

Internet Marketing Planning

(Based on material presented in Roberts, *Internet Marketing; Integrating Online and Offline Strategies*)

In any well-managed business environment, marketing activities are carried out as directed in an annual marketing plan or a marketing program (campaign) plan or both. Developing marketing plans is an essential skill for marketers at many levels in the enterprise. Jain summarizes outcomes of successful planning and execution as follows:

1. Planning puts the organization in a better position to achieve its goals
2. Planning helps the organization progress in the direction desired by management
3. Planning helps every manager think, decide and act more effectively
4. Planning promotes organizational flexibility
5. Planning stimulates the organization to be cooperative, integrated and enthusiastic in pursuit of common goals
6. Planning directs management in the evaluation of progress toward stated goals
7. Planning helps to achieve socially and economically desirable outcomes.¹

He goes on to quote a definition of planning by Kirby E. Warren as:

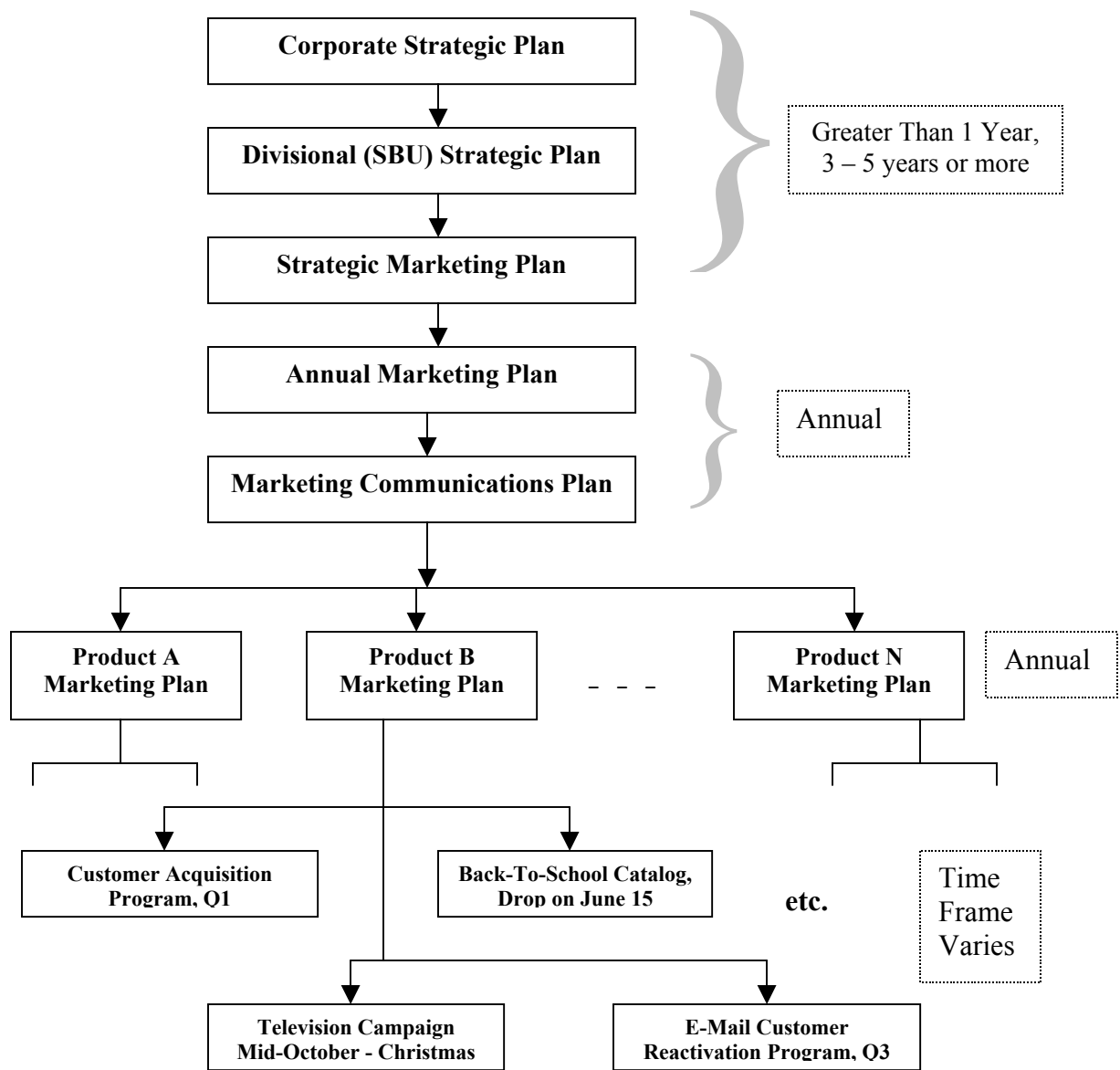
essentially a process directed toward marking today's decisions with tomorrow in mind and a means of preparing for future decisions so that they may be made rapidly, economically, and with as little disruption to the business as possible.²

