

Marketing Essentials

Why promote your business

To succeed, any business must make its products or services known to potential buyers. When creating marketing materials, you will find that your success depends on setting the right tone for your brand, creating a compelling sales message and reaching your audience with your message.

Your target audience

You may be tempted to set aggressive targets such as reaching “everyone in the province” or getting your products into “retailers across Canada,” but the truth is that starting small can pay big dividends.

Reaching a large audience often takes enormous financial resources. Many businesses starting out may not have the money to reach a broad audience right away. Entering the national retail scene also requires broad distribution, which can be challenging for businesses that are not ready to ramp up production.

Segmenting your target audiences into smaller, more manageable groups can help make your marketing more productive, since you have the ability to target the consumers most likely to buy.

How do you find your best audience? Research is a great way to discover the potential audience segments important to your business. Classify customer groups based on the customers’ motivation; the unique demographics of your market; or how your product meets consumer needs and trends. Refer to the factsheet [Market Research](#).

You can learn a lot by reviewing available purchasing data from your current customer base. Evaluate which segments purchase the most and see if certain characteristics stand out for those customers. Also, look at segments that currently

underperform in terms of sales but where there may be opportunities to increase your market.

When identifying your target audiences, be specific, but not so specific that you only have a handful of potential contacts in a group. You can segment target audiences in a number of ways:

- Demographics (age range, occupation, income, etc.)
- Geography (proximity to your business, those in a certain province, by climate, etc.)
- Lifestyle patterns (interests, beliefs, hobbies, etc.)
- Buyer expectations (quality, price, etc.)
- Specialized needs (for example, vegan, organic, gluten-free, etc.)

The “Defining Your Target Audience” worksheet found at the end of this factsheet will help you identify your target audiences and what motivates them to purchase certain products.

Creating segmented lists for your target audiences is just one-step on the marketing path. Next, learn what motivates these people to buy and then make your messages designed to address those needs.

Describe benefits, not just features

For a business starting out, one of the more challenging aspects of marketing can be identifying how best to describe the product or service. All too often, owners want to include a long list of product features and not the benefits.

Features are your product's characteristics that come automatically with the product, such as flavour, colour and size. The benefits are the reason why a customer buys your product and how the product helps them, such as health, convenience and nutrition. For example, the product could be small creamed potatoes, pre-washed and packaged in a microwaveable container. In this example, the buyer then has no preparation or peeling, and the product is convenient and cooks quickly.

When you sell any product, you need to describe your product in a way that clearly communicates how you will consistently deliver value. Referred to as your value proposition, this element is the main reason a potential customer would buy your product. It paints a picture of how your product solves or improves upon a problem, the expected benefits of using the product and why the customer should buy your product over the competitors. It helps make a first impression.

In thinking about what your product delivers, it is helpful to put yourself in your customer's shoes. To help you determine the benefits your product offers, answer the questions in the worksheet *Defining Product Benefits* at the end of this factsheet.

Now, take the ideas you described in the *Defining Product Benefits* worksheet and see if you can narrow them down to a single motivating idea. As a test, determine if you can describe your product and its benefits to someone, you met in an elevator in the time it takes the doors to close and open again, which is about 15 seconds or less.

Remember, you have a limited time to capture your audience's attention and present the all-important information that will motivate someone to buy. When capturing the key motivators in a single sentence, consider these hints:

- Use simple language
- Be clear about your key benefits
- Anticipate or answer your customers' questions
- Include a unique or compelling story about your product to persuade your buyer

Arriving at a single marketing focus is a challenge. Still, those who do it well often find themselves ahead of their competition.

Marketing material must-haves

If you have been successful getting your story into one sentence, or a 15-second elevator speech, then it will be easier for you to create your marketing materials. Be sure to include the final elements as part of your preparations prior to developing any marketing materials.

Develop your positioning statement. This is a critical task to entice shoppers to try your products and then repeat the purchase. Positioning refers to the identification, development and promotion of a specific feature or product attribute or a combination of how you want to be perceived in the marketplace.

