

## 1.5: Understanding marketing strategy

### Business and brand strategy

Before you can delve into marketing strategy, take a step back and consider the business and brand with which you are working.

The end goal of any business is to make money in one way or another. Business strategy asks the questions, “What is the business challenge we are facing that prevents us from making more revenue?” and, “What business objective should we strive for in order to increase the money in the bank?”

The brand is the vessel of value in this equation. The brand justifies why the business matters, what the business’ purpose is and what value the business adds to people’s lives.

The AMA defines a brand as, “A name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers. The usual expression of a brand is its trademark. A brand may identify one item, a family of items, or all items of that seller” (N.A., 2011). To quote Cheryl Burgess, a brand presents, “A reason to choose” one product or service over another.

The value of the brand is measured in terms of its brand equity i.e. how aware are people of the brand? Does it hold positive associations and perceived value? How loyal are people to the brand?

When you have the answers to these questions, you can formulate a marketing strategy to address the challenge or objective you’ve discovered.

### Marketing strategy

The purpose of a marketing strategy is to determine what the business is about, and to then address the business or brand challenge, or objective that has been revealed. An effective strategy involves making a series of well-informed decisions about how the brand, product or service should be promoted. The brand that attempts to be all things to all people risks becoming unfocused or losing the clarity of its value proposition.

For example, a new airline would need to consider how it is going to add value to the market and differentiate itself from competitors. Whether their product is a domestic or international service; whether its target market is budget travellers or international and business travellers; and whether the channel is through primary airports or smaller, more cost-effective airports. Each of these choices will result in a vastly different strategic direction.

To make these decisions, a strategist must understand the context in which the brand operates, asking, “What are the factors that affect the business?” This means conducting a situational analysis that looks at the following four pillars:

1. The environment
2. The business
3. The customers
4. The competitors.

Here are some considerations and tools for conducting your brand’s situational analysis.

#### Understanding the environment

The environment is the overall context or ‘outside world’ in which the business functions. It can involve anything from global economics (how well is the local currency performing these days?) to developments in your industry. Every brand will have a specific environment that it needs to consider, based on the type of product or service it produces.

An analysis of the business and brand environment will typically consider political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental (PESTLE) influences to identify a clear set of considerations or issues pertinent to the marketing strategy.

#### Understanding the business

There are several marketing models that can be used to understand the business and brand with which you are working. Since it’s essential for all marketing messages to encapsulate the brand’s identity and objectives, this is a very important step. A crucial consideration is the brand itself. What does it stand for? What does it mean? What associations, ideas, emotions and benefits do people associate with it? What makes it unique?



Figure 1.5.1: Understanding the business' brand Adapted from Noesis Marketing, 2011.

Out of this, you can determine what the brand or product's unique selling point (USP) is. A USP is the one characteristic that can make your product or service better than the competition's. Ask yourself, "What unique value does it have? Does it solve a problem that no other product does?"

### Understanding customers

To understand your customers, you need to conduct market research. Try not to make assumptions about why people like and transact with your brand, you may find their values and motives are quite different from what you thought. Ongoing research and a data driven business will help you to build a picture of what particular benefit or feature your business provides to your customers allowing you to capitalise on this in your marketing content.

One important area on which to focus here is the consumer journey which is the series of steps and decisions a customer takes before buying from your business (or not). Luckily, online data analytics allow you to get a good picture of how people behave on your website before converting to customers; other forms of market research will also help you establish this for your offline channels.

On the Internet, a consumer journey is not linear. Instead, consumers may engage with your brand in a variety of ways, for example, across devices or marketing channels, before making a purchase.

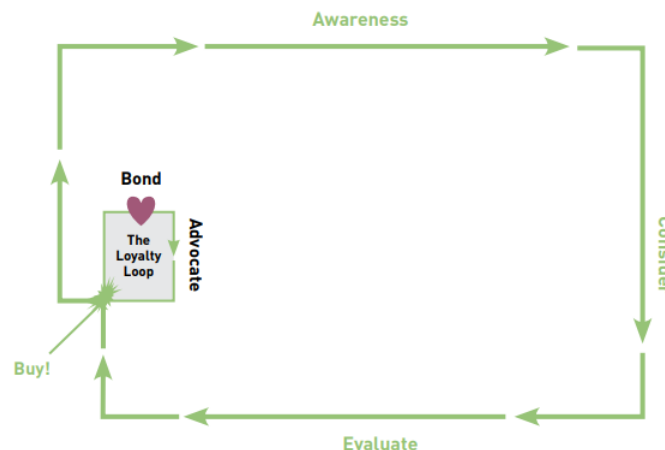


Figure 1.5.2: The customer journey is cyclical Adapted from Brilliant Noise, 2012.

The goal is to reach customers with the right marketing message at the right stage of their journey. For example, you may want to use aspirational messages for someone in the exploration phase, but focus on more direct features and benefits (such as a lower price) when they're almost ready to buy.

### Understanding competitors

Finally, it's important to know who else is marketing to your potential customers, what they offer, and how you can challenge or learn from them. Many competitors target the same needs in a given customer, sometimes through very similar products. Positioning places your brand in a unique place in people's minds. It is impossible to create a strong value proposition or USP without knowing your competitors' positioning strategy.

On the Internet, your competitors are not just those who are aiming to earn your customers' money; they are also those who are capturing your customers' attention. With more digital content being created in a day than most people could consume in a year – for example, over 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute (YouTube, 2017) – the scarcest resources these days are time, focus and attention.

When considering competition it's also worthwhile looking at potential replacements for your product. The Internet is disrupting and accelerating the pace of disintermediation in a number of industries, meaning that people can now go directly to the business instead of transacting through a middleman (look at the travel industry as an example). To stay ahead, you should be looking at potential disruptors of your industry as well as the existing players.

## Digital marketing strategy

Once you have a clear sense of what the business challenge or objective is, you can define how your marketing strategy will leverage digital channels to fulfil it.

As discussed in the introduction, digital should not be considered as separate from your core strategy. Digital marketing builds on and adapts the principles of traditional marketing using the opportunities and challenges offered by the digital medium.

A marketing strategy should be constantly iterating and evolving. Since the Internet allows for near-instantaneous feedback and data gathering, marketers should constantly be optimising and improving their online marketing efforts.

User-centric thinking, which involves placing the user at the core of all decisions, is vital when looking at building a successful marketing strategy. The marketing strategist of today is offered not only a plethora of tactical possibilities, but also unprecedented ways of measuring the effectiveness of chosen strategies and tactics. Digital allows greater opportunities for interaction and consumer engagement than were possible in the past, so it is important to consider the ways in which the brand can create interactive experiences for consumers, not just broadcast messages.

The fact that digital marketing is highly empirical is one of its key strengths. Almost everything can be measured: from behaviours, to actions and action paths, to results. Insight tools can even be used to track the sentiment of users towards certain elements online. This means that the digital marketing strategist should be constantly measuring and adapting to ensure the highest ROI. Built into any strategy should be a testing framework and the ability to remain flexible and dynamic in a medium that shifts and changes as user behaviours do.

If we defined strategy as 'a plan of action designed to achieve a particular outcome', the desired outcome of a digital marketing strategy would be aligned with your organisation's overall business and brand building objectives or challenges. For example, if one of the overall objectives was acquisition of new clients, a possible digital marketing objective might be building brand awareness online.

---

This page titled [1.5: Understanding marketing strategy](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Rob Stokes](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.