Build An Aligned And Actionable Annual Marketing Plan

Forrester's Marketing Plan On A Page

The Challenge With Annual Marketing Planning
The concept behind an annual marketing plan may be simple, but building an effective plan is not. B2B marketers are often unsure of what a good plan should look like — and, marketing plans may suffer from too much detail, or too little, as a result. Overly complex documents are neither actionable nor easy to absorb and can quickly become obsolete. Simple plans tend to look like lists of tactics, placing too much emphasis on execution and too little on alignment with business goals.

Having the right inputs and guiding structure can help. Read on to learn how Forrester's Marketing-Plan-On-A-Page Template provides a straightforward process for building an actionable, quantifiable plan for the fiscal year.

Creating An Annual Marketing Plan: Guiding Questions
A sound marketing annual plan doesn’t depend on marketing alone. At the start of the planning process, marketing, sales, and product leaders should gather the information needed to build an aligned plan that supports the organization’s overall business objectives.

Aim to answer these three fundamental questions:

1. **What are we trying to accomplish?** Consider the corporate priorities and growth strategies set for the coming year. Annual sales targets, business unit or product goals, and regional objectives are critical inputs, as well.

2. **What is our current state?** Review information on the company’s internal and external environment, including the go-to-market approach, market segments, sales channels, product roadmaps, past product and segment performance, and buyer and customer audience data.

3. **What are our resources?** Consider marketing team members and their skill sets, partner and provider ecosystems, available marketing technology, and prior experience and success in program and tactic execution. The size of the annual marketing budget is also a critical input here.
Six Elements Of An Aligned, Actionable Annual Plan
Up-front alignment is the starting point — from there, having the right elements can help you build a clear marketing plan that provides just the right amount of detail. Forrester’s Marketing Plan On A Page represents a process for developing a plan and a template for capturing and communicating it. Each element lays the groundwork for the next, resulting in an integrated and cascading flow of information.

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1. BUSINESS OBJECTIVES
What the company wants to achieve in the new fiscal year guides marketing plan development. Understanding these objectives helps ensure that the marketing plan contributes to company growth and drives business impact.

2. MARKETING APPROACH
With the business objectives known, the next step is to determine how marketing will help achieve them. A few possible approaches include:
- **Innovate**: Disrupt the status quo through new offerings, business models, services, outsourcing, supply and value chain, and delivery.
- **Grow**: Acquire new customers, accounts, market share, or revenue with a view to displacing competitors and achieving revenue or market share objectives.
- **Retain**: Maintain or recapture existing customers, accounts, and wallet share with the aim of protecting revenue and gaining customer advocates.
- **Pause**: Cease activity in a business segment and let the current situation play out to allow activities in flight to work.

3. MARKETING PRIORITIES
These are the top focus areas for marketing in the coming year. Marketing priorities set, at a high level, what marketing will do. They align to corporate, sales, product, and marketing needs and often go beyond supporting financial objectives.
4. MARKETING GOALS
Marketing goals describe, in greater detail, what marketing will do in the near and long term to support business objectives. These goals are quantifiable. They define critical metrics for marketing performance and link back to the business targets.

5. KEY ACTIONS
These are examples of how the marketing plan will be executed. This element entails aligning current activity with the new marketing approach, priorities, and goals and deciding what new activities will need to be implemented. Consider these four options:

- **Drop:** Activities that no longer align to objectives and priorities and should be discontinued
- **Keep:** Activities that fit with the new plan
- **Fix:** Existing activities that will support new objectives and priorities with adjustment
- **Create:** New activities (keep to a minimum)

6. DEPENDENCIES AND RISKS
These are the factors that must be addressed for the marketing plan to work. Budget is one — team skill sets, technology capabilities, and current products may be important, as well. Document any assumptions that were made during plan development so that they can be validated as the plan is finalized.

**Improving Annual Marketing Planning: Next Steps**
A marketing plan lays a strong foundation for a successful year. Be sure to check progress made toward marketing goals, priorities, and overall business objectives in the months that follow plan creation. Quarterly reviews focused on assessing sales, product, and marketing performance in the context of business objectives can help ensure ongoing alignment.

Ready to take the next step? Contact us to learn how you can get a copy of the full Marketing-Plan-On-A-Page Template and hands-on guidance for developing a plan that meets the needs of your organization.