



Four Key Ingredients



Illustration by Dave Swang for The Partner Channel

Spice Up Your Marketing

 Jennifer Culbertson

As marketers, we continually face tough questions about how to make our marketing more effective. How can we take our marketing to the next level? What's the recipe for marketing success? In today's market, "good" marketing sometimes just isn't good enough.

Here are four main ingredients that can help spice up your efforts, and when combined together, can help get you on your way to producing even better results:

- » **Content** – creating and delivering meaningful content
- » **Customer** – having a clear sense of your customer and making connections with the right messaging
- » **Consistency** – creating consistent and sustainable marketing
- » **Closing the Loop** – tracking, measuring, and quantifying results and ROI

Content

I cannot underscore enough the importance of having quality content that supports your marketing efforts, especially on your website and for social marketing purposes. For many businesses today, having plenty of well-written, informative, and relevant content is a prerequisite to extraordinary success.

So if "content is king", how do you know what good content is? The first step to creating good content is to be sure that your content will have specific appeal to your target audience.

Next you want original content, meaning content that's different and unique and not the same as everyone else. For instance, using white papers produced by Microsoft are often relevant and appeal to targets, but the content isn't necessarily unique or different from what the Partner down the street is using. So your goal should be to develop your own content that's interesting and very informative (as in for a blog or tip sheet).

Since content (especially original content) is a huge driver for search engine optimization (SEO) success, you'll want to make sure that it's not copied from another site and that you incorporate keywords unique to your business that will drive more visitors your way.

In addition to beefing up your SEO, having plenty of good content on your site will also benefit you in a number of ways, including:

- » Increase the "stickiness" of your site, meaning that people will stay on your site longer and will keep coming back
- » Increase your credibility, build rapport, and position your company as a thought-leader through original content such as informative articles or how-to pieces
- » Make it much more likely that websites will link to you; the extra links coming to your site will improve your position in the search engines

- » Gain free exposure to the exact market you're targeting by offering original articles and papers to other sites through article syndication

If you have only a few pages of company and product information on your website, now's the time to get some quality related content uploaded as soon as you can. Writing the content on your own is the first option, but if you don't have time or need writing assistance, there are plenty of qualified writers on websites such as guru.com, and elance.com.

Finally, always try to update your website content as much as possible to drive regular visitors to your site and increase SEO rankings.

Customer

However good your product or service is, the simple truth is that no one will buy it if they believe they don't need it. You won't persuade anyone that they want or need to buy what you're offering unless you clearly understand what it is your customers really want.

"Know thy customers" should be one of your marketing mantras from the start. Knowing and understanding customer needs is at the center of every successful business and is a key component to marketing success. I can't tell you how many times I have seen marketing programs and campaigns where this is totally overlooked.

If you don't know who your customers are and what their pains might be, you will be wasting your hard-earned marketing dollars on messages that won't resonate or are meaningless. To be more effective, you've got to shift your mindset and put yourself in your ideal customers' shoes. Make it all about your audience and talk about what's important to them.

The bottom line here is this: The more relevant, compelling, and motivating your message is to your audience, the more successful your marketing efforts will be.

Consistency

I've seen many great marketing campaigns get yanked before they should have because they didn't generate immediate results. Why does this happen? Many organizations fail to realize that in marketing things take time, and it's more like a marathon versus a sprint.

That's why it's imperative that your efforts are consistent and that you use a variety of tactics and vary your approach as you go along. I cringe when I hear someone say, "well, we tried that, and it didn't work so we are not wasting our money on marketing." And then two months later they wonder why their sales pipeline dried up.

You want to strive to deliver multiple touches in your marketing. "Drip marketing" works because it delivers consistent "touches" over time. The medium that you use to communicate might

change (e-mail, printed, online, direct mail, advertising, and so on), but a consistent message delivered to the right people will pay dividends over time.

Consistency in how you present your marketing materials is also critical to success. The way you use your logo, colors, and other graphical elements also needs to be consistent. If you take your sales materials, direct mail pieces, newsletters, website, and other marketing communications and lay them out on a table, do they look like a single, cohesive, successful company? Or does it look inconsistent and chaotic? A consistent look and feel for outward-facing communications sends a message about your company. What message are you sending?

Consistency in your marketing drives the perception of credibility, quality, and value. And, delivering a seamless experience for prospects and customers will make the difference in your marketing.

Closing the Loop

Last but certainly not least are tracking, measurement, and quantifying results. I often refer to this as “closing the loop”, where you track and measure the results of marketing and evaluate to improve future marketing efforts. First of all, you should always establish goals for your marketing campaigns

and programs at the outset so that you can benchmark and improve. Tracking and measurement will also allow you to report back to your management on results and help get further support and funding for future marketing.

The key to measurement is determining which data should be collected. Your marketing results can be measured in a variety of ways such as cost per lead, cost per sale, number of leads/inquiries, percentage of revenue from marketing, how marketing performed year-over-year, and other metrics.

I have seen organizations use a variety of methods to track the effectiveness of their marketing efforts. Whether it's using simple Microsoft Excel® spreadsheets or more advanced software programs, some have struggled getting all the data they need to track, report, and easily calculate the return on investment.

I highly recommend using a customer Microsoft Dynamics® CRM to help track and measure your marketing campaigns. With a CRM solution, you can:

- » Plan and track activities, tasks, budgets, and details for each marketing activity
- » Tailor the right messages and relevant offers to a highly targeted list
- » Track responses and link them to cam-

paings and lead sources

- » Convert responses to leads and opportunities
- » Generate reports easily and measure your marketing success and ROI

Closing the loop on your marketing will help you discover more about what's working and what's not, and most importantly, give you the data you need to make the necessary modifications along the way. The best part is that you'll be able to concentrate on those activities that produce great marketing results and stop wasting time and money on less effective tactics.

On a final note, rather than slide into the busy fourth quarter with the same old marketing bag of tricks, try to incorporate these key ingredients in your marketing efforts, and start seeing the results you want and need. 🌐

Jennifer Culbertson is owner of Looking Glass Marketing and specializes in working with Microsoft VARs and ISVs to build and execute marketing strategies that drive results. With her 18 years of marketing experience within the channel, coupled with her understanding of Microsoft Partner needs, she can help take your marketing to the next level. For more information, contact Jennifer at Jennifer@lookingglassmarketing.com or call 614-453-5927.

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