

Marketing your business

Business Essentials



Introduction

The NDIS offers a new way of providing individualised support for people with disability, their families and their carers by giving them more choice on what supports they need, and how they are provided.

If you work for a disability service provider, your employer is likely to have already undertaken the preparations needed to operate under the NDIS. If you are providing services as a sole trader or in a private practice, it is critical to understand the NDIS market.

We know that it is sometimes hard to find the information you need, so we have done the hard work for you! We have worked with accountancy and consultancy firm Nexia Australia to collate publicly available information and resources to support your journey of working with the NDIS.



Disclaimer:

The information contained in this handbook is not provided as advice or as recommendations. The information is intended as a general guide only. It does not take into account your personal circumstances and may not be relevant to you or be fully up to date. You must rely solely on your own external and independent advice.

The information provided should not take the place of information or advice available from, or provided directly by, relevant Government bodies, including the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) and the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (NDIS Commission).

While we endeavour to keep advice up to date and correct, National Disability Practitioners (NDP), a division of National Disability Services Limited (NDS), cannot be held responsible for the accuracy of the information, or any other matter arising out of the use of the information appearing on the site.

The 'NDIS & Sole Traders' project is funded by the Industry Development Fund, delivered by National Disability Services on behalf of NSW Department of Family and Community Services: Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

Contents

Introduction	1
Disclaimer.....	1
Marketing Plan	4
Understanding your customers.....	4
Understanding your competitors	7
What is your elevator pitch?	8
5 cost-effective ways to market your business.....	9
Developing a marketing plan	10
Marketing plan template	11
Further resources	11
Contact us:	11



Marketing Plan

Marketing is key for businesses of all sizes. Businesses can utilise various marketing methods and strategies to drive customers to their business. Developing a marketing plan can help business owners make sure that they have considered all of the necessary factors relevant to their market. A marketing plan also allows businesses to assess the effectiveness of the marketing strategies they have put in place. The information in this handbook can help you develop and implement your very own marketing plan.

Understanding your customers

Every business needs marketing, whether formal or informal. Depending on your chosen strategy, marketing can be time-consuming and expensive. It is important to understand your customers before committing to any marketing activities so that you can achieve the best return on investment (ROI).

To help you understand your customers better, ask yourself these 4 key questions:

1. WHO are your customers?

Correctly identifying your (core) customers is the critical first step in understanding your customers and developing tailored marketing strategies.

“Customers” can mean different things to different businesses. While a behaviour support specialist may identify parents of children with autism as their target customers, a cleaning company may consider their customers to be anyone with “core supports” in their NDIS plans.

Generally, it helps if you can narrow down your customers to one or several specific groups (whether by age, region, diagnosis etc.).

2. WHAT do your customers want?

After identifying your customers, ask yourself what your customers want. In the context of the NDIS specifically, you want to know what your customers want to do with their NDIS funding.

As part of the NDIS planning (and plan review) process, the NDIS plan identifies the participant’s “goals”. These goals would give a good indication of what your customers want to achieve with their NDIS funding. Understanding your customers’ goals will help you design and tailor your service to meet their needs and effectively promote these services.

3. WHY would your customers want your service?

This is the step where you connect the dots between your customers’ goals and needs to what your business offers.

Try to think from the customer's perspective – why would you choose one service provider over their competitors; what attributes of the service provider would attract you the most; what are the deal breakers for you when choosing service providers. Common features that attract customers include affordability, quality, convenience and consistency.

4. HOW would your customers find out about your business?

Now that you understand who your customers are, what they want and why they would choose your business, it is time to figure out how your customers would find out about your business. The “how” will help you identify the best marketing channels as part of your marketing strategies.

