

Give your strategic marketing a boost:

Avoid these 15 common pitfalls to ensure success

There isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to developing an effective strategic marketing plan. There is no killer template that can be employed to ensure all the right boxes are ticked. And, sadly, no magic bullet that will guarantee success. But don't worry, help is at hand.

Our experience of creating strategic plans for and with our clients - especially in the B2B space - has given us insights into some of the common pitfalls. Pitfalls that individually or collectively can derail the best laid plans. Here we share fifteen to watch out for and how to avoid them to significantly boost your strategic marketing efforts.





1. Ignoring the past

Plans are, by definition, forward-looking but they should be informed by the past. Having a formal – and open and honest – “drains up” on last year’s plans and activities can produce some very valuable insights and learnings to recalibrate or refocus the coming year’s plan. Sounds obvious, yes, but many still don’t start their strategic planning activity with this simple first step. Don’t be one of them.

2. Not securing leadership buy-in

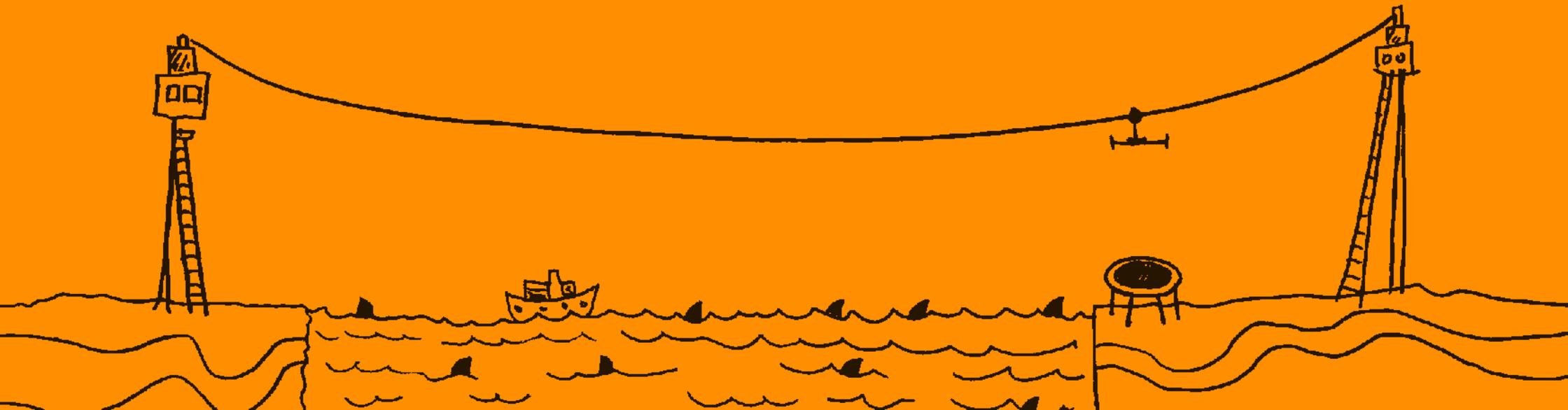
It only takes one person – or a small group of people – to develop and write a compelling strategic marketing plan. But, it takes a committed business to deliver one. This will only happen if all the key senior stakeholders are bought-in. Don’t assume they are, as so often happens. Ensure they are by formulating and executing an engagement plan to get them on board from the get-go.

3. Sticking to the same old boilerplate

The strategic planning cycle seems to come around quicker every year. So, it can be tempting to dust off last year’s plan as a starting point. We’re all guilty of this! But, we’ve learned that sticking to the boilerplate can stifle creativity and lead to approaches that are formulaic and predictable. Starting again with a blank sheet of paper can help unlock and reveal more powerful strategies and ideas.

4. Saying but not doing

The ‘A’ word – alignment – inevitably crops up when talking about strategic marketing; aligning the strategic marketing objectives with both the business and the brand objectives. However, just saying that the strategic marketing objectives are aligned is not enough. You must show this alignment in action through your tangible campaigns and activities.



5. Overcomplicating things

There is nothing wrong – obviously – with a comprehensive and well thought through strategic marketing plan. Nothing wrong as long as it's easy to explain to all key stakeholders. Making the strategy robust but also simple and single-minded is the challenge. By doing this you ensure that the strategy is not only convincing but, more importantly, it is easier for everyone to believe in.

