

Business 4.0

Investing in Your Future: Marketing for Sustainable Business Growth

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Right now, many manufacturers are enjoying a period of high production rates. It's a challenge to find qualified employees to hire and to keep up with incoming business. Any extra bandwidth is spent increasing production capacity by cross training and implementing lean practices.

With so much business coming in, it can be difficult to find time to think about updating your website or making your sell sheets and presentations look better. Why spend time and money on marketing when you don't need marketing right now? The truth is, that makes this the best time to invest in your marketing. When revenue is low, it's difficult to justify investing in projects when you're struggling to keep your employees working. Starting a marketing strategy now can help your company avoid feast or famine business cycles and foster sustainable growth.

Marketing in a Manufacturing Environment

If the word "marketing" conjures up thoughts of big-budget TV commercials, celebrity endorsements, and billboards, rest assured that there is a lot more to marketing, and it's a lot more cost effective.

For the purposes of our conversation, marketing encompasses all communication from your company to prospective customers, current customers, and even prospective employees. While this can certainly include paid advertising, such as traditional print ads, it includes much more. Your company's website, sell sheets, and even business cards all represent your brand and can be enhanced by a marketing strategy.

Where multinational companies can have a full department, and possibly several, to cover everything marketing can entail, marketing is important for manufacturers of every size. The internet has been a great equalizer when it comes to manufacturing competition. For a relatively low price, companies can look fairly comparable online. A clean, updated website, active social media channels, and the occasional video can completely change the image of small manufacturers.

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Once you decide to start marketing, one of the first decisions a company will need to make is whether to hire someone for in-house marketing or whether to go with an agency. If you choose to hire someone to work in-house, they'll be able to pitch in on other tasks. You'll also be able to have direct contact with them more often, but they usually won't have a broad set of skills for all marketing tactics. Manufacturers are sometimes hesitant to trust an agency with lengthy contracts and high retainers; however, agencies typically come with a higher level of marketing experience and more marketing resources than manufacturers can easily access.

Especially for smaller manufacturers who are poised for growth and ready to invest in themselves, a marketing agency can generate more bang for your buck. 360 Direct, a marketing agency that

specializes in the manufacturing sector, sees their clients grow and expand their business – and their comfort levels with marketing – with regular marketing campaigns.

John Bernhoft, President of **360 Direct**, explains, “Many clients are apprehensive about marketing in general, but have a specific need – either they have an old website they know needs to be updated, or they’ve run out of sell sheets. We solve that problem, but not only do their materials look better, they are also getting more results. Customers are telling them they like it, prospects are responding more to their materials. Ultimately, they are getting more sales.”

360 Direct focuses on results-oriented marketing by working to track the ROI of every marketing tactic they use. If that sounds lean, that’s because it is. Not only has the internet leveled the playing field when it comes to manufacturers’ marketing opportunities, it has also enabled companies to track how well their marketing is doing. Because 360 Direct is focused on results, they’ve done away with contracts or retainers. Bernhoft says, “We don’t want clients who are with us because they can’t break a contract. Our clients stay with us year after year because they see what we are doing works. It’s not a flashy expense, it’s an investment – that shows its ROI in your bottom line.”

Marketing to Foster Growth

Marketing is more than making things look nice. Updated sell sheets, brochures, and websites ensure that your current capabilities are communicated to prospective customers. Have you bought new machines or started serving new industries since your website was published? Does your website reflect the services you most want to sell? If it doesn’t, prospective customers are going to have a hard time finding you. Even if they do find you, they may not realize that you offer exactly what they are looking for.

Search engines, like Google, pay attention to how often your website is updated and what your content says about your company, and those search engines determine what your website will be found for. Having an updated website and regularly adding new content helps your company be found on Google and helps educate your customers before they call your sales team. That education is important because it saves your sales team valuable time, ensuring customers are calling for things you actually offer, providing your team with warm, inbound leads, and shortening the sales cycle.

Speaking of your sales team’s time, how often is your sales team actually able to reach out to each of your customers and prospects? Marketing is a great way to make sure you stay in front of your target market, even when your sales team is slammed. Email newsletters and even social media are great ways to keep in contact with everyone on your list. You can let them know about new services, remind them of your capabilities, and always be at the top of their mind when they have a need.

It’s not just customers who are looking at you online. As the workforce ages and manufacturers are scrambling to attract the relatively few younger workers, having a presence on the internet is increasingly important. People of all ages turn to the internet to find out more about a company, and they are checking social media just as much as your website. A polished look adds legitimacy for smaller outfits and can give job seekers insight into your company culture and work environment. 360 Direct has even seen more of a demand for marketing videos that are just used for recruiting! When the labor market is as tight as it is, anything a manufacturer can do to better compete for available labor is beneficial.

Marketing to Support Business Goals

There are a lot of options when it comes to marketing. When choosing which tactics to pursue, there are easy ways to ensure you are making the right decision. Bernhoft elaborates, “All marketing plans and strategies align with your company’s goals. And just as you regularly measure the success of your

work cells and production lines, we regularly measure the success of our marketing campaigns. We test and measure so we can run as lean as our clients.”

All marketing communication should represent your brand and should communicate in the language of your best customers. That way, your marketing attracts more of those top customers. 360 Direct has seen manufacturers use marketing to help grow product lines with the best profit margins, or to help diversify a manufacturer’s customer base so they are less reliant on one industry. These marketing plans ultimately help companies avoid large fluctuations in their bottom line as the market shifts.

Growth is more than just capacity. Marketing helps attract new business, retain and nurture customer relationships, and ultimately encourages sustainable growth. When you put it that way, marketing isn’t an expense; it’s a wise investment.

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