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## **Strategic Market Planning Can Work For You**

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Whether you are considering entrepreneurship for the first time or are contemplating expanding your product or service line, one of the first things a smart marketer does is develop a strategic marketing plan.

Marketing can be one of the most exciting, creative, and challenging parts of owning a business. But without a strategic plan it can become a dreaded chore with dismal results. The marketing departments of established companies perform several steps as part of developing their product or service marketing strategies.

The following steps will also work for you:

Step 1. Determine consumer needs and wants. Take a moment and think about some consumer needs and desires that you are familiar with. As an example, perhaps during certain times of the year there is a shortage of housing for visitors in your community. If your home is large with plenty of room and you enjoy meeting people, you may want to consider opening a bed and breakfast.

Step 2. Develop product or service ideas. These should be based on your conclusions from Step 1.

Step 3. Research the industry. It is wise to collect as much information as possible about the industry you are entering, including trends that will affect your product or service.

Step 4. Research the competition. Try to find out the following types of information about your competition: who they are, their location, their line of products or services, their price range, special services offered, their reputations, how they promote their business, and any other pertinent information. Based on this information you can develop your competitive edge.

Step 5. Research the target market. A target market is a segment of the market a business feels it can serve most effectively and profitably. You will want to gather information about your target market such as: age, gender, educational levels, life styles, where they live, income, and occupation.

Step 6. Test the product/service idea. One good way to test your product/service idea is to offer a free trial period to a small focus group. A focus group is a group of people representative of your target market. After they have tried your product or service, ask them for their honest opinion. Would they recommend any changes? Would they be willing to purchase it? How much would they be willing to pay?

Step 7. Modify the product/service. Based on the feedback from your test, modify the product or service accordingly.

Step 8. Introduce your product/service through promotion. To maximize the effect of your promotion, select your advertising media based on your target market. Then develop a message that not only sells your new product but also helps develop a distinctive image for your business.

Introducing a new product or service into the market can be an exciting and successful endeavor. So why not start now developing a strategic marketing plan that will help ensure your success?