

## Chapter 6

# MARKETING YOUR PRODUCT: FINDING CUSTOMERS AND MORE

*How you find and attract customers depends on what you plan to sell and where you expect to sell it. Your business will benefit from having a marketing plan, and this chapter will help you think through what it should cover.*

**Marketing** is a suite of activities intended to create and identify customers, articulate their needs, develop a plan for meeting them, and promote the product in a way that satisfies them. This definition by Peter Drucker (an Austrian American management consultant, educator, and author) often gets the point across well: “[Marketing] is the whole business seen from the point of view of the final result, that is, from the customer’s point of view... Business success is not determined by the producer but by the customer.”

Here are some marketing concepts:

- **Market research** tells you who buys your products and why, who buys competing products and why, what consumers are looking for and how they make their buying decisions, how much they will pay, and so on.
- **Product placement** is informed by market research and will help you determine which means are most appropriate for getting your product in front of the right audience. Understanding who your customers are will help inform this. You may want to sell directly to the consumer, or you may want to sell to food services or regional distributors.
- **Consumer demographics** describe who buys what kind of seafood, where they live, how much they make and spend, etc.
- **Competitive analysis** involves understanding who the competition is, what they offer, why people go to them and what you can do to get some of that business. Remember, competition can be healthy and helps sellers create a diverse market.

- **Pricing** is deciding how much to charge for your product. You can either decide how much you want to profit per unit (such as a pound of fish or a bag of oysters) and then add your costs, or you can find out what others are charging for similar products and then charge the same, more, or less, depending on your reasoning.
- **Digital marketing** is the practice of using online communication via digital channels such as a website or social media to reach audiences in the hopes of turning them into customers.

## CRATING A MARKETING PLAN

A marketing plan helps you identify the customers you are choosing to focus on, decide how to reach and sell to your customers, set your marketing goals, and much more. It helps you define and position your business, think about your competition and how to distinguish your product from theirs, and set your pricing. To get to know your customers, consider trying to answer these questions: Who is your target market? What is their price range? What lifestyle habits do they exhibit? Knowing the attributes of your customer base will help you determine pricing.

A marketing plan can also house your timeline for reaching your marketing goals and helps you to develop an image or identity that guides your operations. It need not be an elaborate written document, but it should be at least a paragraph or two in your overall business plan.

## DEFINING YOUR PRODUCT

Attracting customers requires clearly defining your product. To do that, you need to know what the market wants. **Market research** can involve sophisticated socioeconomic analysis or simply making a few calls and asking people what they want. Simple or complex, it's essential that you do it. You might have the right species and right grade, but you also need portions that are the right size and available in the right quantities for delivery at the right frequency. In other words, you need to determine that what the customers want is what you can provide.

Direct marketers often have little choice in the species, grade, form and quantity they can supply, because those factors largely are determined by nature. Custom processing, preserving, packaging and storage may afford some control over their offerings. For example, a fish that may be impossible to sell headed and gutted (H&G) might go like hotcakes as a smoked-side or an entrée in a microwavable retort pouch.

Sometimes the easiest and most profitable thing to do with a fish is sell it as is. This would mean pulling the catch one-by-one out of the iced hold or bringing product in from your farm and selling it directly to customers at the dock or harbor. But catcher–seller direct sales only work where fishermen and growers have access to suitable dock sites, large enough consumer populations and the time to do it.

## PROMOTION

If you plan to sell directly to customers you need to advertise or promote your product. Retail means selling directly to customers. This excludes selling to restaurants and/or grocers. **Promotion** is communicating a specific cause, service, or product to enhance reputation, awareness, or usage. Simply put, it is what you do to get your business name and product before potential customers. It can include publicity, public relations, or social media. Any sales to any part of the supply chain require some form of promotion or communication that you have a product to sell and information about why your product is better than your competitors'.

When creating promotional content, ask yourself the following questions:

- **Who do you want to communicate with?** Understand who your current customers are. Who would you like to market your business to? Keep existing customers before making new ones.
- **Where do you want to deliver your communication from?** Create an online presence, such as a website, to give customers information about the business. Engage with social media to broaden your audience.
- **What do you want to communicate to potential customers?** Having an online presence will build trust and develop relationships with customers. It will also increase product visibility and allow you to sell your product to a diverse audience.
  - › Share personal elements of your operation
  - › Share the “why” early and often
  - › Encourage people to take action with each post - this is known as a “call to action”
  - › Share the problems or issues your business solves or what benefits you provide
- **Why should customers prioritize your product over others?** Why should the customer choose to purchase seafood from you? What makes your seafood business unique and worthwhile?
- **How can you create meaningful and effective online marketing content?** Begin your content with the conclusion or what you want people to know. Flip the typical paragraph structure upside down to read: conclusion, content, and then introduce your product. Have a clear brand “why” statement.
- **When and how often should you communicate online with potential customers?** It depends. Consider your own capacity and post only as often as you can. a good general rule of thumb is to try to post multiple times per week on social media and email once per week or month. The frequency of communication can change depending on your business's busy and slow seasons.
  - › For social media posts—use the Insights section on your business page on Facebook or Instagram and post when the bulk of your followers are online and interacting with posts.

Here are some tried and true tools and activities for promotion:

- Press releases to newspapers, magazines, radio stations; sponsorship of community events, public radio, conservation groups, etc.
- Posting fliers at local places of business
- Promotional items such as pens, mugs or clothing with your company logo
- Public speaking engagements
- Exhibiting in trade shows
- Participating in local events (can include samples, giveaways or sweepstakes)
- Brochures, stickers, magnets, business cards and rack cards
- Magnetic signs on the sides of your vehicle
- Displaying a sign board on the roadside or dock near your operation or sales location
- Cooking demonstrations
- Partnering with brands or influencers
- Posting content on social media
- Being a guest on a podcast show
- Writing blog posts
- Sending newsletters by email

Other low-cost tools and activities for promotion:

- Recruit friends, relatives and community connections to spread the word
- Join your local Chamber of Commerce
- Meet with your community's Visitor Center
- Guest-write or ghost-write newspaper or magazine food columns or articles
- The VIP concept: offer price discounts, special offers or gifts with your logo
- Ask repeat customer to post how they prepare your product with pictures on social media, then repost on your site
- Ask chefs to post pictures of product delivery and the dishes they prepare on social media, then repost on your site
- Ask customers to share their favorite way to prepare your product with new customers; this helps to educate them on what they can do with the product when they get home
- Give repeat customers free samples to try new species
- Let loyal customers pre-order and select the most premium pieces to pick up at a prearranged time
- Send bulk-mail fliers to people in the industry
- Offer referral discounts or other awards to people who refer customers to you

Also consider:

**Trade shows, farmers/fishermen's markets and food & wine show** venues to support the promotion of seafood products and cultivate relationships with potential customers and partners in person.

**Food trade shows** allow businesses of all sizes to promote their product, learn of market trends and interact with future customers face to face. Research local events in your region or larger national and international ones to determine the best fit for your business based on attendance, location, costs, and potential ROI.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL

Social media can be a marketing and promotional tool to drive engagement and promote a business or product. It can also be a networking tool for building and maintaining relationships with customers by continuously expanding and interacting with people online (customers, family, friends and others). Content to consider posting may include fishing or farming techniques, seafood recipes, stories highlighting the people behind the business, how-to videos, simple questions that present a call to action, videos showing a day-in-the-life of your business, etc. Whatever you post, ensure the content is relevant to your customers’ interests. Presumably, customers are following your seafood business because they want to be a part of it!

Social media platforms are high-commitment, low-cost marketing channels for many businesses. Social media can reach an international audience with the only cost being your time resources. Most leading social media platforms give businesses free access for promotion. Much content can be developed in a low-cost way; however, you may wish to invest in high-quality production tools, such as a camera, tripod and digital editing software. There are also apps you can use to maintain consistency across your content by creating content ahead of time and scheduling posts ahead of time. These options may help you manage your time.

Table 1 below shows the major social media platforms available in the United States along with their total worldwide monthly users. Each platform requires different types of materials and engagement, because each one caters to a different audience. Facebook is currently the largest social media platform in the United States and offers the option to purchase promotional ad

placement within its text, picture, and video experiences. YouTube is a platform to share videos (with captions) that can be educational or informative. Instagram is a good platform for pictures and short videos or “Reels” (with captions). Make sure you enable captions manually. TikTok is a social network platform to share primarily short videos (with captions) and now pictures as well. Snapchat claims self-deleting “posts” as its primary purpose. Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok are platforms where more informal and “goofy” posts are expected. They allow consumers to get seconds-long “inside looks” at their favorite organizations, some via self-deleting pictures or short videos. X, formerly called Twitter, is a platform to share news and quick updates. It may be the only platform where a business can post many times a day without overwhelming followers.

Social media users tend to “follow” individuals (friends, family, celebrities, etc.) rather than organizations, but when social media users follow a business, they often create a strong bond and show increased brand loyalty. They may expect that the organizations they follow will make no more than one high-quality contribution (“post”) per day. Social media users do not want to be bombarded with content and desire quality over quantity.

A social media presence for your business presents an opportunity to collect impactful reviews from customers’ comments and “tags” (automatically linked to the customer’s post on the social media platform). These comments and reviews are often seen as more trustworthy than traditional comments left on a company’s website or various web outlets. When you do receive a comment, it is ideal to respond within 24 hours if possible. Responding shows your customers that your business is engaged and listening to them.

Table 1. Major social media platforms available in the United States along with their total worldwide monthly users.

Social Media Platform	Type of Platform	Monthly Active Users at End of 2024
Facebook	Social network	3.0 Billion
YouTube	Informative video	2.5 Billion
Instagram	Picture & short video with captions	2.0 Billion
TikTok	Picture & short video with captions	1.6 Billion
Snapchat	Very short self-deleting videos	800 Million
X (Twitter)	News and information	619 Million
LinkedIn	Professional networking	310 Million

To use social media for small business promotion, you'll likely want to choose your most engaged social media employee for account management and posting content. Make sure everyone using the business' social media accounts is on the same page with respect to appropriate content and style. Avoid the common pitfall of accidentally posting private content under the organizational account. Consider obtaining a second mobile device for all business content and do not allow employees to log in to that account on their personal devices. And remember that nothing is ever permanently deleted on the internet. Always save a copy of your content to your files.

**Note:** It's important to maintain consistent branding across channels.

## ADVERTISING

**Advertising** is paid promotion in print (newspapers, magazines, flyers), broadcast media (radio, TV, internet, podcasts) or online (website, blogs, social media, email newsletters).

Different methods of advertising can be used together. For example, it is often cost effective to buy small print ads designed to direct traffic to your website and social media sites or use radio ads to provide information about your product or guide potential customers to your website or place of business. In these cases, the ad needs little more than a catchy phrase, an attractive photo or logo, and the site addresses. Remember before you dive into paid advertising to make sure it will reach your target customers.

Advertising and promotion can be expensive and difficult to do effectively. Paid print and broadcast advertising can be "black holes" of cash flow with no guarantee of success. It usually doesn't pay to buy just a single ad. Instead, develop a series, or "campaign" of ads that includes a message, plans for the size and frequency of the campaign, and a means to measure effectiveness. Your ad campaign message should echo your company's mission statement, a summary of your business' core values.

If you decide to move forward with paid promotion, determine a measure of **return on investment (ROI)**. For example, if you spend \$1,000 on an ad campaign and you can trace \$5,000 worth of sales to that campaign, then you have an ROI of \$5 per dollar invested. But remember ROI is not profit: you still have the other costs of producing your product.

