

*HOW TO CREATE
A MARKETING STRATEGY*

THAT IS PERFECT FOR YOUR BUSINESS

Written by John Jantsch



The role of the CEO in your business

Every business has a CEO, even yours. Now, you may not ever call yourself that, or when you do, it's only in the theoretical sense, but the fact is, every business has a need for the role of a Chief Executive Officer.

Every business also needs a VP of Marketing, Finance, Operations and all those other boxes you'll likely find on an org chart.

The problem with the very small, even solopreneur, business is that because you're doing all of these jobs, often concurrently, and you don't tend to departmentalize the various functions as you must.

In many cases, you most relate with the tactical work that seems to consume most of your day. The busy work is where you feel most productive, it's how you make stuff, sell stuff and ship stuff. I mean, who has time to fantasize about the goofy title of CEO anyway?

And that's the rationale we use so we don't have to do the really hard work.

A CEO's primary function in most organizations is to look beyond today, tomorrow, next month even. To determine the resources, strategies and innovations needed to take the organization to a place of unknown some 12 or 18 months from now.

That's the work we are going to do in this eBook.

So, put on your best CEO face and let's get to it.

Sincerely,



- John Jantsch
Duct Tape Marketing



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Marketing Without Strategy is the Noise Before Failure

*"Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory.
Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat."
- Sun Tzu, Art of War*

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Anyone that's heard me speak or read my books knows that I believe marketing strategy is far more important to the small business than marketing tactics. And yet, the tactical idea of the week gets most of the mind share of the business owner.

Strategy and tactics must go hand in hand in order for a business to achieve a measure of true momentum, but an effective strategy must be in place before any set of tactics make sense.

This Sun Tzu quote, borrowed from the Art of War and adapted for the title of this section, pretty much sums up my feeling on the subject – "Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat."



The reason strategy gets mostly lip service when it comes to marketing planning is because most people misunderstand what a marketing strategy really is.

So, let me start with what it's not. Strategy is not a wish list, set of goals, mission statement, or litany of objectives.

How, Not What

A marketing strategy is a clear explanation of how you're going to get there, not where or what there is. An effective marketing strategy is a concise explanation of your stated plan of execution to reach your objectives

To become the market leader is not a strategy – it's an objective. To serve our customers with honor and dignity is not a strategy – its mission. To double the number of new customers is not a strategy – it's a goal.



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Goals and missions and objectives are nice, but how you plan to achieve them – otherwise known as strategy paired with a logical set of tactics – is the surest route to victory. To become a market leader, you may find that an effective strategy is to carve out one very narrow market niche and dominate it. To serve your customers with honor and dignity you may find that an effective marketing strategy starts somewhere in your hiring process. To double the number of new customers, you may find that an effective marketing strategy is to build a formal network of strategic referral partners.

Now, each of these strategies will have a corresponding list of tactics and action steps, but the action plans and campaigns will all have your stated strategy as a filter for decision making and planning.

After working with thousands of small business owners, I've developed a bit of a 3-step process for developing a marketing strategy. I must warn you, though, that market conditions, competitive environments and trending opportunities all play wild card roles in the process.

A company considering a marketing strategy in a mature market with entrenched players will have a much different view of things than a company trying to bring a new technology to a market with no proven purchase habit.

When developing a marketing strategy for your business, the following steps come into play:

- *Who Matters*
- *Be different*
- *Connect the dots*



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Who Matters

For any strategy and corresponding set of tactics to work, they must appeal to someone. The first element, and in some cases the primary element, is who. Develop your marketing strategy around a narrowly defined ideal client above all.

This step alone may actually prove to be your strategy – to get good at serving a niche market.

Using your ideal client profile, (we'll go much deeper into how to create this in a bit), as the basis of your strategy also allows you to think very personally about how you serve them and how you use your tactics to attract them. Without this concentration on an ideal segment, your marketing strategy will often lack focus.



Be different

After developing a profile of an ideal client, it's time to find a way to appeal to this group. In my experience, the only sure way to do this is discovering or creating an approach, product, or service that clearly differentiates you from the rest of the market.

The market needs a way to compare and differ, and if you don't give them one, they will default to price comparison.

You need to dig in and find that one special way of doing things that your customers truly value. What's going on in your industry that frustrates people, or how to turn the way people have always done it into an opportunity for innovation?

One section in this book titled, 5 Questions You Should Ask Every Customer, unveils the best way to discover what your customers really value.



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In some cases, you may be doing something truly unique, but you just aren't communicating as your core marketing message.

If you don't take this step seriously, everything else you do in terms of marketing will be far less effective. That's how serious being different is.

Connect the dots

The final step in the marketing strategy game is to take what we've done previously – defining an ideal client and creating a core differentiator – and turning it into your stated strategy.

