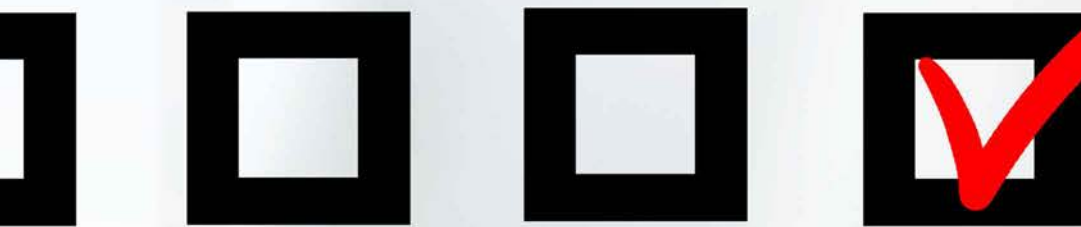


THE ULTIMATE Marketing Checklist



**2015 & Beyond
ARE YOU READY?**

strategy • advertising • cross endorsements • graphic design • sales gaps • social media • goals • internet content • ROI • creativity • customers • referrals • conversion • email • shared incentives • events • differentiation • tradeshow • blogging • segmentation • case studies • execution • digital media • mobile • value • employee engagement • direct mail • business management • videos • point of purchase • influencer • search engine optimization • list building • long-tail • networking • postings • website • SWOT • public relations • performance • long-term objectives • loyalty • survey • demographics • competitors • measureability • prospecting • media • promotions • affiliate • brand loyalty • trends • packaging • demographics • website • distribution • viral • positioning • targeting • channels • call to action • offline/online • needs assessment • search engine marketing • word-of-mouth

The Ultimate Marketing Checklist : 2015 & Beyond e-Book
by soon-to-be-famous Mary Frances Blatchley
forGreen | Marketing Operations & Creative Design Firm
www.forGreen.com

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Brianna ~
Here is to the sun and back. The first of many trips.
With all my love, Mom

Foreword

Welcome and congrats on making a conscious effort to excel your brand and marketing efforts.

More so than not, the concept on how marketing is associated with a business structure is often either misunderstood, a misnomer or undervalued. I've been in the advertising, publishing and marketing industry for over 30 years. I've owned multiple businesses. I've been part of numerous associations, boards, networking groups, including successfully starting various ones. I can tell you it is a continuous, never-ending learning experience. Economies change, people communicate differently, technology transforms, time shrinks... that are many factors to consider when keeping up on current buying trends.

That's why I have developed the 2015 starter/refresher checklist. Don't let the number of pages and the numerous tasks to review intimidate you. The main goal is that you review and move forward with both educating yourself and taking daily specific actions that will lead you and your company towards working more efficiently, gaining more customers and obtaining optimal returns on your investment - whether that be time, money, employees or resources.

I certainly cannot cover all aspects of marketing but this provides some great foundational basics, along with areas that are currently "hotter" than others - especially the explosion of content marketing and database ownership.

There may be some specific areas missing. An example is 'e-commerce'. This business model has distinct, specific marketing tactics. I will have to cover that in my next eBook.

For the sake of simplicity I use the word "customer" globally in place of "client", "prospect", "consumer". Work with me here.

Create. Decide. Write. I would suggest you use this guide to write down thoughts under each section and in the sidebar. Then take those notes and start developing specific action steps and processes in some digital capturing system. From here, I encourage you to develop written protocols. Protocols provide consistent accountable standards that people can refer to. The result is confident employees who understand what they should be doing, when they should be doing it and why it's important to the business objectives and customer. Think of it as a recipe - if you want a certain result, be sure everyone knows the ingredients to creating that tasty and desired cake! The main result will be that each employee feels valued for their contribution to the whole.

I encourage feedback! Feel free to write me at maryfran@forGreen.com. I absolutely LOVE marketing, creative design and creating successful businesses. I want to know what your needs are. What insights you are? Where can I apply those 30 years of my trials and successes that can ensure you don't have to? Let me know. In the meantime, I sincerely hope you find the following insightful, inspiring and useful in creating a successful business.

