

Marketing Fact Sheet

Marketing is a key part of running and growing your business. To help you Ulster Bank has put together this free guide to help you get to grips with important marketing issues.

Business Websites

The growth in Internet use has created an exciting new marketing and sales tool for businesses. Nearly all businesses seem to have a website, but once you have decided to build a site for your business, you will need to consider its purpose and value. Who will design and maintain the website, and will it be for sales or purely to provide information for prospective clients? There will be cost and security implications, all of which need to be addressed.

Is it worth having a website?

You will need to ask yourself a few fundamental questions before embarking on a website:

- Does my business really need a website?
- What do I want it to achieve for my business?
- Do my customers use the Internet? If not, will they?
- How do the costs compare to other marketing activities such as brochures and mailshots?

A small firm that invests in a website can secure the same Internet exposure as a multinational company. There are few restrictions on the Internet, therefore a business can expand its customer base on both a national and international level.

Websites are the ideal medium for building up online communities and generating feedback from customers. Because of their online nature, they can easily be updated and improved, unlike a paper catalogue or brochure. A website will also allow a business to improve its customer service, giving customers an almost instantaneous means of communicating with the business.

Should I do it myself?

Choosing to develop a company website in-house is a big commitment. Considerations before committing yourself to this include:

- Staff - do you have adequately trained staff with the technical knowledge and design flair to set up a website?
- Technology - have you budgeted for the computer hardware and software that will be required to build and maintain your website?
- Maintenance - have you considered the ongoing costs of keeping your website up to date? This will include a member of staff required to deal with user enquiries and feedback, upload new information and remove old material, deal with any technical difficulties and check that hyperlinks work correctly.

Checklist for choosing a web designer

- Review their portfolio. A professional web designer should have their own portfolio of work, showcasing previous projects.
- Review online work. Can the designer provide examples of online work in addition to work from their portfolio?
- Check references. It is worth speaking to former clients to obtain feedback about their work.
- Review their training and qualifications. A professional designer should have, at a very basic level, knowledge of HTML and JavaScript languages.

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- Do you want a database driven site? If so, can the web designer work on the technical requirements as well as the design functionality? Do they have experience of this?
- Check their knowledge. Do they ask questions about you and your business? Do they seem interested in your business?
- Check their understanding. Do they understand the environment in which your business operates? This may include a limit on resources, the audience focus and unique selling points of your business. Do they know who your competitors are?
- Check their interpersonal skills. Is communication an issue? Can they get their message across to you without getting bogged down in technical jargon? Will other members of staff be able to communicate with them easily?
- Check copyright ownership. Will they turn over all ownership of graphics to you once the project is finished?

What does it cost to use a web designer?

Design costs

- This will include the creation of the overall look and feel of the website image, with background and navigational buttons. Additional parameters may cost extra to develop depending on what you require.
- Costs can be per hour, per page or an overall project cost depending on the preferences of the client

Marketing and hosting costs

- Web hosting services may include a set up and monthly fee.
- Registering with the most widely used search engines so that your product or brand name is brought to the fore. Resubmitting of your website to the search engines that you are not ranking well in, and submission of your website to link lists every month to increase popularity, are likely to be based on a monthly fee.

Maintenance costs

- A monthly fee may be charged for the updating and maintaining of the website.

Decide on your budget and ask several designers for quotations. This will give you a clear idea of what can be achieved within your financial constraints.

Hints and tips

- Determine the purpose of your website. This will enable you to focus on the design and marketing of the site.
- Very few businesses have the technological skills required to become a virtual business overnight. It is therefore essential to seek expert advice, at least in the early stages of the project.
- If web space is to be leased, it will be necessary to check how much control the supplier retains over the site.
- It is essential to ensure that the site does not infringe copyright laws by using graphics, photos or text that belongs to other people, without their permission.
- It is worth remembering that some browser software may display the site layout differently and that some of the site visitors will have browsers that do not show graphics. It is possible to check the layout of the design by accessing popular browsers such as Mozilla Firefox and Internet Explorer.
- Test the website. Before going live, try navigating through the website and printing pages from it. Also check download times, bearing in mind that many people are still using slower dial-up connections rather than broadband, and make sure all hyperlinks work correctly.

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- Maintain the website. Ideally, you should appoint someone who is responsible for maintaining the website. Maintenance will include uploading new content, checking for broken hyperlinks, processing user feedback and dealing with any technical issues.

Company Brochures

A range of distinctive and informative publications can make your business stand out from its competitors. Well-designed and high-quality printed material can be a useful marketing tool. However, the design and print of company brochures can be costly. The brochure designer and printer will need a detailed brief. Therefore, before producing printed information you need to be clear as to what it will be used for, its likely market, and the quantity involved.

Is it worth having a brochure?