When I created Duct Tape Marketing, my stated strategy was to create a recognizable small business marketing brand by turning marketing for small business into a system and product. This strategy contained a narrowly defined ideal client and a clear point of differentiation.

Our mission was to radically change the way small business owners think about marketing and our "*marketing as system*" strategy became how we would do that.

Like most effective strategies, the gap in current offerings and positioning was what offered the clear opportunity. Connecting your strategy will also include careful study of the competitive environment and that of other unrelated industries in order to fill a need with your innovation or differentiation.

Let me return once again to Sun Tzu and The Art of War – "*All men can see these tactics whereby I conquer, but what none can see is the strategy out of which victory is evolved.*"

Now, before you determine whether Facebook is better for your business than LinkedIn or if direct mail is still an effective way to generate leads, start at the point where you will ultimately create the greatest possible impact – strategy!



The Four Ps of Real-Life Marketing Strategy

*"There is a home for the Four P's in today's business, but it's in the very mortar of the business and the story of its people rather than in a department on an org chart."
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Back in the early 1960's, the American Marketing Association coined the term the "Four 'P's" as a way to describe the essential elements of the marketing mix. Since that time, every first year marketing student has been taught to think in terms of product, price, place and promotion as they analyze case studies of companies real and imagined.



Much has changed in the last 50 years, including what product really is, what place entails, how package plays a role and, well, pretty much everything about what promotion looks like.

In fact, the very definition of marketing has changed dramatically enough to render the original Four P's somewhat useless as a foundational marketing and business strategy concept.

Today's most important business and marketing directive is one of building trust.

Engagement, connection and story are the new forms of promotional art. Price is a function of value and place has become bytes and ether more often than a shelf or an office.

There is a home for the Four P's in today's business, but it's in the very mortar of the business and the story of its people rather than in a department on an org chart.

The Four P's are now more about how a business is experienced than what it sells. They reside in the expression of human characteristics that turn commitment into culture and culture into customer.



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The following elements make up a redefinition of the Four P's for the fully alive business, and further make the case that marketing is everything you do and every business is really a marketing business.

Passion

The first element of the Four P's in a fully alive business is the passion for living that the owner of the business brings. When the founder of a business can serve their own personal passion and purpose by growing the business, good things can evolve.

The leader of a business must have a great sense of passion for the business, but they also must be able to connect that passion with purpose in order to bring out the desire to commit in others. Leading with passion is how you put yourself out there and do what you were meant to do.

"A ship in port is safe but that's not what ships are built for." ~ Grace Murray Hopper

Purpose

Purpose is how a business defines why it does what it does. It is the reason people are drawn to work in a business, it's the reason they come to life inside the business and it's the reason customers voluntarily become loyal ambassadors of the brand.

Purpose builds trust because it allows people to see their own values in action in support of something they strongly believe. A regular paycheck, important sounding title, or great deal on a cool product, probably doesn't invoke much in the way of purpose.



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Joining a business that is on an epic journey to create joy, change an age old industry, innovate under the nose of a Goliath, or just do a great deal more of the right thing – that's purpose. That's not simply a business, it's a cause and people will do some remarkable things inside and around the support of their cause.

Proposition (Value)

Organizations that understand the power of purpose also understand that purpose is what they need to package as their reason for being, core difference and position in the market. They lead with why and let those attracted to that why create their own definition of what.

In fact, brands that start with purpose over product can effectively enter most any market with the same positioning and compete with entrenched category leaders. I know it's become cliché to cite Apple as an example, but this computer company routinely blows competitors away in any market they enter. Think mp3 players and mobile devices – two categories they entered and dominate in, even though they're a computer company.

Apple's sense of why is so prevalent in their positioning that it wouldn't surprise me if they entered the coffee market and became the category darling.

Personality

The final P is how a business uses desirable human traits or personality characteristics as a vehicle to allow all that encounter the business to actually experience purpose.

It's one thing to state your purpose on a plaque or marketing brochure, but it's another thing entirely to live by a tangible set of daily habits and processes that offer proof of purpose.



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We are drawn to people and experiences that are simple, inspirational, convenient, innovative, playful, community oriented and filled with surprise. These are the personality traits that a fully alive business uses as the everyday creative language of the business.

These traits act as the filter for every decision and make up how the business is run internally and the brand is experienced externally.

Imagine what would occur if every college student today were taught these Four P's. Imagine if every business were started with this framework. Imagine if everyone could go to work for a company built with this way of thinking at its core. Imagine if we could experience these Four P's by simply becoming a customer of your business. What would that be like?

I don't know, I think it would be pretty great.



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Many small business marketers try to be all things to all people and find it hard to really focus or get good at serving narrowly defined market segments.

