

# Platform

## **Introduction**

To start your marketing project, let's establish a platform for your book and your author persona. If this is your first foray into book marketing, these activities will take some time, but they are worth the time and effort.

The contents of this chapter are listed below.

- Strategic Marketing Plan
- Website page
- Amazon Central
- Social media accounts
- Media kit

Today, we'll cover the Strategic Marketing Plan. The other topics will be covered tomorrow.

Most of these activities can't be started until your book is either published or is in pre-order. In other words, after it has a presence on the internet. You'll need the cover image and other information about the book before you can complete these activities. If you have a publisher, a few activities may already be done, but you should review them with an eye to improve and strengthen them.

## **Strategic Marketing Plan**

The Strategic Marketing Plan is the genesis of all your marketing activities. It is the master plan that directs all the tactical tasks that you decide to use. If this sounds nebulous, let me rephrase it. All the marketing tasks except the strategic plan are tactical ones. All these tactical tasks add up to build your tactical plan. Your tactical plan must be in agreement with the objectives in your strategic plan. If the tactical plans and the strategic plan

don't agree, some of your marketing activities will be a waste of time. And possibly money. A marketing task shouldn't be used just because it's doable; it should be used because it agrees with the strategic plan.

Your strategic marketing plan will require a bit of thinking and decision making on your part. Save the answers to your plan; it's reusable for your next book.

Your responses to the strategic plan will vary depending upon the status of your book. More about that later.

I developed a spreadsheet to record your answers. It even has sample answers to make your life a bit simpler. It's an attachment to this lecture so you can grab a copy and use it.

Some of the answers to the questions require information developed in later sessions. As a consequence, you may not be able to immediately complete the strategic plan. That's okay as long as the plan is fully developed before you start spending money on the marketing efforts. This is because the strategic plan is your marketing roadmap and it will define which marketing tactics you deploy.

Here is an outline of your plan. I'll explain much more after the outline.

**Marketing Plan: Product, Customers and Competitors:**

- Describe the book.
- What's different about the book?
- What benefit does the customer get from buying your book?
- Why would a customer buy your book instead of a competitor's book?
- Who are your competitors?
- What benefits does their books offer?
- How is your book better than the competitor's book?
- Who are your target customers?
- What sales channels will you use to sell your book?

- What marketing channels will you use to reach your targeted customers?
- What will you price your book at?
- How does your price compare to the competitor's price?

**Marketing Plan: Objectives and Budgets:**

- What are the financial objectives for this plan?
- How will you measure these financial results?
- What are the secondary objectives for this plan?
- How will you measure the results?
- What is your marketing budget for year 1?
- What is your marketing budget for year 2?

Some of these terms may be unfamiliar to you so I'll explain them all.

Describe the book

This isn't as easy as you may first think. Don't write down a superficial answer. Get into what the book is *really* about. However, keep it short. This doesn't call for a synopsis and it may require a number of rewrites before it's done.

What's different about the book?

This question and the two that follow are critically important questions. Later on, you'll use the answers to develop an important marketing message called the book blurb. For now, come up with answers to the questions.

Who are your competitors?

The competitor question will require research. This is easiest done on Amazon or another web-based book seller. It can also be done in a book store. (But you'll have to be sneaky as you jot down notes.)

Who are your target customers?

Let's talk in more detail about the identification of customers. The first step in the development of a marketing plan is to identify who the customers are and what problem your book will solve for those customers.

Once you stop groaning, we will proceed.

If you have written a non-fiction book, you must have had a set of potential readers in mind. For instance, if you have written a book about fixing household plumbing, your potential readers are people who live in homes with leaky faucets or pipes. Or people who suspect they will have leak problems someday. Your customers are the plumbing-needy and your book will solve the customers' needs for plumbing advice.

If you wrote a book about how to do surgery at home on the kitchen table, your target readership is a bit more limited. Possibly it'll be folks who don't have health insurance although I'm not sure this book will solve the customer's problem. It may actually worsen their problem.

If you wrote a children's picture book, you may think the kids are the customers: they aren't. Kids don't have money or credit cards. Kids don't browse bookstores or websites. Your customers are the parents and grandparents. Other family members and close friends are also customers.

If your book is a fictional tale, you have to position it depending upon the potential audience. Romance readers are quite different from mystery fans and so are sci-fi aficionados. In either case, your book will entertain the reader which is a way of solving a problem for the customer. It gives them a break from reality.

Once you identify your readership, the rest of the marketing plan will be aimed at that group of people, not the general population.

*What sales channels will you use to sell your book?*

Typical sales channels are Amazon, Barnes & Noble, book stores etc. Your publisher will have a lot to do with this and the actual selection may be out

of your hands. Nevertheless, you have to know the sales channels that will be used.

*What marketing channels will you use to reach your targeted customers?*

Marketing channels refer primarily the social media sites you will use to reach the customers.

