



PLAN FOR PROFIT

A Marketing and Promotion Guide
for Photographers & Illustrators

"When business is good, it pays to advertise; when business is bad, you've got to advertise!"
An old advertising maxim

Growing a creative services business takes initiative - and every initiative is most effective when it is backed up with a solid plan. Creative professionals who know how to plan and execute their marketing properly will grow in rewarding directions - both financially and artistically.

PART 1

INITIAL STEPS TO A MARKETING PLAN

Why a Marketing Plan?

A sound marketing plan is the foundational step in achieving your business vision. Creating it will take you through the process of clearly defining what you do, whom you want to sell your services to, and how you will market yourself successfully. It will help you decide how you are going to allocate your marketing dollars for the best return.

When creating a marketing plan the following steps - in this order - are necessary:

1 Know Your Brand.

Refining and clarifying a coherent brand is a precursor to creating your marketing plan. Whether or not he or she knows it, every business owner has a brand. To refine and optimize yours, think about the 'personality' surrounding the goods and services you offer and the manner in which you offer them. Position your unique qualities in relation to the unique qualities of your competition.

2 Establish Your Business Objectives.

You want your business to be successful and profitable. Set your revenue goals for the year, and outline how you plan to achieve them. The role of your Marketing Plan is to support these business goals.

For example you might have a goal to increase overall revenues by 10%, or increase your profitability by 5%.

3 Identify Key Insights.

This is one of the most important elements of the marketing plan. Take a step back and objectively look at what worked and what didn't work for you in the last year. What did you learn about your target audience and how can you apply that learning to your marketing strategy?

For example, you might have learned that you have much better response rates from targeted campaigns than from untargeted email blasts.

Also as part of this exercise, you could conduct a quick SWOT analysis on your business. SWOT is a classic exercise, and stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. This step will help give you some direction before getting into the planning process.

4 Define Your Niche.

If you're not occupying a niche: you should be. Describe it - for example: do you specialize in experimental aerial photography, technical illustration, realistic portraiture?

Next, ask yourself: what is the potential to grow your business within this niche? It is important to take the time here to focus on articulating your style; the way you think visually, combined with the way you execute your work. Once you have established this, you will know what to promote to potential buyers of your art. Knowing your niche ensures that you have strong, consistent messaging that will resonate with these buyers.

5 Get a 360-Degree View of the Market.

Define the field. Are you competing locally, regionally or nationally? What is your competitive advantage? Knowing the strengths and weaknesses of your competition enables better positioning.

You should also be very aware of challenges your buyers face, as this will help you speak their language in your marketing messaging. What are the key industry trends and economic issues? Finally you should take into consideration any regulatory issues that may present constraints or opportunities.

Setting Objectives

What to achieve...and by when? Finessing your marketing objectives is the best way to achieve your business objectives. Think "S.M.A.R.T": ensure that your goals are Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic and Time-specific.

Defining Strategies

Marketing strategies explain how you are going to achieve your objectives in 'big picture' terms.

For example:

- Grow an in-house business by targeting a unique communications campaign to those fashion corporations with in-house marketing departments who hire artists.
- Grow an editorial business by promoting personal work to ten prominent fashion magazines.
- Gain new large agency clients by focusing on building relationships with the key decision makers with the hottest fashion brands.

Working Tactically

Marketing tactics are specific actions taken to implement each strategy. Be creative in order to stand out from the crowd.

For example:

- Execute a multi-channel marketing communications strategy, incorporating quarterly email marketing, a re-vamped online portfolio, personalized letters to decision makers and unique print promotional pieces as a follow-up to those who respond.
- Grow your editorial business by building your personal portfolio, and hiring a PR freelancer to develop a unique bio and portfolio for distribution to key editors.
- Build your relationships with the large agency partners who represent the brands you want to shoot, by hosting an intimate cocktail party at your studios to showcase your latest work.

