

Cut to the Chase MarketingTM

The **9** Essential Questions To
Creating A Marketing Plan That *Works!*

by Nancy J. Wagner

Cut to the Chase
MarketingTM

Phone: 425-415-6427
nancy@cuttothechasemarketing.com
www.CutToTheChaseMarketing.com

Cut to the Chase Marketing™

Why *Cut to the Chase Marketing™*?

Would you like to:

- Make more money?**
- Get more sales?**
- Find more customers?**
- Add new products or services?**
- Get financing?**

A marketing plan helps you clearly identify how you will achieve each of your business goals.

Cut to the Chase Marketing™ helps you identify the critical questions you need to ask about your business so you can reach **all** of your business goals.

The finished marketing plan will give you a “manual” for running your business – it should guide you in all of your marketing decisions. You’ll make adjustments as your sales grow and as you discover some tools work better than others, but when you get to your goal, your marketing plan will show you exactly how you did it. And that spells success for getting more business, finding more financing, or just plain celebrating the fact that you did what you set out to do!

About *Cut to the Chase Marketing™*

Founded by Nancy Wagner, *Cut to the Chase Marketing™* helps small businesses develop and implement marketing materials and websites that make the sales process more effective. Since 1998, the company has provided marketing consulting and strategizing, writing, design, photography and layout of print materials and websites for clients ranging from service companies and manufacturers to Internet and wholesale businesses.

Wagner is also a marketing strategist, speaker and writer who guides small business owners through the marketing maze with lively, enthusiastic, action-based seminars. In addition, her articles have appeared in *Nation’s Business*, *Emerging Business*, *Home Business Journal*, *Seattle: 150 Years of Progress*, and *Workz.com*, among others. For more information, please visit www.cuttothechasemarketing.com.

Cut to the Chase Marketing™

#1: What is your product or service & list the skills needed to sell it.

This question helps you begin identifying a niche so you differentiate yourself from your competition. Answering this question also helps you define what, exactly, your main product or service is. This allows prospects who hear your message to know exactly what you offer rather than getting confused by a message that talks about numerous things.

Understanding the skills needed to sell your product helps you do two things. First, some of the skills and talents you have may help you determine your competitive advantage. For instance, if you are known for providing extraordinary customer service, that may be part of your marketing message. Secondly, knowing what you're good at and not so good at helps you know when to hire professionals so you can keep doing what you're great at and let others handle the other tasks.

Product or service I sell:

Skills I need to sell my product/service:

Creating a niche can be scary. Here are three ideas for getting work immediately while you create your niche:

1. Turn your previous employer into your client.
2. Call your competition and offer to do take on any of their extra work.
3. Volunteer! Chose a non-profit organization that allows you to use some of your skills so you meet people who may be able to refer/recommend you for similar work.

#2: What is your primary sales goal?

Prepare to make your goal very specific such as the following:

GOAL: "I will sell 12,000 units of XYZ product next year."

My goal is:

Next, determine how you can break that goal down further to determine if it is truly achievable.

If your goal is about increasing or achieving a certain number of sales, use the following formula to figure out how realistic your goal is:

a. If you provide services, multiply your hourly rate X the # of hours you want to work per day. \$ _____

OR

b. Write down the average amount of products you would like to sell per day. _____

c. How many days per week will you provide your services or offer your products? \$ _____

d. Multiply the answer in c. times your answer in a. or b. _____

e. Multiply the answer from d. above times the number of weeks you plan to work during the year. (Take into account vacations, holidays, etc.) _____

This is your potential annual income.

Cut to the Chase Marketing™

Now, let's refine your goal. The following goal has been refined from the previous example and clearly states timeframe in which the goal will be reached:

REFINED GOAL: "Next year, I will sell 1,000 units of XYZ product per month at \$10/product, reaching \$1,200,000 in product sales by end of year."

Here's my further refined goal:

Next, ask yourself the following questions about your goal and keep rewriting and refining it until it feels realistic and achievable:

Can you reasonably achieve your goal in the allotted time?

In order to reach your goal, do you need assistance from salespeople, opening another store or office, finding more prospects, selling more to your current customers, etc.? If so, you may want to include that as one of your goals.

How will you measure your goal to make sure you're on track?

If you're already in business, will reaching your goal require some shifting of your priorities?

