



a guide to writing  
**your marketing plan**

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# Introduction

“An integral part of any business, large or small, is a marketing plan that sets out the business goals and objectives as well as the strategies and actions that will need to be implemented enroute to achieving them.” *Cathal Muckian, Director, Bank of Ireland Business Banking.*

Good market planning can be a source of competitive advantage and helps you align marketing and sales resources most effectively behind your brand. Putting together a marketing plan can be a daunting prospect for a lot of business owners/managers and so we have put together this marketing guide to make the whole process a little easier and to help you construct a comprehensive marketing plan for your business that reflects your goals and objectives. This guide is intended to provide guidance and assistance in developing and implementing a successful marketing plan for your business.

“This publication from Bank of Ireland Business Banking is timely and welcome. As Ireland moves up the value chain in all industry sectors, marketing must become a more widely practised business function. Marketing is not just about advertising and promotion. Effective marketing is based on sound business imperatives and results in increased sales. This marketing guide will quickly become a reference book for all businesses as it promotes a practical, common sense approach to an underused discipline.” *John McGrath*

John McGrath is Head of Marketing and Communications at Dawn Farm Foods one of Ireland’s leading food companies. He is President of the Association of Advertisers in Ireland, a member of the executive council of the Marketing Institute and a founding member of The Bord Bia Brand Forum.

## Acknowledgement

This guide could not have been developed without the assistance of our business partner Bord Bia, whose brand development programme, entitled the Brand Forum is aimed at promoting the importance and the advantages of the branded route to market.

This document is intended as a brief summary of principal points and guidelines. While every care has been taken in its production, no responsibility is taken for any errors or omissions. Appropriate professional or expert advice should be taken in all cases. No responsibility is taken by Bank of Ireland for any errors or omissions.

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# Section A

## What is a marketing plan?

Marketing Planning is a logical sequence and a series of activities leading to the setting of marketing objectives and the formulation of plans for achieving them.<sup>(1)</sup>

Market planning is a systematic approach for organising your total marketing effort for optimal results.

## Why prepare a marketing plan?

Market Planning is fundamental to success in business. It is the key to getting things done and making them happen. Putting it down on paper is the first step to translating the ideas in your mind into compelling propositions and business success.

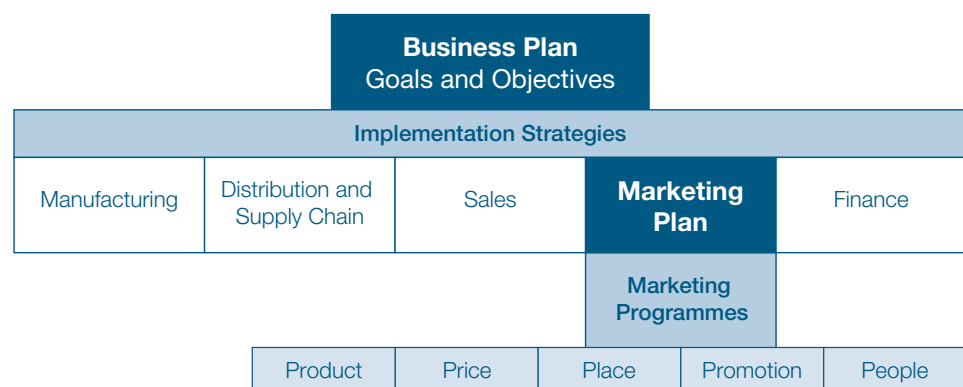
The finished marketing plan becomes an operating tool that will help you to manage your business and work towards that success. A good, well-organised plan will tell you if your idea makes sense.

## What will the plan do for you?

Market planning enables you to make a realistic appraisal of your true competencies, exposures and potential in your chosen market.

It will act as a map allowing management to identify the best mix of marketing activities and to progress these in an integrated and measured way.

Setting the  
Marketing Plan  
in Context



(1) Taken from Marketing Plans by Malcolm McDonald Fifth Edition.

