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Outline for Creating a Strategic, Practical Marketing Plan

A marketing plan may be your most important tool for selling successfully in special-sales markets. The information below provides step-by-step instructions that will help you create a practical marketing plan. Brief directions are found in the left-hand column. Read the instructions for each step, and then write your response in the gray text block in the right-hand column.

1) INTRODUCTION **The introduction of your marketing plan will provide an executive summary of your entire document. In addition, it will highlight the mission and objectives of your business in order to establish the context in which your marketing plan will be implemented.**	
1.1 Mission Your mission statement is a two or three-sentence answer to two questions. First, "What business are we in?" This may initially seem obvious because you are a producer and supplier of books. Instead, look more closely at what you are really providing. In special-sales marketing, the product is a variable through which you deliver your *content* to the appropriate market. What information do you convey? How do you want people to respond upon reading your content? How will their lives change as a result? This will give you greater understanding of your mission. Second, "Who are we trying to serve?" Create a profile of the people who are the ultimate beneficiaries of your content. For example, the mission statement for Book Marketing Works is: “Become the leading and most respected brand-name entity that provides high quality, pragmatic sales and marketing resources that continually enhance a publisher’s efforts to generate more revenue and profits for its titles.”	

1.2 Executive summary

Briefly describe the history of your publishing firm. In addition, include the business structure (corporation, limited liability company, partnership, sole proprietorship, limited partnership), names of owners and any significant events since it began.

Summarize your product lines, distribution strategies, pricing strategies and your existing and planned promotional campaign. Describe your target markets and a profile of prospective customers in each.

Also include a brief and general description of your marketing organization. Explain how it is structured by function or geography. Describe any strategic alliances in which you have entered and the people you employ on a freelance basis.

Even if you are the only person who will see your plan, this summary will give you a frequent reminder of the task you have set for yourself. Make it brief and motivating, something to which you can refer on a regular basis.

1.3 Overall Objective.

This section of your marketing plan should clearly state your overall marketing goals.

2) The MARKET ANALYSIS section of your marketing plan provides a detailed description of the current marketplace in which you compete, including the specific niches. Describe your customers, potential customers and competition.	
2.1 Market definition Analyze the book industry as it impacts your business. Show the growth rate of your various sub-segments of the book market, in terms of units and dollars. Update this regularly. Define and characterize the specific market(s) in which you will participate, including the potential and actual customers for your titles. This could include consumers, businesses or both.	
2.2 Market segmentation Given the industry situation you described in 2.2, in which specific market niches do you intend to compete, and what is the expected potential of each. For example, if your overall market is Children's Books, you may choose to market to segments such as bookstores, libraries, schools or corporations. Talk about the current size and geographical scope of each as well as their growth rate and potential. Use units and/or dollars to characterize each niche. Specific data may be found in libraries, journals, trade press, directories, government publications, focus groups and books. The documented use of facts and statistics will add to the credibility of your marketing plan.	

2.3 Customer needs and requirements Successful marketing requires that you “find a need and fill it.” This means that you find out what information readers want to read and then provide it to them. In order to provide superior value in your market segments, you must know what your customers desire. In this section you describe those desires, needs and requirements.	
2.4 Competition Now is the time to describe and analyze competitive titles. Gather information and keep abreast of the competitions' activities in relation to new products, pricing, distribution systems and promotional programs. This information will assist in your development of new titles. It will also aid the author who is conducting a media appearance and the host asks about competitive products. Competitive data will also enable you to create promotional material that will position the title properly. A simple way to uncover competitive information is through a visit to Amazon.com. Here, a quick search will provide you with titles, authors and prices as well as reviews of each competitive title. A useful way to provide the reader with an analysis of your competition is to summarize the information in a tabular form. You may also provide a one-page summary on each significant competitor in the appendix. Make sure that your analysis provides an apples-to-apples comparison. To the extent possible, include size, years in business, market share, sales, profitability, growth rate, the quality of service and any other pertinent dimensions of major competitors. Include a discussion of your qualitative conclusions. List your primary competitors and what you are doing to close the gap between your business and theirs, or to widen your lead.	

3) The EXISTING MARKETING SITUATION. Given the market situation you described above, how will you organize your marketing strategies to maximize your competitive strengths? Describe your present products and services, channels of distribution, pricing philosophy and promotions. See Chapters One, Five and Six of *Beyond the Bookstore* for more instructions on completing this section.	
3.1 Description of your current marketing capabilities This portion of your plan defines the present status of your marketing capabilities.	
3.1.1 Description of Titles, Products and Services List the titles, product(s) and service(s) you offer. Describe the sales, prices, costs, profits and other relevant information about each. Include the key benefits that differentiate your product line from your competitors'. Use charts and graphs to visually present the relation of each to the total.	
3.1.2 Distribution Describe the distribution network you currently use. Discuss the nature, size, and importance of each of your current distribution partners and why each was chosen. What target markets are not being adequately served?	