Most businesses want to attract the attention of prospective customers and inform them about the products or services they offer. Advertising is a popular way of attracting attention and passing on information, so the effective use of promotional material is very important. A wide range of materials is used for promotion, but leaflets and brochures are among the most commonly used.

Brochures are usually longer and glossier than leaflets and are useful when a potential customer wants more detailed, often technical, information. A well-produced brochure can also help to reassure a customer that they have made the right decision in buying from the firm (particularly important for high value contracts). Boosting customer satisfaction can lead to referrals.

Choosing a print company

Should you decide to get your brochures designed and printed professionally, there are a number of issues you will need to consider before deciding upon a company to work with.

- Location. You may need to visit the printers regularly to discuss your plans or view artwork for approval. A print company located near to your business offices will be easier to work with than a firm located miles away.
- Some print companies may keep examples of work they have done for clients in the past. If you ask, they should be happy to show you these.
- Check whether a company is a member of a trade association such as the British Printing Industries Federation.
- Obtain quotes from a shortlist of print firms. You can then compare prices and contact the ones you are most interested in pursuing. When comparing quotes, it is important to check that the suppliers are offering the right level of service and that incidentals (delivery and packing charges, correction charges, charges for changes to schedules and cost of additional proofs) are also taken into consideration. An initial agreement should be reached as to what constitutes incidentals.

What costs can I expect?

- The majority of money will be spent on set up costs, so that a large print run will often be more cost effective than a short one.
- Other costs will be based upon the quality and quantity of the materials you require. High quality paper will cost more than lower grade material. Similarly, the number of colours you choose to use in your design will also impact upon the price. The more colours you require the greater the cost.
- Enquire about costing for repeat orders. If the brochures will be required repeatedly, then you may be eligible for a discount.
- The cost of finishing should be taken into account. Costs will vary depending on the type of finish you require (for example, gloss is usually more expensive than matt).

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- If the company collates, packs and delivers your brochures, this may incur an extra charge. Always check before you agree to anything exactly what services you can expect for the agreed price.

What should be included in the design brief?

In order to ensure that your specific printing requirements are met, it is a good idea to create a brief.

- The brief should describe exactly what is required in terms that are easily understood by both the customer and supplier.
- The printing job must be specified exactly, with details regarding deadlines, quality, quantity, paper type and weight, colours, packaging, delivery and so on.
- It is especially important to consider who will read the brief, how the brief will be distributed, the end result required and the budget available.
- Every time a brief is written, it will be necessary to reconsider the price and level of quality and service required.

Time spent creating the brief is well spent, as printing errors can be costly.

Hints and tips for producing brochures

- Promotional materials should always be designed with the target audience in mind. Literature will not be read if it does not appeal to the reader.
- Everything must be proofread. Several people should check the drafts. It is vital to make sure that all corrections are made (and no other errors have crept in) before approving the final version for printing. Somebody must also check headings, formatting and layout for consistency. It is important to check that nothing has been left out, especially details of how to contact the business.
- It is a good idea to look at other business's brochures. What is the target audience in each case? If there are magazines aimed at the same target audience as the business, what elements of design do they use?
- If the business publishes something containing someone else's artwork, for example a quote from a book, it may be in breach of copyright if permission has not been obtained. The use of computer 'clip art' is usually permitted by the licence that comes with the software but this should be checked.
- It is important to think carefully about the number of copies to be printed. The business does not want to be left with thousands of useless brochures, if, for example, the products or services change.
- To gain maximum impact from brochures it is worth seeking professional advice on design.
- Producing folders could be considered as an alternative to brochures. They can hold a combination of leaflets, information sheets, covering letters and so on. They are cheaper to produce than brochures, and more flexible as the contents can be made up to suit the recipient. Another advantage is that if information, such as a location map, contact name or price list, goes out of date, only the relevant insert needs to be updated and replaced.

Exhibitions

Exhibiting your business at a trade fair or industry show is one of the best ways of getting in front of your target audience. At these events you can launch a new product or service, conduct market research and tests, raise your company profile, find distributors and marketing partners, or simply network with other people in your industry. However, they certainly aren't cheap to do and need a lot of planning, managing and most importantly sufficient budget to do it.

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What are the costs of exhibiting?

There are a number of costs to take into account when budgeting for an exhibition including:

- Floor space hire (costs are usually based per square metre). Entrance and corner pitches are normally the most expensive.
- Stand design and construction.
- Stand accessories - display racks, flowers and plants.
- Furniture such as chairs and a table can either be hired or be bought and used again. Lockable cabinets, shelving and lighting can be hired from the event organisers.
- Insurance. This is required to cover the stand being destroyed, staff belongings going missing or valuable equipment such as computers being stolen.
- Staff accommodation if necessary.
- Couriers may be needed to transport any equipment to the exhibition.
- Transport (if necessary) - car hire or train tickets.
- Promotional material. This may include product and company leaflets and brochures, catalogues, business cards, and giveaways such as pens, stress toys, mouse mats and so on.
- Clothing. You may decide to order company clothing so that all members of staff working on the stand are dressed similarly, incorporating the business's colours and logo.