Actually, I don't think they really try to be all things. It just sort of happens from a lack of focus and a prospect on the phone asking for some help in an area that's not really your thing.

While it may seem like growth to take on a new customer, if that customer isn't a good fit, it can actually stunt real growth and may even create detractors that expected something other than what you were able to provide.

I think most businesses are suited to serve a narrowly defined market segment best – kind of like a sweet spot. It's doesn't mean the sweet spot won't grow, evolve and change altogether over time, but at any given time there exists a set ideal client or engagement for most businesses.

The trick is to discover what that ideal client looks like in the most specific way possible and then go about building your entire marketing strategy around attracting more of them.

Before I go much farther, let me say a word or two about the term "ideal." For some, this might simply be a subset of folks that can afford what you offer, but for others this might make up one of the six or eight clients you intend to work with long-term to help them gain a result. In the latter, you should be working with people who are a perfect fit or life may get miserable.

A perfect fit may mean that they have the kind of need you really can help with, but it might also mean that they value your unique approach and treat you and your staff with the respect the relationship deserves. A multiple red flag client, taken because they said they would pay you, will suck the life out of a small business faster than most any other dynamic.



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A less than ideal client can also come in the form of a person that you would love to work with, but they just don't really have the need that matches what your business does best.

Below is my step-by-step approach for helping organizations discover their ideal client with an eye on creating a communication plan with them in mind.

Profitable First

If you can, create a spreadsheet of your clients and focus on the amount and type of business you do with each. You might even rank them in order from most to least business over the last three years.

Now, carefully comb through the list with an eye on profit. Which are your most profitable clients? Are there entire types of work or types of clients that traditionally produce unprofitable sales? I know it sounds crazy, but most businesses take on work that, in the light of day, ends up being a waste of time at best.

The key is to understand the most profitable work. Is it a certain product or service, type of engagement, or even a challenge that you enjoy solving the most? (This is often a good time to resolve to get rid of work that you know is no longer profitable.)

Now Add Referrals

Now let's divide that list again. From the profitable work, identify clients who are known referral sources. Here's what I've found to be true: Only happy clients refer and happy clients are most often found because you or your approach is a good match for what they needed.

This narrow group of profitable clients, the ones that also refer, holds the key to discovering your ideal client profile.



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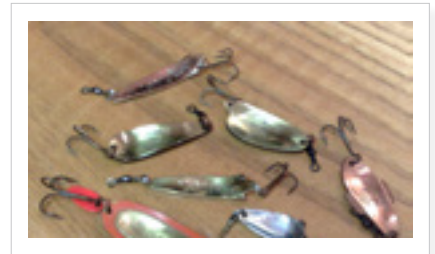
Demographics are Outbound

From your group above, it's time to start looking at the physical characteristics that are known about your ideal client group. You're looking for any common characteristics that are shared.

Marketers call this 'demographics' and often stop here and go buy a demographic selected list to do some outbound marketing. While I think demographics, such as age, income and even zip code, can be important, they are only a part of the story and are useful in an outbound marketing kind of way.

Behavior is Inbound

The secret to attracting, as opposed to hunting, your ideal client is to understand what makes them tick, what triggers them to go looking for someone like you, and what behavior they typically exhibit that might act as another marker for you to focus on.



This is the essence of attraction and how marketers create inbound marketing paths to their business. For example, if you know your narrow market enjoys tech-related conferences, you might show up at a few of these or even work to get on the stage. If they are active in civic or non-profit causes you might look to create partnerships with these types of organizations.

The Biographical Sketch

Finally, once you are able to pull together profit, propensity to refer, demographics and behavioral markers, you have the making of what I refer to as the ideal client biographical sketch.

The idea here is that you create a picture of your ideal client through the use of words and images that is so rich, just about anyone could conjure up a vision of such a client. The key question to answer for yourself and then ultimately for your staff, partners and referral sources is this – How would I spot your ideal client?

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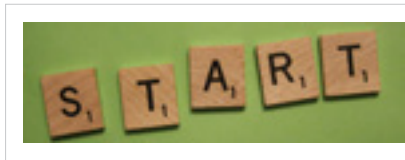
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You may have different profiles, and that's OK too, just give them different attributes and name them – either Bob and Susie or Needy and Squeezy.

If you draw a picture to accompany the "how would I spot" question, and then hold that picture as the filter for every marketing decision – "Would this appeal to Bob?" – You're on your way to building a business that every ideal client will recognize is built just for them – and that's something people will pay a premium for.

What if you are just getting started and don't have an ideal customer?

Finding and serving an ideal customer is equally important for a business just getting started and establishing a focus on discovering a narrowly defined ideal client from the very beginning will save months of wandering in the dark trying to be all things to all people.



The 5 steps below can put you on the path to discovering your ideal target customer.

