

HOW TO WRITE A MAP:

The Marketing Plan that will Blow the Doors off your Competition

A Master Action Plan (MAP) clearly defines WHO your agency is, WHERE your agency wants to go and HOW your agency will get there. Whether your business is NEW or NOT SO NEW, you need a MAP to find success in less time and at a lower cost.

A MAP prepares you for the stresses of participating in this fiercely competitive marketplace. It improves your odds of success, keeps you on track, reduces distractions, guides your operation to ensure constant viability and growth, helps you raise cooperative advertising dollars and shows you how to spend it.

There is no scientifically proven MAP that will guarantee you increased sales and higher profits. Give yourself the best shot at success -- be thorough, precise, realistic and optimistic!

Keep focused on fulfilling the needs of your target customer base. Capitalize on your personal strengths and surround yourself with people offering other essential skills. You – and they – must possess the passion to succeed. *A winning attitude is half the battle!*

Don't expect to write your MAP in an hour. It may take weeks! Even after you finish, be prepared to change directions if you reach a fork in the road! Adapt to the ever-changing internal and external forces promptly and decisively.

"There are passengers on the road of life, and then there are drivers". Do you recall hearing this quote before?

Slide over to the driver's seat and buckle up. Embark on a 20-mile journey. *Answer the question posted at every mile (DON'T skip ahead).* As you move down the road, look back often at the miles you've traveled and at your answers. They will help guide you towards the end of the journey – to the winner's circle.

There will be hundreds of agencies answering these questions along with you. If you answer the questions realistically and optimistically, you will all meet up in the winner's circle -- despite having taken different paths.

Just follow these simple rules:

- Don't run out to get your corporate MBA. *You won't need one.*
- Don't write a novel -- answer in single words or short sentences. *That's an order!*
- Don't do it in the office -- pick up and leave. *Avoid disruptions!*
- Don't call it a Marketing Plan --call it your Master Action Plan (MAP). *It sounds a lot less threatening!*

*** MILE 1: WHAT DO YOU WANT?**

Are you in this ball game to have fun, make a living, or to make a fortune? Your answer to this question determines how aggressive you will be traveling down the road towards success. Will you be walking? Jogging? Or running? It is O.K. if you answer "yes" to all of the above!

*** MILE 2: WHAT ARE YOUR **BUSINESS** STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES?**

Are you a strong, confident salesperson or a super-efficient administrator? Use single words to describe your general business skills. Be honest. (Later down the road, when we talk about support staff, you will surround yourself with people who are stronger in your weaker areas and vice versa).

*** MILE 3: WHAT ARE YOUR **TRAVEL** STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES?**

How much do you really know and how much do you need to learn? If you are dealing directly with the public, you need to know current events, destinations and products and be viewed as an authority on vacations. Our industry provides numerous ongoing educational opportunities – at all levels.

*** MILE 4: WHAT ARE YOUR **RESOURCE** STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES?**

First, consider your *financial* resources. As a business owner, you must know what comes in, what goes out, and what's left for advertising, staffing, etc. Second, consider your *physical* resources – your location. What's great about it? What are the challenges? Lastly, consider *yourself* as the other resource. How much time are you able to dedicate to your business? Make sure your response jives with your answer at MILE 1. *If you want it all you'll need to give it your all!*

*** MILE 5: WHO ARE YOUR COMPETITORS?**

List them all; every agency located within your marketplace and every agency that advertises within your marketplace (yes, even the "800" number operators). Clip their ads and assess their strategies. Get on their mailing lists. What image are they attempting to establish? Do they specialize? "Keep your friends close, keep your *enemies* closer"! Knowing your competitors will help guide you through the next few miles. You will not be successful if you ignore the competitive forces around you.

*** MILE 6: WHO LIVES AND WORKS IN YOUR MARKETPLACE?**

If you don't know who *lives* there, check with the town hall for population statistics, check out the town's web site, or get the information from your local cable company, newspaper or radio station salesperson! You must know who *works* there, also, so you can get new corporate accounts. (NOT their corporate travel -- go get their LEISURE travel!).

*** MILE 7: WHO WILL YOU TARGET?**

Now that you have traveled seven miles you know who YOU are, who your COMPETITORS are, and WHAT POPULATION SEGMENTS you could possibly sell to in your marketplace. It's time to decide what slice of the pie you want -- where the best opportunities lie. Choose your PRIMARY, SECONDARY, and TERTIARY target markets -- no more!!! (Examples: seniors, families, upscale, singles, etc.).

*** MILE 8: WHAT PRODUCT (S) WILL YOU SELL?**

List the popular products that appeal to your PRIMARY, SECONDARY, and TERTIARY target markets. List destinations and types of travel -- NOT suppliers.

*** MILE 9: WILL YOU NICHE?**

Is there a big enough selling opportunity that exists within ONE target market? If so, then throw out the other two and focus on number one. Become an all-out expert in meeting the needs of your one target market. Before you know it, you will develop a reputation in your marketplace and consumers will seek YOU out! (Examples: Europe or Alaska specialists, gay & lesbian travel, senior citizen escorted travel, etc.).