Is it worth doing?

Exhibitions can be an excellent way of promoting your products and business and making direct contact with customers. There are two types:

- Consumer - lifestyle orientated and predominately attended by the general public.
- Trade - bringing businesses together from one area of interest such as IT or accountancy.

Contact the exhibition organisers to get a breakdown of the type and number of visitors expected at the exhibition to make sure they are your target market. You also need to have clear objectives prior to exhibiting to enable you to choose the most appropriate event for your needs and provide a focus for your stand design. Objectives can include:

- Finding new customers (a key aim is usually to identify sales leads that can be followed up after the exhibition).
- Making industry contacts and leads.
- Obtaining press coverage.
- Launching a new product or service.
- Launching a new business image.

Exhibitions can be expensive so it is important to weigh up the potential benefits against the cost and time involved in preparing and attending an exhibition.

Checklist for exhibiting

- Set clear objectives for exhibiting.
- Decide which exhibition opportunity will be the best to help achieve your objectives.
- Produce a draft stand design.
- Provide the stand designer with a brief.
- Approve the final stand design.
- Book hotel accommodation and make travel arrangements for staff and equipment well in advance.

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- Erect and check the stand before the exhibition opens.
- Plan publicity for your stand.
- Prepare press release and event guide entries.
- Prepare company and product brochures, business cards and flyers.
- Select and order company clothing.
- Book insurance cover.
- Order or buy stand furniture and accessories.
- Organise staff passes and badges.
- Arrange telephones, fax and plug-in points for any audiovisual equipment.
- Know the route. Plan the travel route to the exhibition for both drivers and staff using public transport. Provide maps and directions to help them get there safely.

And when it's all over:

Party hard! Organising and attending an exhibition is stressful, so relax and enjoy yourself afterwards.

Hints and tips for exhibiting

- Keep the stand design simple, but still get yourself noticed.
- Make the stand inviting to visitors. Don't create barriers such as raised platforms as this can intimidate people.
- Promote, Promote, Promote. Make the most of the PR opportunities that the exhibition will bring. Get your business name into the show catalogue. Write a press release. Send complimentary show tickets to existing customers to let them know you will be exhibiting.
- The Exhibitors Manual is your Bible. You should receive this from the show organisers once you have booked your stand. It will provide you with all the information you need, from contractors information to recommended suppliers, build up and breakdown times, floorplans, and job lists.
- Arrive early. This will enable you to set up your stand and check everything is in good working order.
- Communicate with your staff. Keep all staff fully briefed and motivated from day one, so they know exactly what the objectives are and what their role will be.
- Communicate with visitors. Don't forget to think about how you will respond to different enquiries. You may encounter competitors, students, journalists or VIPs on your stand.
- Always over-budget. Budget 10% more than you think you need to cover the expense of exhibiting.
- Be in the right frame of mind. Get a good night's sleep beforehand. Leave socialising until the end of the exhibition.
- Get in touch. Always follow up potential customer leads made at the show.
- Evaluate the exhibition. Your first exhibition may not be amazingly successful in terms of sales leads, but the experience should be worthwhile. Learn from it.

Marketing Plans

A good marketing plan will outline the emerging trends and developments within the market in which your business operates. It will help to identify what your business hopes to achieve in the future, set targets, and perhaps most importantly, state how your business will achieve these goals. Writing a marketing plan may seem a time-consuming activity, however, all new businesses should produce one. A good plan can save time and money in clearly showing the direction your business should take.

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Is it worth having a marketing plan?

The marketing plan can be written and used at various stages in the development of the business. It should be an integral part of the business's start up information. However, it may also be developed (or additional plans may be written) to promote new products or target customer groups.

Writing down a detailed plan may seem a difficult and possibly unnecessary task, but by clarifying your aims and ideas, your business will be steered in the desired direction. As well as this, a marketing plan can reveal some of the potential dangers ahead and ensure that you are prepared to deal with both the threats and opportunities that arise. By carefully examining aspects of your product, your customers and your sales strategy, you will formulate a clearer understanding of what it is you are trying to achieve.

Once the plan has been drawn up it is important to remember that it is there to be used. However, do not stick to it too rigidly; it is a flexible instrument that should be updated as the need arises.

Aim to maintain a balance between keeping the original objectives in mind and adapting the plan to changes in circumstances.

What should be in it?