*What will you price your book at?*

*How does your price compare to the competitors price?*

I'll discuss these 2 question together. First, a few words of advice. Don't let your ego get in the way of making a rational decision on this subject. It's true you may have spent years producing this masterpiece and you think the book's value is enormous and that thousands of readers will be happy to pay a premium price to get a chance to own their very own copy. Well, you're wrong. You are an unknown author and unknown authors can't command premium prices. It'll be hard enough selling your book without the added burden of an unrealistically high price.

Back to the question on how to come up with the price. The answer is research. Let's consider print books first. The best place to do this research is on Amazon or some other major book site, although you can do this in a book store or even a library. Once on the site, search for books that are similar to yours. If your book is non-fiction and covers plumbing repairs, search for other plumbing repair books. Note the price for the ones that have similar subject matter and a similar number of pages. That is the target price of your book. If your research reveals four similar print books and their prices range from \$15.99 to \$24.99, your book should be priced somewhere within that range. You can also make a pricing decision to make your book available at a lower price if you wish.

If your book is fiction, search for other books within your genre. This may be a tougher job than with the non-fiction books. Genre books have superstar authors who command premium prices. Ignore them. You don't

have the clout to demand a premium price — yet. Your search should be for lesser known authors in your genre. If your print book has three-hundred pages, you should search for other similar genre books with three-hundred pages, approximately. Comparing your three-hundred page book to a six-hundred page one isn't very productive. The six-hundred page print book will cost more to produce because of the larger number of pages and subsequent production costs, so that book will require a higher price than a three-hundred page print book. Set your price to get the best possible sales at your current status as a new author.

For an ebook, the search process is similar but you'll probably come up with a confusing array of data. A bit of explanation is in order. There is a debate going on about ebook pricing. Many voices claim that ebooks sell best if they're priced at \$0.99. Others contend that a higher price yields more profits but fewer sales. There are studies that conclude the sweet spot for an ebook is \$2.99 to \$5.99. Obviously, an ebook selling for \$2.99 will bring in more royalties for an author than an ebook selling at \$0.99. On the other hand, an ebook selling for \$.99 could sell more books than a higher priced ebook. You can ask for advice on web sites like LinkedIn and you'll get replies, many of them contradictory. After reading the replies, it still comes down to you making a decision. Make sure this is a business decision.

Another complicating factor is the presence of best-selling authors. Their ebooks come from the major publishing houses. Their price will be closer to \$10.00 or even higher. It will not even be close to \$.99. Here again, the premium price is due to name recognition and clout. If you price your ebook close to \$10.00 you won't have to worry about tracking sales; you won't get any. A first-time self-published author simply can't expect to use premium pricing and sell any books, no matter how great the content is.

Here is my pricing strategy. For my novels, I start out at \$3.99 for ebook and \$19.99 for print. As the book ages, I'll drop the ebook price lower.

For non-fiction, I price a multi-topic ebook at \$5.99. Some of my non-fiction books are dedicated to a smaller topic and I price them at \$2.99.

### Marketing Plan Objectives

I'll address all of these questions together. Another early step in market plan development is to establish a set of financial objectives. A business needs to set goals for itself and if you haven't realized it yet, let me point out that once you publish a book, you own a business and the purpose of this business is to market and sell your book.

The reality facing a first-time self-published author is that you won't sell many books in the near term even though, over time, you may indeed sell truckloads of books. For this reason, you should establish goals that recognize this reality and keep your initial goals modest.

While a business may have non-financial goals, they are secondary to the financial goals. Such goals can be: get interviewed on a local radio or TV show; have a book signing in a book store.

An important consideration is that the objectives must be measurable. Another consideration is that they must be reasonable and achievable. Setting goals that can't be reached is simply an exercise in futility. However, the goals must be hard enough to reach that they will force you to turn off the TV and work on meeting the goals.

Next, let's discuss how the strategic marketing plan changes depending upon the book's situation.

#### *Scenario 1: Your book was put out by a publishing company.*

In this case, much of the work was (or should have been) done by the publisher. The publisher will establish the price and the sales channels. It will target the book to an appropriate set of customers. It may start an

Amazon Central page in your name. It also probably started an author page for you on its website.

While this relieves you some responsibilities, you should check the Amazon page to strengthen the publisher's material and add more content to it. You also want your own web site in addition to the publisher's web page.

*Scenario 2: You self-published your book and it is currently available.*

As part of the self-publishing process, you have already established the sales channels such as Kindle or Smashwords. You also uploaded descriptive material about the book and established a price. After you finish working on the strategic marketing plan, you should review what you did when you published the book. Possibly that content can be strengthened. You should also reconsider your pricing strategy.

*Scenario 3: You plan to self-publish your book but it isn't yet available.*

All of the strategic marketing plan applies to this scenario.

There will be more Platform topics tomorrow.