



[HOME](#) > [COLUMNS/BLOGS](#) > [MARKETING INSIGHT](#)

Of Pivots, Rumbas and Quicksteps

There are various kinds of marketing audits. All of them can improve your organization and investments

WANDA KENTON SMITH • FEB 28, 2022

I've recently been contracted to evaluate a company's marketing activities. In marketing circles, this is generally referred to as a "marketing audit," a systematic analysis of overall marketing operations and activities with a review of the plan against measurable key performance indicators. Over the years, I've conducted dozens of audits, and I admit, it's a big lift. It requires a company's top-down commitment for success, and it can potentially reset a business' marketing drive.

A marketing audit in today's volatile environment is an especially smart investment. The most compelling reason for performing an audit has everything to do with the significant business disruptions of the past two years. Marine marketers in virtually every segment have evolved from a simple pivot to performing a full-scale rumba. We've never moved and turned on our heels so fast, or with such frequency. Our well-honed plans were tossed, replaced by real-time (often knee-jerk) responses to fast-changing conditions. In some instances, the quickstep then shifted to a slow dance as budgets were slashed and marketing activities sputtered.

I believe the time is right to take a deep breath and a good look at current marketing operations. An audit will allow you to review and potentially reset your marketing focus. Here are key insights to consider.

First, the leadership team must invest time to develop audit goals, then collaborate and set priorities, which will allow for substantive results. Second, enlist support not only from the C-suite, but also from the marketing department. Some teams fear outside intervention because they misunderstand its purpose. The spirit of the exercise isn't to point fingers but, rather, to appraise and assess the organization's current focus, effort and performance, and to define new opportunities. There is intrinsic value in an independent audit, which can uncover internal needs or deficiencies tied to staffing, resources, tools or technology. But as the adage goes — and as many marketing chiefs will testify — it's often hard to be a prophet in your own organization.

Next, brainstorm marketing audit options. There are audits ... and there are audits. Thankfully, a marketing audit is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. It can be narrow or broad, customized to best address your company's needs, budgets and timelines. For example, you could conduct a comprehensive annual audit that covers all aspects of your marketing organization and marketing mix. While this approach may suck up resources and prove more costly, it allows a company to take a full 360-degree view. Another, more manageable option might include a biannual or quarterly project-based initiative, tackling bite-sized topics more frequently. I favor this approach because it keeps marketing top of mind throughout the year while promoting an ongoing culture of marketing improvement.

While every organization has different needs, I highly recommend an audit of the internal marketing organization to evaluate the structure, experience, skillset and assigned roles of the marketing team, overlaid against established marketing goals. Contracted marketing vendors, including freelancers or ad agencies, are also evaluated. The goal is to understand whether the company is appropriately staffed and organized to achieve its goals. This exercise should also reveal whether additional staff, training, education, tools, technology or resources are needed.

Another traditional audit component analyzes the external environment, such as defining and understanding a company's positioning in the marketplace. A word of warning: Don't believe you own the same spot you've commanded for years. Considering the chaos of the past two years, that playing ground may indeed have shifted, or been leveled.

Are you keenly aware of your company's present position and that of the competition? Have new players emerged? Has the competition expanded, constricted or shifted? Are you truly "in the know" about their respective positioning, status, sales, product and pricing offerings, promotions and programs? Are you able to quantify and validate these findings, backed by more than sheer gut instinct? Are you prepared to respond to new threats?

To accomplish this goal, some organizations conduct a comprehensive competitive SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis as part of the marketing audit. Additional, external-based areas often tapped for audit include targeted customer niches or key personas. Are those you've previously identified still relevant? Have there been shifts in focus or priority? Are there any emerging target groups missing from your marketing plan? How effectively is the organization targeting, reaching, influencing and converting these prospects?

Another consideration: Has there been a change to your customer satisfaction index scores or rankings? If you don't subscribe to CSI services, when was the last time you surveyed customers to gauge their satisfaction with your products, services and overall performance? Many sales and service departments were clobbered during the pandemic, so it may pay to see where things stand.

Marketers also can zero-in on specific areas of function, not only to analyze performance, but also to enhance and better position the company for future success. For example, an audit might focus solely on marketing strategy, considering how well the marketing department is directly aligned to address the company's mission and vision, along with its goals and objectives. Other, narrower areas may include a palette of tactical deliverables, such as a digital marketing performance audit, a brand audit, a content audit or a search-engine-optimization audit.

Perhaps it's time for a critical review of the customer journey and acquisition process involving campaign lead generation, nurture and sales conversion channels. Do you need to drill down on email campaign performance? Or on customer outreach and communications, public relations and social media strategy?

The good news is that your organization can go big or cherry-pick prioritized areas. Once you've defined the audit scope and purpose, it's time to source an experienced auditor, collaborate and develop a custom plan. Finally, make sure everyone understands the plan parameters, individual and team responsibilities, execution strategies, timelines, reporting mechanisms and measurements for inclusion.

If you're looking to objectively measure your marketing performance with a continued emphasis on improvement, a marketing audit should be an integral component of your focus for 2022 and beyond.

This article was originally published in the March 2022 issue.