

Conduct your own small-business marketing audit with these steps



BY ERIC CAWLEY

Can your small business (even if it's new) move up the search engine rankings quickly, even with stiff competition? Yes, definitely.

Can you effectively promote your product

or service without breaking the bank? Of course.

To make those possibilities a reality, you must first know how effective your marketing is currently, and how it should be doing. It all starts with one five-letter word: audit.

It's a word that can strike fear in the hearts of small-business owners.

However, when an audit is focused on your company's marketing, and performed proac-

tively, it can (and should) strike fear in the hearts of your competitors.

Like financial audits, marketing audits can provide you with invaluable insights into your company and can have a significant impact on your company's bottom line. Here are some tips to get yours going:

Take your pulse: Gather all sales and marketing documents and reports, including your current marketing plan and budget. Eval-

uate your industry's current technological and economic climate. Finally, get your latest sales and marketing metrics.

Get objective opinions: As was mentioned in last month's column, speak with current and potential clients, vendors and suppliers — those who could provide greater insights into every aspect of your company's external brand image. Ask them how you're doing versus your com-

petitors.

Research your internal resources: Obtain feedback from current employees about your business as a whole. What are their perceptions of your company's image, goals and marketing strategies? Consider having them submit a SWAT (Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats) matrix to you.

Put it all together: Assemble all the information you've gathered into separate sections, such as:

- Branding
- Messaging
- Product development
- Website
- Social media

- Multimedia
- Promotions/events
- Lead generation

Perform a gap analysis: Based on the above factors, analyze how your marketing is doing now, and how you want it performing in three, six and 12 months. Develop an action plan based on your conclusions. Hint: It's good to bring in outside, objective business experts who can review your work and give you pointers you hadn't considered.

Eric Cawley is president of Complete Marketing Solutions, Meridian. eric@completemarketing.us; 440-6754