

## It's results that count



As a business discipline, marketing has always played an important role in the growth and prosperity of the world's most successful companies. In common with all business disciplines, however, marketing needs to be understood and defined in the context of individual organisations and then implemented so that subsequent results can easily be measured.

How results are defined will, of course, vary from company to company, but they should ultimately have a positive impact on the bottom line. This is especially true for small to medium sized enterprises, where marketing budgets are often smaller or spread more thinly than in larger organisations with a more formalised marketing structure.

Given that the single objective of any marketing activity is to produce a defined result, the issue that has first to be addressed is to determine what is meant by results. Typically, this will be an increase in the number of sales enquiries, an improvement in market profile or a change in the way in which an organisation, its products or services are viewed by a particular group such as shareholders, employees or key customers.

## The bottom line!

Ultimately, the impact of any marketing activity should register on the bottom line. There is, for example, little point in spending thousands of pounds on market analysis, direct mail or P.R. if it does not result in increased sales, either directly as a result of immediate enquiries or by creating greater market awareness so that related sales processes, such as the work of the sales force, can be carried out more effectively.

Results can be measured in many different ways, from simply agreeing a specified number of items to be produced during a set period, to the use of market research before and after a campaign has been carried out. For most small to medium size companies, however, the most important result is likely to be increased sales enquiries from both new and prospective customers.

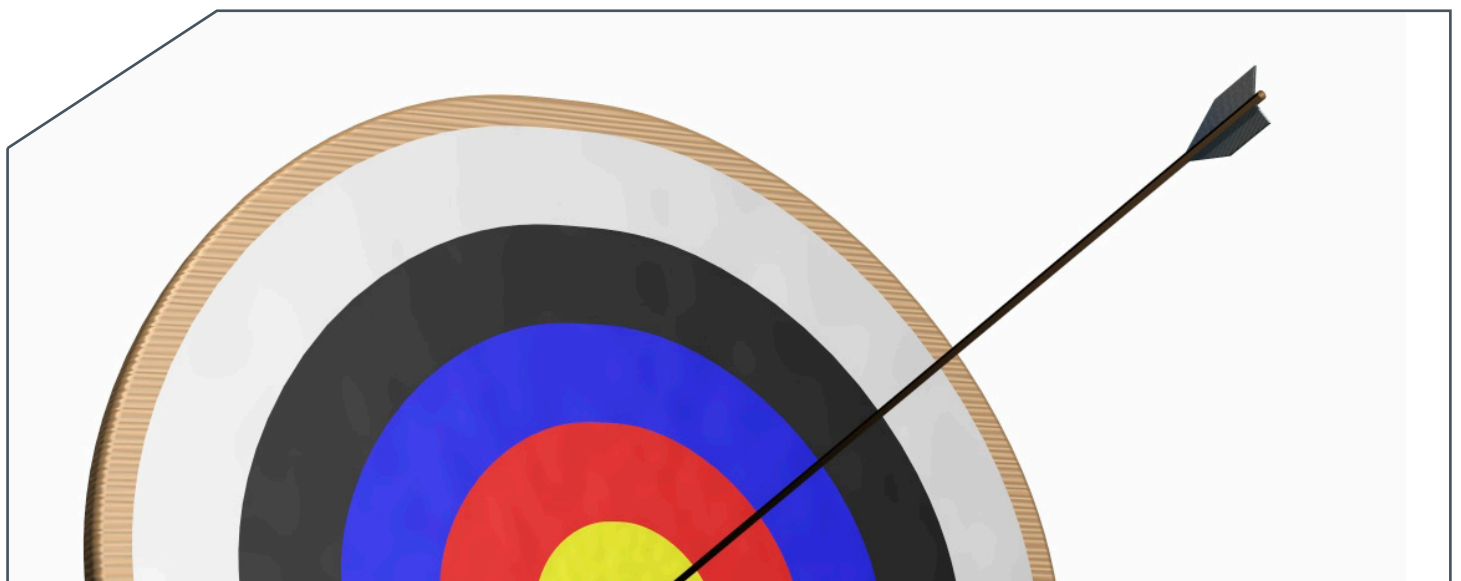
It is therefore important to record the source of all enquiries and, perhaps more importantly, to monitor each enquiry to its natural conclusion. In this way it is possible ultimately to prove that a certain volume of sales came directly from a particular marketing activity and to calculate a return on investment. This process is by no means revolutionary but it is surprising how many companies fail to carry it out effectively; on a similar note, it is also surprising that, even in today's ever more competitive business

environment, many companies continue to spend significant sums on generating sales enquiries and then fail either to respond or simply distribute a brochure and then never follow the enquiry through.

Producing results in a marketing context therefore demands that marketing, sales and administrative functions (to name but a few) work effectively together to create a company that is truly focussed on the needs and demands of its prospects and customers. The important point to recognise is that unless the vital post-marketing support disciplines are working satisfactorily there is little point in embarking on often expensive up-front marketing activities.

## Creating a successful campaign

So far, we have discussed the importance of understanding what is meant by results and how they can be measured. This of course pre-supposes that any marketing campaign has been conceived and implemented correctly from the outset. It is, therefore, worth considering some of the factors that contribute to a successful campaign. Although these will vary from activity to activity - P.R., for example, requires a different approach to advertising - there are a number of common issues that should be considered. All too often, marketing initiatives fail because they are badly planned or produced in a hurry. The first questions to be asked of any



proposed activity include, why are we doing it, how will it benefit our customers and what impact will it have on the bottom line?

It may be that, as a result of this basic questioning, the proposed activity is dropped, redeveloped or carried through as originally conceived. Whatever the conclusion, the next step is to define the objectives and set a realistic production schedule, agreeing this with all those involved; this is especially true if outside agencies are to be used, as they will produce best results if they have clear understanding of the project objectives and deadlines.

External agencies - marketing, P.R., advertising, design etc - will probably play an important role in the implementation of any marketing programme.

Selection of the right agency can, however, be one of the toughest challenges facing a small to medium sized enterprise. It is, for example, often difficult both to differentiate between agencies and to determine how well they will really work with a client organisation.

Ultimately, choosing an agency is like choosing your friends or work colleagues. There has to be a natural synergy so that both partners benefit from the relationship. In practical terms, this means that the agency has to understand your company, its products, services and marketplace. It also means

that the agency must be prepared to be flexible, professional and accountable.

Before making a choice, talk to the agency's existing clients and make sure the agency is prepared to set and stick to agreed objectives and that you have access to senior agency staff at all times. In addition, continuously evaluate their performance - this should be relatively simple as a good agency will be producing consistent results and have a monthly reporting structure in place to ensure you're aware of each success.

Finally, on the subject of marketing materials, such as advertisements, brochures, newsletters, and technical or sales fact sheets, don't allow yourself to be seduced by glossy images or, conversely, into thinking that the cheapest is the best. Put yourself in the position of your prospective customer and consider what you would expect from a professional, credible supplier.

Marketing is one of many business disciplines and, as such, can be accountable, measured and structured so that, for most activities, it is possible to calculate return on investment. In common with any other discipline the secrets of success lie in having a clear understanding of the goals and the best way to achieve them.

Ultimately, it's results that count.