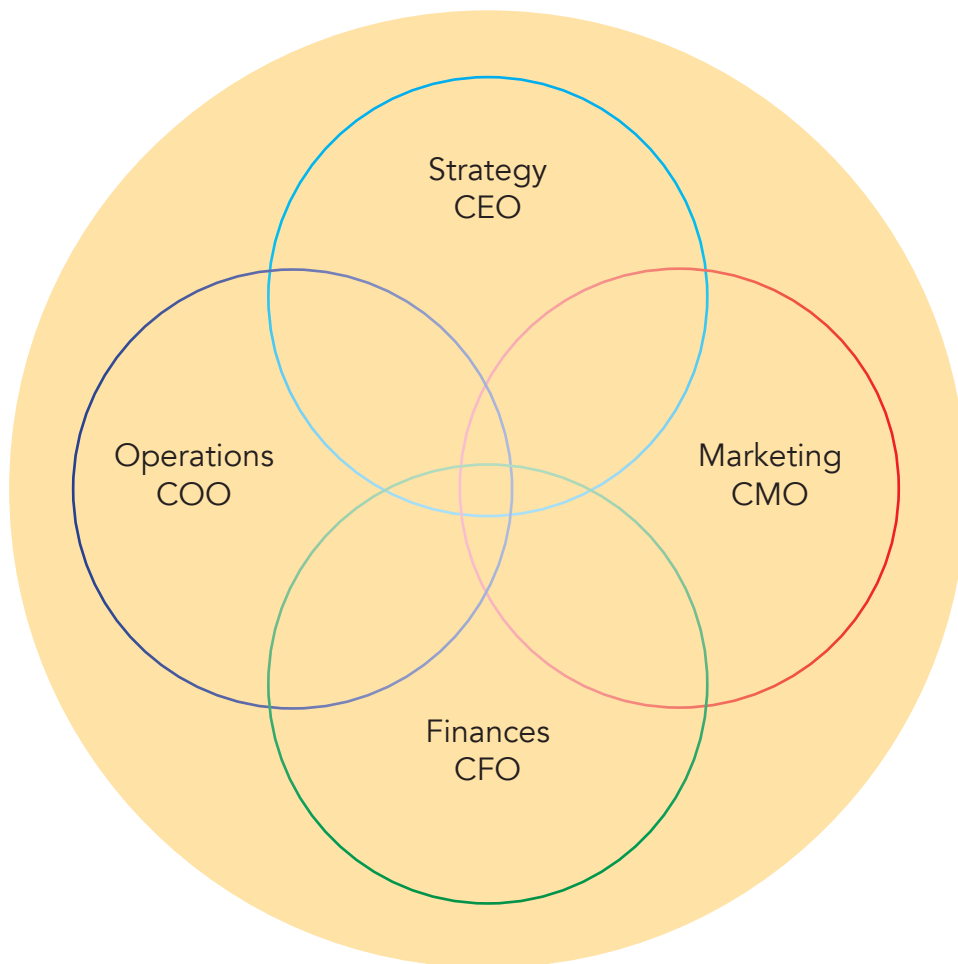
~ Peace & love,
Mary Frances Blatchley

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Marketing is not an option of a business.
It is one of four segments in the business model.
Those businesses who own and value this understanding,
are some of the richest and most successful in the world.

~ Mary Frances Blatchley



The Ultimate 2015 Marketing Checklist

If you've arrived at this point then I know you are going to be intrigued enough to carry on reading! The world we live in today is constantly changing and evolving and the way we do business needs to keep up with that flow of information. Marketing is key to the success of your business, not only today but also long into the future. It's crucial to keep up with all the current knowledge so that you can make sure that your business stays ahead of the game.

Always remember that small changes made now are more manageable on a daily basis and can make a *massive* difference to your business in the future. Sure, we are all guilty of having the best of intentions at the start of a new financial year, but having the ability to carry them on *throughout* the year is the most important factor. But in order to look to the future of your business, you also need to review your current position.

- Did you meet all your objectives during the previous year?
- Have you made sure that all your staff are regularly updated with best practices?
- Did the business run according to plan during the previous year?
- Did you fully meet your ROI objectives?

If you can answer a resounding 'yes' to those questions, then congratulations!...last year was a great year for you, but does that mean that you have a sustainable business plan for the coming year?

2015/2016 & Beyond

Before you can continue to move forward you need to take some time to reassess the position you are currently in.

- What is your overall vision for the business right now?
- Is it the same, or different from when you began?
- What *big* goals for the future changed after the previous year?

- What about your plans for the next 3 years? What needs to be changed based on last year's performance?

A Sensible Look at Goals

We are all in business to make money – that is obvious! But what happens when things get a little 'samey'? Okay, you may well be 'ticking over' and making a decent living, but where do you go from there? How do you make things *really* big happen?

You need to take time out to reassess your goals and make sure that they are in line with the way your business is currently running. It is well known today that highly successful people, and companies, begin with the end in mind. So do yourself a favor and put a good amount of time towards analyzing this.

But back to basics for a moment.

The Brand ~ Understanding the Elements

Brand : an often misunderstood term. Ask to define "brand" and you will get a variety of answers: It's our logo. It's our name. It's our advertising. It's our product/service line. And all those are correct, and then some.

I like to explain a brand using a simple equation that has a lot behind it :

EXPECTATION + EXPERIENCE = BRAND

A company makes a promise that they are "something" to a person via some kind of communication (usually their marketing/sales). Then that person experiences that company's "something". The sum of what they were told and what they experience creates the true essence of the brand.

What makes an amazingly successful brand? When the expectation and true experience match, which is a very difficult thing to get right.

Without getting into another book (which will be my next), there are many steps that create the expectations and experience of the customer. Thousands and thousands of moving elements. A starting list: the

product/service/offering (the look, its smell, its taste, its feel, its sound, its quality), your people (how they act or not, what they say, how they move, what they do), your messaging (what it says, what it promises, how it makes one feel, what it makes one do), the processes (what they are, how they work, what they accomplish), etc.

Simply put, a “brand” is what a company “BE”. This is every action that is performed and every element which is produced to create the experience to the end user.

In the following pages, we will examine the variables and actions needed to create a successful marketing plan. However, don’t put the cart before the horse, without first reviewing if you have a brand worth marketing.



- **Do you own a clear space in your customer’s mind?** It can be logical (better made product) or emotional (I feel so sexy when wearing this). When a consumer thinks of your brand they should never have a muddled vision.
- **Can you easily and distinctly express your differentiating factor from the competition?** Unless you’re the newest invention or advancement in science/technology, then this can be difficult to find. But every company has its unique characteristics/elements that define its brand. Find it. Then express it - often!
- **Is everyone in the company ‘living’ the brand?** Sounds easy but most companies are merely skin-deep. A clue whether a company is living the brand is that it “feels” as if that brand is alive. All employees are completely aware and embrace the brand message, company values and key differentiators. Customer relationship attributes are ingrained and natural. The company’s vision and mission are instilled into each department. All processes, protocols and procedures are congruent with this vision.
- **Does everyone deeply understand the customer?** Providing

a customer a product or service to fix a problem is only *part* of understanding their needs. A person buying a drill doesn't want a drill; they want a hole. Finding out their real needs not only allows you to provide a better customer experience, but also sparks the future development of even more products/service that they are seeking.