1) Start with the Smallest Market Possible

This may feel counterintuitive to many just starting a business, but you have to find a group of customers that think what you have to offer is special. When you're just getting started, you may have very little to offer and, in many cases, very few resources with which to make sufficient noise in a market for generic solutions.

Your key is to find a very narrow group, with very specific demographics or a very specific problem or need and create raving fans out of this group. You can always expand your reach after you gain traction, but you can also become a big player in this smaller market as you grow.



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2) Create an Initial Value Hypothesis

In the step above, I mentioned the idea of finding a narrow group that finds what you have to offer special. Of course, this implies that you do indeed have something to offer that is special.

You must create a "why us" value proposition and use that as your hypothesis for why us. If this is starting to sound a little like science, that's because it is. You must always stay in test and refine mode in order to move forward.

Many people get caught up in trying to execute their business plan when the fact of the matter is the market doesn't care about your business plan. The only thing that matters is what you discover and apply out there in the lab beyond your office.

3) Get reality in Discovery Test Sessions

Established, thriving businesses have the ability to learn a great deal every day from customer interaction. Since start-ups don't have any customer interaction they have to create ways to test their theories initially and on the fly.

The key to both making and affirming your initial assumptions is to set-up what I call Discovery Test Sessions with prospects that might easily fit into your initial smallest market group. These are essentially staged one on one meetings.

This can be a little tricky since you have no relationship with said prospect. I often find that there are industry or trade groups that may contain your initial target market, and by joining these you may have an easier time gaining access to this group.

Another possible option is to offer free sample products or beta test relationships to those willing to provide you with agreed upon feedback.



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The main thing is that you start talking to prospects about what they need, what they think, what works, what doesn't and what they don't have now. This is how you evolve your business, your features and your assumptions based on serving a narrowly defined target.

4) Draw an Ideal Customer Sketch

Once you've trotted out your hypothesis and tested it with your narrow group, you've got to go to work on discovering and defining everything you can about your ideal target group. Some of this information will be commonly understood, such as demographics, but much of it will be discovered in your test sessions and through some additional research in more behavioral oriented places such as social media.

This is a great time to start your CRM thinking by building custom profiles that include much richer information than most people capture.

5) Add Strategy Model Components

The final step is to apply this new ideal customer approach to other elements of your strategy.

The thing is, when you discover your initial ideal client it should impact the thinking about your basic business model and overall business strategy. All great business models are customer focused, and now that you have a picture of this customer it's time to consider how this alters the other aspects of your business.

Consider now how this discovery might impact your offerings, your revenue streams, distribution channels and even pricing.

Consider how you can reach this market, who you can partner with and what resources you either have or need to have in order to make an impact in this market.

I can tell you that my experience suggests that you're never really done with this exercise. As your business evolves, as you learn and grow, this model will evolve as well, but perhaps the continual process of discovery is just as important as what you discover.



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Now, let's turn our attention to discovering your core point of differentiation, the one thing we'll use to create your core message.



Constantly seeking feedback from your customers is a great way to learn how to market your business more effectively. If you've never done this before, do it immediately, as it is one of the best ways to discover what you do that actually differentiates you from your competition.

I can't tell you how many times I've worked with a small business that had no idea what its competitive advantage was until we heard it right from the mouths of happy customers. Seeking feedback is also a great way to get better and plug gaps. I can tell you that if you're not receiving a large amount of your business by way of referral or word of mouth, you've probably got some gaps in your processes.

Below are five questions I like to pose to customers as they can provide a great discussion base for getting at what's truly important to you and your customers.

Create a form and get in the habit of surveying a handful of customers every month. I think you'll be rewarded with tremendous insight and you'll also find that your customers enjoy being asked what they think. One word of caution, don't accept vague answers like "you provide good service." While that may be true and good to hear, you can't work with that. Push a bit and ask what good service looks like and maybe even if they can tell you about a specific instance in which they felt they got good service.



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1. What made you decide to hire us/buy from us in the first place?

This is a good baseline question for your marketing. It can get at how effectively your advertising, message and lead conversion processes are working. I've also heard customers talk about the personal connection or culture that felt right in this question.

2. What's one thing we do better than others you do business with?

In this question, you are trying to discover something that you can work with as a true differentiator. This is probably the question you'll need to work hardest at getting specifics. You want to look for words and phrases and actual experiences that keep coming up over and over again, no matter how insignificant they may seem to you. If your customers are explaining what they value about what you do, you may want to consider making that the core marketing message for your business.

3. What's one thing we could do to create a better experience for you?

On the surface this question could be looked at as a customer service improvement question, and it may be, but the true gold in this question is when your customers can identify an innovation. Sometimes we go along doing what we've always done and then out of the blue a customer says something like, "I sure wish it came like this," and all of a sudden it's painfully clear how you can create a meaningful innovation to your products, services and processes. Push your customers to describe the perfect experience buying what you sell.