4) ISSUES AND OPPORTUNTIES. In the context of the information you have analyzed thus far, what are your significant strengths and weaknesses? Next, what opportunities do you expect to create or exploit, and what threats do you foresee and how will you combat them?

4.1 Strengths

Tell the strong points of your line of products and services as well as your business itself. A strength could be as straightforward as the quality of your production or marketing prowess, or subtler examples such as an exclusive URL or the respect your titles create in the minds of your customers.

4.2 Weaknesses

It is sometimes difficult to describe your areas of weakness, but an awareness of them can help you correct them. Objectively describe areas in need of improvement, such as company reputation and track record, technological hurdles, and obstacles to clear understanding of the customer's fundamental needs.

Present these weaknesses impartially. For example, your company might have a traditionally modest level of promotional spending each year. How might this represent a disadvantage relative to your competitors?

4.3 Opportunities Describe the opportunities that exist in the marketplace and market niches in which you have chosen to compete. Present these opportunities realistically, using facts and statistics to substantiate them. For example, a declining economy may signal action to resurrect your backlist titles. However, you may need to create a new edition or publish the information in a different format.	
4.4 Threats This section highlights the inherent or potential risks or hazards you see in the marketplace. As you describe each, the focus should not be gloom and doom, but rather the critical issues that could be menacing to your position.	
4.5 Key Resulting Issues This section funnels the data and analysis from your preceding key points. The fundamental issues that result from your analysis set the stage for the rest of the plan. The remainder of the plan should, among other things, address these fundamental topics. Concise writing and presentation in this section will help the reader hold on to the few key issues as they read the balance of your plan. You may want to use bullet points to focus the attention of your reader.	

5) GOALS

This section funnels the data and analysis from the preceding analysis into your objectives. Concise writing and presentation in this section will help you focus on your goals.

The purpose of objectives is to divide your long-term vision into attainable goals. Traditional business planning requires that objectives be written, functional, measurable, specific and time-oriented. However, objectives must be more than that or they simply remain good intentions.

5.1 Financial Objectives Since you know your sales forecast, distribution discounts, and expected returns, the next step is to specify the net income you expect to receive for the planning period. Financial goals might include but certainly are not limited to the following: sales volume, cost, gross margin, net profit, cash flow, and ROI.	
5.2 Marketing Objectives Set goals in each of the four area of marketing: product, distribution, price and promotion. Describe how you will seek new titles to bring to market (or new markets for existing titles), different distribution channels, unique ways to offer price incentives while maintaining your margins, and original ways to promote your titles above the ever-increasing clutter of competitive advertising, sales promotions and publicity. Examples might include, but should not be limited to, the following: new market segments, sales volume, market share (in each niche), total units per purchase by customer or niche, average dollar amount per order, rate of repeat purchase and number of new title introductions.	
5.3 Innovation Objectives Creativity must be applied to find new titles to bring to market (or new markets for existing titles), different distribution channels, ways to offer price incentives while maintaining your margins and original ways to promote your titles above the ever-increasing clutter of competitive advertising, sales and publicity.	

6) GENERAL MARKETING STRATEGIES. This section presents your general integrated approach to accomplishing your mission and objectives. Marketing strategy involves the mix of several key dimensions referred to here as: Product, Price, Promotion, Place (distribution) and Positioning.

Articulate your game plan for implementing these variables in your target markets. If you have more than one target market segment, then you might have one game plan for all the segments or you may have tailored a market strategy for each different target segment. First, state your overarching strategy, and then elaborate on how you will tailor your plan for each of the different segments.

6.1 Positioning Positioning establishes the desired perception of your titles relative to the competition. In other words, what should be the first thing that comes to your customers' minds when they think of your titles? For example, when most people think of *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books, heartwarming stories immediately come to their minds. Your positioning statement could change for every market segment. In this space, explain the image your product line creates (or should create) in the minds of people in your target market.	
6.2 Product and packaging In special-sales marketing, buyers are more concerned with the content of your book than with its form. Describe how most people want your content delivered and how you will provide it to them as such (book, booklet, DVD, spiral-bound workbook).	
6.3 Pricing strategy Discuss the incentives and discounts you might offer to stimulate demand.	