There are a few ways NDIS participants can find out about providers of their desired services/products:

- **Word of mouth.** You may often hear that you were recommended to a new customer by an existing customer. This is called “word of mouth”. Positive word of mouth drives customers to your business, while negative word of mouth drives customers away from your business.
- **Referrals.** In the context of the NDIS, support coordinators and local area coordinators (NDIS LACs) are the most common and influential sources of referrals for most service providers. Other potential referrers include other service providers (e.g. therapists), GPs and specialists, advocates, and even your “competitors” (They may refer new customers to you if they are at capacity). When identifying potential referrers, think which professionals your target customers would interact with and trust the most.
- **Search engines.** Almost everybody will use a search engine such as Google to find services they want. If you have a website, your business will come up when people search the relevant key words. Some customers may want to read reviews of your business or find out the location of your business. Service Providers may choose to undertake Search Engine Optimisation strategies to improve their online presence. Search Engine Optimisation (commonly referred to as SEO) is a set of techniques and procedures to improve an organisation's ‘natural’ or ‘organic’ website ranking in various search engines. The Department of Industry, Innovation and Science has useful resources on the importance of SEO and different ways to implement SEO strategies. These resources can be found at: <https://www.business.gov.au/marketing/websites/improve-your-search-ranking>
- **Media** (including social media). Newspapers, TV and radio are traditional media platforms where providers may advertise to attract customers. Recently, social media has become more and more popular due to its cost-effectiveness, flexibility and the ability to target specific audience.
- **Directories and provider lists.** There are online directories of services relevant to your target customers. Some of these directories are free to providers and keep ratings or reviews of each provider. The NDIS website publishes provider lists categorised by state, type of service and name of the provider. The NDIS participant and provider portals also have functions to allow users to find support providers.
- **Exhibitions.** Disability or NDIS-specific expos are another way for customers to discover products and services of interest.

Understanding your competitors

Do you know who your competitors are, what they offer, and how they attract customers? It is worth spending some time researching your competitors before forming your own marketing strategies.

When researching your competitors, focus on the **similarities** and the **differences**.

Similarities:

- What services/products do your competitors offer that are similar to yours?
- How much do they charge for the services? Are the prices similar to yours?
- Where do they deliver their services? Do they cover the same geographic area where you deliver your service?
- Are they targeting similar customer groups?
- How are they promoting their services? Are they using marketing channels that you are also thinking of using?

Differences:

- Are your competitors offering products/services you don't offer?
- What are the different features between your service and your competitors? Do these features make your competitors' offerings more attractive or less attractive to customers?
- Do they charge different prices or use different units of measurements (e.g. 45-minute sessions instead of 1-hour sessions)?
- Do they target a different geographic area? Does their service model involve significant travel?
- Do they target different customer groups? Why do they target these groups?
- Are they promoting their business differently? What other marketing channels do your competitors use?

It is useful to list 3 – 4 businesses who may be in direct competition with your business and note their key features and activities (including marketing activities). Make sure you update this list regularly to keep track of what your competitors are doing.

What is your elevator pitch?

An “elevator pitch” is a brief, persuasive message that you can use to attract potential customers’ interest in your business. An elevator pitch can be written (for example, on your website), or spoken (for example, when you meet new customers face-to-face or on the phone).

An elevator pitch is important because it communicates the most important features of your services or products within a short amount of time.

Here are a few tips to help you craft your own elevator pitch, so when you get a chance to talk about your business, you are prepared.

Describe who you are and what you do. For example, “I’m a psychologist specialising in positive behaviour support ...”.

Identify your ideal customers. For example, “...for children and young people with autism”.

Highlight what’s unique about your service (or “point of difference”). For example, “You don’t have to come to me, I come to your home or your child’s school”.

Give supporting evidence/examples. For example, “In the past 5 years, I have helped more than 100 families and significantly improved the quality of their lives”.

Include a “call for action”. For example, “Please email me or leave a message on my website for a free initial consultation”.

Remember, the purpose of an elevator pitch is not to close the deal and make the sale on the spot, but to attract enough attention from potential customers (and referrers) so they are interested in you and your business.