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4. Do you refer us to others, and if so, why?

This is the ultimate question of satisfaction because a truthful answer means your customer likes the product and likes the experience of getting the product. (You can substitute service here of course.) There's an entire consulting industry cropping up around helping people discover what Fred Reichheld called the Net Promoter Score in his book *The Ultimate Question*.

Small businesses can take this a step deeper and start understanding specifically why they get referrals and perhaps the exact words and phrases a customer might use when describing to a friend why your company is the best.

5. What would you Google to find a business like ours?

This is the new lead generation question, but understanding what it implies is very important. If you want to get very, very good at being found online, around the world or around the town, you have to know everything you can about the actual terms and phrases your customers use when they go looking for companies like yours.

Far too often, businesses optimize their web sites around industry jargon and technical terms when people really search for *"stuff to make my life better."*

Bonus: I'm a big fan of building strategic partnerships and networks. Another question I would suggest you get in the habit of asking your customer is – *"What other companies' do you love to refer?"* If you can start building a list of *"best of class"* companies, based on your customer's say so, there's a pretty good chance you've got a list of folks you should be building strategic relationships with.



7 Competition Crushing Value Propositions

*"This is how you define value in terms that matter to those you are trying to attract."
- John Jantsch*

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As you develop a marketing strategy for your business you must proactively create the value proposition of "why us" and build all of your marketing messages, products, services, processes and follow-up communication around supporting that proposition.

This is how you use strategy to dominate your market. This is how you define value in terms that matter to those you are trying to attract.

Below are seven proven ways to think about defining and refining your core value proposition.

1) We know you – So many companies try to serve mass audiences. This is tough for any organization, but can be next to impossible for a small business just getting started. One very powerful way to create a point of differentiation is to carve out a narrow segment of a market and explain through every communication that you are the experts in serving that market.

Divorce attorneys that specialize in representing men are an example of this type of approach. Obviously, you won't attract female clients, but a man going through a divorce might feel you have specialized knowledge and experience that other, more generic divorce attorneys, don't possess.

2) A better way – Creating a product, service or approach that clearly offers a better way to get a result, particularly a result I desperately need to get, is another strong way to demonstrate value and promote a business.



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Pretty much everyone struggles with processing too much information. Many have developed all kinds of systems to remember things, track things and keep to do lists under control. Evernote created a better way to do this and made the process simple, accessible and manageable on the devices that millions already used, so its value proposition offered a very recognizable way to do something better and the company has grown measurably because of it.

3) One of a kind – Some segment of just about every market craves things that are custom made. The more markets are inundated with mass produced items, the more opportunity exists for things that are made to order or made by hand.

I believe the popularity of a platform like Etsy is due in part to this need for some to find and possess things that are one of a kind or made just for them.

If you can find a segment of your market that values this approach it can be a highly profitable proposition. I asked the owner of a men's clothing shop I frequent about the market for suits these days and he said there are really only two segments left. The low end off-the-rack suit, and the very high end custom tailored suit.

4) Access – Another interesting value proposition is to take a market or demand that already exists and disrupt it by creating access that isn't generally available.

Peter Shankman founded a service called HARO or Help a Reporter Out, based on this proposition. PR professionals and marketers had long paid thousands of dollars a year to gain access to a pool of journalists looking for sources to specific stories.



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HARO built a database and service based on this concept and made it available to anyone who wished to subscribe for no cost. The service became so popular that it began to attract significant ad revenue and Shankman later sold it to another industry disruptor Vocus.

5) Savings – Offering a market ways to save money or lower risk will always be a strong way to differentiate a business. Now, understand this is not the same thing as offering a lower price. The key to this proposition is to demonstrate how your product or service will clearly allow them to save money through the use of what you are offering. A version of this proposition is to show them how they can lower the risk of losing money as well.

Many of the cloud based Software as service offerings, such as Dropbox, do this very well. Dropbox allows many people to more easily share and store files without the need for server hardware and eliminates the risk of losing data by automatically offering backups.

6) Convenience – Come up with a product, service or business that makes it more convenient to do something that people are already used to doing and you've got the makings of a winning value proposition.

I read a lot of books, and the Kindle device, for me, is flat out the most convenient way to find, buy, read, store and carry lots of books around.



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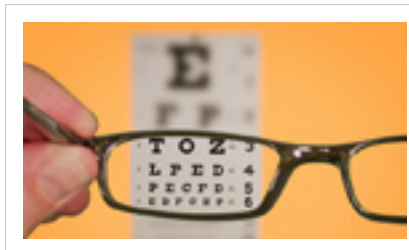
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7) Design – Great design is actually very hard to do, but when you invest in it as a core value proposition, it can actually be a tremendous way to stand out and attract a market segment for which form and function are equally important.

