



5 Steps to Targeting Your Marketing Message By Lois Carter Fay, APR

In order to win at the game of business, a company needs a good plan. This can be done in-house, with a marketing consultant, or with a marketing firm. Here are five steps to developing and implementing a good marketing message:

1. **Determine your company's strengths and weaknesses.**

Before you can tell others who you are and what you do, you need to know about yourself. Gather your employees together and brainstorm a list of your company's strengths and weaknesses. Write everything down that is said and wait to evaluate it until you have exhausted all of the ideas.

Next, review each item on the list and decide if this is appropriate to be on the list, or if it can be eliminated. It's likely you will find several that can be combined so that you end up with a relatively short list of strengths and weaknesses. You can also develop a short survey and ask your customers and vendors what they think your strengths and weaknesses are. Their answers may surprise you!

2. **Research your target market/customer.**

Next, analyze your sales from the past three years. What products or services are most profitable for you? Who are your customers? What can you conclude about your customers? What is similar about them? Based on your profitability evaluation, should you be targeting a certain type of customer, or changing your current strategies? How do these customers make their buying decisions? How can you influence those decisions?

Consider such things as:

- Location
- Size business (either sales dollars or number of employees)



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- Industries/types of businesses
- Type of ownership (sole proprietor, corporation, etc.)
- Who are the decision makers, influencers and gatekeepers?

3. Investigate your competitors.

Who are your main competitors? When you lose a sale, why does this happen? Which competitor generally makes the sale? What is better about your competitors' products and services? Why do your prospects choose a competitor instead of you? What are the annual sales figures for your competitors? What do they spend on their advertising and marketing efforts? (Your industry periodicals and associations can help you determine this.)

4. Differentiate yourself.

How are you better than your competitors? What is different about your company? Is your product or service a higher quality than your competitors'? Is it less expensive? Do you have better customer service? Does your product last longer? Require fewer repairs? Why do your customers choose you instead of your competitor?

What problems do you solve? Make a list of your product's features and benefits. Are they different than those of your competitors?

Try to describe your business in one short and succinct "tagline," or positioning statement. This should be a clear statement of what you do and what you stand for in no more than eight or ten words. Coca-Cola, for instance, says Coke is "The Real Thing." Once you create this short positioning statement, create your 30-second sound bite, also known as your "elevator speech," to use when you introduce yourself in public. This is also what you will use to help you focus your marketing efforts.

5. Create a marketing plan and execute it.

Now that you know who you are, who your competitors are and how you are better than them, you can create a roadmap to follow—a marketing plan for your company. Remember to include measurable short- and long-term goals, specific strategies, and appropriate tactics to reach your goals. Then, put your plan into action and evaluate the results, making adjustments as required.

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Self-employed since 1990, Lois Carter Fay is the owner of [Strategic Business Partners](#), a marketing consulting firm that develops ideas and strategies to grow your business, [Words For Websites](#), a website writing and strategy business, and the [Marketing Idea Shop](#), an online resource for marketers and small businesses. She works with small business owners and managers to help them with all of their marketing and public relations issues. Find out more at <http://www.marketingideashop.com> .

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