Marketing Dietetic and Nutrition Services

What is marketing?

Marketing is defined as the management process of anticipating, identifying and fulfilling customer needs profitably. A basic definition, but it encompasses a significant number of variables to consider when planning how to market your business products or services.

Why market yourself?

The reasons to market yourself are many and varied:

- introduce new customers
- income (£)
- discourage competition
- promote services
- improve your image
- enter a new marketplace

What is the marketing planning process?

The marketing planning process will help you to choose, provide and communicate your product or service so that it adds value and is sought after by your clients. Your marketing plan is like an instruction manual which puts all business elements in place to combine them for success. It is NOT a business plan, but may be part of an overall business plan. A sound business plan together with a marketing plan and a strategy is essential in determining your business success.

1. See Factsheet #1 “Building Your Business Plan”
The key steps in the marketing planning process are detailed below, step by step, with descriptions for each stage of the planning process:

1. Analyse Market Opportunities

- **Review Internal Data or Statistics**
  - Look at quality assurance, case mix data, nutrition audits or types of referrals.
  - Develop reports to outline number and types of consults; costs of different service, e.g. clients with diabetes, heart disease, etc.; or profit or value to the organisation.

- **Micro-Environment Information**
  - Look at factors that affect your market or work environment such as client satisfaction questionnaires, competitors (include other health professionals) and the added value that your suppliers provide. For example, look out for the information, additional resources or support services clinical nutrition companies or food service providers offer.

- **Macro-Environment Information**
  - Consider demographic, social, political (government initiatives that might impact on your business), economic information, etc.
  - Note health trends and GP practice trends.

- **SWOT Analysis**
  - Summarise your preliminary market research from a perspective that details the potential impact on your market strategies and programmes. See Table 1 for details.
Table 1: SWOT Analysis

Having assessed the four elements of your SWOT, try to think of what you could do to overcome your weaknesses or convert them into strengths and how you’ll deal with your threats, perhaps by looking for opportunities hidden within them.

STRENGTHS (internal)
- enthusiasm
- high-level communication skills
- media skills

WEAKNESSES (internal)
- poor time management
- limited marketing experience
- poor office reception facilities

OPPORTUNITIES (external)
- new fitness centre in your area
- increasing costs of pharmaceutical treatments

THREATS (external)
- competition
- fitness trainers providing nutrition counseling advice

2. Researching and selecting your target markets
Bear in mind that you cannot be all things to all people. As part of your business plan you will have identified your own product or services you can offer and you will have defined who will want them. To do this it is important to look at the size and attractiveness of the markets and segments you plan to utilise, then work out where the greatest demand is for your services. You might find it helpful to use any or all of the following tools:

Oct 2012

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A. Market Research
This is a crucial component of the marketing process and worth taking time to do properly. Market research provides important information to identify and analyse market need, market size and competition. Market research discovers what people want, need, or believe, and, when done well, can be used to determine how to market your product to its best advantage.

B. Segment Definition
You must clearly define who your client groups (segments) will be, then determine their distinguishing needs. Eg, newly diagnosed diabetics who eat out a lot.

3. Designing Market Strategies
Using your market research, competitor reviews and SWOT analysis results, you need to determine what makes you different from your competitors and the unique competitive advantage you can offer your clients. To do this you will need to consider:
**Logo and Branding?** Remember that the identity of any business is in the founder, so you do not always need a logo. Make your name stand for everything you represent. Be consistent and evolve gradually.

