

Book Excerpt...

The 4As: A Four Step Approach to Marketing **By Brian Norris, ©2005, All Rights Reserved**

Summary:

I've helped clients market since 1990. During that time, I've developed a four-step definition of what makes a marketing campaign successful.

Marketing is a four step process that begins with analyzing and defining a qualified universe of potential users or buyers. After this first phase in the marketing process, a true marketing effort succeeds in capturing the attention of the intended buyers within the targeted universe. Third, systematic effort must be put into getting the prospects to accept the concepts or propositions being offered via the marketing effort. Finally, with all three of the previous steps achieved, the marketer must convert the prospective buyer into an actual buyer by getting them to take the desired action (purchase, rent, call, download, subscribe, refer, sell, follow the law, become a member, etc.).

While most marketers have used the Ps of marketing (Price, Place, Product, Promotion) to develop their marketing plans, using the 4As, (Analysis, Attention, Acceptance, Action), more accurately helps determine and formulate the catalysts that lead to sales and revenue; the ultimate goal of any marketing effort.

A deeper look...

Marketing works by using my four-step process (the 4As). To succeed, they ought to be followed in order.

- **The first step: Analysis.** Time needs to be earmarked to determine the drivers, emotional and logical needs, and traditional and psycho graphic nuances of the intended

audience. This step allows focus and micro-segmentation and a significant decrease in marketing cost.

- **The second step: Attention.** Once you've identified who the core prospect for your products or services is, creative efforts must be taken to get and maintain their attention.
- **The third step: Accept.** You must use the tools of copy, design, social networks, psychology and repetition to get the intended audience to accept that your solution is the best one to take. This acceptance must take place despite the fact that your solution is just one of many options available in an increasingly saturated marketplace.
- **Finally, the fourth step: Action.** The prospect has to act on their acceptance of your proposition by doing whatever it is you want them to do. Generally, this might be making one or more purchases (be sure your marketing strategy includes opportunities for buyers to evangelize their positive purchasing experiences to others). It may also be picking up a phone or responding to a direct mail offer or fundraising effort or petition drive. The 4As, used correctly and consistently, results in measurable, traceable return on marketing investment.

Here's my 4 step approach to effective marketing in more detail.

First Step, Analyze. You have to analyze the needs of your audience. No buyer or buying population is alike. And, if you try to apply a one size fits all approach to your marketing, then you're going to be nothing special to anyone. That's why you have to create the perception, at least, that your goods are created with a specific niche or target audience in mind.

Better still, market as though you have one specific person in mind. You may only have one product or service, but you have to niche that product or service differently to different audiences, and segment your audiences in unique ways. Find out:

- Who has money or who has spent money on similar products or services?

- What are their beliefs and values?
- What are their desires, dreams and passions?
- What are their fears and secrets that they'd prefer to keep in the shadows?
- Where do they go on Mondays and Tuesdays and Wednesdays?
- Why do they buy what they buy?

This first step presents a critical opportunity for you and a major point of implosion for many marketers in every category. For the rest of the equation to work, you'll have to earmark time to analyze the needs of your audience.

Step Two, Attention. After you know who your audience is, after you've identified who your most likely, best prospects are, then you have to get that specific niche's attention. Focus exclusively on your buying universe and their environment. Do you have the time or resources to be concerned about upsetting your non-buyers? Of course not.

You're almost always going to have a group of people in every market resentful towards your sales and marketing efforts. They or their actions will attempt to relegate sales and marketing professionals to third-class status. Don't let these individuals rob you of your passion, pride and creative spirit. The reality is, that without sales and marketing, nothing happens. So don't be shy or ashamed of your role in marketing. You are the lifeblood of your organization. You can have everything else in place, but if you don't have sufficient marketing, and revenue coming in, you're going to end up closing your doors. Ask yourself and your entire staff questions that revolve around getting the attention of your defined prospects.

- Where are our customers on a daily basis?
- What are they really looking at throughout the day?

- What is shocking, beautiful, humorous, emotional, frightening, and urgent enough for them to pay attention to our message and unique marketing proposition?

At this stage, brainstorm and develop some traditional and untraditional strategies to get and hold on to the attention of your target buyer with every marketing impression. Be bold without losing sight of your core principles. Few organizations have ever succeeded by being plain vanilla.

