

How To Develop A Marketing Plan (153)

Tourism operators often try and sell their own services and products without selling the area at the same time. But tourists usually want to know what attractions are available in the area they are going to, not just the place they are staying. In fact, an interesting area is almost always the deciding factor in planning their trips.

One of the benefits of being part of a route is that areas can be marketed together. This means that people are drawn into the area first, before individual operators start competing for their share of the market. Visitors need to be made aware of the area and its attractions, so they can decide that this where they want to spend their hard-earned money. Before this can be done, however, you need to know what exactly you are selling and who your target market is.

A marketing plan will help to do this.

This Guide will explain what must go into an effective marketing plan, so that the route can attract more customers to the area – to the benefit of all members there. It will explain how to write a marketing plan, what you should include in your plan, and how to monitor and review your marketing performance. It provides useful hints and tips, as well as sources of further information.

A marketing plan must achieve one or more of these aims:

- Attracting more customers to the route.
- Increasing the average sales made by route members.
- Ensuring your route visitors buy from members more often.
- Ensuring repeat visits from visitors (customers).

The marketing plan for your route does not have to be too long, and you shouldn't be overly concerned with making your plan too complicated. The shorter and clearer it is, the better, so that everyone can understand it.

Why is a marketing plan important?

Sadly, most small organisations do not have a marketing plan, but focusing on your marketing effort is one of the most effective ways for your route to survive and thrive, especially in increasingly competitive times. This is because a good marketing plan can:

- Get you more visitors and customers
- Get inactive visitors to come back
- Get your current visitors to buy more.

By developing a marketing plan for your route, the Route Forum is collectively marketing these smaller organisations as well as the larger organisation.

It will also allow you to take advantage of all the know-how, thinking and underutilised assets that you own but are not fully exploiting. By bringing your knowledge together in a plan, you will identify all the actions and tactics you need to achieve your marketing objectives with an implementation timetable.

What is a marketing plan?

A marketing plan describes your target market and your customers so that you can better understand what they want. It will also then build on this information to plan the best ways of reaching them with products, services and experiences they will be most likely to buy at a price that they can afford.

Defining your market

Your marketing plan should provide detailed information about your target audience – this is the market you are aiming at with your product or service. A profitable market consists of people who genuinely have a need or desire for the products, services and experiences sold on your route, and will jump at the chance to buy it when you offer it to them.

For instance, most routes will want to target as least two traveler types: tourists who travel by road and business people who travel by road. You need to think about what your route can offer to each of these segments.

Your plan should typically answer the following questions about your target audience:

- Are there segments in your market that are currently underserved? For instance, does the route cater for business travellers (upmarket accommodation, meeting rooms or conference facilities?)
- Are the segments you are aiming at big enough to bring substantial business to your route?
- Does your route face too much competition for certain segments? (Is it more sensible to target low-budget travellers rather than business people, for instance?)
- What are the services or products that your route can offer that travellers cannot get easily in other areas (scenery, certain outdoor activities, certain fruit or vegetables, etc.)?

Understanding your customers

Knowing your customers intimately is the key first step to effective marketing. To prepare a marketing plan, you must know exactly:

- Who your customers could be.

- What they would want from your route.
- What will motivate them to come to your area and spend time there; in other words, what do they want to do there?

To help you really understand your customers, your marketing plan should answer the following questions:

- What are the demographic characteristics of your target customers, in terms of age, gender, income, hobbies, ethnicity, and so on?
- Who is the primary buyer and who has the primary influence in the purchasing process? These may not always be the same person. When marketing to families, for instance, should you target the husband or the wife? When marketing to businesses, should you target the CEOs or the administrators? (Ask the question: who makes the decisions and arrangements for company travel?)
- What habits do your target customers have? For instance, where do they get the information to help them make decisions? Is it from television, newspapers, specialist magazines or the internet?
- What are the main emotional motivators that will make someone consider visiting your route? Relaxation, excitement, saving money? What else?

Identifying your market niche

For most small organisations, the best marketing plans concentrate on supplying products and services to customer groups that fit the lifestyle (psychographic) and demographic (such as age, gender, occupation or income) profiles of your target market. In other words, if you define your market as everybody and anybody, then it is hard to focus your limited marketing budget.

Your marketing plan should outline how you will carve out your specific niche and how you aim to dominate it. By defining the

niche and narrowing your market focus, you will find you can spread the awareness of your route more quickly. It will also become easier and cheaper to contact potential visitors, and you will almost certainly face less competition.

Developing your marketing message

Once you have identified your target market audience and profiled your niche customers, you will need to focus on developing your marketing message. This should explain what your route offers and should persuade people to visit.

There are generally two types of marketing message. One is short, to the point and often referred to as the elevator pitch. It's your once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be with someone important who asks you 'What do you do?' and you have 30 seconds to make your pitch.

Here is a video on [How To Do An Elevator Pitch](#) that will help you get the idea.

