

The Definitive Guide to eCommerce Marketing



Ecommerce Marketing Strategies: A Comprehensive Guide for Growth

“A failure to plan,” the old adage goes, “is a plan to fail.”

In 2018 and beyond, growing, competing, and scaling demands a comprehensive approach to online sales. Starting with an Executive Summary Template — to lead you and your organization to success — this guide outlines:

14 ecommerce marketing strategies ...

1. Compose an executive summary
2. Identify your goals and objectives
3. Craft a mission statement and value proposition

4. Target the right customers and market(s)
5. Conduct a situational analysis
6. Develop a pricing and positioning strategy
7. Optimize your distribution and fulfillment plan
8. Create a cross-channel promotion plan
9. Inventory existing marketing assets
10. Construct a conversion strategy
11. Explore joint ventures and partnerships
12. Detail a strategy for increasing orders
13. Deploy a referral strategy
14. Outline financial projections

1. Compose an Executive Summary

Writing an executive summary is both the first and last step in creating a marketing plan. Like the name suggests, it will summarize — i.e., catalog, align, and bring together — all the other sections in the document as well as provide you, your employees, your advisors, and your (potential) investors an easy-to-understand and implement overview.

Marketing Plan: Executive Summary

Introduce your company (points 1-3). Briefly describe your business and the products or services you offer. Include your goals, objectives, mission statement, and value proposition.

Next, highlight your target customers and the markets you serve (point 4). Add high-level details about their demographics and psychographics. Also include the purchase process (or, "buyers journey").

Outline your situational analysis and positioning (points 5-6). This should summarize your product's distribution channels, the broader competitive landscape, current financial conditions, and any pertinent external forces.

Walkthrough your growth strategies (points 7-13), including the ...

- Distribution plan
- Marketing plan
- Marketing assets
- Conversion strategy
- Joint ventures and partnerships
- Strategies for increasing orders
- Referral strategies

Conclude with your financial projections (point 14).

Reverse engineer the executive summary after you've completed the rest of your marketing plan and do your best to keep it limited to one-to-three pages.

2. Identify Your Goals and Objectives

This is where you set the stage and paint a broad picture of what your marketing activities will be focused on for the upcoming year.

Goals might include (but are not limited to):

- Penetrating or creating a market
- Stealing customers from an established competitor
- Expanding product distribution (on or offline)
- Launching a new product or product line
- Scaling existing [growth strategies](#) at the enterprise level

As you define your objectives, use real numbers to add gravity to how you plan to achieve the goal.

If the goal is “Grow revenue by 25% each quarter” your objectives might be:

- Add 300 new customers per month
- Increase repeat purchases by 10%
- Increase AOV by 15%

Don’t worry about getting into the “how” just yet, but rather let this Goals & Objectives summary set the stage for the rest of your ecommerce marketing strategy. As you flesh out the next few sections, you’ll build the case for why the market will be receptive, and how to achieve these objectives tactically.

3. Craft a Mission Statement and Value Proposition

This is typically a finely-honed paragraph that considers the following:

Company Vision

- Why are we in business?

- What markets do we serve and why?
- What are the main benefits we offer our customers?
- What does the company want to be known for?
- What does the company want to prove to the industry, customers, partners, etc?
- What's the general philosophy for doing business?
- What products/services does the company offer?

Company History

- When and where was the company founded?
- Why was it started?
- How has our product evolved?

Resources & Competencies

- What are we good at?
- What's special about us compared to current and future competitors? (no need to name names)
- What gives us a competitive advantage?
- What are our advantages in terms of people, products, finances, technical, supply chain, etc.?

Not all of these things need to make it into the mission statement of course, but having an awareness of each of these elements can help you to choose what is most important to the organization.

For example, there's an old, high-end men's shoe store in my town. If they were to launch an online store, I would write their mission statement to say:

"Since 1915, Lexington Shoes has outfitted gentlemen with luxury, hand-crafted footwear. Our founder Charles Lexington believed the only way to deliver a premium experience was to make eye contact, listen deeply and make recommendations based on the person, not the products on the shelf.

"100 years and 3 generations later, we stand by this value and feel its increasing importance in our ever connected, too busy to slow down and see each other world."

The mission statement differs from the value proposition, in that the value proposition is a concise promise of value. [Peep Laja of CXL says](#):

“A value proposition is a promise of value to be delivered. It’s the primary reason a prospect should buy from you.