Once you've got their attention you move to Step Three in the process, Accept. To succeed you'll have to use every tool at your disposal to encourage and get the prospect to accept your proposition, no matter what it might be. You have to get them to accept that your marketing proposition (despite the fact there might be countless other competitors in the marketplace right now) is the best one to help them achieve the outcomes they're looking for.

People do not buy products or services, they buy outcomes. You and I are in the outcomes business. Your company, association, government agency, religious institution, online business, consultancy, or non-profit is merely a conduit that links people to the emotional, physical, spiritual and mental outcomes they crave. In a world of dysfunctional families, dead end jobs, wars, pain, boredom, addictions, abuse, complacency and apathy, people seek escape, respect and salvation – something new! Even if that escape is temporary, people will pay for it. Your goods provide a vehicle to get people what they want quickly. Talk about the outcomes not just the vehicle.

For instance, suppose you sell State parks as a destination for families. To successfully market that park you'd have to shift your thinking to the end results, the outcomes that a visitor wants to get by going to the park. State parks are more than just a destination or a vacation to-do. Parks allow people to find a sacred space and carve out a sacred time for them to reconnect with their family. It's an opportunity for them to reconnect with the earth. It's a chance for them to escape the hustle and bustle. You're providing a rare chance for them to feel what salvation and paradise on earth feels like. That's what you're selling, not just a bunch of trees.

Another example, accounting services. Why should a person or company use the services of an accounting firm when perfectly good software can do the task just as well, at a fraction of the cost?

- Because software can't provide peace of mind.
- Because software still requires input and a knowledge that I don't have time or desire to acquire.
- Because I want someone on my side who can protect me from fraudulent employees or unfair tax and accounting legislation.
- Because software programs use finite formulas and I might have a truly unique situation that only a qualified and trained accountant can exploit to my benefit.
- Finally, after a 12 hour work day, I want to be with my love ones, and not have to worry about whether all the financial tracks are covered. That's what I can pay someone else (the accounting service) to worry about.

Those are the outcomes most people really want. The product or service is simply a vehicle to expedite delivery of the ultimate outcomes. It's the heart of marketing; delivery of outcomes valuable to the end user. Notice I didn't say valuable goods. No product or service is valuable unless a person perceives it as worth paying for or giving something up to get. Although you control supply and demand or pay a spokesperson to claim that something is worth having, value is ultimately determined by the consumer not the producer.

But how often do you see, watch and hear marketers marketing to themselves, pounding their chests with bullet points and catchy slogans that talk about size and ego and other worthless features that rarely connect to what the prospect wants? When the pontificating begins, we quickly become blind to and learn to ignore the garbage marketing.

By now, this Four Step marketing equation is progressing nicely. You've thoroughly analyzed your audience. You've got their

attention. The prospect has accepted that your solution might be the right one (better still, the only one) for themselves, their family or their company.

Now, comes Step Four, Action. You have to get them to act. The potential buyers have to do something with the information and relationship you've cultivated by taking a specific, intended course of action. They have to make the transition from tire kicker or prospect to full-fledge customer/buyer/member/inductee. Money or some other commitment has to take place to make your marketing efforts worthwhile. Will it be a trip to your store, a phone call to set up an appointment or a visit to your website to order online? Will it be a completed survey, petition signature or membership renewal?

And you can't afford to settle for the single purchase. One purchase isn't sufficient. Instead, great marketing pros focus on the power of forever. FOREVER! Not just once, or twice or thrice, but repeated purchases that increase in terms of volume, frequency and profitability.

One of the simplest ways to keep marketing expenses fixed or to actually decrease what you spend without negatively impacting sales growth is to focus on your customers.

Way too many businesses spend more money on marketing than necessary. One of the reasons for this overspending is excessive customer churn. The customer buys once and they're never contacted again. Or, they buy once and get burned when the product isn't what it was supposed to be or the buying experience was too painful. All that money spent in acquisition but you don't follow through by delivery positively passionate customer service!

So, the newly acquired customer moves on to another vendor or solutions provider. Thanks to sloppy customer retention strategies, someone else gets them to accept that their proposition is better. Not only didn't you manage your front end, but your back end (potential for future purchases and upgrades) was ignored, too.

In fact, most marketers will tell you that they're willing to break even, or even lose a few dollars on the first purchase, because ultimately,

it's not the first purchase that drives long-term growth. What matters most is the repeat business, the lifetime value of each and every single customer.