## Characteristics of a good marketing plan

### **A good Marketing Plan should be:**

- Driven from your company's Business Plan (A guide to Starting Your Own Business – available in any BOI branch or [www.boi.ie/business](http://www.boi.ie/business) will assist you in completing a business plan).
- A marketing 'bible' for your business and brand – clearly presented and easily accessible so it can be used to brief key business personnel and external supports/partners including your bank.
- Based on adequate but not excessive analysis.
- Based on your company's 5P's (Price, Product etc.).
- Grounded in accurate segmentation and targeting.
- Actionable and measurable – set objectives and targets and devise methods of measurement. You have to look at each task and measure the impact it had on the return gained on the investment.
- A living dynamic document that is regularly reviewed and updated to reflect market influencing trends and help you make the most of new opportunities.

## An essential building block for your business – your brand

Jeff Bezos, (Chief Executive of Amazon) recently delivered an interesting definition on brand: 'A brand is what people say about you when you are not in the room'.

A successful brand is an identifiable product or service, augmented in such a way that buyers or users perceive relevant or unique added values that match their needs closely.

Brands are important because they provide people with a means of telling products and services apart. Brands also signal a level of quality and consistency of experience.

A brand's success results from an ability to sustain these added values in the face of competition and effective market planning is a key determinant in getting you there.

Please refer to Template 1 - Brand Positioning Statement.

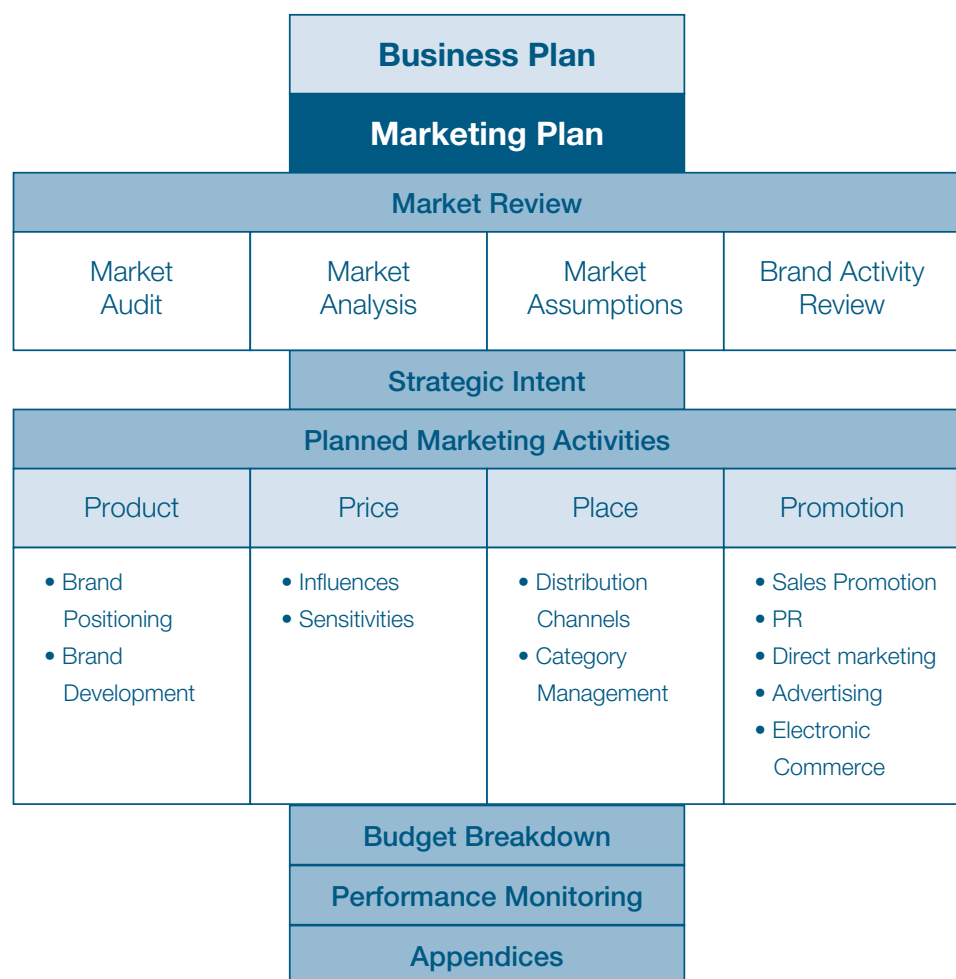
# Section B – Marketing Plan

## ‘A “how to” Guide’

### What to include in your marketing plan

There are several different ways of presenting your marketing plan, and while there are a number of publications and software packages available to guide you, most plans include the following key elements.