In order to create a successful brand, a good place to start is to make sure you have the basics covered. Start with asking some of these questions:

- What is your clearly-defined mission? Vision? Company Culture Values? Customer Relationship Management?

- In what ways is it expressed?

- How do you educate and instill your employees with all of the above?

- How can this educational process be improved? What protocols can be created?

- What is your defined list of services and/or products?

- Are your products/services packaged in a way that they can be communicated easily?

- Who are your “real” competitors?

- In what ways are you “surveying” your current customers to fully understand their needs?

Examining Your Target Market **~ Turning 'Thinkers' into 'Action Takers'**

We all know that customers come and go and that your customer base will be constantly changing. So for every customer that leaves, it would

be good to be able to replace them with two new ones. In order to do this you need to better understand your target market and whether the demographic has recently changed.

Would your target market respond better to...

- HUMOR? Making a customer chuckle is a great way of getting them to both remember what you have *and* to respond to it.
- AUTHORITY? Is your chosen demographic one which responds better to someone who appears to have deep knowledge of the product and the background to it?
- FRIENDLINESS? Maybe your target customer is one who would respond better to a warm and friendly approach; one where they feel this is not a faceless company, but one which they could hold a conversation with.
- OR WHAT IF YOUR TARGET MARKET IS A MIXTURE OF ALL OF THE ABOVE? It may be necessary to create different 'personas' as a crucial part of your marketing approach. You need to be able to respond to the needs of everyone within that target market so be ready to change 'voices' as appropriate.



Develop a list of all your different types of customers, what they respond to and what they are purchasing. To gain a better insight into your customers and prospects, you need to really understand them and 'walk a mile in their shoes'. Address the following questions:

- What are they doing/feeling?
- Do they have any issues or problems?
- Are they having all their needs met?
- Are any current providers not giving them what they want?
- Are they experiencing poor service elsewhere?

- It's important to find their 'pain points' in order to address them properly by offering a solution. What are all their possible pain points?

In addition, it is also the time to take a look at the kind of customer your competitors are attracting. If they are successfully targeting the same market as you are then take a good look at their approach.

- Is it similar to yours? How so?
- Is it vastly different, and if so, what makes it different?
- What can you learn from this?

Also take a look at companies which are in a similar market to yours. There may well be some 'crossover' into your niche which you can also learn from. Don't make the mistake of thinking that you are 'stuck' with a certain kind of consumer. People's needs and wants are constantly changing and you need to be abreast of those changes.

Existing Customers **~ Cherish & Give Them Lots of Hugs**

The costs of obtaining new customers versus existing is 6-7 times more costly in time and effort. So do not neglect existing customers while you are looking for new ones. Make sure to remain in front of them, keep them in the loop and continue to provide premium customer service.



Here are some actions you can take to ensure that you create a strong relationship well into the future:

- **NEW OFFERS FIRST.** When you have a new product or service that can complement what a customer has already purchased, be sure to tell them first - and let them *know* they are first. A great tactic is via email or direct mail using a customer loyalty code that they need to use when

purchasing. It will make them feel exclusive and even more special. Have a running list of new offerings that are in development for the upcoming year. If there aren't any, re-look at what's a hot item and consider developing a complementary product/service.

- **CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE.** Customer service may seem an old-fashioned term these days but the last thing you want is to lose a frightening 86% of your customers due to the lack of this crucial element. The sad fact is that people tell their friends and family far more often about a *bad* experience, than they do about a *good* experience. Make sure that anyone that works for you has clear and concise instructions about how to engender a great customer experience such as using the customer's name multiple times during a conversation, eye contact (when applicable) understanding and having conversations about what they purchased in the past.

Keep staff training up to date to ensure that everyone presents a clear, friendly and approachable face of the company.

- At what stage does each person in the company come in contact with a customer (or vendor)?

- What tactics in each situation can be used to improve the customer experience?

- **APPRECIATION EVENTS.** This works well with B2B customers but you can also create online events/contests for all customers. Creating an annual Customer Appreciation is a great way to personally get in front of previous customers without them feeling pressured to buy. Although they may not be actually purchasing, they are still experiencing your brand by the people, all their senses and the atmosphere. Think being a kid in Disney World.

If an on-site event is not possible, consider an online event exclusive to existing customers. This could be a customer-only educational webinar, a new product showcase, or contest.

- In what other ways can you engage your current customers in some type of appreciation event?

The 'Lost' Customers ~ Regaining the Love

You have already invested time and money into gaining customers and those who were profitable for you need to be nurtured. After all you already have their contact details so utilize these wisely. This can be done by phone call, email, survey, blog, etc.

Try and find out why they no longer purchase from you.

- Have their needs changed? How?
- Has their income changed? How much?
- Have they already purchased everything they *think* they need from you?

If possible, try to address each of these issues by getting back in touch with them and asking relevant questions.

Maybe they were unaware that you can match their needs more closely or that you can offer them a 'special' price/offering for a certain amount of time? Maybe they were unaware that you now have a new product/service which would be a perfect complement to their previous purchases?

Whatever the reasons are for them no longer buying, the attempt to lure them back in is worth it. This interaction is far cheaper for you than gaining new customers; you've already spent the money and time on the initial sale. Don't just assume that you've lost them forever.

Further Understanding of Your Chosen Demographic

Now is the time to reassess how your customers' spending habits may have changed over the previous year. By taking a careful look at the following points you will be able to better develop this year's persona or voice you need to use to increase sales.

- Take a careful look at what your customers have been buying. Are there any changes and are sales per customer increasing or decreasing? What are they?

- New customers are usually more excited about buying from you so take a look at how long it is since they purchased and offer them something of *low* price but *high* relevance. How recently have they made a purchase? When?