There is a range of ways to present a marketing plan. Enlist the help of your business adviser or marketing consultant. There are also some software packages available that can help you with your plan. The framework will be up to you, but the following layout may be useful to begin with:

- Scope or executive summary - summarise where your business is now and where it aims to go with the marketing plan.
- Objectives - realistic objectives should show what the plan is intended to achieve in terms of turnover and profit.
- Market review - these are the key facts and assumptions on which the plan is based. Make sure the plan and reality are consistent. What sort of environment are you working in? Who are your competitors? Segment the market - who are you targeting with this plan?
- Marketing objectives - these need to be clear and quantified, based on current and established trends as well as an analysis of what you plan for business development and how you can improve the current position.
- Marketing strategy - how you are going to achieve your objectives; for example, through improving your product, increasing promotion or a new pricing strategy. This should be clear and realistic, reflecting the practical implications behind your marketing objectives.
- Marketing budget - state the resources that you will delegate to marketing activity, detailing areas of major cost.
- Marketing action plan - what is the action plan for each strategy? For example, the selection of media for your promotional campaign, delegation of resources for product development and market research. By setting yourself clear objectives and activities, results can be monitored more easily.

Hints and tips

- Keep your plan simple and straightforward.
- A few key points are more useful than a complex strategy that may not come to fruition. It also helps if the message for your customers is clear and simple.
- Training in marketing skills will be useful. Courses often use case studies that give you practise in devising a marketing plan.
- Don't neglect the plan once it has been written - make use of it.

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Selling Online

An online service allows your customers to buy your goods and services directly over the Internet. Selling online gives you access to a global market, 24 hour shopping and the ability to compete with much larger businesses. However, there are numerous factors to consider, including dispatching goods to meet overseas orders, security issues, and the cost of maintaining an up-to-date website.

What are the advantages of selling online?

An online shopping facility allows customers to order and pay for your goods and services over the Internet. Advantages of online shopping include:

- Access to global markets 24 hours a day.
- Reduced overheads - the expenses of a shop are eliminated.
- Access to new customers.
- The ability to compete with larger businesses on an equal footing.
- Gives customers access to products and services not available in their area.
- Offers convenience and privacy for your customers.
- Appealing to a wide and varied base of customers. For example, online shopping allows disabled or housebound people easy shopping.

What are the disadvantages of selling online?

The main disadvantage of online shopping is the safety and security issues. Recent media coverage has highlighted the threat of commercial websites being infiltrated by computer hackers, or credit card numbers being stolen online. Although consumers have become more relaxed about giving out their credit card details over the Internet, worries about online security issues are still seen as a major obstacle to the wider take-up of online shopping.

Other disadvantages include:

- Slow Internet speeds can make websites slow for users.
- Difficulties in delivering goods to worldwide customers.
- The customer does not receive their goods immediately.

How do I set up an online shopping facility?

The different ways of setting up an online shopping site include:

- **Off-the-Shelf Package**

Software programs are available to plug into your business' existing website, with sophisticated wizards providing the basic set-up. This can be customised by adding graphics, installing software that runs credit card checks and buying a secure certificate, which installs security measures on the server.

- **Working with an Internet Service Provider (ISP) or web designer**

An ISP/web hosting service can take responsibility for all or part of the operation. They may offer a web design service and run the credit card facilities on your behalf.

You will probably want to start off your online shopping facility as cheaply as possible. A low-risk starting point is a simple and cheap online catalogue with prices. At a later stage, you can

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develop the site by adding a shopping cart to allow customers to purchase goods online. Customers must be able to find your website easily. Registering a unique domain name that users can associate with your business is the best way to achieve this.

What costs should I consider when of preparing to sell online?

In general, the costs associated with online shopping are low, although this does depend upon the complexity of your business. Basic considerations may include:

- An online shop will need 'shopping basket' software to allow your customers to buy online. Using an 'out-of-the-box' solution can be a cheaper and less problematic option. Alternatively, you will need to consider employing a consultant to design software to meet your particular needs.
- An online shop will require facilities for processing payments. You will have to set up a merchant account with a bank to accept credit card payments. A charge will be made for using the bank's credit card merchant facility, which may either be a percentage of transaction values or a fixed fee.
- You must take into account the costs of registering the website with a domain name and a search engine.
- You may need to seek the help of a legal professional when setting up an online shop. Online trading is different to 'normal' trading, so existing contracts and terms and conditions may need to be adapted accordingly.

Hints and tips

- Keep your existing customers informed. E-mail them to tell them about your new service and provide an introductory offer to encourage them to use it.
- Check out your competition. Look at competitors' websites to see how aspects of online shopping may be done differently or adapted for your needs.
- Don't forget the legal aspects. You may need to adapt existing contracts and trade terms in preparation for trading online.
- Your website should be maintained on a regular basis by updating your product range, pricing and content.
- Track how your service is used. Most web hosting services/ISPs can provide the business with a 'log' that indicates the number of hits received. This can be compared to the number of orders, giving the business an idea of how many hits are being converted into actual sales.
- Provide feedback areas on the website to hear your customers views about the service.