“In a nutshell, a value proposition is a clear statement that explains how your product solves customers’ problems or improves their situation (relevancy), delivers specific benefits (quantified value), tells the ideal customer why they should buy from you and not from the competition (unique differentiation).

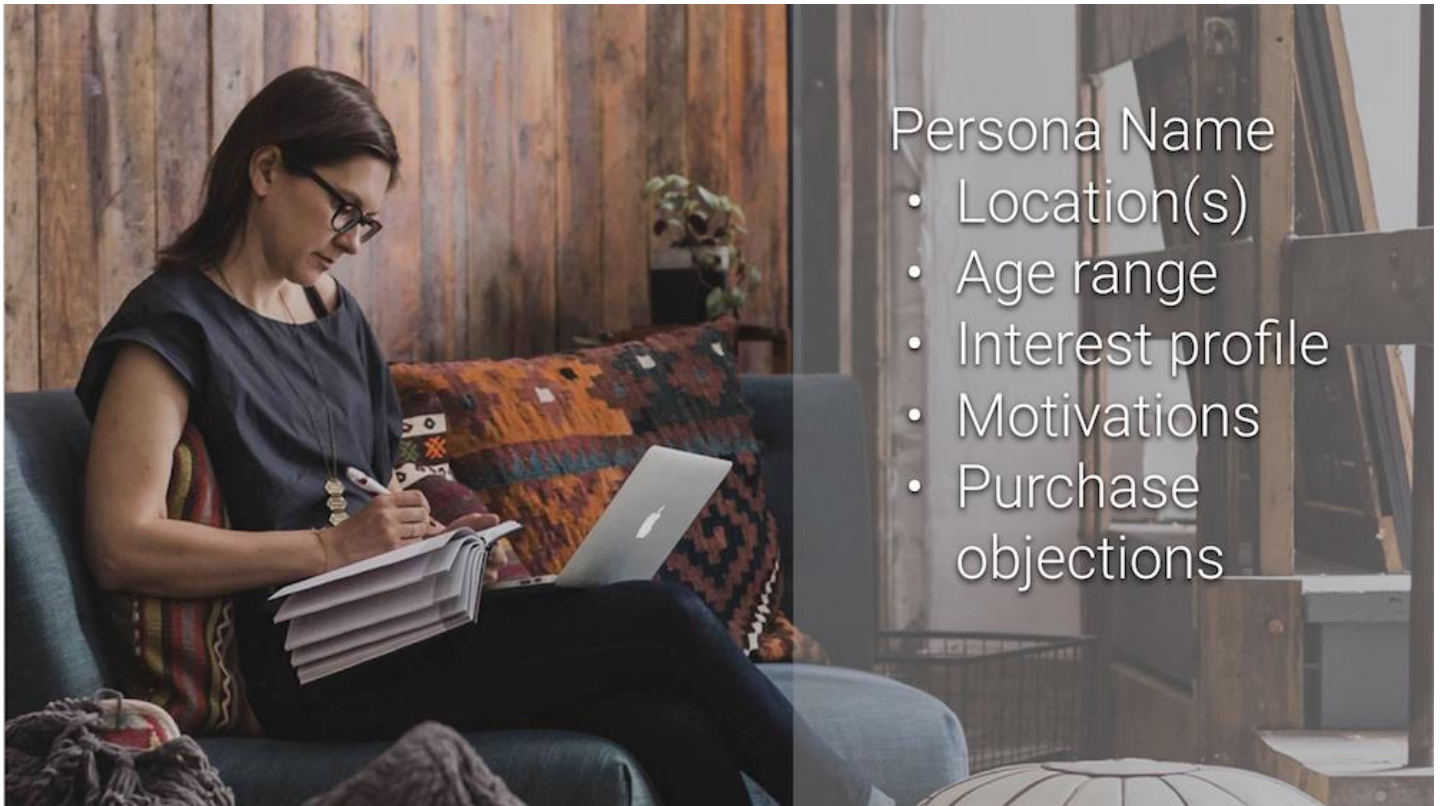
“You have to present your value proposition as the first thing the visitors see on your home page, but should be visible in all major entry points of the site.”

4. Target the Right Customers and Market(s)

In this section of the marketing strategy, detail everything you can about your target customer or customer groups.

This includes any relevant customer demographics:

- Age
- Gender
- Geographic location
- Income
- Purchasing power
- Family status
- Or any other quantifiable data



[“Customer Psychology in Ecommerce”](#) offers a phenomenal summary the various elements that go into building personas. If your customers are U.S based, I recommend using the Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor’s website to gather the information. I’ve also found City-Data(dot)com to be an excellent source of quantifiable demographic information.

