

Marketing 101

Finding a Job... Selling Beer — Kinda the Same

Excerpt from:
Land the Perfect Job In an Imperfect Market:
Strategies to help break through the job search clutter

There are those who believe (and I happen to agree with them) that a job search is essentially a marketing and sales process. In the marketing phase, you create your product - which happens to be yourself - dress it up, clean it up, make it look as good as it possibly can - and then sell it to a potential employer. That's it in a nutshell.

When your selling process is successful, you've got yourself a job.

To realize the full benefit of the process you probably should have some idea of what constitutes a sound marketing approach. This may be more difficult than it first appears. Unfortunately, many people mistakenly use the terms marketing and sales interchangeably, but the two functions - although inter-related - are very different.

Ideally, most of your marketing efforts should be completed before you venture out to begin selling. Your marketing program may not end there however. As you proceed through your selling efforts, you may find that you may need to modify your marketing plan. That's not unusual. It happens all the time.

In this chapter, we present an overview of the marketing function so that you can see how to apply it to your job search. In the real world of marketing, every plan is unique. While every plan may not contain every element to be discussed here, there are a lot of similarities and constants – and that is where we will focus our attention.

Where to Start?

Oscar Hammerstein wrote, "Let's start at the very beginning. A very good place to start."

So, what is our starting point? That would be our product. In this case, it's you! So what about you? What can you do? And, perhaps just as important, what can't you do? Where can you do it? Where have you done it? Where would you like to do it next?

These are all good questions, but to wrap your arms around the process, it would help to have some sort of framework. Fortunately, the marketing gurus have given you one. It's called a SWOT analysis. Used mainly for companies and products, you can perform a SWOT analysis on yourself as well.

By the way, SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Sounds a little bit like the questions we posed a couple paragraphs back, doesn't it.

Strengths. What your strengths? Maybe you have 20 years experience doing whatever it is that you do. Maybe you're adept at handling a variety of types of equipment. Maybe you've mastered several kinds of software. Maybe you shine at cutting costs or managing people. Any of those can be strengths.

From these strengths – and it's more than OK to have more than one – you can create a summary of qualifications for yourself. This also will give you a good sense of where to look for your next position.

Weaknesses. Do we really need to cover this? Yeah, I'm afraid we do. Honestly, what are your weaknesses? (Honestly is the key word there. Actually "honestly" is the key word through out this entire endeavor.) Maybe you haven't mastered that software. Maybe the only kind of equipment that you can run is the obsolete relics that your former employer was trying to squeeze a few more years out of. Maybe you have physical limitations that prevent you from performing certain tasks. Maybe you were never given an opportunity to be put into a leadership position.

Keep in mind, your weaknesses don't make you bad person. It simply means that these are not your strong points. No one excels at everything. No one.

Why do we need to do this? Knowing and accepting your shortcomings may help eliminate some positions and/or companies where, realistically, you don't have a snowball's chance of getting through the door. This can save you considerable time as well as the burden of rejection. Let's focus our efforts on the positive.

Opportunities. This is where we play match.com with your strengths. Your strong at X,Y and Z; here's a company that thrives on X, Y and Z. So which are those companies. Make a list. Eliminate the ones that may be geographically impractical for you to reach (i.e. commute.) Target the companies that are in an industry where you have experience.

Let's match your skills with their needs. Those are opportunities. How to find them? Scan the business news. Talk to your friends and colleagues. Who might open to adding staff?

Threats. Then, there's the bad news. What can prevent you from locking in with one of these companies? Maybe there's a burnt bridge in your past. Maybe your most promising company was just bought out by a foreign competitor and they'll be cutting people before hiring any. Maybe it's a youth-oriented company and you're... well, not so young any more. Threats can come from anywhere. The good news is that 98 percent of the time, they're not your fault. Get over it. Move on. As with your weaknesses, you don't want to waste time and effort on a not-so-promising target.

Key Messages

To successfully market a product, everyone on board needs to know about the product so that you can deliver a clear, distinct, consistent message. It could be that your product is new or re-designed, or cheaper, larger or smaller, more efficient, more cost effective, the first of its kind, a vast improvement over anything in the market today. What can I say about this product that might make someone want to purchase it?

In marketing yourself, you must decide on what to emphasize and what to highlight as well as what to downplay. (Maybe your strengths?) These messages may vary somewhat depending on the person you're contacting, the job in question, or the industry in which you're entering.

Which brings us to a very important juncture. This point is absolutely critical for the product marketer and the job seeker alike, and it may be the most difficult part of the process. And that point is honesty. There's that word again.

