention if you supply them with case studies. Investing time in a collection of case studies or inspirational stories is probably the most useful thing your marketing team can do to support your new marketing initiatives at the moment.

7. Have a clear structure and consistent tone of voice.

Make sure that your article is easy to understand, that it's presented in an interesting way, and that it's well written and smoothly carries a train of thought. This needs to be applied relentlessly everytime you publish. Remember the "the 3 Cs of all customer satisfaction" are "consistency, consistency, and consistency" McKinsey & Company.

8. End with a clear call to action.

What do you want people to do as a result of seeing your marketing? Book a demo? Buy a product? Attend an event? Make the CTA short, punchy, timely - book now, act now, do it today, and include relevant links to make that action simple.

Now you've started to create engaging content it's time to start thinking about choosing the right marketing channels.

3# The four top performing channels for SMEs.

Small businesses need cost effective options to make the most of their budget and resources. With the right strategies and tools in place, small businesses can operate at a high level, even with more limited resources.

So far you have built unique and persuasive brand stories as part of your content plan and your marketing messages now have more impact.

Your branded content has a consistent look and feel across channels but is delivered in a style and tone that is relevant for each unique channel. Well designed content shows that you understand your customers' needs and/or challenges, by providing value or interest.

1. Uploading content onto your website

It's important to create an area on your web site where you can share content - most websites have this in their 'latest news' or 'updates' area in their navigation.

Uploading your content onto your web site increases your SEO rankings, especially when you include relevant keywords. You can find keywords to target your target audience/ personas using the following tools: Google Search Console, Ahrefs Keywords Explorer, and Google Keyword Planner.

Search engine optimization is the process of making your website rank high in the search engine results pages for a certain term. This allows your content to be visible and easily accessible to those searching for the term, or something similar to it.

This is vital as according to HubSpot, 62% of consumers use a search engine when they want to learn more about a new business, product, or service, while 41% use a search engine when they're ready to buy.

You can link this content to your email and social media posts driving traffic back to your website. When you review your website analytics traffic should spike when you publish relevant, interesting content to your target audience.

2. Sharing content via email marketing

Market research firm Radicati predicts that by the end of 2023, the number of email users worldwide will top 4.3 billion. This makes sense. How many people without an email address do you actually know? Not many.

This widespread use of email is the reason why email marketing is such a powerful way to engage with people who have shown interest in your product, service, website, or brand.

Which is why it is super important to curate an up to date and growing email database of people in your target audience, whilst following GDPR guidelines of course. This is where effective marketing is a pure numbers game. The more relevant email addresses you have, the more conversions you will generate.

You can use lead magnets on your website to capture email addresses, we'll come back to this later in future hints and tips.

When you utilise email marketing you own your own data, so you won't have to worry about a website going down or a social media algorithm shifting beneath your feet.

Email ranks firmly as a top channel for providing opportunities for both customer acquisition and brand awareness so it should always be a marketing priority, ahead of pure social media.

Tracking open rates and responses will help you to understand what content is resonating most. On average a consumer needs to see your content 5x before they are likely to start recognising and responding to your brand messages. Having a clear nurture strategy for those people who are clicking through or liking your content is the next stage of your email marketing strategy - we'll come back to this at a later date.

3. Social media channels

When you start to understand your target audience/ personas you'll be able to track which social media channels they show up in. If you have a B2B business LinkedIn is a must, as is twitter. If you have a consumer facing business facebook is still the largest platform in the world however audiences are fragmenting and instagram and tik tok are two of the fastest growing.

The good news is that all these channels are free to access. You just need to edit your content marketing to be its most effective for each channel. It costs nothing to give them a go and learn from the experience.

Publishing relevant content on social media channels should manifest in growing follower numbers, likes and shares. Tracking these will help you to refine your content marketing strategy.

4. Paid for social

You don't need a huge budget to try out and build your conversions through paid for social using your content. Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram all allow you to target your audience in a simple self serve model where you can set a small budget to learn a) what content gets the most traction and b) how to keep refining your audience selection. This can help provide data which shapes your marketing strategy, creating a virtuous circle.

Why tracking results is important

As your marketing strategy evolves you need to track your progress to ensure that you are getting the maximum ROI from your internal resource and paid for marketing.

I'd recommend a simple dashboard which tracks total audience reach, email click throughs, email unsubscribes, social media engagement by channel and conversions for each piece of content or campaign.

Helen is an experienced business leader, founder and marketer who understands how SME's can use digital marketing to engage with potential customers and ultimately grow their revenues.

During October she is hosting a masterclass titled, The Digital Imperative - why you need to embrace online marketing now more than ever, and how to do it.

[Click here to book today.](#)