6. Not validating customer insights

You cannot engage customers or develop campaigns that resonate with them without a deep understanding of their needs and motivations. But, many customer insights – generated through research – have been replaced by assumptions and anecdotes masquerading as fact. Regular validation of segmentation models and personas will ensure that insights are relevant and accurate.

7. Underestimating the competition

It's always surprising how little information and knowledge exists within companies – especially in the B2B space – about their competitive set. Without this understanding, propositions that were assumed to be differentiating end up being “me too” – due to a competitor quietly upping their game without your knowledge. It's easy to become internally focused. Take the time to look outwards. Regularly audit your current competitors as well as potential new entrants.

8. Having too many targets

What gets measured gets done. Indeed. KPIs are a given when it comes to assessing the effectiveness of strategic marketing activities. But, having too many metrics can result in teams not knowing which are more important than others. It can also be distracting and signal a lack of focus. Be clear from the outset what the most critical success criteria are and set targets for those alone.

9. Being unrealistically ambitious

Being ambitious is a good thing. Having objectives and goals that stretch you and the team is admirable. However, not everything can be achieved in a quarter or a financial year. For example, shifting customer or market perceptions of your brand takes time and may require a three-year window, with the foundations established in year one and then built on in year two and so on. So, be ambitious but manage expectations on what is realistically achievable.

10. Engaging sales too late

The success of strategic marketing initiatives, campaigns and activities is indelibly linked to the performance of your sales team. But, from what we've seen, engaging sales is regularly a case of too little, too late. Your sales team can only perform if they've been consulted, informed and armed with the right tools to deliver what the strategy requires. Early and often is the best policy when onboarding and engaging your sales force with your plan.

11. Taking existing clients for granted

Not all clients are equal. Some are more important than others. More specifically, the 20% of clients that deliver the roughly 80% of your profits year after year. So, it's remarkable that many marketing plans do not include explicit strategies for retaining and growing these most valuable clients. Segment specific strategies are key to minimising churn and avoiding complacency.

12. Choosing quantity instead of quality

Content strategies are core to the success of many strategic marketing campaigns. Great content is what engages clients, deepens relationships and builds brands. But, too often content becomes a numbers game with relentless weekly and monthly targets for articles, white papers, blog posts and video content for YouTube channels. Inevitably, quality suffers in the race for quantity. Focus less on sticking rigidly to the content calendar and more on creating and curating original, inspiring and engaging content that sets you apart and keeps them coming back for more.

13. Assuming existing channels work

Is your message getting through intact? How do you know? Are the channels you're using still the most effective ones for your clients? Regular validation of the fitness for purpose of communication channels and formats should be part of any strategic marketing plan to optimise return on investment. For example, posting printed materials – in a digital first world – might seem positively archaic. But, we've found that for some campaigns print outperforms email by three to one.

14. Having no contingency plans

Unfortunately, things don't always go to plan. Even though everyone knows this – and many times informed by bitter experience – very few have a Plan B or contingency plan in place. A healthy dose of paranoia is good thing. Having an “emergency kit” in place for when things inevitably go wrong is good practice and good planning. Not having one is either naïve or overconfident or both.

15. Not developing the right team

Your strategies, campaigns and activities evolve and change from year to year. Therefore, the knowledge and skills of your team also need to evolve to ensure success. This doesn't always happen. Without the right team around you, achieving your strategic marketing ambitions will be difficult, if not impossible. Regularly benchmark the capabilities of your team to ensure they're aligned with what's required to deliver your plans.



Higher customer expectations, channel proliferation, increased competition and extra pressure on margins means that strategic marketing is more challenging than ever. This is exacerbated by brand and marketing departments regularly being under-resourced, with teams consistently expected to deliver more for less. This is the context for this simple guide: a quick reminder of the things we all know we shouldn't do - or things we should avoid when it comes to strategic marketing but, for whatever reason, we don't. We hope you found them helpful. If you know of any other pitfalls worth avoiding please feel free to share with us!

It's a wide-ranging and challenging subject to chew over, so we thought you'd appreciate a little Boost to help you along. And while you're at it, get in touch and we'll share our experience.

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