It is incredibly difficult for some product managers to look at their products honestly and give a straight-from-the-hip appraisal of what their product can do (and can't do) and why it's worth whatever you hope to be charging for it.

The same is true for the job seeker. You may think you ran the department at your last job, but can you give yourself that title on your resume. Not a good idea. Can you detail what your functions were and what successes you had? Absolutely. But, again, you have to be painfully honest. If, because of you, sales went up 12 percent – great! But 12 percent is not “nearly 25 percent.” Can you round up 12 percent? Maybe, but in no one's math does 12 = 25.

“But everyone lies on their resumes!” A tired, old argument, to be sure. One can also say that people murder each other everyday too, but that doesn’t make it right. On any number of fronts, you’re better off not getting a job by being honest, than landing a job based on a lie (or an exaggeration, or an embellishment) and having to explain it when you’re found out. (And, don’t kid yourself, eventually you will be found out.)

Now, back to the matters at hand.

Features, Advantages and Benefits

Every successful product has these three elements. To help distinguish one from the other and to help appreciate the differences, we’ll use the example of automobile tires.

Features. Features are those elements of the product that make it new, special, or worthy of the customer’s interest. In automobile tires, it may be the composite of which the tire is made; or, it might be the tread design.

Advantages. Advantages have to do with why these features are important. A new composite of automobile tire may result in the tire wearing longer. A new tread design may provide better handling.

Benefits. The benefits are how the customer profits from these advantages. Having a tire that wears longer is a financial benefit. You’re getting more tire for your money. The improved handling may make your vehicle easier to drive or may provide greater safety.

	AUTOMOBILE TIRE	JOB APPLICANT
FEATURES	New composite materials. New tread design.	Examples: Education. Work history. Industry experience. Skills.
ADVANTAGES	Wears longer. Improved handling.	Examples: Needs less training. Able to hit the ground running. Can deal with new circumstances + challenges. Good fit for your company.
BENEFITS	Saves money. Makes the car safer.	Immediately productive + more productive. Better return on the employer’s investment.

Audience

If you're marketing a product, you have to ask yourself: Who do I need to reach to be successful in my plan? It could be the end-use customer. It could be a key decision maker who doesn't actually use the product, but is integral to making the purchasing decision. It could be a dealer or distributor. It could be a purchasing manager. It could be a retail outlet that would stock your product. It could include a government regulator. It all depends on your product(s) and the industry where you do business.

As a job seeker, your key audiences are also varied. They are human resource professionals, recruiters (or headhunters), the final decision makers – which could be the person making the hiring decision, or the person for whom you would be working (who are not necessarily the same person). In addition, you need to include colleagues, friends, family, or former co-workers and vendors, etc. Anyone who can assist in your quest.

Work Your Plan

Finally, we reach the real meat and potatoes of your plan. Again, the similarities with products and job searches are intriguing to say the least.

Let's start with the overall goal. In business, the overall goal is almost invariably to make money. In the job search, it's simply to find – not just a job, but the job that you want; the job that provides for you financially and professionally. You want a job that you will find satisfying and fulfilling.

With your goal in place, we turn our attention to the objectives, strategies and tactics.

"Wait a minute. Shouldn't the objective be to get a job?" Well, you're close. Let's do some hypothetical comparisons.

	MARKETING PLAN	JOB SEARCH
OBJECTIVES	Get established in a new territory. Take market share from a competitor. Become the low-cost (or high-end) product in the market.	Develop a list of suitable target companies in my industry or geographic area. Secure no less than x-number of interviews in the first month of your job search.

STRATEGIES	<p>Create a new distribution network. Re-tool the product; design new packaging. Commit to an aggressive advertising and/or social media campaign. Develop a list of target customers who are critical to your campaign.</p>	<p>Employ multiple sources of potential company factual information (i.e. library reference lists + lists compiled from contacts with former co-workers, vendors, etc.) Supplement the factual information with subjective information regarding company plans, industry developments, etc. Use this information to learn what is important and/or trending at your target companies.</p>
TACTICS	<p>Utilize your new distributor network to get the word on the street about your new endeavor. Selectively target your advertising to reach new target customers and/or to coincide with a key industry trade show.</p>	<p>Leverage the information from your research to gain a foot in the door of your target companies (new markets, new products, new competencies – and how you’re a good fit) to secure interviews. Follow up with all contacts (successful or not) to maintain relationships with them that can be useful down the road.</p>

“Remember: your resume is a marketing brochure, not a blueprint that documents your career history.”
– business2community.com