

GUIDE TO DEVELOPING A MARKETING PLAN

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of a Marketing Plan is to get your proverbial ducks in a row before you start making phone calls and dropping resumes. By developing a personalized Marketing Plan, you are developing the foundation for your marketing materials (resume, cover letter, and verbal “story”), your networking strategy, and even your interview responses. All of the Marketing Plan content you will use again and again throughout your search – you do not want to underestimate its importance.

For some job seekers, particularly those that plan to progress along their current career track, much of the Marketing Plan content will be top of mind. For other job seekers, especially those looking to change careers, some research will be involved. Either way, a Marketing Plan is a critical step in organizing your thoughts before you start tapping into your network to ask for help.

Like traditional marketing plans with which you may already be familiar, this guide includes objective, positioning, targeting and segmentation components.

COMPONENTS OF A MARKETING PLAN

Professional Objective:

Your Professional Objective is your “true north,” and is also ultimately your elevator pitch. In the clearest, most succinct possible terms, describe what you seek. Attributes might include job function, industry, company size, geography, etc. It depends on what factors are most important to you. As you craft your objective, consider how it would sound if you were saying it aloud to a networking contact. Would they understand what you mean? Would they reasonably be able to help you with your objective?

For example, imagine a fellow Darden alum reaches out to you for a networking call. Which objective would you find easier to address with this job seeker in a 20 minute conversation?

1. I have experience in both finance and marketing across industries in both the public and private sector and am open to roles where I can use my skills to create value for a company. I am looking for an organization that is mission driven and has a collaborative culture. I am willing to move for the right opportunity.
2. I am looking for internal strategy roles in the hospitality and travel industries in the southeast U.S., where I can use my consulting experience to contribute to global growth.

Your objective needs to be broad enough to be achievable (“I’m looking for roles in Fortune 500 hospitality companies in Charlottesville” clearly won’t work) but concise enough to be actionable.

Potential Roles:

What are the roles you are interested in actually called? What language does your target marketplace use to describe the function and responsibility level? Don't know? Reading job descriptions can help. Or, this is a great reason to have an informational interview. Say you have spent the last five years in product management in consumer banking and you are interested in pivoting to the tech industry. Asking a product manager in tech to help you understand the nomenclature of the job titles and what titles correspond to your level of experience would be very helpful before you put yourself on the market.

Positioning Statement:

Your positioning statement is an explanation of why you are uniquely qualified for the potential roles you have identified. It is your value proposition to potential hiring managers. Consider what the hiring managers you are targeting care about. Once again, keep it pithy! You should be able to speak it in 30 seconds or less.

Competencies:

For this section, first consider the key competencies required of the potential roles you have identified. List them all out, both hard/technical and soft skills. Categorize them if you wish – whatever makes sense to you. Now, which of all of these skills do you possess? For which skills do you have supporting evidence – clear examples of achievement? These are your key competencies, and you will use them to develop the experience bullets on your resume and build stories for interview questions. For career changers, informational interviews may be needed to deeply understand the key competencies required of your target job. That's okay! You will find this research to be invaluable when you start networking and interviewing.

Target List:

A non-negotiable part of developing a Marketing Plan is developing a target list of companies. What are the companies that fit the criteria you developed in your Professional Objective?

How long should it be? It really depends on the size of your target market. But ultimately, you want it long enough to give yourself good odds but short enough to be manageable. If you are currently working, aim for at least 5-10 targets. If you are unemployed, aim for at least 15-30.

We suggest that you segment your list, depending on your criteria. You could organize your list based on your target cities or target industries (if you have more than one) or maybe company size. This is clearly flexible depending on what is important to you.

Keep in mind that your targets do not need to have currently advertised job openings. You never know when an opening will arise at an organization. Ideally, you will be top of mind as a candidate before the job is publicly posted.

You may come up with some target companies off the top of your head, especially if you are looking to stay in a field in which you are already an expert. However, for many job seekers, solid research is necessary to build your list. Tools such as industry publications, regional business journals, rankings (Fortune, Inc5000, etc.), LinkedIn advanced searches, Crunchbase, etc. can be extremely useful.

Once you have a specific set of targets in mind, you can prioritize those that have advertised openings and those for which you have a natural role fit and known networking contacts. Then, begin working toward landing an interview. Each target will necessarily require different communications tactics, so be flexible, work to your focused list and approach your search with confidence gained from having a solid Marketing Plan.