Work out the steps involved, and the timeline needed, to complete each tactic. A good way to do this is to determine the target date, and then work backwards -assigning completion dates to all the steps involved.

Making the Cut

A key insight from research commissioned in 2007 by ADBASE, was that unfocused promotion reflects poorly on your business and your brand. Generic emails from sellers who do not focus on a style, or even type, of photography used by an agency's client list was an oft-mentioned complaint of art directors, art buyers and photo editors from all sized agencies.

Definitively establishing the audience for your creative service is the key to marketing success. ADBASE gives direct, 24/7 online access to current contact information and offers you tools to target the key creative buyers looking for your particular service. Once you've targeted whom you want to speak to, ADBASE lists make it easy to focus your efforts on those buyers.

Budget: A Key Concern

When setting tactics, ensure that the individual estimated expenses roll up to the number you already decided you could afford. You can fine-tune as needed to ensure that you have a balanced, multi-channel communication program targeted to the right creative buyers for your specialty.

An emerging artist will have less money to invest, and should strategize creative, inexpensive ways of marketing. Veterans: you may have an established client roster and your business development requirements may be less, but your marketing efforts need to be finely targeted to ensure new projects support your reputation.

Sales goals in dollars are usually the basis for promotional budgets. Opinions on what this percentage should be, vary widely, but it is generally believed that 2 to 5% of your revenues should be allocated to promotion and advertising.

It is very important that you be true to your budget and look at how you can spread it out over a year to ensure you have consistent, continuous messaging. ADBASE is a strong proponent of splitting your E-mailer budget into quarters to make sure that you are promoting throughout the year.

Test for Success

Test your copy, images and formats, and different types of print promotional pieces, to learn what works best. Measure the results from everything you do, so you learn what works and what does not. In email marketing, test your subject lines as a simple start, as these are key in determining your percentage of opens.

PART 2

EXECUTING THE MARKETING PLAN

What does Promotion Look Like?

Promotion is the main activity associated with marketing a creative services business. Essentially, this is a mix of communications designed to convey information about a company and its products/services to prospective customers. The purpose of promotion is either to sell more products or services to existing clients and/or to acquire new customers.

A Promotional Plan covers all types of communication between the seller, and potential or existing clients. There are four basic components:

1 Advertising

This is paid promotion, and includes media such as newspaper, magazine, radio, television, billboard, subway, direct mail, banner advertising, flyer advertising and even 'viral', word of mouth campaigns. For artists, the most effective forms of advertising have proven to be direct mail, source book advertising and on-line portfolios.

2 Personal Selling

This important promotional activity involves personal meetings with interested buyers, showing your portfolio and selling your vision.

3 Sales Promotion

This range of activities involves marketing communication activities other than advertising, publicity or personal selling. Examples of sales promotion activities include building and maintaining a website, email marketing campaigns, a blog, catalogues or brochures, trade shows, and hosting a cocktail party or event.

4 Public Relations (PR)

PR includes any communication intended to create a positive image of a product or service. For example: you might hire a PR freelancer to write a press release about a showing of your newest collection of work (or write it yourself), and send this to relevant media read by art buyers (typically magazines and on-line vehicles such as PDN and American Photo). Although you have no control over which publications, if any, will publish your press release or talk about your showing, it is generally considered to have greater value than paid advertising, because any 'buzz' generated is actually an unpaid endorsement of your service.

Attaining the Right Promotional Mix

When you are putting together your promotional plan, it is crucial to achieve the right blend of all the activities discussed above. With an integrated marketing communications program, each type of promotion has a distinct function, yet complements the other types. It is always best to have a variety of media rather than concentrating on one specific source. To determine the right marketing mix for you, you will need to test different concepts and media. For example, you might want to test an email only campaign vs. a print & email combination campaign to assess the lift in response rate with the addition of the print element. Make sure you incorporate testing into your promotional plan immediately to avoid wasting money.