6.4 Distribution strategy

Describe all the methods you will use to make your books available and accessible to the target customers. Distribution includes your choice of distributor, wholesaler and retail outlet plus all of the logistics associated with making your product or service available and accessible in the most efficient manner.

A dual-distribution strategy will make your products available in traditional and special-sales markets. In this section of your plan, state your distribution strategy(s) and explain the reasons your strategy(s) supports your overall marketing objectives.

6.5 Promotion Strategy

This section deals with promoting your titles and how you will persuade customers to buy your books.

7) SPECIFIC MARKETING PROGRAMS. This is the action part of your marketing plan and tells the reader what you intend to do to implement your strategies and reach your objectives. Discuss your specific plans for developing your product lines, building your distribution, enhancing your pricing strategies and creating new promotions your titles.

7.1 Product line tactics

What new products will you introduce? What part of your content is important to different market segments? How will you preserve product quality? For which titles will you perform test marketing?

The packaging for one title may be different for various target segments. For instance, you may decide to release a title in hard cover for the library market, in soft cover for bookstores, as a booklet for use as a premium, and in a small, 4" x 6" size for gift markets.

Tactic	Completion Date	Cost	Revenue	BEP
1)				
2)				
3)				
4)				
5)				
6)				
7)				
8)				
9)				
10)				

7.2 Pricing tactics

Distribution discounts and the costs of production and marketing are two of the components to consider when pricing your books. Describe pricing incentives you may offer. For instance, if you choose a competitive pricing strategy you might differentiate your titles by offering coupons or refunds. What if you changed your payment terms? How can you cut costs without reducing quality?

Tactic	Completion Date	Cost	Revenue	BEP
1)				
2)				
3)				
4)				
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6)				
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8)				
9)				
10)				

7.3 Distribution tactics

Who are the specific partners you will use in each market segment? What are their terms? Who will pay shipping? What fees will they charge for placement in their catalogs? In what time period will you be paid? What percent of sales do you expect to be returned? In what special markets can you sell? Do you need a distributor or wholesaler to reach them?

Tactic	Completion Date	Cost	Revenue	BEP
1)				
2)				
3)				
4)				
5)				
6)				
7)				
8)				
9)				
10)				

7.4 General Promotion Tactics

Tell how your promotional plan will be different for each title and author.

Author	Publicity Strengths	Selling Strengths	Store Events	Media Strengths
1)				
2)				
3)				
4)				
5)				
6)				
7)				
8)				
9)				
10)				

7.4.1 Personal Selling

This section lists the actions, dates, and people responsible for each personal selling program, such as making personal sales calls on prospective customers, networking at trade shows, making personal presentations and conducting events at retail stores.

Tactic	Completion Date	Cost	Revenue	BEP
1)				
2)				
3)				
4)				
5)				
6)				
7)				
8)				
9)				
10)				

7.4.2 Direct Marketing Tactics

List each direct marketing-related action that you plan to implement.

Tactic	Completion Date	Cost	Revenue	BEP
1)				
2)				
3)				
4)				
5)				
6)				
7)				
8)				
9)				
10)				

7.4.3 Sales Promotion Tactics

Describe each sales promotion-related action that you expect to take.

Tactic	Completion Date	Cost	Revenue	BEP
1)				
2)				
3)				
4)				
5)				
6)				
7)				
8)				
9)				
10)				

7.4.4 Publicity

How will you apply publicity and public relations to reach your objectives. Types of programs might include press releases, press kits, reviews and media performances. Will you engage a professional publicist? Will you write and send out a press release on your new special products and services?

Tactic	Completion Date	Cost	Revenue	BEP
1)				
2)				
3)				
4)				
5)				
6)				
7)				
8)				
9)				
10)				

7.4.5 Advertising Programs

Explain the advertising-related actions that you will perform. Are there opportunities for co-op advertising? Can you barter ad space for content?

Tactic	Completion Date	Cost	Revenue	BEP
1)				
2)				
3)				
4)				
5)				
6)				
7)				
8)				
9)				
10)				

8) DEVELOP CONTINGENCY PLANS. This presents contingency plans designed to protect the critical strategies of your plan from the associated risks that you have identified in the "Threats" section. The contingency plans basically tell the reader what you will do if things do not go according to plan. A contingency plan minimizes risk by addressing the following issues:	
8.1 Set up monitoring operations so problems are revealed more quickly. Watch marketplace and financial results, as well as analyzing the implications of any changes.	
8.2 Define alternative plans of action in advance so that minimal time and energy is spent on deciding what to do after the problem is recognized. Action plans are proactive responses to business or program problems rather than reactive ones.	