- What about your best customers? What do you need to do to keep them purchasing? Any special offers for them?

- Look at the other end of the spectrum. What about your worst-paying customers? What can you do for them to re-ignite their excitement? Are they even worth retaining? What did you learn about them that you don't want to re-create in the future?

- Make sure that every department is coordinated in their efforts. Marketing, sales and customer service all need to be singing from the same hymn sheet. Always keep staff abreast of offers which are in the pipeline so that they can advise customers of exciting new things coming their way. What systems do you already have in place to make sure this is happening and are they working? What new systems/protocols could be put in place to make sure this is happening?

Outside Impact

~ Who's Lookin' at Who?

It's all too easy to be introspective and just focus on what you are doing as a company, but it's a great idea to also take a look at the world around you. It will give you a better idea as to any changes which could have an impact on your company or your target demographic.

- Do the economic and political environments foretell any changes for the coming year? Will these predictions have any impact on your business? How will competitors deal with these?



Smart Notes

- Carefully look at major players in your marketplace. Are they planning any possible changes that could impact on your business? What are they?

- If *they* are they making changes for the coming year, should you consider doing similar changes? If yes, what would those be?

- And what about your suppliers? Are they still strong within the market? Are they planning any changes in price or distribution which could potentially affect your business costs? Don't know? Ask them or invite them for a round-table luncheon whereby everyone brainstorms to create a successful year for all of you.

Your Current Offerings

~ Products & Services

Fresh ideas and innovations in existing products and services is what will keep you ahead of the game. You need to take a long and hard look to see whether you can improve/change in any way to keep abreast with market developments.

- Are your current products and services everything they could be? How can they be improved?
- Do you have plans for new products coming up this year? What are they? Check that these are still relevant and on your customer's 'wish list'.
- Are there any changes in technology which could impact on your products? For example, could you now consider selling virtual as well as physical products?
- Do you have new information to offer which could be developed into a

virtual product? The associated costs with these are far lower than selling physical products.

- Are there any gaps in the market which you could fill? Ask your customers what they would like to see going into the future.

Sales Process

~ Is It All That It Should Be?

You need to analyze and understand exactly what your customer's buying habits are and how they behave before, during and after they purchase from you. Many customers today start their initial search online before they venture out or call so now is the time to take a careful look at your online presence in regards to starting the sales cycle.

- How effective is your sales funnel? Does it get customers to where you want them to be? A purchase, a phone call, driving to your place of business?



- What is your conversion rate? Are you losing prospects at a certain point within your sales funnel?

- How long does it take to create a sales conversion? Would it be beneficial to add special offers at strategic points within your funnel?

- Is your advertising effective? For example, are you gaining sufficient new leads? What is the quality of these leads? Are they converting quickly enough?

- Are you overly keen to close a sale? People don't like to be rushed; they need to know that you will give them adequate time to come to a considered decision. What is a feasible amount of time for your customer to make a buying decision? Immediately, 24 hours, a couple of weeks?

What processes do you have in place to touch base with them at the end of that time?

Planning the Future ~ Your Marketing for the Year Ahead

It's not enough to rely on chance, now is the time to pull everything together, based on what you've learned so far. It's time for all of the different marketing elements to come together to achieve an all-encompassing business objective for the coming year.



- Make sure all your strategies are up-to-date. Do you have a written plan? If not, write one NOW.
- Re-look at your key marketing objectives and make sure they are measurable and achievable. What tactics are you using to measure? What does "achievement" look like?
- What is your USP (Unique Selling Proposition)? This makes obtaining customers so much easier. Your USP should be simple and clearly understandable, and it's crucial that it should be of benefit to your potential customers. Questions to ask in creating one would be :
 - What makes you different, *really* different?
 - How are you able to stand out from the crowd? Identify aspects of your product or service that your competitors cannot imitate.
 - Is everyone in your industry doing things in a specific way?
 - Do they all use the same suppliers, or do they price things similarly?

– How do you do it differently?

– What emotional need is specifically being met by your product/ service? Answer your customer's primary question: "What's in it for me?"

- A customer database is **GOLD**. I can't stress this enough. How do you collect customer contact information? Is this up to date? Are you capturing as much information as you can? Are you segmenting your lists? How can you improve on this? Do you comply with any confidentiality laws?



- Besides all the dreaded Spam you get daily, email marketing is still one of the most effective types of marketing to date, that is, when properly implemented. I will discuss more of this further along. If you don't have an email strategy in place, start one *today*.
- Carefully examine and update your website. Is the content fresh and original? Google is King. Have you examined it taking into account the latest Google algorithm changes? How is it optimized for SEO purposes, taking Google into account? I would highly advise engaging an SEO company to review your site. There's a tremendous amount of activity to be analyzed and it's best to have experts look at this. Period.
- Do you have a physical presence? If yes, can you be seen more than you are now? What advertising is in place to get bodies to walk through the doors? How effective has it been or not been? Is it branded with the same look, feel and message as your other marketing?
- Mobile communication is rapidly increasing. Do you have a mobile marketing plan? Try to ensure that your content is developed for mobile use *before* any competitors. Make sure your marketing campaigns works across all devices and platforms.

- Always take public relations into account. We're in a day and age where content is king (besides Google, who eats it up). Developing press releases and posting them to the web is a great way for people to find you via searches. Be sure to have at least 6 press releases a year. In addition to pleasing the search engines, this makes people visiting your site feel as if you're a mover and a shaker.

If you're already doing it ask, where can you improve on this? Is there a company out there who can help you to develop? What are their costs?

