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# Are You Planning to Fail?

By: Jennifer Marsnik

Benjamin Franklin is credited with the quote, *“If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.”* This philosophy may be applied to any number of things in life, but it certainly holds true in business. Most companies understand the importance of planning and are disciplined at annual budgeting. At the very least, they have a basic vision for their future and good intentions of mapping out a plan for how to get there. But for many small and even medium-size companies, the formal process of strategic planning – particularly around their public relations and marketing efforts – doesn’t go much further.

## Excuses, excuses...

Executives and managers in smaller organizations tend to wear many hats, juggling a variety of responsibilities and solving challenges as they arise every day. Going through the exercise of strategic planning simply never reaches the top of their list – and understandably so because the effort can seem daunting.

Setting aside time to think about your marketing strategy requires some discipline. It demands thoughtful consideration, debate and discussion among key stakeholders, brainstorming sessions and putting plans in writing. For people who find no enjoyment in this exercise, it’s even easier for the planning process to fall by the wayside.

But there is risk in ignoring this important business function.

*“If you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up someplace else.”* —Yogi Berra

Even when your company is running on all cylinders, it’s necessary to take a step back periodically to evaluate where you are today and where you hope to be tomorrow. Even more important is how you will get there.

A marketing plan works like a road map, putting your organization on the most direct path from point A to point B. That said, it can include some flexibility to allow for alternate routes, in case you occasionally wish to take a more scenic path or because you encounter an unexpected detour. Having a formal plan helps to ensure that all your public relations and marketing-related activities are purposeful. This means you are investing your limited resources of time, talent and dollars on meaningful things that work directly toward accomplishing your overall business goals.

The absence of a working road map opens up the possibility of too many wrong turns or unnecessary detours (and expenses), which may cause a company to lose focus on where it’s really trying to go.

## Step by Step

There are several steps in the process of establishing a successful PR and marketing strategy. The first and most important one is to know what you are trying to achieve. Without clear objectives, it’s impossible to formulate a strategic plan that will help you accomplish them.

From there, you must assess your current situation, which typically includes a review of the market and a thoughtful SWOT analysis. Make sure you have the right message for the right audience and that you’ve researched viable platforms for getting that message across. With



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changing technology comes new and different marketing channels to consider every year, which is why the exercise of planning is so important today.

Next, put your strategy in writing. Be realistic about the activities that are right for your marketing mix, based on the traditional Ps (product, price, place and promotion), on your budget and, most importantly, on what you're trying to achieve. Consider every proposed activity or expense in relation to your goals. If anything in your plan doesn't work directly toward accomplishing one or more of the stated objectives, why are you doing it?

Once you've invested the time and effort to craft a strategic marketing plan, don't stop there. Implementing and managing the plan require discipline and patience, but are the best way to achieve success and increase your ROI. Assess activities along the way to ensure they're working toward the stated objectives and be flexible to make changes when necessary. Detours aren't always predictable, but sometimes the scenic route is well worth taking.

Questions about getting started on your 2017 PR and marketing plan? Contact Edge today! Our experienced consultants can facilitate the process, share valuable tools for establishing goals and assessing your situation and can provide information needed to craft a purposeful plan that will work toward achieving your unique objectives.

*About the author*

*Jennifer Marsnik is a senior account manager with Edge Marketing. She specializes in helping clients develop and implement strategic PR and marketing plans that support their overall business goals. Jennifer is a life-long Minnesotan who tolerates the long, brutal winters only so that she can readily feed her obsession with Minnesota Twins baseball.*



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