Key Elements in  
the Marketing  
Planning Process



We will go through each of these elements in this guide.

## Introduction

This is the scene setting element of your marketing plan where you describe the purpose of the document and its contents. It should also define the timeframe over which the plan applies.

## Business overview

This is a brief summary of the key objectives of your business plan and includes:

- Business/brand vision
- Key business/brand objectives
- Historical/current performance – sales volume/value
- Forecasted sales volume, value and profit for the coming year

## Market audit

The market audit is an information collecting process designed to describe the relationship between your business and its operating environment.

The audit's primary purposes are:

- to build understanding of the operating environment and its influencing factors going forward
- to identify your company's specific strengths and weaknesses

Don't over analyse at this stage of the process. What you do with the information is much more important than trying to collect every last item of data. Dealing with future uncertainty is part and parcel of planning.

Please refer to Template 2 - Marketing Audit

## Market analysis

The collection of audit data provides the raw materials. Your analysis and interpretation of what this data says and means is far more important.

One of the key analytical tools you should apply from both your own and your competitors' perspectives is a SWOT analysis.

Please refer to Template 3 - SWOT Analysis

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
What are you/they particularly good at? What advantages do you/they have?	What are you/they particularly poor at and what disadvantages do you/they have?
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
What market opportunities present themselves that your business or theirs is particularly well placed to exploit?	How could they/you threaten the business you/they have and how could they/you hinder your/their future ambitions?

## Market assumptions

List the assumptions on which you are basing your activity plan. For example market growth will continue at x%; inflation will grow at x%, there will (not) be new market entrants; existing competitors will (not) become more aggressive; innovation/pricing/promotion/other will become a key feature of the market, exchange rate outlook, etc.

## Business/brand activity review

In this section you will deal with the key brand marketing activities you undertook in the last 12 months, including an honest assessment of their success or failure.

## Strategic intent

This part of your plan sets out the three or four key marketing objectives required to deliver the business plan. These can be categorised into short term (next 12 months), medium term (three years) and long term (five years).

### **Typical strategic intents might be:**

- to gain a listing in account x
- to increase market share by x%
- to build a loyal base of customers

The strategic intent sets your goals, which the marketing programmes you devise will have to deliver against. Each intent needs to have a clear sense of purpose and a target, so that you can assess whether or not it has been achieved.

Please refer to Template 4 - Summary Strategic Intent.

# Section C – Activating Your Marketing Plan

## Testing the market

Market research is a fundamental step in bringing a project to fruition. Market research is concerned with getting answers or indications about the demand for your product or service

The key research objective of any business is to determine whether or not there is a market for the product or service which could sustain a profitable enterprise. Think about the information you need and the questions you should ask to generate it. As the market research is being carried out, refer to the questions continuously to ensure that you are getting all the information you need. The questions must ask, for instance, who the customers are, where they are located and if there is a genuine interest in your product or service.

Set out a research plan that will prioritise the information you need, where you are going to get it and how you are going to analyse it. You must focus on facts. You will need the following information:

- An assessment of the business sector you operate in or are planning to go into.
- You need to know your customer – numbers, age, disposable income etc.
- You need to know your competition – Who? How many? Big or small?
- You need to know about pricing.
- You need to know about changes that are taking place in the sector.
- The best means of promoting and advertising your product or service.
- The best channels of distribution for your product or service.
- You need to know if the market for your product/service is growing or declining.

Please refer to Template 5 - Marketing Activation Plan.

## Market segmentation and targeting

From market research you can hope to identify the target market or markets. By analysing these market segments by age, numbers, income etc you can identify their needs and requirements which will allow you to focus on market segments whose needs match your offerings.

You will also need to look at what the most successful distribution channels are for each of the segments e.g. supermarkets, mail order, online etc.

An analysis of the competition is also required, try and answer the who, where and how questions. Do they focus on price or service?

Now you have to decide on the most effective form of communications. Ask yourself the following questions; do the target markets read newspapers, trade magazines, local press? Do they listen to the radio? If so, what stations and at what times of the day? Would they be interested in attending presentations/demonstrations etc?