- Think about establishing a promotional calendar, trying to include maybe one new promotion per month. Think about co-ordinating your marketing promotions with events and holidays, leading into relevant content creation. Make sure that your promotions are of value and relevance and are not always discount-based. Further develop promotions which are targeted to your top customers by asking them what they want/expect from you. What can these be?

- The value of networking is often underestimated. Make this an actual section on your marketing plan and work it just like you would an advertising campaign.

What are the different types of networking groups that could be joined? What types of prospects are at each? How many key decision-makers are there? What is the cost for attending and memberships fees to participate?



In addition to meeting a potential prospect face-to-face, it also gives you the opportunity to meet like-minded people. This means you can gain an insight into another's knowledge and ideas. Surrounding yourself with

like-minded individuals is a hugely positive step towards success. Develop a list of these groups, including online groups, such as LinkedIn where you can learn and develop a brand presence. What are these?

- Think about testing different components within your marketing plan. For example, try split-testing different landing pages on your website to see which works best. Your main objective is to constantly look at improving the various processes in play to convert prospects into paying customers. You will need to go step-by-step in your marketing plan and develop a list.
- What could give you more valuable information about your products and services than getting feedback from those who experienced them? Surveying is always a great tool in obtaining this feedback. Invite customers to reach out to you and tell you what they want and make it creative by developing a contest. What type of questions would be valuable to ask customers about your products/services? About the process of purchasing or experiencing the brand? What gift/reward would they go totally ape at receiving?

Email Marketing

~ The Peanut Butter & Jelly

In 2014, email marketing was cited as the most effective digital marketing channel for customer retention in the United States. (eMarketer) with 80.8% of users reporting reading email on mobile devices. (HubSpot).

However, there are a variety of factors that make this successful. First is to make sure you are properly obtaining email addresses which is a permission-based process. Besides - this is illegal if you don't. Know the laws. 2 In addition, if they gave you permission then they WANT to stay connected and WANT your information. There's your peanut butter and jelly!

- Understand that all email campaigns have a strategy behind them. Plan each step and each touch point. Start with asking 'what's the purpose?' Hint: it should always lead to a sale/conversion of some sort. What action do you want them to take? Are you leading them back to a contact/sign up website form, to download something, to your e-store to purchase now, or to make a call? What do you expect that to turn into?

- What type of email is it – a monthly newsletter, a catalog email, a press release, an announcement or a sales/sign-up process email?

- The content needs to lead to conversion. Consider this list and ask how well you are currently following these guidelines:

- Write an email subject line that is attractive and relevant. They need to jump off the page to make someone open them.



- You need a headline (and sub-headers, if applicable) which are going to grab the audience's attention. How many of us hit the delete button when it's a boring headline? This is the only chance you have to get someone to open your email so make that headline work for you.

- Consider what you can give to them as a 'loss leader' to encourage them to come back into the fold. An offering of something free at this stage can be enough to get them to become paying customers again in a short space of time.

- Think about conducting a survey to try and find out the reasons they no longer purchase from you. For sure some of them might not wish to share their reasons but from those that do, you will glean some important information about what previous customers now want from you as a company. Use this information to tailor your special offers into those with the most relevancy.

- Think carefully about the call-to-actions within your emails. Make the process as easy and streamlined for them as possible. People will navigate away from anything which is too complicated or requires too many clicks to get a result. How concise and clear are they? What urgent language are you using? How are they visually standing out amongst the rest of the email?

Content Marketing

~ Even Google Wouldn't Exist Without It

When you define and set out your marketing objectives, you are far more likely to be a successful market leader. Your content marketing strategy needs to match your offline marketing plans for the coming year so that content creation is relevant and streamlined, with the minimum of costs. If you don't feel able to do your own content creation, consider hiring an agency or freelancer. Choose a talent with a profile that fits your specific needs and look carefully at what previous customers have had to say about their abilities.

Coordinate new website content with upcoming offers and blog posts. A skilled copywriter will be able to link these together meaning that Google will view your website in a far more positive manner as you will be supplying useful and relevant information to the reader. SEO no longer works in the same way as it used to so make sure that your copywriter is abreast of any Google changes.

5 Kinds of Content Your Customers Need & Want

- **Up-to-date product information.** Give customers sufficient information which will allow them to make an informed choice about purchasing from you. Don't forget that you're simply a click away from them looking elsewhere to get the products they're looking for. What detailed product/service information are you giving them so that they don't need to look elsewhere?
- **Answer FAQ's.** If you answer a question before it's been asked, you're already on the way to gaining a new customer. Have a comprehensive list of possible questions and make sure that everyone in your organization has a copy so that anyone can answer a question when it is asked.
- **Easy to follow product-related information.** No-one likes the idea of tiny, hard to read information leaflets, the like of which are often seen in build it yourself furniture, for example. Make any instructions clear and always use simple English; no long words, no unnecessary 'fluff' and if something is complicated to use, then consider an audio or video guide.
- **How to 'style'.** Many people want additional information when purchasing something like clothing or home décor. For example, 'what other color would complement this?' or 'does this purse go with these



shoes?’ Think out of the box here if you don’t sell an actual physical product and try to sell a complete experience to the customer. For example, if they purchase a low-priced product, try to sell them an upgrade for them to enjoy an ‘enhanced experience.’

- **Reviews from previous customers.** Many customers want to know what everyone else who bought your product thought of it. Just bear in mind that you can’t please all of the people all of the time and so potential customers do understand that these reviews may occasionally be less than perfect. In fact, that makes for a more realistic customer experience; they are more likely to be suspicious of all glowing reviews than to not buy because an occasional customer has stated that the product wasn’t ‘for them.’

Not every prospect will take note of every one of these, but most of them will examine a number of them and so it’s a good idea to offer the information, even if it isn’t always used.

