



Writing Your Marketing Plan: Where to Begin?

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The hardest part about developing or updating a marketing plan is figuring out where to start. A great starting place is gathering information about your business and the industry environment you are in, such as your competition, industry trends, statistics, etc.

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The amount of information you gather about your own business will depend on your company size. In some companies, this includes business strategies and plans; company marketing plans; pricing; and income statements. Employee knowledge is a valuable resource. As you gather information, turn to employees first and then expand your understanding through external resources.

External information about the business environment often takes the form of existing research, articles, competitive information, and industry news. While these are often available both

online and offline, it seems much easier to find information online.

Online Information

Now, it's so important to know where to search in order to find the information you need. Listed below are several places that might be a good starting point. Organize and collect this material as you find it. Purchase, bookmark, or file each resource so you can draw upon it during marketing plan development.

Information Sources

News Articles: A great place to start as they often lead you to additional information sources.

Industry Sites: Archives, press releases, newsletters, and executive summaries on these sites can provide relevant research findings and statistics. Bookmark these for future use.

Annual Reports: These documents and others are required by publicly held U.S. companies and often include statistics and other industry information.

Books: Go to the library or purchase online books for detailed insight and analysis you cannot find elsewhere.

Trade Associations: You will often find industry information, statistics, and membership lists online.

Federal Government: At last count 100 U.S. Federal agencies had statistical programs, many with data available on the Web. You can find the complete list at fedstats.gov/agencies/index.html.

Industry Newsletters: By reading and subscribing to competitor and industry newsletters you can get insight into current promotional tactics and other activities.

Search Engines: Search by keyword or drill down into directory sub-categories to find information.

Subject Sites: There are some general sites such as about.com and business.com, topic-specific pages. Check for pages relating to your industry or product.

White Papers and other Company Publications: Companies will sometimes publish free white papers that summarize the industry trends or other information.

This should give you a good idea of the content you'll need to create an unbiased approach to your marketing strategy and tactics.

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