Write your final goal below:



Imagine celebrating your goal! To help you reach your goal(s), first imagine the way in which you will celebrate reaching that goal. Make your celebration something memorable and worth working hard to obtain. Then, keep that vision in your mind as a source of motivation to help you reach that goal, even when it seems like way too much work to do so!

#3. What benefits do prospects *AND* customers feel they get from your product or service?

Determine the benefits of your products or services by asking yourself the following:

What problem does your product or service solve *from the prospect's point of view*? Prospects may be interested in your offerings for an entirely different reason than your customer. For instance, you may try a meal at a new fast food restaurant because you're really hungry and you want to try out the new place. But you'll go back for a different reason – maybe the sandwich tasted good, or you got friendly service, you saw something else on the menu you'd like to try next time, etc.

How does your product or service make their lives better *from your customer's point of view*? Why is your customer returning? If you don't know, start talking to them and find out what they're thinking. This knowledge alone could help you grow your business immediately.

Are any of the skills you need to offer this product or service a benefit to your customer?

List every single benefit you can think of no matter how important or not. Listed below is a list of benefits to get you started.

Consider the following potential benefits of your products/services first from your prospect's point of view, then from your customer's point of view. This list is to help you get started but is by no means comprehensive:

- Close in proximity
- Community-oriented
- Competitive prices
- Consistent service/product
- Convenience
- Convenient hours
- Convenient location
- Customer service
- Deadline-oriented
- Delivery services
- Detail-oriented
- Discount for volume
- Eases stress

Cut to the Chase Marketing™

- Fast turnaround
- Free parking
- Free shipping
- Friendly
- Full refund upon return
- Guarantee
- Help clients get the edge on competition
- Inexpensive
- Longevity of product life
- Makes life easier
- Organized
- Pickup services
- Reputation
- Superior product/services
- Thoroughness
- Variety of products in stock
- Uniqueness
- Warranty

The benefits of my product/service, from my prospect's point of view, are as follows:

The benefits of my product/service, from my customer's point of view, are as follows:



HOMEWORK: During the next week, find out what your competition is doing by visiting their stores, web sites, asking for their collateral materials, reviewing their advertisements, and anything else you can think of that will help you build a clearer picture of how they attract customers. Investigate a minimum of two of your biggest competitors and write down the results of your investigation.

#4: Who buys/will buy your product or service?

Who is your customer? Who wants or needs your product or service?

First, are they consumers or businesses?

Secondly, which best describes where your prospects can be found?

In the neighborhood (within a 3-5 mile radius)

In an expanded geographical area

Next, pinpoint as many characteristics as you can about your prospects and/or clients.

If you primarily sell to consumers, you may want to start with age, sex, income, education, interests, etc.

If you primarily sell to businesses, you may want to start with position of decision maker, motivation to buy, size of company in employees or sales volume, education, type of business, etc.

My customer profile:

#5: Determine what makes your company different than your competitors.

To better understand your competition, try the following exercise:

Recall the first thing you can think of about each of your competitor's products or services and write it down. This might be a slogan, a behavior, a particular product or service, or whatever you think of when their name comes to mind.

Next, list the unique differences your services/products offer that would be attractive to a buyer and list those below. Refer to the benefits list you created earlier.

Now, look for clear differences between your products and the competition's and list these.

Cut to the Chase Marketing™

Finally, write a short statement that sums up what you uniquely offer prospects and customers. This statement should drive just about everything you do. Make this statement your mantra, your positioning in every single marketing effort you make, and the song sung on demand by yourself and employees. You may also wish to use this statement as your tagline.

Write your statement below.

SAMPLE STATEMENTS

Hair salon: *"If you don't like it, come back within 2 weeks and we'll make it right!"*

Writing Services: *"Meeting deadlines with a willingness to get it right no matter how many revisions it takes."*

Printing Company: *"48-hour turnaround, low-priced printing"*



HOMEWORK: Now that you've identified the benefits your clients get from your products and services, it's time to create a unique networking introduction. You use it to introduce your company at networking events or any place where someone asks you "what do you do?" Visit www.cuttothechasemarketing.com/prepUSP.html on how to create a networking intro that grabs and holds the listener's attention.

#6: What is your marketing budget?