Content Curation

~ Making Sure It’s Streamlined

It’s the day and age of information, which heavily comes in the way of content, so creating the process and flow of collecting, organizing and displaying your information relevant to a particular topic or area of interest is a must!



- Be sure all your email and communications with your customers are in line with what is currently being offered on the website. Planning all of your content in one go is very useful and ensures everything flows and nothing gets missed when special offers are in the pipeline. What type of calendar planning system are you currently using?

- When implementing a specific advertising/marketing campaign, be sure that all areas of your communications reflect the same message or have been updated to align with it. In addition, make certain that every employee understands the campaign, its messaging, its value and how they should express it when coming in contact with prospects and customers. What tracking system are you using and how will you be communicating this to employees?

- Try and get plenty of bang for your buck by re-inventing existing content into new and relevant posts. Look back over posts which resonated with your readers and re-write to give them a fresh new feel. Maybe technology has changed since they were written or your outlook on the subject may now be different, but whatever the reason, make sure to change enough of the content so that it doesn't appear anywhere as duplicate. Maybe you gave away a free eBook at some stage? Think about making each chapter into a shorter post or email with follow-ons at set stages. That way you will get plenty of new entries from what you have already paid for or created. Ask, which ways can you re-purpose existing content?
- Marketing using social media is most definitely the way forward these days. So many people spend a vast amount of time browsing their social media that they are just as likely to see your posts 'on the go' as then are when opening an email. Re-purpose content so that it fits in with the limited number of characters on Twitter or so that it is short enough to read quickly on Facebook. You can always place a clickable link on there so that they are re-directed to your original post. And make sure the link works and takes them straight to a place where you want them to take action. What current social media tactics are you using whereby you can implement this process?
- Most people adore the idea of having something for nothing. Think about offering a 'freebie' in your re-worked post to generate extra interest. Don't forget that in order for content to work for you, you need your audience to take action. One of the best ways for doing this is to answer a need that they have. (Sure, they may not be aware that they 'need' it at the moment, but that is your job as a successful marketer to make them realize they have a need for what you're offering!) What freebies can you think of that your customer would really want?

Social Media

~ Worth the Conversation

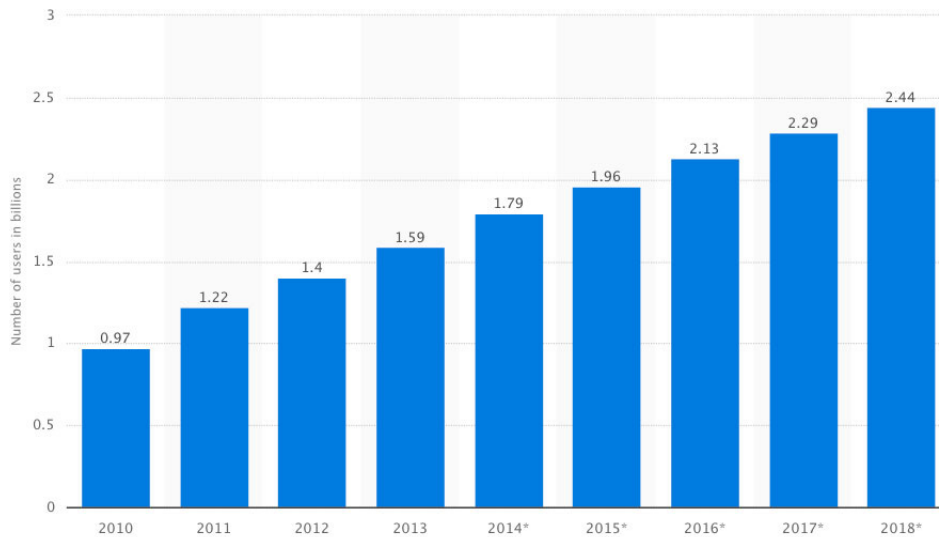
As touched on above, the power of social media must not be underestimated. Facebook alone has an astonishing 1.2 billion active users 3 per month, which equates to around 7 times more usage than Twitter! Roughly 60% of that usage takes place on phones and tablets, rather than on desktops/laptops and therefore it is also essential for you to keep

abreast of mobile technology when considering your content marketing.

Take a look at this useful visual:

Number of social network users worldwide from 2010 to 2018 (in billions)

This statistic shows the number of social network users worldwide from 2010 to 2014 with projections until 2018. In 2016, it is estimated that there will be around 2.13 billion social network users around the globe, up from 1.4 billion in 2012.



So consider the following points when working on your social media strategy:

- Keep abreast of both your own company and close competitors to see what people are saying about you on social media. Make sure you understand what is 'hot' and what is not these days. What grabs people? What are they talking about and sharing? Learn how to increase your conversions using social media.
- Make sure that your staff understand what 'voice' you will be using on social media so that there is a uniform approach across the board. You don't want one voice to be authoritative and the next one to be laid back and casual; that just doesn't work. Your audience should always feel that the same 'person' is speaking to them. Who is currently handling your social media? Is everyone aware of the messaging and voice?
- Don't make the mistake of thinking social media begins and ends with Facebook and Twitter. Think of Pinterest, Google+, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube as a minimum. All social media platforms are not alike.

Be sure to understand the function of each platform and why it exists. Facebook is for sharing feelings and current experiences, as opposed to LinkedIn where it's all business talk. Know where your customers like to "hang out" to get the information/experience they want and make sure you're there.

You should have a concentrated strategy across each platform. It's best to focus on 1-2 platforms and provide a great experience, than to try and extend yourself to places where you won't even be heard.

What are the top two social media platforms that would be good to market your product/service?

- People are always willing to talk about a bad experience; unfortunately it's not too often that they communicate a great experience. So if you can acquire some video testimonials from previously delighted customers, think about sharing them on social media. When people can actually see and listen to someone telling them how great you are, or how wonderful your customer service is, they are far more likely to want to know more about your company. It's much more interesting to a potential customer than seeing a dry and boring written letter of recommendation; although, (of course!) these do have their place, especially if you are a 'traditional' style company. Who are your top five customers you can ask to create video testimonials on?
- Refresh and update your blog on a regular basis. This will complement your social media strategy and also help you get found more easily by the search engines. In addition, the search engines LOVE new content. There are two different robots that skim the Internet for SEO - the static content and new content. Be sure your blog stays fresh or they will push you down to page 10...or 1,000. Develop a top fresh 5 list today. What are these topics?
- Take advantage of new things which appear, such as LinkedIn Publishing:
5 You can skyrocket your business by keeping ahead of the game on platforms such as this.
- The brain processes images about 60,000 times faster than text, and



presenters may have finally gotten the picture. If part of your business is B2B then consider sharing information on SlideShare. In Q4 of 2013, the site averaged 60 million unique visitors a month and 215 million page views and it's growing. What presentations do you already have that can be re-purposed onto SlideShare? 6

Search Engines

- Understanding How People Seek

Although people have increased their use of searching via social media, most people still use search engines, especially with the advent of 'speak and search.' As a matter of fact - Google now processes over 40,000 search queries every SECOND on average which translates to over 3.5 billion searches per day and 1.2 trillion searches per year worldwide. 7 And, that's just one search engine.

Fully utilize content to improve the readability across all possible searches. Questions to ask when developing better SEO content would be:

- What normal words/phrases do people use to currently describe your products/services?

- What branded words/phrases do you use to currently describe your products/services?

- What is the focus of each company page per platform? This can be individual website pages, YouTube channel, Linked company page, blog posts, etc.

- How keyword-rich is each page and does it follow Google rules?

Other recommendations to consider are:

- If you don't already have it, be sure to put a Google Analytics code on your website. Although Google recently updated its rules (again) to push people more into Google AdWords purchasing, there is invaluable information on what words/phrases people use in their searches to get to your site. And, it's FREE.

In addition, there are a great many free tools from companies such as tools.seobook.com and seotoolset.com to get you started.

- Google informs us that around 15% of searches each day are new searches; in other words, these people have never entered these terms before. This means that you must not assume that you 'know' what people are searching for, so always ensure that you carefully consider not only keywords, but also 'broad match' and 'long-tail' in your content where ever you are placing content on the Internet.



- There is a difference between what people would type into a search bar and what they would speak for a search, so try and think of possible sentences which may be used when people are looking for you or your services. Use these phrases and terms in your content so that you have more chance of appearing when people do search.

Advertising ~ To Do or Not to Do

I understand that advertising can considerably increase your costs, but I do urge you to remove any emotional attachment you may have with money when it comes to investing in your business. The key word here is 'investing;' think of an investment as being something which will give you a return. A cost or expense will give you no return, so change your mind-set if necessary.

- All businesses need investment, whether they are brick and mortar or online, and focused, demographic advertising is one such investment. In the past, you would have advertised in newspapers, yellow pages and such-like, hoping that someone who needed you would actually see your advertisement and then take action on it. Today it's very different; you can target your advertising so that it reaches the specific demographic you are aiming for.

Spend on advertising where your audience will see it and where you have the widest reach. With that said, all it takes is planning, budgeting and

management. Questions to start with:

- Is it the right time to advertise? Are you promoting something seasonal? – In a new market?

 - What type of media do your customers use to get this information? Internet, newspaper, radio?

 - Does your competition advertise? Where? When?

 - What is your budget and the expected return on that investment (ROI)?

 - How does the ROI look in real life? Sold product/service, brand awareness, event sign-up?

 - How will you track and measure your ROI?
-
- Don't forget to take advantage of social media marketing, however, be sure that your target audience makes buying decisions in those areas that associate with your product/service. For instance, if you're a B2B business you may have a better chance with LinkedIn ads, as oppose to, Facebook ads, which is a great B2C market. What platform is best for your business?

 - Check your stats on a daily basis to ensure that you are reaching the audience you want and also to make sure that your ad message is working. Tweak the message/design if necessary until you get a positive ROI.

Employees

~ Your Most Valuable Asset, and Then Some

Whether you have one member of staff or a hundred+, people make up the nucleus of your brand, of your company. Let's face it, behind the best technology, production software, distribution center, etc. is a HUMAN.



THE EMPLOYEES ARE BOTH BRAND MANAGERS AND BRAND AMBASSADORS OF EVERY COMPANY.

So how are you capitalizing on your most valuable brand asset?

The first step for every new employee should be induction into the brand via an comprehensive onboarding process. After all, how can they “BE” the brand if they don’t know what this is?

Typical onboarding processes fall short, just making sure the standard HR forms are filled and turned in. Then there’s the introduction to their specific department and their own location set-up. Done. And, ouch!

If you develop an educational and multi-sensory, engaging process whereby new employees feel inspired and immediately connected to the company, then you have a lifer!

- What is your current onboarding process? Does it also include explaining the company culture? The company values? The company’s goals? The company’s standards?
- How is the process multi-sensory?
- How are you making new employees immediately feel part of a “family”?
- How are you making them feel smart, engaged and important?

Keep Employees Motivated Through Engagement

Smart Notes

In addition, you need to continually let them know you appreciate them. If your employees are looking forward to a raise more than to other considerations, you're doing something wrong. Contrary to popular belief, they value many more things than the money they are paid.

Mindvalley, a global self-improvement company, attracts brilliant applicants from around the world whom they pay half of what these employees can get at other companies. How can they do this? Because they truly understand what their employees - talent, thinking, passionate human beings - want when it comes to expressing their talents, which is a lot more than just yearning for a paycheck.

