

# A marketing plan

You can make money—sometimes without a plan. But thoughtful planning of marketing tactics will often result in more sales and more profits.

by Rudd McGary and Ed Wandtke

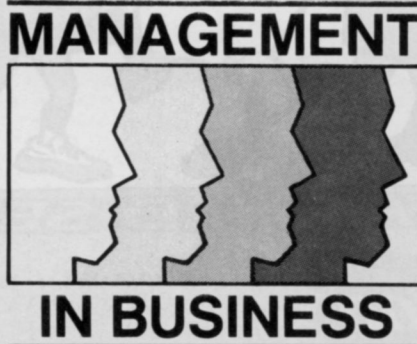
All companies involved in attracting and keeping customers use marketing. That is not an issue. But not every company plans for increased efficiency in its marketing—and more cost effectiveness—by using a marketing mix.

It's not a question of making money; you can do that—without a plan sometimes. It's a question of being able to control the growth of the company with the best possible use of talent and capital. That requires planning, in both landscape maintenance and lawn care operations.

The marketing mix consists of four distinct parts, some of them more important to the green industries, some less so. The four parts are: pricing, promotion, product/service, and physical distribution.

Pricing consists of consumer reaction to an offered price, competitors' pricing, and the profit margin necessary to keep the company operating. If any one of these three parts is ignored in setting prices, the company will suffer.

The physical distribution part of the marketing mix is less of an issue for green industries, unless you consider the your routing as distribution of services. (This is not the standard use of the term physical distribution but can be applied to green industries



in certain cases, if we enlarge the meaning of physical distribution.)

The product/service that is to be delivered is a key to the success of the company. Many companies don't have a clear idea of the real services they offer, at least from the consumer's point of view.

The consumer is the key in an overall marketing system, since he/she will determine if you are going to be in business next week. Therefore, the product/service you are offering should match the consumers' needs, something that is often forgotten in the green industries—particularly those run by managers with strong agronomic backgrounds.

Try defining your service in terms of the consumer instead of an internal image and you will find that all your marketing efforts will be better coordinated and more effective.

The final part of an overall marketing mix is the promotion part, which is often confused with an overall marketing system. "Promotion" generally consists of an advertising, promotion, and personal sales mix designed to get the consumer to a yes/no buying decision.

Some of the marketing practices that used to be standard in the green industries have changed dramatically. The use of direct mail continues, but the return rate is lower than ever before. (Some companies are experiencing .05 percent and less, return

on their mailers.) Advertising done in the Yellow Pages and newspapers is almost always used, but we have found that the ads don't often respond to consumer needs but rather to something dreamed up either by the ad agency or the the owners of the company.

The promotional efforts are often overlooked in this part of the marketing system. Opportunities for free space in newspapers and free time on television that can help the overall marketing effort are very often overlooked by most companies.

The personal sales part of market planning is, to us, the key to a successful marketing plan. All other functions of the system are designed to have a salesperson face-to-face with a consumer who can say yes or no.

Telemarketing is not sales, it is designed to get a measure. Direct mail is not sales, it is designed to get a customer to take a measure. All advertising is designed to get the customers to inquire about your services. Thus you have to have a well-trained sales force which knows how to close a sale when they are in front of a customer.

Thus we see that marketing is an organized system designed to fill consumer needs in exchange for capital.

You can make money in spite of yourself, but as the green industries get more and more competitive, companies that plan their marketing will grow faster than you. You may even find that you can't afford to stay in business because you don't have a large enough customer base to stay open.

The planning of your marketing is going to be one of the major efforts you will make in the upcoming years. If you don't want to grow, or you are satisfied with a shrinking customer base, don't bother to plan your marketing efforts. If you do want to continue to expand your customer base, you must be aware of the different parts of a marketing system and be able to plan for the future.

Someone else is, why not you?

WT&T



Wandtke and McGary are owners of All-Green Management Associates, Columbus, Ohio.