Most established companies budget at least 10% of their gross income for marketing purposes unless their business is among other highly competitive businesses. Leaders in their field know to allow for even more.

New businesses will likely find that they spend far more to get established. To figure your budget, do the following:

- A. Write down your sales goal from question #2 \$ _____

- B. Next, calculate the percent of your annual income you'll put into marketing (I strongly recommend *at least* 10% for an established business, more if a new business) _____

- C. Multiply a. X b. above to determine the annual dollar amount of your marketing budget. _____

Once you have a marketing budget, you're ready to review your current and find new marketing tools to build your business!

To get started, list the marketing tools you are currently using and write down the cost involved to develop and use these tools during the next 12 years. List everything you can think of including brochures, websites, advertising, networking, luncheons, meetings, organizational dues, etc.



TIP: Can't afford to print a full color brochure? Want to send your information to prospects immediately after they express interest? Now you can save expensive printing fees AND send your info to prospects within minutes! Simply have a pdf file created from your digital brochure file and send the pdf via e-mail. A pdf file is readable by anyone who has or can get a free copy of the Adobe Acrobat software. Plus, you can offer a downloadable version of the brochure on your Web site!

#7. What is your sales process?

There **IS** a secret to choosing successful marketing tools...and it lies in determining your sales process.

Many highly successful service or product businesses rely on the following 4-step sales process model. This is a VERY effective, targeted way of doing marketing that finds and turns prospects into customers.

The goal of the 4-step sales process is to find prospects to whom you consistently provide targeted marketing. Since most prospects may not be ready to buy the first time they hear of your company, one way to get them interested is to offer them an enticing freebie. Your goal with the freebie is to qualify the prospect AND get their mail or email address. Once you have that information, you begin to send targeted marketing information to these prospects until they convert into customers.

Let's think about how this works. A newspaper ad typically needs to be seen 7 to 12 times before a person actually buys. If you rewrite your ad and offer a freebie in order to attract lots of interested prospects, then you can start marketing directly to them until they convert into customers.

Attracting prospects on a consistent basis also means you always have prospects in the pipeline, thus eliminating the "feast vs. famine" syndrome many businesses experience. As some of your prospects convert to being customers, and you're busy fulfilling orders, you're still marketing and adding prospects to your database, readying those prospects to turn into customers so you keep the orders coming. That is the key to marketing success!

Here are the 4 steps:

Step 1

Attract **prospects** with something FREE. All you want right now is their mail or email address. (Sure, if someone calls to buy immediately, that's great!)

Step 2

Consistently market to these **prospects**.

Step 3

As these prospects convert into customers, provide extraordinary customer service and a quality product or service.

Step 4

Consistently market to these **customers** to make additional sales.

#8. What marketing tools fit into your sales process?

Provided below are a few marketing tools you might consider for each of the steps of the 4-step sales process mentioned earlier.

Step 1 - Attract prospects...

Direct mail packages – Direct mail packages have a 1-2 page letter explaining the prospect's problem and offering the benefits of your solution, a FREE offer and a postcard or fax form to encourage the prospects to get in touch with you.

Direct marketing postcard campaign – Inexpensive, easy to do. Can also be used as part of your direct mail package campaign to get your name in front of prospects more than once. Make sure you offer the FREEBIE.

Ads – Find out what your prospects/customers read, listen to or watch. Then, look for ways to get your message to them. Write your ad so the message includes a FREEBIE to get prospect mailing addresses. **TIP:** Consider placing targeted ads in less expensive newsletters, trade publications, community/club newsletters, association newsletters, and commercials that fall into the required FCC allowance for local advertising.

Website opt in offer – Encourage visitors to your website to sign up for either a FREE periodic eNewsletter or email about product/service specials, etc.

Networking (business cards) – Find groups with members typical of your customers. Then get your unique selling proposition statement ready (20-30 seconds) and use it to introduce yourself to people who might want your services or products. Offer to add them to your mailing list (use a strong, FREE benefit to encourage them to do so).

Community networking – Briefly, community networking involves identifying other businesses in your area who attract the same type of customers you do. Then, you approach these stores with the idea that you can make them look good and as if they are thanking their customers by offering them a certificate that gives those customers a big discount or FREEBIE at your business. Once the customers visit your business, make sure you find a way to get their mailing or email address.

Step 2 - Consistently market to prospects...