The target customers section should also include relevant psychographic profile information:

- Hobbies
- Books
- Movies
- Websites
- Lifestyle
- Television shows
- Magazines

All of this will influence a wide range of areas in your business, including brand positioning, advertising creative, ad placement, local markets you want to penetrate and more.

Being able to more clearly identify your target market will help you to “speak the language” of your prospective customers, and get a higher return on your investment for your creative assets.

Using this, describe your target market approach. Are you using a mass-market strategy or speaking to a niche?

When evaluating your target market try to answer the following questions:

- What problem(s) does your product solve?
- Who uses the product?
- Why do they use the product?
- When do they use the product?
- How is the product used?

You should also use this section to discuss how customers perceive your product in relation to competitor's products or the other solutions they use to solve the same problem. What are their attitudes toward your company, and to the general product category you serve?

Describe their purchasing process as well:

- What does the decision-making process involve?
- What sources of information do they seek?
- What's the timeline for their purchase?
- Who actually makes the purchase?
- Who or what influences the purchase?

["How to Map a Customer Journey in Ecommerce: The Data Behind Consumer Psychology and Experience"](#) not only includes a wealth of direct wisdom from some of ecommerce's leading voices, it also provides a number of customer journey overview as well as a downloadable template:

Customer journey map

Buyer Stage	Awareness	Conversion	Loyalty
Time frame	Day 1-2 Report: time to transaction	Day 3 Report: time to transaction	Day 21 Report: time to review
Buyer's goal	Find lasting motivation to live a healthier life	Start an exercise plan and feel comfortable in gym clothes	See improvements, buy advanced workout gear
Brand's goal	Educate, build trust, opt into email newsletter	Inform on products, add to cart, purchase	Product review, repeat purchase, feedback
Channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facebook• Instagram• Pinterest• Google	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Direct• Email• Google	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Direct• Email• Facebook Group
Pages	/home /blogs/motivation /blogs/fitness-research /blogs/workout-ebook	/home /products/shorts /products/sizing-chart /cart /checkout	/blogs/fitness-research /products/rings /products/kettlebells /blogs/fitness-challenge

And finally, provide market size estimates for those included in your target market.

- What is the largest possible market if everyone bought?
- What percentage actually bought from you in the past?
- Given the current timeframe, how much growth do you think is possible in the next quarter, year, and five years?

5. Conduct a Situational Analysis

This section of your marketing strategy is to provide a snapshot of where everything stands at the time the plan is presented.

This section, in particular, can take a significant amount of time as it scrutinizes multiple levels of your business, your market, where you stand, and how your competitors are doing.

If you're running an established business, this is where you take inventory of what's currently working and what isn't. For new businesses, this is the research you that'll help you understand the market you're getting into. This includes an analysis of the following areas:

Current Products

Product Attributes

What are the main features of the products, and major benefits received by those using the product, current branding strategies, etc - If you're selling the same product other retailers, the "product" would be in how you're positioning the product category and the benefits of buying from you instead of everyone else.

Pricing

Describe pricing used at all distribution levels, including the pricing to final users, wholesale buyers, the incentives offered, discounts, etc

Distribution

Detail the various ways the product is made accessible to final users, including the channels used, major benefits received by distributors, how the products are shipped, and the process for handling orders.

Promotion

Describe the promotional strategies and tactics in terms of advertising, sales promotions, personal selling, public relations and how the product is currently positioned in the market.

Take inventory of which promotions exceeded expectations in the previous year, and which did not perform to expectations. Include hard numbers when possible.

Services Offered

Discuss the various services offered to final users and distributors before, during and after the sale.

Include performance and/or usage metrics of each service, and impact it's had on the bottom line. Customers who use our personal styling service tend to spend 4x more than customers who do not. Wholesalers who use the quick order function in the ordering portal process 2x more orders than wholesalers that do not.

Distributor Networks

Evaluate how your company's product is currently (or will be) distributed.

This includes your own website, any third-party marketplaces you might sell on, physical retailers, pop-up shops, affiliates, referrals from existing customers etc.

For your own website, it's also worth breaking down which traffic sources brought the most sales in the past (i.e., Adwords, Facebook Ads, Organic Search, etc.).

List out each of the channels in the supply chain and provide an overview of their performance.

Be sure to include the needs/benefits sought by distributors. This might include referral fees on marketplace sites like Amazon or Etsy, or the need for localized co-promotion with a physical retailer.