Please refer to Template 6 - Communications Plan.

## Making the 5Ps work for your business

A well used and simple definition of the marketing mix is known as the 'Five Ps'. Working through each of them can help review the marketing function in a business.

According to research by Booz Allen Hamilton, 85% of loyalty to a product or service is created by the quality of the sum total of contacts between the customer and the product/service provider; only 15% is generated by the quality of the product itself or the promotions or sales literature.

### **Product**

Defining the product or service you offer is a critical first step to marketing your business. For many owner managers, this is a most difficult question as the answer may change the very definition of the business itself. For some owners of pubs, for example, the development of more elaborate food menus has broadened the product range extensively but more importantly, redefined the business and the mix of skills necessary to ensure success.

### **Price**

A common error of small businesses is to underprice the product or service they offer and many businesses have taken a number of years to reposition their companies in relation to price. A business that provides a service to the pharmaceutical sector was told by a friendly and supportive buyer that their pricing was out of line with the competitions'. The quality of the service was critical and the company had under priced it by over 40%. A company must always be careful about how it is perceived, and pricing strategy is a key characteristic of successful businesses enjoying positive perception in their marketplace. Constantly survey the competition to monitor their price points and combine this with an exercise in cost plus pricing.

## **Place**

Place is one aspect of the marketing mix which is undergoing the most radical change. In Ireland, the distribution channels are being altered at present as the multiples and symbol groups opt for centralised distribution. E-commerce will take this one step further. Many companies are now planning on selling direct to customers in their homes through web sites. This will result in the channels of distribution, as we know them, being fundamentally altered.

## **Promotion**

Promotion is the aspect of the marketing mix most easily identified by people. Many small businesses think that putting advertisements in the papers, radio or elsewhere is marketing. Although they are an important part of the marketing mix, advertising and promotion should be directly linked to product positioning strategy, pricing strategy and the type and location of the customer you want to reach. In relation to promotion, you should try to get as much free coverage as you can from product launches by preparing press releases on different aspects of your business. For many businesses, attendance at trade fairs is an effective means of promotion but consideration must be given to the cost of hiring, dressing and staffing a stand to ensure professional image is presented. Personal selling, cold calling and direct marketing are also effective methods of promoting your company and its products or services to the customer.

Please refer to Template 7 - Agency Brief.

## **People**

The fifth 'P' is people. We can only deliver our product or service through people and a customer service approach that brings back customers on a regular basis is a fundamental part of marketing any business. Business revolves around the customer – the person who pays for a product or service. In any business, it is important to measure the level of customer satisfaction and, even more so, the level of customer retention. It is much, much cheaper to hold on to existing customers than to find new ones. If you can do this you will build a business. If not, the company will be like the bucket with a hole in it. Water is flowing in at the top and out at the bottom. Businesses with low customer retention can survive in a growing economy. However, when demand falls the company that has built the good relationships is the one that will survive.

## Budget

You should aim to set a firm and realistic budget for your proposed marketing plan, allocated across the Ps.

This is best done on a 'bottom up' basis – i.e. take each proposed activity and identify the known/likely cost e.g. product – costs of new packaging; promotion – in-store tasting campaign etc. It is recommended that you build in a miscellaneous/contingency amount (say 10% – 20%) to allow for unexpected costs or opportunities as they arise.

If you use advertising, you will need to make a judgement call as to how much you need to spend to create the desired effect. You can get a realistic cost from either an advertising agency or local media supplier.

Once a budget is set – always try to keep within it and limit any unplanned impulse activity.

## Monitoring effectiveness

The final element in the overall market planning process is to monitor performance in order to better understand how well or badly your marketing programmes are working.

A checklist of key performance measures should include:

- Sales volume and revenue for each product
- Distribution for each product (penetration of each major account)
- Price – Retail price of each product in each major account
- Specific measures:
  - sales/revenue generated by individual promotions
  - sales/revenue of additional distribution generated by advertising
  - additional sales/enquiries generated by direct marketing
  - measures of company/brand exposure/mentions in the media

## Conclusion

Market Planning simply tries to structure and shape your proposed marketing programmes and activities. It is intended to bring logic and discipline to the process, so that you can set yourself clear objectives and assess whether or not you are achieving them.