Newsletters – one of most affordable, effective ways available to stay in front of your clients and prospects on a consistent basis while convincing them you're the expert in your field. Consistency is key, always answer the question – will this article, tip, success story, information convince my audience I have the solution to their problems?

Direct marketing postcard campaign – Inexpensive, easy to do. Send however often your prospects may need your products/services.

eNewsletter or E-mail – Send consistent emails about your products and services to your opt in list. Make sure the info you send clearly sets your company up as an expert – use success stories, tips and ideas on how to use what you offer, benefits from the prospect's point of view, etc.

Warm calling – if you have prospect ph #'s, it's easier to call them if they know who you are.

Press releases – send your press releases to the media AND your prospects, too.

Step 3 – Convert prospects into customers – provide quality & excellent customer service...

Thank you notes – handwritten are best, consider postcards as an inexpensive way to say thanks

Follow-up calls – check in after your customers buy and make sure they're really happy; it's best to resolve problems now than later.

Customer surveys – Conduct them yourself on the phone or via written survey or hire a company to do the whole thing for you. This will also give you good feedback to help you tighten your competitive advantage.

Step 4 - Consistently market to *clients*...

See Step 2 above and if possible, develop mailings that specifically target your *clients*.

(At this point in the marketing plan, many of my clients and I start working together to determine which tools will deliver the most bang for their buck. Unless you know how much each of these tools will cost to develop, it might be a wise idea to talk to an expert who can give you the approximate costs and additional benefits of using these.)

#9: Develop an action plan for each marketing tool you use.

First, develop an action plan that lists every single step required to create that tool.

Next, develop a plan that explains at what point you will use the tool to get more business and how often, where, and when it should be used. Make sure each tool ties into your sales process. Also, calculate how much business each tool needs to attract in order to meet your goals and objectives.

See the sample action plan on the next page.

Consider these questions when developing your action plan:

Why am I selecting this tool? What are its benefits or attractions for me? Does it fit into my sales process?

What types of resources will I need to complete the marketing project? (printer, photocopies, graphic designer, writer, paper, web site, marketing consultant, people to deliver flyers, postage, bulk mail permit, samples, etc.).

List the many ways you can use this tool to attract customers in addition to being part of your main sales process.

How much will this project cost? (Cost depends on your skills what resources you'll need to buy/hire.)

What is this marketing tool's price per piece?

How much business must I get from this piece in order to reach my sales goals?

Once you've set your plan in motion, track the results of each tool to see if you are on target with your goals. Make adjustments where necessary and watch your business grow!

**(SAMPLE)
MARKETING TOOL
ACTION PLAN**

Project: One color business card

Approximate Cost: \$25/500 cards

Benefits of tool: Must have in today's biz world
Easy to use as an introduction to my services
Use to build business by giving to prospects and referral partners

Is this marketing tool part of my sales process? If so, where does it fit in? Must have to attract prospects as an exchange for the other person's biz card with email or mailing address on it.

Action Plan:

1. Get logo on diskette from graphic designer.
2. Write up, layout, and proof info to go on biz card.
3. Determine how many cards I need printed based on how I plan to use the cards.
4. Take logo and biz card layout example to printer.
5. Pick up cards when ready

Use Strategy:

1. Use my business card to attract prospects and offer to add them to my free newsletter list.
2. Give business cards to everyone I meet.
3. Leave cards with referral partners, networking group members, and in strategic places where my services complement another service or product.
4. Include business cards with all marketing information provided to prospects or clients.
5. Add card to all invoices, thank you notes, proposals, and bags/boxes of products shipped/sold.

Amount of Business Needed:

Attract a minimum of 10 prospects per month.

**MARKETING TOOL
ACTION PLAN**

Project:

Approximate Cost:

Benefits of tool:

Action Plan:

Use Strategy:

Amount of Business Needed:

**MARKETING TOOL
ACTION PLAN**

Project:

Approximate Cost:

Benefits of tool:

Is this marketing tool part of my sales process? If so, where does it fit in?

Action Plan:

Use Strategy:

Amount of Business Needed:

**MARKETING TOOL
ACTION PLAN**

Project:

Approximate Cost:

Benefits of tool:

Is this marketing tool part of my sales process? If so, where does it fit in?

Action Plan:

Use Strategy:

Amount of Business Needed: