

## Build Your Business On a Solid Marketing Foundation

### Lay the Foundation

Consider what it means to have a foundation. On a house, the foundation is a solid base that supports and protects the structure above it. Without it, a house may lean, settle or eventually fall over, while a well-built house on a strong foundation can last for centuries. So the purpose of a foundation in general is to support and stabilize what is built upon it and enable it to reach its potential. It is an important component that needs to be installed first, before building the remainder of the structure.

Marketing a business is different from building a house, but it also requires a foundation. This foundation has three related elements:

- Target market – the specific group of people or organizations to which you sell
- Positioning – the unique value your business offers that you want to stick in the public's mind
- Messaging – the words you use to express your business' unique value

All of your marketing efforts build upon this foundation. It strengthens, focuses and gives consistency to marketing campaigns. In fact, a solid foundation makes the difference between so-so and superb marketing. Like speaking through an amplifier, your message to the world becomes louder and clearer. This holds true for any industry, campaign or media. A solid foundation makes the time and money you spend on marketing more productive – ultimately by drawing more customers and generating sales.

Marketing is a key part of building a successful business. It includes everything a business does to get people to know and like what it offers, so they choose to become customers. With customers come growth and a healthy business.

Therefore it is worth taking time to thoughtfully define your marketing foundation. Once the target market, positioning and messaging are in place, you are ready to develop effective marketing campaigns and spread the word! Read on for details.

### Name Your Target

The first element to define is your target market. You may have heard the adage, “You cannot be all things to all people.” This is certainly true. All of us have limited amounts of time, resources and talents at our disposal. We can only do so much, whether individually or corporately as a business. It is better to focus on a narrow opportunity and deliver great results than to chase numerous opportunities with mediocre results for all.

**Therefore the purpose of a target market is to focus your energy and resources on a select group of people or organizations.** This establishes a win-win situation: By focusing, your business can better satisfy the requirements of this customer set, and you increase the

chances of selling and receive a better return on your marketing efforts. The most difficult aspect of choosing a target market is deciding where *not* to focus. It is a natural temptation to keep options open and pursue many paths, though it leads to the problem of diluted efforts.

There are many ways to define and describe a target market:

- Demographics – such as young urban professionals, retired couples or Spanish speakers
- Industry – such as health care providers, restaurants or computer resellers
- Organizational size – such as small businesses or large enterprises
- Geography – such as the United States, Western Washington or the Boise metropolitan area
- Lifestyle – such as car enthusiasts, people actively dating or downhill skiers and snowboarders
- Any combination of relevant characteristics – such as electricians in southwestern Idaho

Choose a target market that is meaningful and a logical fit for your business. The following questions will guide you in defining it:

- Which groups benefit the most from your products?
- Which are easiest to reach with marketing and sales efforts?
- Which provide the best revenue and profit opportunities?

## Find Your Position

The next element to define is positioning. This is simply an idea that reflects the essence of your business. **More precisely, positioning is the unique value your business offers that you want to stick in the public's mind.**

By way of example, what comes to mind when you think of Lance Armstrong, Neil

Armstrong and Louis Armstrong? These are all men named Armstrong, though from different eras and areas of achievement. Lance is widely known as a Tour de France winner and cancer survivor. Neil is remembered for being the first astronaut to set foot on the moon in 1969 and who famously said, "There's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." Louis Armstrong was an excellent and pioneering jazz musician with hits such as "Hello, Dolly!" and "What a Wonderful World". People remember these Armstrongs because of their unique, outstanding achievements. You could say they have a "position" in the public's mind – what they are known for and what people think of when they hear their names.

While the positioning of these people was determined by the fame of their achievements, you have an opportunity to shape and define the positioning of your business through marketing. You can stake out an advantageous position, a hilltop to claim as your own, and define who you are in the public's mind.

To do that you need a Big Idea that captures the uniqueness of your business. This is essential. Being unique is how to set your business apart from the competition. It is the way to stand out in a busy, distracted world. It is the starting point for creating and communicating a message that sticks in the public's mind.

The good news is that your business *is* unique! No two businesses are exactly alike, and there is always something unique in what one offers. It might be found in its products, services, location, longevity, the people working for it or the people it serves. Whatever it is, it will set your business apart and give people a reason to remember.

These questions will help you pinpoint your positioning:

- What are the main benefits customers receive from your products?

- What aspects of your business are unique and that people appreciate and remember?
- What do you want to be the first thing that comes to mind when the public hears your business' name?

## Ready Your Message

The last element is messaging – the verbal vehicle that carries your positioning to the target market. **You want words that express your business' unique value in a clear, distinct way.** Here are some principles to strive for in your messaging:

- Original – Let the messaging reflect the uniqueness of your business. Richard Branson, Chairman of Virgin Group, said, "To me, business isn't about wearing suits or pleasing stockholders. It's about being true to yourself, your ideas and focusing on the essentials."
- Distinct – Write words that stand out from the crowd. 7-Up is called "the uncola".
- Clear – Make it easy to understand. The California Milk Processor Board asks, "Got milk?"
- Relevant – Know your audience (i.e. target market) and speak to its needs and interests. This slogan from Federal Express is a good example: "When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight."
- Emotional and logical – Touch the emotions and the mind for maximum impact. Purchasing decisions are based on both feelings and facts.
- Simple – Simplicity is the new sophistication. In a busy, complicated world, people crave simplicity. So give it to them in writing!
- Brief – Related to simplicity, less is more. If you can say it in five words instead of ten, go with five. Do you know what the parent company of Kentucky Fried Chicken, Taco Bell and Pizza Hut is named? Yum!
- Descriptive – Names and phrases should be vivid and memorable. For

example, Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream flavors include Chunky Monkey, Cherry Garcia and Wavy Gravy.

- Honest – Avoid setting exaggerated expectations that lead to customer disappointment. It will come back to bite you. Think of junk mail that says, "You are a Grand Prize winner!" Yeah, sure.
- Stylistic – Choose a style that is your own, such as funny, clever, serious or classy. Everyone has a different personality, as does every business. Let the style show in your messaging too.

With these principles in mind, craft messaging that expresses your positioning to the target market. We recommend first writing a long version that is two to four sentences in length. Then hone it down to the essentials by writing a short version with three to fifteen words. It can serve as a tagline or slogan.

## Launch a Marketing Campaign

Start with the foundation when marketing your business. With a target market defined, you know who to aim for. With positioning, you know what you stand for. With messaging, you know how to say it. Put it all together and you have a solid platform for launching effective marketing campaigns.

A campaign is the action part of marketing, where you engage various media channels to spread the word and win customers. Media can include printed publications, Internet, television, radio, direct mail, signs and billboards, tradeshow and events, public relations, direct sales and networking. Depending on which media you choose, you will also need a set of marketing materials to support the campaigns.

## Next Steps

A group effort is the best approach for defining a marketing foundation. Unless you are a sole proprietor, knowledge of the business and its customers, products, competitors and market potential is usually

distributed among multiple persons. These stakeholders can include business owners, managers and sales and marketing personnel. We recommend giving them a voice in creating the foundation. This collaboration will strengthen the final result. Additionally, enlisting an outside marketing agency can bring valuable expertise and accelerate the marketing and growth of your business.

### **About Apropos**

Apropos is a marketing services firm that helps businesses grow through streamlined, cost-effective marketing. We serve as an extension of your marketing department and offer a broad range of services.

Contact us today for a business-building brainstorming session!

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