Lessons About Marketing Complacency I Had to Learn the Hard Way



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2020 cast many unprecedented obstacles for businesses. From the mass exodus of in-office work because of the Covid-19 pandemic to quantum shifts in consumer buying behavior, we saw many businesses struggling to stay afloat while managing a mostly remote workforce.

Other businesses, however, experienced growth. Companies in the SaaS, marketing and healthcare sectors found their services in high demand, inspiring a massive surge in traffic and revenue.

But there was a hidden downside to this rapid expansion. Unexpected growth can also breed complacency. So while 2020 was a lucrative year for many, neglecting to have the right future-oriented systems in place could mean a painful downturn in 2021.

Here's why you should never become complacent with your marketing — and how to set your business up for sustainable success.

Diversify your prospecting

After nearly 13 years of business, our marketing agency was heavily dependent on in-person conferences for lead generation. But once the pandemic forced most events to go virtual, we were pushed to adapt to keep our sales pipeline full.

Our efforts to stay on top of virtual events paid off, and we saw a 97 percent increase in growth in 2020. However, our complacency caused us to assume this source of leads would sustain well into 2021.

In fact, the opposite happened. We saw a 32 percent downturn in growth despite all our efforts to push conference marketing. We were forced to reconsider our one-track mind marketing strategy and instead diversify our marketing to ramp up lead generation. The lesson learned is that having one source of leads is rarely a smart or sustainable strategy. Always have a Plan B — whether that's email marketing, social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), or beyond — so you never become dependent on a single channel to sustain your business.

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Build systems to scale

As growth surged in 2020, we poured most of our efforts into hiring new team members and managing projects. We were so consumed with client work and training our new staff that we had little time to put the appropriate systems in place.

These constraints led to bottlenecks in our process that would later stunt our growth in 2021. We hit a roadblock, limiting the amount of work we could accept. We didn’t have the tools our team needed to do the job at scale.

In 2021, our sights are set on maintaining the quality of our services and building efficient and effective systems to facilitate our growth well into the future. Documented procedures and a well-thought-out content management system have been our saving grace for managing projects, training new team members and onboarding new projects.

Create a sales machine

While our heads were down working on our countless client projects, our attention was pulled away from our marketing. We boldly assumed our pipeline would remain stable based on the growth we were seeing in 2020.

The hardest pill to swallow is that many good things come to an end as a result of being unprepared. Had we implemented the right strategy from the beginning, we might not have experienced the downturn in the first quarter of 2021.

Now, we know to always be prospecting. We keep the door open to new opportunities at all times and don’t take new leads for granted. We’re always looking for new ways to reach potential clients, share relevant content and nurture trust in our brand.

To sustain growth in 2021, we hired a sales consultancy to

assist us in training our account managers and managing new outbound and inbound processes. We're already seeing an uptick in leads and are putting the plans in place to prepare us for 2022.

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Think five years ahead

If 2020 taught us anything, it's that the entire business landscape can shift overnight. Many business owners found themselves in a nearly impossible position having to make life-changing decisions. The lack of preparation led many businesses to close indefinitely.

Today, my philosophy is to plan at least five years ahead. What steps can I take now to set my business up for future success? Do I have a Plan B, C and D in place in case my primary lead generation channel closes up? Can I shift from in-office to remote with ease?

While it's okay to manage growth and work on your business as you go along, you shouldn't avoid planning for the future. Instead, always be selling and marketing so you don't find yourself in a dire situation with only one source of leads for your business.

This mentality has allowed my agency to grow from a one-man shop to a team of over 24 employees, even over the course of the pandemic. Painful lessons learned in early 2021 have inspired us to put the right systems in place so we never again become complacent in our marketing.

Does your business have a game plan for the future? Get started now to get ahead of any unprecedented times.

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