Most marketing texts do not devote a great deal of space to marketing planning, although many discuss the concept of strategic planning. Advertising and marketing communications texts usually contain an advertising plan outline and a discussion of the advertising planning process. These discussions are useful in the context of Internet marketing planning, because Internet marketing is in many ways a medium for marketing communication. It is, however, different in that Internet marketing may also involve transactional activities. There is a chapter devoted to planning direct-response programs, with an extended example, in M. L. Roberts and P. D. Berger, *Direct Marketing Management*, 2nd ed. (1999, Prentice-Hall).

Authors do not always clearly explain the hierarchy of planning in an enterprise. Understanding where the Internet marketing plan fits into the process is one key to successful planning. It is also important to remember that, whatever the role of Internet marketing in the overall marketing strategy, the planning process is the same. The hierarchy is likely to appear as follows:

¹ Subhash C. Jain, 1997, *Marketing Planning and Strategy*, 5th ed., Cincinnati, OH: South-Western College Publishing, 4.

² Ibid, 5.



The strategic portion of the hierarchy is common to most large enterprises. So is the marketing plan and marketing communications level. Beyond that, enterprises organize the process according to their own needs and organizational structure. Many have a product (brand A) structure and do operational marketing planning at that level. Others have a customer-focused structure (Enterprise Customers Over \$1 billion in Sales; Small and Home-Based Businesses, for example) and do operational planning on that basis. At the most operational level, called here the program planning level, plans for specific marketing activities—from television campaigns to outbound telephone programs to e-mail marketing programs—are developed.

At this level the plans can be quite diverse in terms of content and time frame. It is important to remember several things about marketing program planning:

1. The number and content of program-campaign plans are determined by the annual marketing plan and/or the marketing communications plan. Operational campaigns or programs (the two terms are used here as synonymous) are specified at the previous level of planning but the description is general in nature. At the program planning level, each is planned in detail from objectives through evaluation, budget, and time line.
2. Program plans do not necessarily cover a twelve-month time frame as do annual plans. In fact, they often cover varying periods of time as illustrated in the graphic above.
3. A primary use of program plans in the corporate setting is to request budgets for marketing activities.
4. Without program plans that have a reasonable level of formality and specificity, it is less likely that marketing activities will have clear objectives and be evaluated for success or improvement.

The manner in which businesses engage in marketing planning varies considerably. Many have a formal planning schedule and process. Except in new businesses, or businesses new to formal marketing planning, there are past plans that can be studied by the new marketer. These provide a great deal of guidance that is not available to most students.

It is also important to note that not all enterprises engage in planning at each of the levels illustrated above. The number of levels depends on the size and complexity of the organization as well as the degree to which it adheres to formal processes. While it is important not to let planning become an end itself instead of a means to a successful marketing outcome, the complexity and speed of modern business makes planning more important, not less.

There are a number of interactive software programs that can be used to guide marketers through the planning process. Opinions of their usefulness vary. Some consider them very helpful. Others feel that use of the software tends to lead to less creative thinking on the part of planners. The software is not required to create a good marketing plan. In addition, the software tends to be for annual marketing planning only, not for more specific marketing program planning.

If you want to learn more about marketing planning, you should consult the articles on the Marketing Planning Resources page. There is also an Internet Marketing Plan Outline that contains links to numerous articles that deal with specific parts of the process.

These articles are useful, whether you are studying marketing planning or whether you are about to prepare a plan. Remember, however, that there is no substitute for a thorough understanding of the industry and marketplace in which the enterprise operates or for thorough and creative attention to the many details that make up a successful plan.