The second type is the complete marketing message and your plan should develop this type of message and identify where it will be used. The message must be compelling and persuasive; include the following in it:

- An explanation of your target customers' need or problem.
- Proof that this need is important and that it should be served without delay.
- An explanation of why you are the only business that can address this need.
- An explanation of the benefits people will get by using your solution.
- Examples and testimonials of satisfied customers who have used your visited your route and enjoyed it.
- An explanation of prices and payment terms.

Defining your marketing medium

This is a crucial part of your marketing plan and will define the methods and media you will use to ensure your message reaches the target audience. It should identify exactly how you will sell your route to your targeted visitors.

Your marketing medium is the communication vehicle that you will use to deliver your marketing message. The best medium for you will be the one that reaches most people in your niche at the lowest possible cost. The following is a selection of different types of marketing media you can use to get your message across:

- Newspaper, magazine and radio adverts.
- Online advertising on selected websites and search engines.
- Social media – here is a video that shows you [How To Set Up A Facebook Fan Page](#).
- Posters and billboards.
- Competitions.
- Seminars and talks.
- Leaflet drops.
- Travel shows – read the Guide [How To Attend Travel Shows](#) and look at these [Examples](#) of how other routes have got the most out of shows they have attended.
- Press releases and advertorials.
- Networking.
- Flyers and brochures.
- E-mail.
- Postcards.
- Sales agents.
- Gift vouchers.
- Word of mouth.
- Website links.
- Business cards.

Setting sales and marketing targets

Targets are critical to marketing success and these should be realistic and specific. If you haven't written down your goals and targets in your marketing plan then you are simply wishing for success instead of aiming for it.

Ensure that your goals and objectives use the SMART formula:

- Specific.
- Measurable.
- Achievable.
- Realistic.
- Time-defined.

These goals should include financial values in terms of numbers of visitors, numbers of overnight stays, numbers of customer visits to key sites on the route, amounts spent by visitors per visit, length of visit per visitor, etc. You can also include targets such as enquiry levels, sales conversion rates, website traffic generated, press releases and articles published.

Once these targets are set, your marketing plan should indicate how and when you will review and adjust them.

Setting your marketing budget and timetable

Your plan should include a realistic budget to allow you to undertake all your desired marketing activity and a timetable for its implementation. You can calculate your budget using either exact figures or an estimate.

Once you have calculated or estimated your budget, you will need to produce a timetable to implement the plan. This timetable will identify:

- Each specific marketing action you will take.

- Who will carry these out.
- A timescale for each activity and when it will start.
- Key events and milestones during the year, such as trade shows and exhibitions.
- When any additional or external resources, such as specialists in PR, graphic design or direct sales will be needed.

You will find it useful you read these Guides: [How To Develop A Project Budget](#) and [How To Develop And Manage A Route Budget](#).

Monitoring and reviewing progress

Once your marketing plan is under way, you will need to monitor and review its progress continually. Ideally, you should do this each month. You should also consider possible scenarios such as how to handle responses to particular marketing activities or how to deal with seasonal aspects of your industry or sector.

In addition, you will need to consider how to manage your marketing plan. You must ensure that you don't spend your entire annual budget in the first couple of months. Decide how you will monitor and interpret results and think about how you will adjust the plan or introduce new tactics as you progress.

Who is involved with developing a marketing plan?

The route forum needs to facilitate the process of producing a marketing plan with the input and involvement of all members.

How do we develop a marketing plan for the route?

If there are resources available, it can assist to have an

expert involved in helping the route members to develop a plan – but it must be someone with on-the-ground tourism experience in the area or a similar area. Their role would be to streamline the writing of the plan but they must take all the input from members and must be able to draw the necessary information out of members. It will not be useful for the plan to be written by an outside consultant if members do not ‘own’ the result.

The process needs to involve all members, and must express their views and capacity. This way, the objectives, plans and implementation timetables will be relevant and achievable.

Practical tips

- The marketing plan will be one of your most important business documents, so make sure you set aside some uninterrupted time to develop it.
- Study the detail around your proposed marketing media, how appropriate your marketing message is to your target audience, and your overall marketing budget.
- To begin with, don't worry about writing style or making your plan too complicated or long-winded.

Use of this Guide

This Guide can be used by the Route Forum to develop a marketing plan that will extend the route's impact. It can also be used by individual members to better market their own businesses.

Other Guides and Examples

Open Africa has developed a detailed Marketing Toolkit to help you develop a marketing plan.

You may also find these other Resources on marketing topics

useful:

- Guide: [How To Attend Travel Shows](#)
- Example: [How Do We Attend Travel Shows](#)
- Resource: [How To Do An Elevator Pitch](#)

Contacts and other support

SA Tourism Services Association (a database of credible tourism service providers).

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Website: www.satsa.com

Indaba Tourism Exhibition is one of the largest tourism marketing events in Africa, showcasing a variety of southern Africa's best tourism products. It attracts about 12 000 local and international visitors and around 1 700 exhibitors.

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