

Is Planning Dead?

(I sure hope not!)

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Over the past three decades in marketing, I've seen the planning process go from a 5-year exercise, to a 12-month glimpse ahead to the one-page plan, to "Who the hell needs a plan anyway if it's just going to change?" Lulled into a false sense of security by tales of businesses that have done phenomenally well with no apparent early stage plan (e.g., Facebook), many entrepreneurs now turn down their noses at the notion of having a roadmap for success and instead prefer to drive at high speeds down the marketing superhighway, randomly spending time and money until they reach the bank (or crash into a wall). Even if one has difficulty planning more than 3090 days at a time, the mere existence of a plan - and sharing it with others - helps keep even the most mercurial small business owner accountable and on track. All too often, great opportunities are lost due to the lack of preplanning and commitment.

Social media has helped fuel a "cowboy town" mentality about marketing planning. Many businesses are just jumping willy-nilly into this new frontier. Because social media is perceived as free and easy, it seems like the thing to do. But business owners are now finding that they have invested time and resources into posting on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, without necessarily having any cohesive strategy behind it - or integrating it with their other marketing efforts. Call me old fashioned...or a purist. But the basic principles of marketing - knowing who you're talking to, what your message needs to be, why, how often to communicate and how, and what it yields all still apply - regardless of whether you're dealing with a 60second TV spot or a Tweet.

Having come from the big brand world, I was very accustomed to publishing annual, quarterly, monthly and even weekly marketing plans. These did not have to always be elaborate documents, but merely documentation of goals, specific actions, and obstacles to be overcome - along with defined commitments to the necessary steps toward making great things happen. As a solopreneur (in 2003 and 2004), I used to write brief Power Points, laying out my annual marketing plan. Perhaps it was a bit unnecessary - but the discipline did me good. (I stopped short of standing in front of the room and presenting to myself in front of a mirror or creating a virtual Board of Directors out of my daughters' American Girl Dolls.) As my business grew, I assembled a virtual team of advisors and trusted mentors, and included them, along with my staff, in the development and review of plans.

So, if you don't yet have a marketing plan for 2010, follow these easy steps (no dolls or Power Points required):

- Create a simple document - even a 30-day one-page plan is better than no plan. Plus, if you write it down, you are more likely to actually deliver on it. If you'd like to see the template I use, just email me at nancys@theonswitch.com.
- Develop a clear sense of who your target customer is and who your future customer might be.
- Think objectively and honestly about what has worked for you in the past - and what has not; what has changed since you started your business; what your competitors (and business in other industries with similar targets) have been doing that's been successful.
- Share your plans with an expert who is not directly involved in your business - and listen to what he/she has to say. If you manage a team, involve them in the planning process - and ask them to set individual professional goals too. Seek out mentors, entrepreneur groups (like [Entrepreneurs Organization](#)) or other peer advisory groups.
- Consider all forms of media and test new techniques.
- Commit to a success measurement system and track results carefully.
- Follow the plan! (And, of course, be prepared to fine-tune, flex, and course correct as you go.)

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