So what are employees really seeking? Below is the "real" list of what they want:

- To feel proud
- To be treated fairly
- To have a personal life
- To feel smart
- To have a pleasant work environment
- To respect a boss
- To be heard out
- To beat the competition
- To have fun

Are you currently providing this? If not, how can you provide this?



Consider "marketing" to your employees as equally valuable as it is to your customer. In a nutshell, marketing is providing motivation by way of communicating or engaging to the target audience

enough to motivate them to take some action. In this case, you are motivating and educating your employees. This in turn creates great self-responsible leaders.

Also, this marketing doesn't have to be boring. Forget the PPT lunch-n-learns. It can be a month-long interactive contest, it can be by sending them out to a networking event for pure enjoyment - even if they are not in sales, it can be by a company sports activity.

In-house Brand Ambassadors

If they like it, they will tell others. How are you capitalizing on your employees to be your word-of-mouth brand ambassadors?

Not only can they help you to *create* content via your social media, newsletters and blogs, but they can *also* help you to share it amongst their friends and followers. In this way you are broadening your audience with no advertising costs. You may be surprised at the natural communicators you have amongst your people.

In what way can you allow employees to communicate on your behalf? Facebook, Yelp, LinkedIn, YouTube, enewsletters, review sites.

How are you communicating these options?

How can you reward these efforts?

Technology & Software ~ The Necessary But Sometimes Dreaded

This is an ever-changing technological world and it would be almost impossible to keep on purchasing new technology when it becomes available. It can be overwhelming. It can be challenging. But what you can do is to ensure that you keep abreast of latest developments and ask whether it would be worth your while investing in new software and the like. Again, it comes to viewing this as an investment, rather than cost or expense. If you are going to gain more than you spend, then it is a worthwhile investment.

Questions to ask are:

- What is your current Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform? Is it set-up correctly for easy process management? For easy data downloading? Does it work across all applicable departments - sales, marketing, accounting?

- What technology are you using to create marketing plans, budgets and money management?
- What are using for team project collaboration? Does it eliminate double entry? Does it make use of real time communication and updates?

Make sure that staff are aware of the importance of backing up information and also how often this should be done. Also make sure you have in place a security and confidentiality policy. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you have enough technical support on board or should you consider hiring someone? Could they also update your employees on current new technologies which would be useful to your business?
- Do your staff need extra training or support? If yes, are there any local training facilities available? What are they?
- Could you find an online course at a lower cost?

Executive Outsourcing

~ When It's Time to Call in the Professionals

I am aware that I have given a huge amount of information to take in and know that you may need to read through this a few times for it all to make sense and sink in. However, if you are still struggling to understand the best marketing options for your business and how best to move forward and keep ahead of the times, then again you should consider outsourcing.

It makes sense to make the most of your money by hiring a Virtual Marketing Department and here's why:

There's a lot to do when it comes to managing a company's marketing options, and with the digital technology age, it *is* feasible to do some of it yourself. However, when it comes to wanting to take your company to the next level (and enjoy a 15%+ increase in revenues,) you should consider hiring a virtual STRATEGIC marketing team that understands full business

operations as well as how to communicate the brand effectively to your potential customers.

They can look at your business from a neutral viewpoint, without being emotionally involved - the 50,000 foot level instead of at the ground level.

Unlike a website design firm or email marketers, they will have experience in all areas of marketing, not just one aspect. They will bring cohesiveness and consistency into your business.

As a plus point, you can also hire them to be just consultants and to oversee a project, or to get the best results, hire them to actually complete the project. This means you enjoy the flexibility of a situation that works extremely well with the growth of the company, both now and long into the future.



Some questions to ask about your current marketing efforts are:

- Are you affectively strategizing, developing and implementing your marketing and design initiatives seamlessly?
- In what areas is your marketing implementation weak?
- Within the marketing department, analyze each person's role.
 - Does each title match responsibility?
 - Are they educated fully in that position?
 - Is there an opportunity for them to be better trained in both strategy and application?
 - Are they at time capacity?
- Are you spending money and not see the expected return on investment?
- Do have that sinking feeling that you don't know what you don't know,

therefore it's not getting done?

When considering hiring a virtual firm, consider these questions:

- Have they clearly defined all their service offers?
- What do their customers say about them? Read testimonials. And, analyze these testimonials to make sure they are diversified in skill set and solutions.
- What is their client industry experience? Does it match your industry?
- What is the experience of each team player? Are each of their roles clearly defined?
- What processes and procedures do they have in place to seamlessly project manage?
- Does their own marketing strategy match their own business goals?

I'm a strong believer in 'horses for courses'. In other words, most jobs are best done by someone who has experience. For example, I would not try to build a swimming pool at my house; I would hire someone who has expertise in that area. We all learn from experience and have a thirst for new knowledge, so, armed with the information in this guide, why not try your own marketing endeavors for a while and see what happens? Keep your budget in mind and clearly focus on the fact that an investment WILL give you a ROI. If you find that you are unsuccessful, then consider outsourcing to someone who CAN build a swimming pool!

About Mary Frances



A cross-disciplinary thinker, multi-entrepreneur and speaker, Mary Frances Blatchley is an expert in innovative marketing strategy, business operations, creative and brand development, interactive technologies and green/wellness initiatives. For nearly 30 years, Mary Frances providing her clients and peers the opportunity to take a brand leadership position through beautifully executed, award-winning strategic marketing campaigns.

Recognized as a leader in the marketing, sustainable and wellness communities, Mary Frances has served on numerous boards, spearheaded various non-profit associations and been featured in various publications. She regularly speaks on strategic marketing, interactive media, business resilience and personal wellness.

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