

Why research matters to your marketing strategy

So what is it that makes your product or service better than that of your competitors? Finding an answer to this question can make an important and positive impact to your overall success as a business. By finding an answer to this question you have the opportunity to strengthen your marketing strategy, come up with more accurate sales projections, and decide how and what to emphasise within your marketing campaigns. It just goes to show that a little research can go a long way in improving the effectiveness of a marketing campaign.

Amazingly only 1% of businesses out there do 90% of all market research completed. Whilst large, international companies can afford to hire research firms and conduct extensive customer surveys and discussion forums, for the average large or medium sized business this level of investment into market research is implausible and to be fair is also unnecessary. There are however a number of marketing strategies and exercises that all companies can undertake to better inform them of what customers want and what competitors are offering.

1. Find out what's happening out there in the industry within which you operate. Information can stimulate innovative ideas and can help you recognise great new business opportunities. It can also help you understand how your competitors are marketing, and what works well. You don't need to invest a lot of time and effort into this form of research. Simply subscribing to key trade magazines and visiting key news websites should be sufficient. Networking and chatting to others to find out about their opinions on ideas and opportunities that are out there within your industry at any given point in time can also be a very useful way to gather information.
2. Find out what your customers think of you. After all, perception is everything and what a customer thinks of your product or service will ultimately determine the success of your business. Try to get into the habit of asking customers on a routine basis about what they like and don't like about your service or product. Ask them to rank a list of descriptors for your business using a scale of 1 to 10. Keep an eye on trends, and if the way customers rate your services or products seems to worsen, investigate why.
3. Watch what your competitors are doing. By comparing your marketing strategy to that of your competitors you can easily see what your customers like best and how you can best communicate with them. Watching what your competitors do can also help you find new business ideas to keep your services and products in line with the times, and it can help you see how competitive the services or products you offer really are. To conduct competitor research, pull together a list of the things that are important to your service; for example price, turnaround or delivery times, guarantee offered, add on or free services provided, range of marketing material they currently use, ease of use within this marketing material, unique selling points. Now review the services or products of your competitors against this list. Are they priced differently to you? Do they offer any incentives that you don't? How does your guarantee stand against theirs? How would you rank their marketing material? Use these points to identify any opportunities for change within your own marketing strategies.