To determine ROI, you need to track the sources of your customers. You can use tools such as coded email, mailing addresses, survey questionnaires, or web analytics to indicate where the prospective client got

your contact information. If you have hired help from a web developer, they may offer a package to collect and organize this information for you.

**Pay-per-click advertising** is a model where you pay only when someone clicks on your ad. It is a sometimes expensive and sometimes effective way to advertise online. Advertisers bid on keywords (e.g. "fresh," "California," "crab") that they believe their target market will plug into search engines to shop for products. a business might buy several keywords. When the keywords are entered into the search engine, the advertiser's website link is displayed with the search results; when the shopper clicks on the advertiser's link, that advertiser is charged the amount bid.

**Keyword research** is the beginning of this process where you, the business owner, identify common search terms and phrases that your consumers use to find products or services online. These keywords should be incorporated into your site content.

**Banner ads** are digital ads that are positioned across the top, sides, or bottom of a website that link to the advertiser's website. They often include an attention-grabbing image, a logo, and limited text and are meant to generate traffic. Banner ads typically have lower conversion rates (visitors converted into customers) than SEO (search engine optimization) or content marketing (written material for blogs, newsletters, emails, etc.), because banner ads are a more intrusive form of advertising. You can use banner ad networks, which are publishers who connect advertisers to several related websites, to target specific types of host websites. Advertising costs can be based on impressions (views) or a pay-per-click model.

You can generate supplemental income from your website by displaying banner ads from other sites. This is known as reciprocal advertising. For example, direct marketers might find a cooking recipe website a good affiliate or reciprocal advertising partner. You could have banners advertising your website and displaying pictures of your products on the recipe pages for seafood dishes. If you choose to host banner ads be mindful of maintaining a clean appearance for your website.

## Email and SMS marketing

Beyond having a website and utilizing social media channels, businesses often attract customers through email promotion and SMS (text) marketing. Curating a list of email addresses and sending emails directed at a specific target market has been very successful for seafood sales, with many businesses and associations using email marketing effectively. Emails can be augmented with valuable content to increase readership and response rates. Coined "content marketing," these

emails provide information of value to your target audience, like preparation techniques, recipes or unique knowledge.

**Email marketing** can be used to send messages to a list of existing subscribers to share information, drive sales or create community. Emails should be easy to read and worthwhile for subscribers to open. For example, they may have a sale, use images, have links, or share highlights from the week or behind-the-scenes photos or stories. One email marketing strategy may be to send an email at the beginning, middle, and end of the harvest for in-season updates along with any potential sale or discount opportunities. It is important to be consistent and to show up throughout the year—in other words, to stay in your customer's inbox. Don't be discouraged if less than 1/4 of recipients open your email, as open rates for email marketing may be low. Recipients will likely still see your subject line and any preview text their email client provides.

You may consider using an email marketing software (Mailchimp, Constant Contact, etc.). With these tools, you can create emails from templates, personalize messages, and segment subscriber lists for more effective marketing.

**SMS or text message marketing** involves sending text messages to customers, often for alerts on events,

promotions or holiday specials. The downside of this form of marketing is that you need customer phone numbers, and that information is often harder to get than email addresses.

Email and SMS marketing are opt-in, which means customers need to sign up for it.

**Note:** For both email and SMS marketing, utilize automations and schedule messages to be sent ahead of time to be more efficient.

Software platforms for website development, email and SMS marketing vary widely in cost. You should determine what you want from the software (template availability, custom domain, number of subscribers and messages, customer support, e-commerce integration, social media integration, etc.) and then select the option that is best for you.

Developing a website for marketing and promotion can be critical for small businesses to attract potential customers, establish credibility, and offer information about products. See Chapter 7 to learn more about effective website marketing.

**Find more tips on marketing and promoting your product on the accompanying website to this manual, "Market Your Catch": <https://marketyourcatch.msi.ucsb.edu/start-expand/promoting-your-product/>.**

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