For example, my girlfriend Nancy loves the taste of Starbucks Caffé Lattes. Nancy goes to Starbucks at least once a day, and orders her iced Venti non-fat latte with two Splendas. Occasionally, she'll treat herself to a vanilla biscotti. On average, Nancy spends about five dollars a day. That's \$25 minimum a week, and at least \$100 per month. Over the course of one year, she'll have spent \$1200.00. After 10 years, she'll have spent \$12,000; at 30 years, it's \$36,000!

Do you think that Starbucks relishes Nancy's loyalty and figures the economic value of her loyalty into their marketing strategies? Absolutely. Now, multiply all the other Starbuck loyalists into the equation. What happens when you factor in the long-term economic value of everyone else just like Nancy (According to Howard Shultz, CEO of Starbucks, the average "Nancy" visits a Starbucks 18 times a month!)?

It's not the one-time purchase, it's the FOREVER value. When you go to Starbucks pay attention to the efforts put into creating the unique experience you're treated to. If you're a regular and even remotely sociable, the baristas probably know your name. They probably know exactly what you want. On certain days they probably have it waiting for you. They take care of you. Starbucks' front-line staff is well trained. They create a consistent product. That consistency breeds some semblance of loyalty and repeat usage amongst a finicky, brand resistant segment. One that will pay \$5.00 for a latte or chai if you deliver value.

A final thought to complete my 4A approach to marketing. One of your highest goals should be to get current prospects or current customers to "go yea into all the world" and evangelize the value of your products and services to other people.

Consider the trends.

Advertising and acquisition is only getting more expensive. And, less people and less qualified eyes are reading that very expensive

advertising. Awareness without action (things being bought and sold or made into law) is meaningless.

The task of resonating above the standard noise grows daunting. What messages people do receive through traditional marketing channels is rarely trusted. Skepticism has never been higher. Many people simply don't believe what's being said.

Many people no longer respond to hi-pressure marketing. They prefer honest, organic, unfiltered messages that don't smack of a slick, pre-meditated marketing machine approach that tends to permeate the airwaves and printed pages of traditional media.

Given these realities, it makes financial sense to invest time, energy and deliberate planning on passive marketing. Passive marketing, also referred to as Buzz Marketing, Consumer to Consumer Marketing, Word-of-Mouth Marketing, or Viral Marketing, is an ongoing process where a friend of a friend, of a friend, of a friend, of a friend recommends a product on your behalf. These friends form social networks which form communities which form global hives that can transfer news at lightning speed, especially with the advent of email, blogs and on-demand meetings created through services like meetup.com.

People have always bartered and purchased based on their informal network of peer recommendations. But when you consider the above trends, the urgency for marketing professionals to assist in creating systems that make it easier for customers to spread their positive purchasing experiences to others has never been higher.

So, what are you doing to make your give your marketing message passive, easy-to- forward and evangelize? Plan for the systems by asking the questions:

- What doctrine is in place that give customers something to believe in, spread to others and anchor into?
- What can you do to help your customers communicate the virtues of your products or services to others effortlessly?

- Where are your prospects looking? What spaces are they not looking at anymore? What information sources does your niche turn to for believable news and updates?
- What channels of influencers exist to help spread your message organically and quickly?
- What distribution channels can be jumped over or bypassed?
- How can you distribute your marketing message through share and peer-to-peer networks?
- What do customers get in return for leverage their reputation in forwarding your message to their colleagues?
- How conversational is your collateral?
- How can you apply what's working in other industries to generate buzz and authentic applause for your company? How can you translate that applause into tangible revenue?

All phases of the 4A approach to marketing must concentrate on mobilizing current databases to “go yea into all of the world” and evangelize the value of your products to other people. This shift in how organizations market and create awareness, attention and action is critical. If you can't mobilize your existing network of internal or external customers (and unconverted prospects) to tell everyone else about what ever it is you're selling, expect an uphill battle.

Brian Norris is a leading marketing, management and motivation strategist, and is author of the best-selling book, The Creative Sales & Marketing Manual. His company, Brian Norris LLC, is the only ultra-premium training company specializing in giving growing companies the power to sell more, lead better and stay positive. To contact Brian directly about your training or consulting needs, call 954-236-4834 or email info@briannorris.com.