Apple has entered and dominated several markets in which they had no history- mp3 players and phones- using their design value proposition.

Building a business model and marketing strategy based firmly on any one of these proven propositions will allow you to carve out your place in the market. However, if you can combine several of these propositions you've got the foundation for something downright disruptive.



A collaboration between four close friends, eyewear maker Warby Parker was conceived as an alternative to what the founders felt was the overpriced and bland eyewear available today.

According to Neil Blumenthal, co-founder and co-CEO, "We just didn't think a pair of glasses should cost more than an iPhone."

Warby Parker's obvious innovation was to go direct in an industry full of middlemen, big name designers and licensed brand names.

The company designs their line of glasses, works directly with the manufacturers and sells its line of prescription glasses and sunglasses directly to the end consumer.



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In an effort to take on an entrenched \$16B industry, they created a fixed price of \$95 for all styles, ship out up to 5 pairs for no cost test drives prior to purchase and donate a pair of glasses to those in need for every pair sold.

The company was featured on CBS Sunday Morning and in the New York Times in 2011, sold over 100,000 pair of glasses and grew to over 50 employees according to its 2011 annual report – another innovation as it was delivered in a series of infographics rather than the typical dry corporate report.

Savings, access, convenience, design and a better way all rolled into one value proposition.



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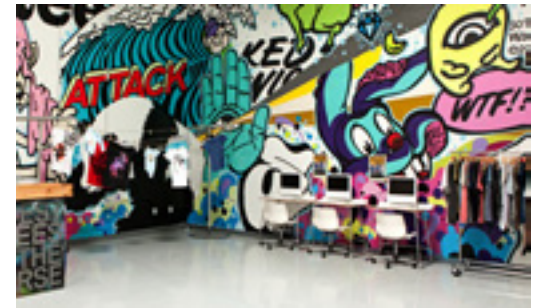
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I've spent a great deal of time wrestling with the idea of developing useful, real life marketing strategies for small businesses and have concluded that there are a handful of characteristics that can be mined, explored and shaped in order to make marketing strategy the foundation of business building.

The key to discovering an effective marketing strategy lies in understanding first that its essence is much more about why a business does something than what or how the business does something.



These elemental characteristics are rooted deeply in human wants and desires and act to create a connection between a company, its products and services, its people and ultimately its customers.

I believe any company can create a marketing strategy that will actually serve as the catalyst to creating a remarkable business by deeply exploring and embracing one, or some combination of several, of the characteristics outlined below.

Single-minded purpose

If I were going to point to a requisite characteristic it might be this one. When a company is built with a single-minded purpose and can communicate that "why we do what we do" in a way that makes meaning in the lives of its customers and prospects, magic can happen.

The idea of higher purpose can be a tricky one too. A customer can resonate with the fact that your mission is to bring peace and harmony



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to the world, but it's just as likely that there's a market hungry to do business with a company that believes bringing beauty to the world through incredibly simple design is why they do what they do.

The key is a thorough understanding and simple and consistent communication of the why. You can't fake this characteristic, but you can move your higher purpose front and center in your marketing strategy.

Some of the companies that enjoy the highest levels of staff and customer loyalty focus almost entirely on why they do what they do, as opposed to simply trying to do what they do better.

The product is almost secondary to this single-minded purpose – Shatto Milk Company's marketing strategy is one that claims to bring a return to what's good about creating all-natural products in small, hand crafted batches and, by the way, we sell dairy products.

Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos, has said repeatedly that Zappos is a customer happiness business that happens to sell shoes.

Desperately seeking inspiration

People want to go on journeys they feel are epic in nature. Now, this may sound a little far-fetched if you're simply building a small law firm focused on small businesses, but every business can inspire.

We can inspire by telling stories, by communicating the why, by standing up for simplicity and by bravely connecting our own purpose in life with that of the business, and that of the goals and objectives of our clients.

Leadership, the kind that's drawn from deed and word, the kind that



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understands that the best way to get more is to want more for others, is inspirational. Firms that draw commitment from customers and staff give them a way to sign up for something that can allow them to be their best self.

Steve Jobs is cited more often than any other company leader for his ability to inspire through telling stories about the Apple brand.

An obvious innovation

Every industry engages in some practice that customers just come to live with. And then someone comes along, either from outside of the industry or as method of survival, and shakes it up but suggesting there's a better way.

Creating what ends up looking like an obvious innovation in an industry and then embracing that change as a marketing strategy is one way that companies create a clear differentiation.