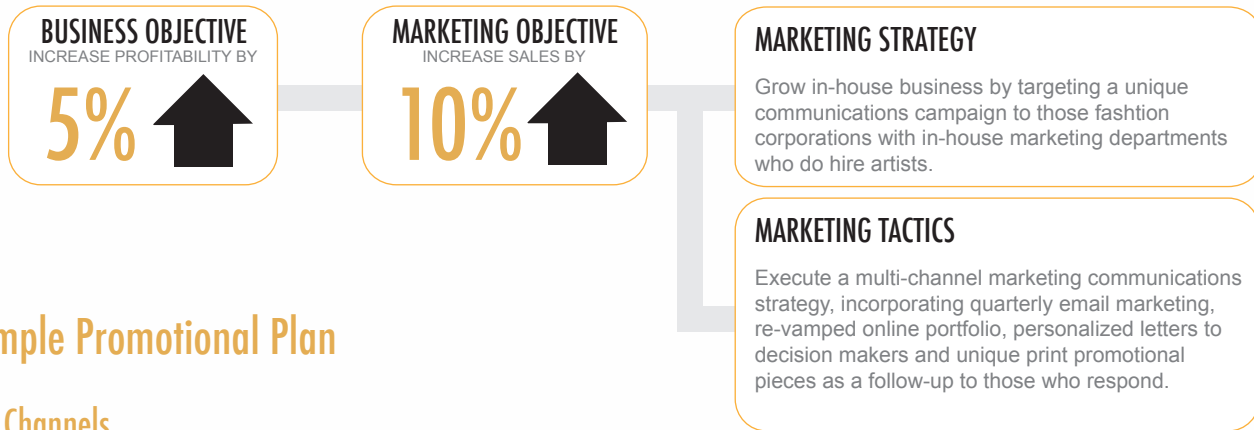
Response Strategies

Decide what your response strategies are as part of your overall promotional strategy. For example: if a buyer responds to two or more of your Emailer promotions by clicking through, plan to send a personalized direct mail follow-up piece for example. Your marketing response strategies should be built into your promotional planning and budgeting.

PART 3

**A PROMOTIONAL PLAN SAMPLE
TO GET YOU STARTED**

Below you will find a sample mini Marketing Plan and Promotional Plan. The Promotional Plan deals with the specific execution of the marketing objective, strategy and tactics listed below (taken from the marketing plan). In this example, the artist is a fashion photographer looking to increase sales by 10%, by growing business with in-house marketing departments. This is intended to be an illustration of planning format and the type of thinking that should go into this process, and we hope you find it helpful for these purposes.



Sample Promotional Plan

Key Channels

Online, Direct Mail

Specific Tactics

1st Quarter

- Update on-line portfolio
- Send 100 test emails promoting latest in-house fashion work to top in-house art directors, testing 2 subject lines
- Send 400 emails (balance of my ADBASE list) with most successful subject line within 1 week
- Send personalized letter to key contacts (most desired)