Consider your brand: a brand isn't about your logo, tagline and glossy brochure. A brand is about who you are and what you represent. Keeping a brand alive, vibrant and memorable is difficult – consider the difficulties the big players like Marks & Spencer, Apple, Microsoft and various airlines have had over the years.
Table 3: Marketing Plan – the 4 P’s

The marketing mix elements must be selected on the basis of their contribution to achieving your marketing objectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Products and services</th>
<th>Clearly define your products and services as well as the benefits they provide your clients. For example, Jane is a dietitian who provides nutrition counselling to people with eating disorders. Jane’s clients tell her that her service helps them feel better about themselves and about food.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Price or cost to the client</td>
<td>Determine the price your clients will pay for your services. As this is the only element of the marketing mix that will earn revenue or ensure viability you need to ensure that your price will cover all costs as well as provide you with a reasonable profit margin. It is also important to set your price so that it reflects the professional position dietitians seek in the market place. A guide to pricing your services can be found in the Freelance Dietitians home page of the BDA website, <a href="http://www.bda.uk.com">www.bda.uk.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Place (distribution)</td>
<td>Identify where and how clients access your services. Consider location, convenience, access for people with poor mobility, public transport links and parking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promotion or communication</td>
<td>In developing your promotions plan there are some key considerations: 1. What do you want your promotions to achieve? 2. Consider the ‘buyer readiness state’ of your clients. Generally there is a behavioural process most of us need to progress through before we decide to purchase. Gear your communications to what your clients or</td>
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customers might need to know. Here are some areas to consider:

- **Awareness**: What is a dietitian? Is this the same as nutritionist or nutritional therapist?
- **Knowledge**: What do dietitians do? Do they only work in hospitals? How can dietitians help?
- **Preference**: What do they offer over other health care professionals?
- **Conviction**: What can the dietitian do for me?
- **Purchase**: How can I get to an appointment to see the dietitian? How much will it cost?

### People

- As the dietetic service experience depends on interaction with professional people, it is important to ensure that your marketing strategy includes a focus on both relationship building and professional development.
- The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) recognises the need for professional development to help ensure that the quality standards of dietitians are maintained. As a member, you can use their logo on your website and other business-oriented materials and resources.

### Physical facilities and evidence

You must do your best to ensure your physical facilities convey an image of nutrition expertise, professionalism and competency:

- Display your professional qualifications and HPC certificate.
- Pack your bookcase with relevant textbooks and journals.
- Include a display of resources such as useful books or publications in your waiting room.
- Ensure you have up-to-date references and testimonials from previous clients readily available.

### Process management

The degree of market investment needed in process management depends on your area of work. The process of service delivery is critical to patient satisfaction because, while most of the work may occur behind the scenes, the steps to the delivery of your service need to be executed without fault to ensure consistent delivery of a service quality your clients expect.
Table 4: Developing Action Programmes

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<th>BUDGET</th>
<th>CONTROLS</th>
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<td>needs to be accurate to forecast sales or demand for services</td>
<td>contingency plans and factors that could affect your success</td>
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<th>ACTIONS</th>
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<th>EVALUATION and MONITORING</th>
<th>APPENDIX</th>
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<td>evaluate whether you achieve your marketing objectives; identify how you will monitor your progress, eg using a monthly report</td>
<td>use supporting documents (eg, spreadsheets or market research results)</td>
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And, last but not least, consider how you market yourself professionally. A mission statement such as “We are dedicated to providing unquestionable personal gain with support through integrity without compromise.” says absolutely nothing about you, other than you are able to spout aspirational rubbish! Straplines and taglines get tired long before your customers do, so stay true to your professional role. In healthcare, the fundamental currency is trust. Without trust in your professional capabilities, you will have difficulty finding and keeping customers. A Marketing Plan that underlines your capabilities in a specific market will go a long way to helping you succeed as a Freelance Dietitian.
The following pages provide a format for you to put all these elements together to develop your Marketing Plan:

**MARKETING PLAN**

Date: ______________________

Name of business/ service: ____________________________________________________________

**STEP 1. Analyse the market opportunities**

Outline the environmental trends related to your products or services:

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Describe your competition:

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Work through a SWOT analysis:

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<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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<th>Opportunities</th>
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Summarise the key leverage points from the SWOT analysis.
Look at how you can capitalise on your strengths, and the key opportunities in the market place. Identify how you can manage any competitor threats or any particular weaknesses you have that may affect your performance.