Rackspace, a hosting company located in Austin Texas, created an obvious innovation in the hosting industry by simply making a decision to provide real service. While that shouldn't seem like an innovation, it was in an industry that appeared to abhor actually talking to its customers.

To sum up Rackspace's marketing strategy – *"Fanatical Support isn't just what we do. It's really what makes us, well, us. It's our need to make a difference in the lives of our customers—no matter how big or small. Really, it's our way of life."*

Let us entertain you

People will give their last dollar to be entertained. I believe this has never been truer than it is today. Since so many of the products, services and ideas we sell can be acquired for free these days, the money's in the package and the experience.



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Fun, joyful, theater and stage aren't words that are always connected with business, but bring them in and a new world opens up. I had reason to spend a day at Google recently and they get this one very well. Work is often long, hard and boring, but when do we ever tire of play? Make that fact that yours is a business that's fun to go to work in and fun to do business with central to your strategy and people will be drawn to the game.

Step inside the offices of t-shirt maker Threadless and you'll be greeted by giant stuffed creatures, two Airstream "think pods,"



offices decorated by staff to show off departmental personality, and a basketball court in the warehouse. The place is definitely fun.

The role of convenience

This one goes hand in hand with simplicity and surprise, but it's something different entirely. Some businesses are actually hard to do business with. We may love what they do, but scratch our heads at how they do it. This one is all about non-friction, speed of change and a mentality of yes.

Take down the barriers to communication, give people the tools to do what they want, rethink meetings, eliminate the policies of control, trust your customers and staff and, above all, use technology to enhance personal relationships rather than wall them off.

Being easy to do business with is a marketing strategy that can become a culture and mantra that spreads word of mouth and drives customer adoption faster than any promotion or campaign ever could.



Evernote is easy to do business with. Their products sync across all of my various tools and just work, without the need to consult an owner's manual.



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Simplicity is harder than it looks

Life's too complicated. Instruction manuals and return policies and messages and mission statements and features and design are all too complicated. One of the most attractive features of organizations that enjoy high levels of commitment is a lack of features.



Simplicity is the most appreciated attribute of the products and services we love to love. And yet, it can be one of the hardest to actually achieve. This can't really be achieved by simply stripping out features. If this is to be a marketing strategy it must become a way of life that informs every decision.

37 Signals is a great example of a business that has embraced simplicity as a marketing strategy. They make great software that does just a handful of things very, very well. According to the CEO, Jason Fried, they spend more time considering what features to leave out of a release than what to add.

The element of surprise

Few things enamor like exceeding someone's expectations. This might end up sounding more like a personality trait, but companies that turn customers into volunteer sales forces fully understand and use the power of giving more than was promised and surprisingly beating expectations as a marketing strategy.

Who doesn't like to get little unexpected gifts, free overnight shipping, and hand written notes? And yet, when was the last time you got any of those?

Again, I return to Zappos. Zappos has an unstated policy of surprise. If you order shoes on a Monday, the order confirmation will suggest that you allow 3-5 days for shipping, but don't be surprised if they show up the next morning.



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For as long as anyone that's read my blog can remember, I've routinely uttered the phrase – *strategy before tactics*[™]. I firmly believe that lack of a clear marketing strategy is what leads many businesses to the ranks of the commodity.



In my opinion, developing and executing an effective marketing strategy is the most important job of any marketer, and failure to do so is the single greatest threat to creating anything that looks and feels like business building momentum.

Most people understand the notion that an effective marketing strategy is key, but few get that, in order for it to actually serve any purpose, you have to make it real.

You have to drive in into every corner of the business, and you've got to give your marketing strategy a personality that people in and out of the business can relate to.

Don't just state it, define it

The first step in bringing your marketing strategy to life is to figure out what it really is.

Here's what I mean: A lot of people would look at software maker 37Signals and determine that their marketing strategy is to develop



low cost, functional software and provide it in several versions with a 30-day free trial period.

But, closer examination would suggest their real marketing strategy is simplicity in all things. Of course, founders Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson are very vocal about this characteristic, but I still think people miss the connection.



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Make it purpose

37Signals has made the art of simple in software, simple in hiring, simple in pricing, simple in use – the purpose the business exists.

Take this excerpt from their stated values – *Useful is forever – Bells and whistles wear off, but usefulness never does. We build useful software that does just what you need and nothing you don't.*

So, while it's easy to see simple in their UI, you can also see it in their offices, their pricing, their hiring, and their entire business model really.

Turn it into a mantra question

So, if you've developed a marketing strategy and now realize you can bring it to life by way of a defining characteristic, you might be wondering how to drive it deeper into the organization.

In my view, the only way for your real-life marketing strategy to blossom is to make it an integral aspect of everything you do. The simplest way to do this is to use it as the leading question for every product, service, staff, customer, marketing and process decision.

