



## 10 Tips To Help Small Businesses Calm “Marketing Plan Panic”

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The fourth quarter, a busy time in general for many businesses, is also budgeting and planning time for next year. A lot of people are at a loss when it comes to deciding how to approach the marketing plan process and how to stay within time and budget constraints. To make for a less stressful marketing plan process, keep in mind these 10 tips:

1. **Think Strategy First**

An overall marketing strategy drives many decisions. If you first identify general goals, choosing appropriate marketing programs for a small business plan becomes much easier.

2. **Decide Format**

Putting together a general outline and deciding how you will publish the plan can help you better visualize steps you need to take. Examples are (a) a full, detailed report including Executive Summary, the plan itself, and back-up data, (b) a single summary sheet, or (c) something in between. Size and structure of the small business can help determine the scope of the plan.

3. **Set Aside Time**

A good, strategic marketing plan requires a certain amount of analysis. Early stages in the process go smoother with minimal interruptions. Make it easier for those working on the plan to concentrate by setting aside “closed” time during early planning stages. In a busy, small business environment, this can be accomplished by working during off hours or putting aside a short time – 30 minutes to an hour – each day.

4. **Brainstorm**

New, creative ideas flow more freely when people are not inhibited by preconceptions. Hold a brainstorming session, with two rules: (a) there are no bad ideas and (b) everyone’s ideas carry equal weight.

5. **Shorten The List**

Implementation suffers severely when there is an overload of marketing projects, especially in small businesses with a small or one-person marketing department.. The list of potential projects generated in the brainstorming session can be shortened by concentrating on those likely to be the most profitable and those that take advantage of the company’s internal strengths.

6. **Make The Plan Flexible**

Business does not operate in a vacuum, so your plan needn't exist in one. For example, the business environment may change during the year or additional marketing opportunities may arise. Building in flexibility to adjust throughout the year can avoid the pitfall of continuing down an unproductive path.

7. **Have Measurements In Place**

Knowing if and how well a program works can help you identify opportunities for improvement. In your marketing plan or in back-up documents, set explicit goals and measurements.

8. **Evaluate Past Programs**

Past programs are one of the first places to look when deciding which programs to include. Those that worked well may bear repeating. Those that did not should be revised and improved or omitted from the marketing plan.

9. **Timeline Critical Projects**

Effectiveness of a marketing plan depends on strong implementation. Including timelines for the most critical projects – especially those that revolve around trade shows, holidays, or other time-sensitive events – will help assure smooth implementation.

10. **Publish A Summary Sheet**

A marketing plan is easier to track and more likely to be used when a one-page summary sheet clearly reflects goals, strategies, and planned marketing programs. Post the summary in high-traffic areas and/or above desks to help maintain focus throughout the year.

For more information on writing and implementing a marketing plan, visit <http://www.MarketingPlanArticles.com>. The site focuses on making planning easier by helping small business people decide upon and find resources that are right for their specific situations. It includes articles and features other planning resources, including site publisher Bobette Kyle's marketing plan and Web promotion book, "How Much For Just the Spider? Strategic Website Marketing," and other online marketing plan tools.

**About The Author**

Bobette Kyle draws upon 12+ years of Marketing/Executive experience, Marketing MBA, and online marketing research in her writing. Bobette is proprietor of the Web Site Marketing Plan Network, <http://www.WebSiteMarketingPlan.com>, and author of the marketing plan and Web promotion book "How Much For Just the Spider? Strategic Website Marketing For Small Budget Business," <http://www.HowMuchForSpider.com>.

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