2nd Quarter

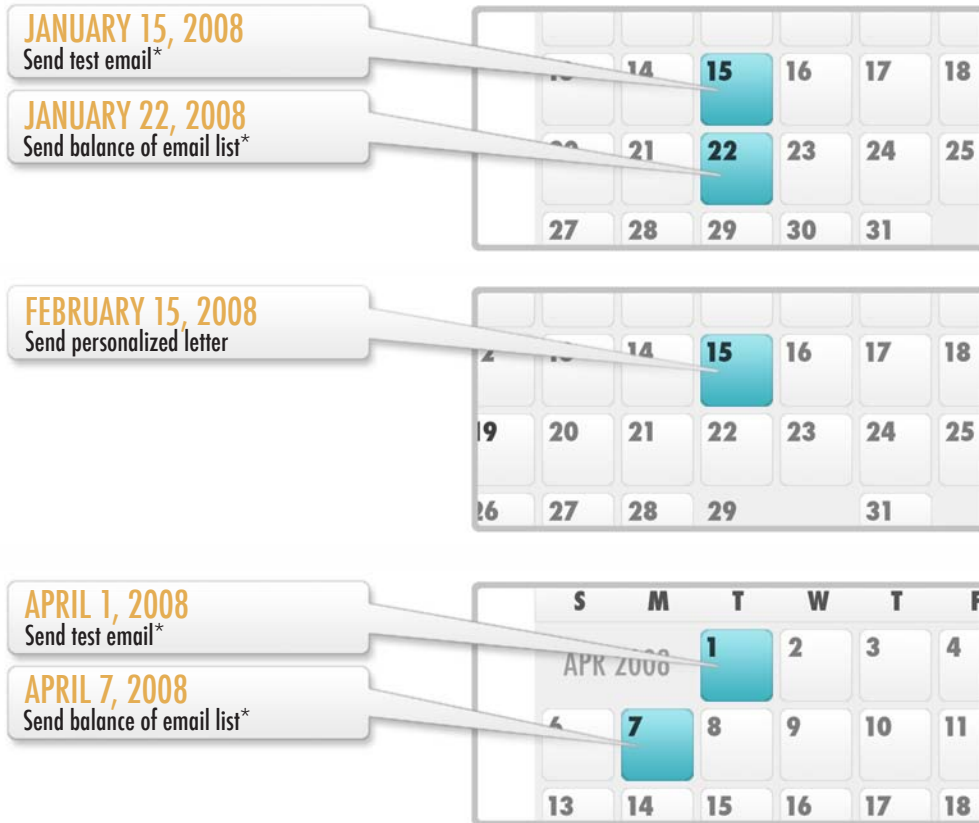
- Update on-line portfolio and website with latest work
- Send 100 test emails promoting new personal fashion work, testing 2 different images
- Send 400 emails (balance of my ADBASE list) with most successful image
- Send personalized (on demand) direct mail piece to those who responded to both emails by clicking through

ETC.

Key Messaging

Demonstrate unique flair for shooting fashion appropriate for catalogue, brochures and on-line, enhancing all detail and always conveying the appropriate fashion image for company/brand image. Demonstrate flexibility in working with brands at different levels Action-send leads to website to register for RSS feed for new work, send leads to online portfolio Ensure all contact info present and bold and encourage contact

Timing (see calendar below for details)



*send variable direct mail piece to respondents as responses occur

Campaign Budget

Postage for direct mail: \$250

Design and printing Variable Direct Mail Piece: \$2,500

Total: \$2,750

Measures of Success (it is key to be able to measure the results of what you are doing)

- Email Response Rate
- Registrants on website from email/print campaign
- Calls from direct mail piece
- # of new clients
- Increased sales

Expected Results (you should know what you want to get out of each campaign)

- 25% open rate on emails, 5% click-throughs
- 100 new leads on website
- 10 new clients
- \$80,000 additional sales

The Annual Promotional Calendar

Be sure to not waste promotional dollars by spending money in a slow season and then failing to take advantage of a stronger time of year. A promotional calendar helps you maximize the impact of your dollars over the year. Before planning the calendar, look at the campaigns you have run over the last few years. Examine the types of media, timing and response rates. Once you evaluate past promotional performance, you can effectively plan the most appropriate timing for your campaigns. And once you develop your calendar, try to stick to it so you can properly assess the results. Keep in mind that you may find you have to respond quickly to changing market conditions, and will need flexibility to adjust your strategies and timelines if needed.

Afterword: Haphazard Growth or Coherent Growth? A Conscious Choice.

Growth that takes every opportunity without cultivating a coherent vision, can only ever be described as haphazard growth. Such growth leads to a flurry of short-term activity - and perhaps also to a measure of long term 'success' too. But for the photographer or illustrator who wishes to grow in strategic directions for an optimally satisfying career, growth should be planned and executed with care. At the core of properly managed growth, is marketing. From its highest-level 'vision' stage to the specifics of implementation, marketing is a crucial process for visual creative professionals.