Also, include your product's role in the distributor's business.

- How important is it to their strategy?
- How do they position it in relation to the competition?
- How do they make their purchases & who influences their purchase decision?

When evaluating distributors, be sure to list the type of distributor, their size, geographic region, and the markets *they* serve.

Competition Analysis

This is where you'll examine your primary competitors serving the same target market.

You'll want to analyze direct competitors:

- Target markets served
- Product attributes
- Pricing
- Promotion
- Distribution
- Services offered

You'll also want to discuss their strengths and weaknesses including

- Financial standing
- Target market perception
- Research and development capabilities

Finding this will take some digging. [Audenti has a great article that can help.](#)

It may also be a good idea to provide a S.W.O.T analysis on your competitors to provide an overview of their Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

Current Financial Condition

Using charts, tables, and graphs along with a brief paragraph explaining what you're looking at will prove invaluable for making the information easy to digest.

Current Sales Analysis

Overall industry sales and market share:

- Total market sales
- Total for your company's products
- Total for competition

By segments/ product categories:

- Total for segments/product categories
- Total for company's products
- Total for competition

By distribution channel:

- Total for each channel
- Total for company's product by channel
- Total for competition by channel

By geographic region:

- Total for each region
- Total for company's product(s) by region
- Total for competition by region

Profitability Analysis

In addition to the sales analysis, you'll want to look at how your expenses impacted those sales, and identify the areas where you should scale back or double down.

Marketing Expenses

- Direct: those that can be tied back to the product. (i.e., ad spend, spend on creative assets, etc)
- Indirect: expenses that are tied to talent and technology fees

The point of this is for you to evaluate if certain channels, markets, geographic regions, etc are worth it moving forward.

For highly detailed plans, this may need to be broken down into individual products or product categories.

External Forces

These are the areas you have no control over that have a (positive or negative). This could include product trends, natural disasters, seasonality, etc.

Other areas to consider are:

- Social and cultural
- Demographic
- Economic
- Technological
- Political
- Legal, regulatory, and ethical

If you're an established business, consider these from the previous year and discuss how this impacted certain rises or drops within specific markets and channels.

If however, you do not have your own historical data to consider, measure the known impact these external forces have had on established competitors and those in your market.

Being prepared for external factors could lead to major opportunities. Think - having enough snow shovels on the shelves during a blizzard, or having enough medical supplies during a natural disaster, or having a protocol in place for upcoming regulatory changes within an industry.

Being prepared for external forces is where a company can catch its competitors sleeping.

Summary of the Situational Analysis

Because there is so much to take in with the situational analysis, it's good to provide a summary of everything you've just talked about.

Discuss the opportunities that may arise as a result of any of these factors, what you'd like to spend more on, and where you should spend less.

6. Develop a Pricing and Positioning Strategy

In this section of your marketing strategy, detail the positioning you desire within your industry and how your pricing will support it.

Using the information you've collected in your situational analysis, pricing will likely need to be adjusted by distribution channel, competitor positioning, geographic region, and so on.

Pricing on channels you own should not also be overly competitive with distribution partners who sell the same product. If you're selling for 20% less than a highly visible partner, for example, you could risk upsetting the partner and losing their distribution.

When discussing positioning, you may also want to *briefly* discuss how you'll want to position your product with your *existing* distribution partners.

Do you develop exclusive product lines with specific distributors? Will you include special bonuses for customers who buy through that partner? Are certain items only available when a customer orders direct?

Tie all of these adjustments and changes into real numbers and how it impacts the bottom line.

Do this showing the impact of:

Customer sales

- By volume and growth percentage
- By customer segments

Channel sales

- By volume and growth percentage
- By channel

Also, show the margins associated with working with each channel and how profitable potential price/positioning changes will be.

Because this relates specifically to your *existing channels* the goal is to show how these changes will attribute to the objectives outlined above.

7. Optimize Your Distribution and Fulfillment Plan

This is where you detail how and where customers will be buying from you.

Are they buying directly through you? Are they buying from other retailers and distributors? Are you doing pop-up shops or selling in person?

If you're working on a large scale, it's worth organizing your distribution touch-points into various regions.

Given how sensitive logistical issues can be, we've spent considerable time at Shopify Plus outlining not just the general pros and cons of third-party logistics (3PLs) — namely, international warehouses and fulfillment — but advice from industry leaders along with a series of questionnaires to guide you.