Is this process simple? Does this product inspire? Does this decision keep fun alive? Is this pricing convenient? Does this new hire value community?

The one word people most often associate with Duct Tape Marketing is practical. And while I may occasionally miss the mark completely, I even ask myself if my writing is practical – and that keeps my marketing strategy and brand real and not just words in a marketing plan.



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Install strategy filters

In order for your marketing strategy to reach full potential, it must be the filter your entire staff uses for their work with each other, suppliers, advisors, and, of course, customers.

In my work with clients, we teach them to install a process that staff members use when considering a project or even action step. This simple process allows them to view anything they choose in the light of strategy impact and either change course or know for certain that they are taking real strategy action.

Create strategy scorecards

In addition to creating the key mantra question, teaching how to think with strategy and using strategy filters for decision-making, you have to find ways to keep real strategy alive in the everyday language of the organization.

One of the best ways to do this is to turn strategy thinking into a game. Create scorecards that reward people for thinking, employing and acting with marketing strategy.

If, in the case of an organization where entertainment and surprise are the prime characteristics of marketing strategy, bonus points could be awarded for taking action that exceeded a customer's expectations thoroughly, or for chairing a meeting that was both productive and fun.

The point is that, if the only place your marketing strategy lives is on a hard drive somewhere, it will suffocate and keep your organization in the ranks of commodity provider.

If, however, you turn it into a living, breathing, acting character in your business, it will become one of the most valuable assets your business possesses.



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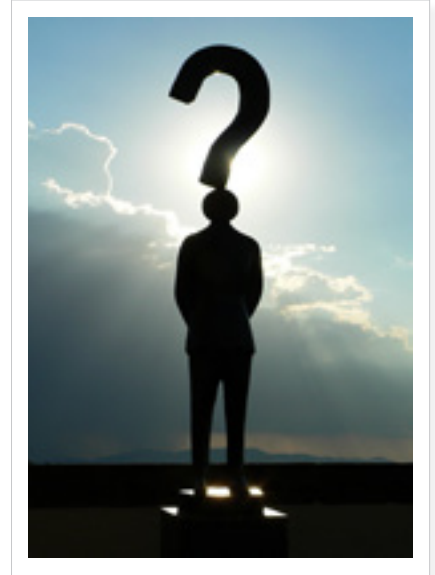
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Plenty of startups try to determine the perfect business model to take to market only to find that the market doesn't need, want or understand what they are presenting.

The fact is most books or courses on business models take this into consideration by suggesting trial and error scenarios and market hypotheses prior to launch.

Any business model, or plan for that matter, is little more than a guess and I believe that your best chance for getting that guess right is to build your business model based on a marketing strategy.



This assumes the role a fully developed marketing strategy actually should play in determining the direction of an organization. The fact is, most people, if they consider marketing strategy at all, stop at a core message, identity elements and perhaps a sales proposition and call it a strategy.

A marketing strategy is how you plan to use the resources available to you to build an ongoing case that your business, products and services are the obvious choice for a narrowly defined ideal customer.

If you accept this expanded view of marketing strategy, then I would suggest you answer the following questions in an attempt to measure where your strategy stands today, and where it could go if you understood and integrated it fully as your business model:



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1. *What about this job, work, or organization are you passionate about?*
2. *How does this business serve a higher purpose for you and your customers?*
3. *What value do you really bring that benefit your market in ways that your competitors wouldn't dream of proposing?*
4. *What's the dominant personality trait that you need your customers to associate with your business?*
5. *What does an ideal client look like?*
6. *What is the simple 10-word core message that explains and excites?*
7. *How will your market become aware of your business?*
8. *How will your market come to trust that you have the answers?*
9. *What are the revenue sources that you can tap to grow this business?*
10. *Can you describe the perfect customer experience throughout your organization?*
11. *What resource gaps and constraints do you need to overcome to achieve your strategy?*
12. *What partnerships do you need to create in order to achieve your strategy?*
13. *What would the result of using this strategy model to run your business look like?*





About The Author

John Jantsch is a marketing consultant, speaker and best selling author of Duct Tape Marketing, Duct Tape Selling, The Commitment Engine and The Referral Engine.

He is the creator of the [Duct Tape Marketing System](#) and [Duct Tape Marketing Consulting Network](#) that trains and licenses small business marketing consultants around the world.

His blog was chosen as a Forbes favorite for marketing and small business and his podcast, a top ten marketing show on iTunes, was called a “must listen” by Fast Company magazine.

Huffington Post calls him one of the [top 100 “Must Follow”](#) on Twitter and Forbes named Duct Tape Marketing on of the [100 Best Websites for Entrepreneurs](#).

To find out more about John and Duct Tape Marketing visit <http://www.ducttapemarketing.com/>.



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