*** MILE 10: WHO WILL BE YOUR PREFERRED SUPPLIERS?**

Now you can begin selecting your suppliers. You must focus your selling efforts on a select group of suppliers – giving you the opportunity to become a product expert, develop a long list of satisfied customers for referrals, earn higher overrides rapidly, and gain leverage and higher levels of support from them. Check out their commission levels and their reputation with other agencies *and* consumers. Meet their local sales representatives. *Is this someone you can develop a solid business relationship with?* Selecting suppliers requires this critical evaluation because it will be a long-term investment.

*** MILE 11: HOW WILL YOU REACH YOUR TARGET MARKETS?**

You know WHO you will be selling to, you now need to list the best ways to reach them with your message. Is it newspaper? Direct mail? The World Wide Web? Magazine? Radio? Don't be afraid to call upon the sales representatives from the various media. They will very likely have a demographic analysis and be able to tell you precisely whom they reach. At this time you should consider what promotional activities would help generate new customers (i.e. cruise nights, tie-ins with other retailers, sales events, etc.).

*** MILE 12: WHAT TYPE OF SHOP WILL YOU BE?**

The question posted at this mile marker is challenging yet critical. Here's what I mean by "type of shop": Will you focus largely on groups or individuals? Will you be a discount house and rebate substantially? Will you dedicate yourself to outstanding customer service and value -- minimize discounting and rebating? You will need to review miles one through eleven in order to ascertain the answer. Once it is clear, stick with it. It is important not to ramble around and let yourself be blown off course during the course of business.

*** MILE 13 HOW WILL YOU MARKET TO YOUR PROSPECTS?**

It's time to develop your image. When consumers see your advertising, they must come away with the image you intend to portray about your company, your products, your services and your prices. Your ad must tell a story – in seconds. Elements like graphics and text should be carefully considered. Your advertisements must also break through the clutter – so what would be YOUR hook? Your logo and slogan are very important, so “pick and stick”! (Whatever you choose, stick with it. Inconsistency will only confuse the marketplace and work against you).

*** MILE 14: HOW WILL YOU MARKET TO THE PEOPLE YOU'VE ALREADY SOLD TO?**

After-the-sale marketing is EQUALLY as important as before-the-sale marketing. However, one could argue that it is MORE important. It will take you six times as much money and effort to bring on a new customer than it does to keep an existing one. Isn't it worthwhile putting an “auto-pilot” follow-up program in place? There IS such a thing as customer loyalty. (Just ask the agencies that contact their clients immediately upon their return AND contact them at least once every three months thereafter!!!).

*** MILE 15: WHO WILL YOU AFFILIATE WITH?**

If you are currently affiliated with a marketing organization like a consortium or franchise, you should know exactly how they are helping to build your business. **They should no longer be a “commission club” for you.** You should be receiving substantial support in a variety of ways. Right now, list what they have done for you in the past. Now list all the sales promotions that are available to your front-line sales people TODAY. If you are not currently affiliated with a group, don't “bite off your nose to spite your face” and think you're better off going it alone. Shop for the one that's best for YOU. (I am just slightly partial to Vacation.com).

*** MILE 16: HOW MUCH CO-OP WILL YOU SEEK?**

Whatever you have allocated towards advertising *can* be matched dollar for dollar by your preferred suppliers. You should be getting twice the bang for your buck! So how do you tap into the well? Submit a WRITTEN request to your local sales representatives. Include the following: Describe the promotion, state your booking objectives, detail your tracking methods, and detail the costs. You have a better shot at getting more money if you submit your plan during the fourth quarter of the year (for next year's advertising), as many sales reps run out of money during the year. Don't expect to go back to the well unless you "talk the talk and walk the walk"! You must show results.

*** MILE 17: HOW WILL YOU MEASURE?**

What is making your phones ring? Systematically and persistently track every incoming phone call. Did the caller see your newspaper ad? Hear your radio ad? See your window? Hear about you from another client of yours? You will never know what advertising is working unless you track this on a simple form and summarize the results weekly. This will also allow you to calculate the Cost of Leads, Cost of Acquisition, and your Closing Ratios.

*** MILE 18: HOW WILL YOU RUN YOUR OPERATION?**

Ever ride the bumper cars at a carnival? That's what your office will look like if you don't figure out how the work will flow! Will your "ace" sales person also do the paperwork or will he or she pass the baton to their teammate – the support administrator? Spend some extra time at Mile 18 to determine who you will hire (bring on people who are stronger in your weaker areas, etc.), what software you will use, how you will decorate your office, how you will compensate your employees, and what your hours will be. There can be nothing worse than launching a great ad campaign then not being able to handle the inquiries.

*** MILE 19 WHERE DO YOU WANT TO BE IN SIX MONTHS? ONE YEAR?**

NOW you can do your sales projections. Your 19 mile marathon has taught you everything about your business and you are now qualified to make an educated "guestimation" at your sales figures. Be ambitious yet realistic!

*** MILE 20**

HOW'D YOU DO?

After six months, sit down with your MAP and drive down the 20 miles again, stopping at each mile marker. Did you follow your plan or did you go off track? It is OK to make adjustments to your MAP where you feel it is necessary. After six months, drive it again. Constantly check-up on yourself. Your MAP has been so carefully crafted that by following your own directions it will help you build your business, achieve success faster, and blow the doors off your competition.

**SEE YOU IN THE
WINNER'S CIRCLE!**