You can access those in-depth articles here:

- [Omni-Channel vs Multi-Channel: What is the Difference?](#)
- [Supply Chain Optimization: How to Develop a Logistics Network](#)
- [Third Party Logistics \(3PL\): Everything You Need to Know About](#)
- [International Warehouses in Global Ecommerce](#)
- [Global Fulfillment: Finding the Right International Shipping Partner](#)

8. Create a Cross-Channel Promotion Strategy

This section is where you'll give an overview of your overall promotion plan, providing a summary of existing and new channels you'd like to add to the mix and how it could impact your growth.

It is important to calculate the both the monetary and time costs that will be associated with each channel and how it will impact growth.

For instance:

You currently work with a smaller marketplace site, and for \$1,000/day, you're able to receive front page & sitewide promotion to the products you sell with them. Estimated traffic during the time frame is X. If existing conversion rates are Y and there is a Z% increase in traffic, it could result in ____ new revenue.

Make sure you include *all* possible channels you want to explore including but not limited to:

- Partnerships
- SEO
- Facebook
- Referral
- Affiliate
- PPC
- Street
- Magazine and print
- Radio
- Television
- Direct mail
- Physical retail
- Blogs
- Other social media

Please Note: At scale, each of these channels has a **real cost** to be done properly. For as much as you can [build backlinks](#) and [perform keyword research](#) on your own and *maybe* get early traction, at some point, you will need to hire somebody who knows what it takes to break into more competitive SERPs.

For each area that falls under “Online Marketing,” you may want to create separate documents for each, as these plans can be quite detailed on their own.

9. Inventory Existing Marketing Assets

This is the creative used to promote your content to current and existing customers. This may include:

- Your website
- Ad creative
- Design talent
- HD photography
- Business cards
- Catalogs

Identify what you already have, and what's needed to successfully execute the promotion strategies discussed in the previous section.

10. Construct a Conversion Strategy

Once you get people to yours or one of your distributor's sites, how do you plan on converting them to paying customers?

On sites you don't control, this could include, but is certainly not limited to:

- Improving sales copy
- High-quality photography
- Testimonials

On sites you *do* own, you're free to experiment with iterative testing, such as making the search function easier to use, improving the value proposition, and increasing the visibility of features that prospective customers need to feel comfortable buying.

Using what you know about the different customer segments you've identified (i.e., high-ticket spenders, frequent buyers, etc.) propose a handful of ways you might be able to get them spending more & more frequently in this section

Conversion optimization is an ongoing process that is too encompassing to boil down to a handful of tactics. However, if you're providing an overview here, it's a good starting point for a separate fully fleshed out document for later.

11. Explore Joint Ventures and Partnerships

This is where you identify the agreements you've made with other organizations to help reach new customers or better monetize your existing customers.

When you see McDonald's co-promote Coca-Cola, or when you buy a remote and it includes Energizer batteries, this is JV and Partnerships at work.

Think about what other purchases your customers are making before, during, or after they buy from you. Make a list of the companies that provide those solutions and reach out to secure them.

12. Detail a Strategy for Increasing Orders

Detail how you'll make more revenue per customer. This could include using:

- [Free shipping thresholds](#)
- [Loyalty programs](#)
- Product bundling
- Subscription services
- [Flash sales](#)
- Exclusive product releases
- Savvy discounts and coupon codes

In this section, be sure to reiterate any relevant qualitative research or data you've found that would support a need for the program. Also, provide estimates of how much each program might cost to implement and projected impact it may have on growth.

13. Deploy a Referral Strategy

How do you incentivize existing customers to refer new customers?

A [strong referral marketing program](#) could do wonders for your business; however, it requires careful planning and needs to ensure the rewards for joining are valuable for your existing customer and whoever they're referring.

Which customer segments will be the most receptive to taking action with a referral marketing program, and at what point you should reach out to them. Frequent buyers, for example, may be a good starting point.

14. Outline Financial Projections

Here is a final summary of all of the expenses incurred from each of the previous sections as well as their projected growth rates and timelines.

While these will never be 100% accurate, they will provide solid guideposts for your overall marketing strategy and goals to achieve.

As you progress through the year, work off of this document and create parallel documents to track the success/failure of certain campaigns. With any luck, you will exceed your own expectations and have even more budget to play around with the next year.

Conclusion

There is a lot of work that goes into ecommerce marketing strategies.

If you're well established and using multiple channels, take the opportunity early in the marketing strategy to discover which channels and segments are wasting your time.

Regardless of who you are, don't try and run a business without a detailed marketing strategy.