

Start the year with a marketing plan

 By [Andrea Paulsen](#)

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A new year - a fresh start! Everybody is rested after their yearend break and full of enthusiasm and positive expectancy. Use that momentum to do what you've always meant to do, but usually don't get around to.



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What's your vision for 2020?

Outline what you'd like to achieve in your business this year. It's likely that you already have a projection of expected overheads and expenses. This usually is the basis for what you need to earn. But don't stop there.

What about business growth, developing new products or services, expansion to other cities or countries? Starting an online business?

Put a marketing plan in place

Nothing happens by itself. You need a plan with deadlines, budget allocation, and commitment from staff.

Get professional help

You probably have an accountant to do your books, and an IT specialist to sort out your computers. So, don't try to become a marketing expert. Focus on your core business and outsource if you don't have funds to employ a full-time marketing person.

Get buy-in

Marketing is part of everyone's job. Don't underestimate the ideas your staff may have. Involve them, have brainstorming sessions and you'll find among the most ridiculous or outlandish ideas that one gem that you can put into practice. Then reward those that have bright ideas with the responsibility to implement them.

Marketing on a shoestring budget

Allocate a budget. Draw up a list of possible marketing activities. You may find that you have more ideas than you have budget.

There's no need to spend large amounts on high-cost advertising. You don't need a full-page advertisement in the *Sunday Times*, nor a banner in the airport arrivals lounge to get your message out there. Rather focus on marketing activities that cost little but offer good returns.

Newsletters and social media

Write articles for your monthly, inhouse newsletter that you can repost on social media and various online publications. Send ad hoc emailers about news in your industry to your database. Because regular newsletters and social media posts increase brand awareness.

Seminars

Offer short, informative seminars to clients at your offices. Keep them low budget. Have a coffee break at the halfway mark to give you the opportunity to network with them. Don't think food has to be the main attraction for clients to attend a seminar. Sharing your knowledge and expertise at no cost is the drawcard.

Differentiate yourself from your competitors

Offer clients free, in-house seminars or workshops about issues that are relevant to their employees. You're not marketing your services, but you're adding value and clients remember that. And these short presentations can be given by junior staff – an opportunity to develop their presentation skills.

Social responsibility

Get active in your community. If you don't already have a social responsibility programme, partner with an NGO in your neighbourhood. Get your staff involved in volunteer work. And, if you can, make a financial contribution or offer your services for free. These activities will create goodwill and promote your brand. As a bonus, you can post what you've done on social media.

When times are tough - diversify

There are always companies that do exceptionally well during tough times. It's all about your mindset. If you believe that your business will struggle during bad economic times, you are going to act accordingly. So, do the opposite. Brainstorm what you can offer your clients as added value, free of charge, that will help them improve their business.

Also, look for additional income streams and ways to utilise your staff when they're not busy.

- Run seminars where you give in-depth input on topical issues and charge for those.
- If you're in a central location and have spare offices and meetings rooms rent them out to business people who come to your city and need an office base (a footnote on a newsletter that you have these facilities is all you need to get the ball rolling).
- Market your services to smaller firms in other cities or countries, who may need a local partner.

Secondments

If you provide a service to clients (such as legal, accounting, etc) and you have junior staff who aren't used to full capacity, consider outsourcing them to clients. Your clients pay a discounted rate for a full-time, inhouse lawyer or accountant, who still has access to senior expertise when required. Your junior will be very keen to add this secondment to their CV. And once they're back at your office, you have a closer relationship with your client and a better understanding of their day-to-

day business requirements. Win-win-win.

First things first:

- Refresh your website and brochures and update individual profiles. Add new expertise, or just rewrite existing content, to make it sound fresh and new. (Don't forget to update your website's copyright year.)
- Plan your seminars and workshops for the whole year in January.
- Draw up a schedule for newsletters, social media posts, etc and assign content provision.
- Enter all relevant events, important dates and deadlines on a year planner. Make sure everyone has access to this information and knows what they're expected to contribute.

If you don't plan ahead, it's not going to happen.

ABOUT ANDREA PAULSEN

I provide freelance writing, proofreading and editing services, with main focus on professional services.

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