Place answers how your product will get to the customer. Ask yourself where the customer is most likely to purchase the product. Will you sell direct to the consumer, through wholesale or retail or a combination of channels?

This also means you have to think about how you get the product from your production facility to the marketplace. Is your customer coming to you or to one of the market channels?

Price effectively by starting with knowing your cost of production. Refer to the *How to Price your products* for more details on setting your price, as well as the related essentials of pricing factsheet series.

Promotion is the final step where you develop your marketing materials and begin to communicate about your product and brand to the consumer. The idea is to make them aware of your products, attract and induce them to buy your product over another. Refer to [Developing a promotional plan](#) for more details.

For example, if you have a food product, think about featuring the following in your materials:

- Your best-selling products with a short description and attractive photography
- The story of your product, selling the benefits to the consumer
- What makes your product different from others in the same category
- Specifications about your product's size and weight, the dimensions and weight of the case or shipping container and (if applicable) the shelf life of the product
- Contact information (telephone and e-mail)
- Website for customers to get more in-depth information

Remember, these elements provide you with an overview about your products to create the materials to sell your idea effectively.

Creating the marketing materials

Marketing materials must reflect the professionalism of your brand and show you can compete in a complex and crowded marketplace.

Today, websites are a powerful, and often inexpensive, way to present your company and product information. You should have your brand identity and website completed before creating your other marketing materials, such as a sell sheet.

Some final questions to ask yourself:

Have you been able to get your selling idea down to one or two sentences?

Are you simply listing your products' features or truly expressing the benefits they provide?

If you already have marketing materials, how current are they. What, if anything, has changed?

Has your customer base evolved? Are you still promoting the correct messages?

Do you have new products that are not included on the current materials?

Depending on your skillsets for developing these marketing materials, you may want to consider the following options:

- Hire a creative art director or designer to produce your materials
- Hire a professional photographer to photograph your product, plus any key personnel like chefs or owners
- If applicable, work with a food stylist who can make your products look amazing
- Hire someone who is familiar with creating marketing pieces for both the food industry and your specialized audience

More information, contact:

Alberta Ag-Info Centre

Call toll free: 310-FARM (3276)

Website: alberta.ca/agriculture-and-forestry

Defining your Target Audience Worksheet

1. Identify who you are talking to (List your target audiences and provide details about)

Characteristic	Customers most likely to buy	Secondary customers	Customers with potential
Age			
Gender			
Income			
Occupation			
Location			

2. Identify your value proposition (List the factors that motivate your target audience to buy your product)

Possible motivators	Customers most likely to buy	Secondary customers	Customers with potential
Price			
Quality			
Convenience			
Location			
Diet-food preferences			
Customer “pain-points”			

3. Find your target audience (List all possible gathering areas where your target audiences may be)

Where	Customers most likely to buy	Secondary customers	Customers with potential
Social Media			
Business Groups			
Associations			
Commodity Groups			
Events			

4. Reach your target audience (List all possible information sources (online, printed etc.) where your target audience may be getting their information)

Sources	Customers most likely to buy	Secondary customers	Customers with potential
Websites			
Blogs			
Social media (list all)			
-Facebook			
-Twitter			
-LinkedIn			
-Google+			
-Instagram			
Online news sources			
Community publications			
Magazines/newspapers			
Experts			
Peers			

Defining Product Benefits Worksheet

Answering these questions can help you identify your product benefits.

What exactly are you offering? <i>(This can be a list of features of your product)</i>
List what makes your product unique or different
What value, or end-benefit, does your product or service delivery? <i>(This time, try to communicate the benefits rather than features (eg. convenience, high quality, packed with nutrition).</i>
Does your product or service solve a problem or 'pain point' your customer has?
Do different audiences have different needs or expectations? <i>(If so, list by audience).</i>
Does brand identification motivate your buyers?
How does your product or service compare to others like it? <i>(Why should the customer buy from you instead of a competitor)?</i>

Does your product deliver a new experience? *(Describe it).*

Is price a factor in the customer's buying decision? *(If so, how)?*

If you had to identify one thing that is most important in getting your potential customer to buy, what would it be?