5 cost-effective ways to market your business

Marketing doesn't have to be expensive. Small businesses and sole traders working with the NDIS can effectively market their business without huge costs. Here are 5 points to consider when marketing your business:

- 1. Be visible and memorable.** Make sure you pick a business name associated marketing items (logo, slogan, tagline) that tell people what you do and is easy for people to remember. If you can afford a website (or are able to build one yourself) – have a website! It is a lot easier for people to find you online.
- 2. Leverage existing relationships.** Word of mouth is critical to small businesses. The easiest place to generate word of mouth is your existing relationships. Have you asked your existing customers for referrals? If they are happy with your service, you should ask them to tell their friends about your business. Other people you know and talk to regularly can also help. These existing relationships may include your family members, friends, former work colleagues or even your accountant and your GP.
- 3. Network with influencers.** Networking has been proven to be one of the most effective marketing techniques for professional and personal service businesses. You need to be mindful of who you network with. Always target those who have influence on your potential customers' purchasing decisions – for example, NDIS Local Area Coordinators, support coordinators, early intervention therapists etc.
- 4. Send emails.** While attending networking events, forums, expos, you can collect relevant people's email addresses and ask them for their permission to send them information about your business. Keep updating this email list and send relevant information regularly (e.g. once a month), especially when you launch new services or start servicing new areas. There are tools that service providers can use to keep track of large lists of email addresses.
- 5. Invest in online marketing.** If you are considering advertising, online marketing can be a cost-effective way to do it. Online marketing methods include search engine advertising (such as Google AdWords), search engine optimisation (SEO), social media advertising (such as Facebook Ads), etc. With online marketing, you are usually able to assess the return on investment (such as the number of clicks or "sign ups") and change the content or method of your advertising quickly. You can also set your own (daily) advertising budget and turn it on or off as you wish. There are specialist digital marketing agencies that can provide professional assistance.

Developing a marketing plan

Once you have studied your customers and competitors, worked on your elevator pitch, and thought about ways to promote your business, you can put all the thoughts together in a marketing plan. A marketing plan helps you record the market intelligence you have gathered and set clear directions and targets for planned marketing activities within a set period of time.

A marketing plan for a small business should incorporate the following key elements:

- **Marketing objectives.** This section should describe what you are trying to achieve through marketing activities. Typical marketing objectives can be to acquire new clients for an existing service, to sell new/additional services or products to existing customers, and/or to launch your service in a new geographic area. You may have more than one objective in the plan period. Preferably, you should have a quantified target for each objective – for example, to acquire 50 new clients in the next 12 months.
- **Value proposition.** This section summarises your research and analysis of your potential customers and competitors, and your “elevator pitch”. Your value proposition should be a statement of how your service will benefit customers and why they should choose your business over your competitors. This statement can then be used across a range of marketing activities/materials.
- **Marketing activities and channels.** This section details what activities you plan to carry out in the plan period for marketing purposes and the platforms or channels where these activities will be carried out. Typical marketing activities may include: exhibitions, email campaigns, creating a website, one-on-one meetings with potential referrers etc.
- **Marketing budget.** This section sets a limit on how much you plan to spend on the various marketing activities and gives the breakdown of the estimated cost for each activity.

Marketing plan template

Ready to make your very own marketing plan? There are a many different formats and layouts of a marketing plan. There are a lot of marketing plan templates that are available online at no cost.

The Department of Industry, Innovation and Science has developed an easy-to-use marketing plan template and guide that is suitable for small businesses.

<https://www.business.gov.au/planning/templates-and-tools/marketing-plan-template-and-guide>

What is your elevator pitch?

- **Business promotion**

<https://www.business.gov.au/marketing/advertising/promote-your-business>

- **Advertising**

<https://www.business.gov.au/Marketing/Advertising>

- **Search Engine Optimisation**

<https://www.business.gov.au/marketing/websites/improve-your-search-ranking>

- **Marketing Plans**

<https://www.business.gov.au/Planning/Marketing-plans>

- **Market Research**

<https://www.business.gov.au/Marketing/Marketing-research>

ndp.org.au

ph: 02 9256 3188 e: info@ndp.org.au



National
Disability
Practitioners



/NationalDisabilityPractitioners



/national-disability-practitioners



/NDPbuzz



/ndplife