STEP 2. Research and select your target markets

Decide on the products or services you will offer and outline who will want them (your target market). Where possible be specific about the characteristics of your clients and aim to name the actual people you want to refer clients to you.

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<th>Services</th>
<th>Target market (clients)</th>
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Prioritise your target market or client list in order of their market size and potential:

STEP 3. Develop your marketing strategies

List the key advantages your services or products provide to your target market over your competition.

Write your positioning statement. This is how you want to be identified by your clients in the market place, e.g. Mary Smith – she’s the one that......
List your marketing objectives (what you want your marketing efforts to achieve for you). Ensure they are realistic, measurable and have a defined time frame:

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STEP 4. Develop your marketing programme

a. **Outline the benefits or added value your services will provide your clients.**

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<th>Services</th>
<th>Benefits/added value</th>
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b. **Pricing your products/services: What costs do your fees need to cover?**

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Ensuring you cover your costs and allow for a profit margin, work out the fees you will charge for your services:

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c. **Place/location**

Where will you or your business be located?

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How will your target market find you?

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d. **Promotions**

What do your clients or target market know or think about your product or services? How do you know this?

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What will you tell them to persuade them to choose your products or services?

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What promotional methods will you employ to inform your target market about the benefits of your product or services (i.e. FDG website, PR, advertisements, calls to GP or consultants)? What are the anticipated costs for use of these methods?

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Outline how your clients will have multiple exposures to your market promotions.

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<th>Exposures</th>
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What promotion pieces do you have and what do you need to develop? What are the anticipated costs?

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Outline your ideas for a logo, themes, colours, etc. to be used on stationery. How can you differentiate your services from other nutrition health care professionals?

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Develop copy for your brochures and promotional materials. Think about the benefits of your products or services and develop some key phrases or brief taglines to describe them concisely.

List your achievements, qualifications and relevant professional memberships.

Remember to include your business location, contact details, email address, etc.

Oct 2012

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e. **People management and professional development**

The service performance of yourself and any staff is critical to the success of your marketing efforts. How will you ensure all persons involved in the service delivery process work to exceed your client’s expectations?

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f. **Physical facilities/service impressions**

How will you ensure your surroundings support the service experience you seek to offer your clients?

- Is your appointment method reliable, efficient, accurate and convenient?
- How will you receive calls if there is no-one to answer the phone?
- How will you remind clients of their appointments?
- Do your waiting areas convey an image of a professional service?
- What can you do to the office and service provided to enhance your clients’ first impressions.
- Can you seek feedback or suggestions to understand how your clients felt about the service provided?

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 g. **Service processes management**

What systems do you need to have in place to ensure the reliable delivery of services or products that will exceed client expectations?

List the steps that need to be managed in the service delivery process.

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STEP 5. Action programmes

What needs to be done to ensure successful execution of the marketing programs?

Outline all tasks to be completed, who is responsible and when they need to be completed.

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<th>TASK</th>
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<th>RESPONSIBILITY</th>
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STEP 6. Develop your budget

What budget targets have you set in your marketing objectives? Break this up into monthly targets for each product or service you are going to offer. This information will be used to monitor your performance against budget.

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Outline monthly marketing programme costs:

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Then work out anticipated revenue, i.e. subtract marketing costs from your sales targets:

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**STEP 7. Monitoring and evaluation**

Outline how you will measure the success of your marketing programme:

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How will you code your promotion materials to work out response rates?

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**STEP 8. Your marketing achievements**

How will you celebrate and promote the success of achieving your marketing objectives?

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A successful business does not just happen – it requires careful planning and commitment. Make your marketing plan a one-year plan with long-term goals, then revisit your marketing plan every quarter. This ongoing evaluation is essential to ensure future marketing initiatives make best use of your finances and resources, and it is crucial to achieving your market objectives. **GOOD LUCK!**