The right marketing plan and associated marketing programmes really can help deliver the vision you have for your business.

# Section D

## Useful links

Bank of Ireland  
[www.bankofireland.ie/business](http://www.bankofireland.ie/business)

The Marketing Institute in Ireland  
[www.mii.ie](http://www.mii.ie)

Irish Direct Marketing Association (IDMA)  
[www.idma.ie](http://www.idma.ie)

IBEC (Irish Business and Employers confederation)  
[www.ibec.ie](http://www.ibec.ie)

Dublin City Enterprise Board  
[www.dceb.ie](http://www.dceb.ie)

County enterprise board for Dun Laoghaire  
[www.venturepoint.ie](http://www.venturepoint.ie)

PLATO business support forum for owner managers  
[www.plato.ie](http://www.plato.ie)

Small Firms Association  
[www.sfa.ie](http://www.sfa.ie)

Enterprise Ireland  
[www.enterprise-ireland.com](http://www.enterprise-ireland.com)

Irish Development Authority  
[www.idaireland.com](http://www.idaireland.com)

Entreworld  
[www.entreworld.org](http://www.entreworld.org)

Irish Small & Medium Enterprises Association  
[www.isme.ie](http://www.isme.ie)

Bord Bia  
[www.bordbia.ie](http://www.bordbia.ie)

[www.startingabusinessinireland.com](http://www.startingabusinessinireland.com)

Other guides available from Bank of Ireland Business Banking include  
A Guide to Starting Your Own Business and A Guide to Franchising

## Brand positioning statement

**Brand Name**

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**Product/Packaging/Price**

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**Market Space**

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**Target Audience**

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**Proposition**

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**Reasons to Believe (RTB)**

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**Key Discriminator**

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**Brand Essence**

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**Brand Values**

Functional:

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Emotional:

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**Brand Personality**

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**Summary Brand Positioning Statement**

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## Market audit

### Market Definition

What market do we compete in?

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To which consumers?

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Via which customers/channels?

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### Market Performance – Last three years

	3	2	1	0
Volume (tonnes/litres)				
Value (€)				
Commentary/Significant Events				

### Audit of Key External and Internal Contextual Factors

External

• Political

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• Social

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• Economic

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• Technological

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Internal

• Financial/Commercial

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• Resource (Human/IT/etc)

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• Manufacturing

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### Competitive Performance

What has been our key competitors' volume and value growth over the last three years?

Competitor A	3	2	1
Volume			
Value			
Competitor B	3	2	1
Volume			
Value			

### Our Brand's Performance – Last three years

	3	2	1
Value € y-o-y % (=/-)			
Volume y-o-y % (=/-)			
Market share (%)			
Margin/Profit (€)			

### Overall Outlook

Market

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Competition

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Our Brand

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This largely factual data provides a summary basis for the competitive SWOT analysis.

## SWOT analysis

### SWOT – Our Brand

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats

### SWOT – Key Competitor A

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats

## Summary strategic intent

### **Business Objectives**

What the business is aiming to achieve over the next one/three/five years

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### **Current Competitive Position**

Summary of our brand's competitive position based on market audit/SWOT

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### **Marketing Objectives/Goals**

Summary of our brand's 'hard' measurable marketing goals:

Next 12 months

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Medium/long term (three/five years)

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### **Overall Intent of Marketing – Next 12 Months**

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### **Summary Intent against each of the 5Ps**

Product

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Price

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Place

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Promotion

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People

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## 12 month marketing activation plan

Month	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	Planned Total Cost
<b>Product Development Plan</b>													
<b>Pricing Plan</b>													
<b>Distribution Plan</b>													
Account A													
Account B													
<b>Promotion Plan</b>													
Sales Promotion													
PR													
Direct Marketing													
Advertising													



Detailed 12 month promotional/marketing communications plan

Month	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	Planned Total Cost
<b>Sales Promotion</b>													
Account A type													
Account B type													
Account C type													
Account D type													
<b>PR</b>													
Activity 1													
Activity 2													
<b>Direct Marketing</b>													
<b>Advertising Support</b>													
Type (press)													
Type (outdoor)													
Type (in-store magazine)													

## Agency brief

To be completed to ensure agency has a comprehensive brief to respond to.

Agency

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Project

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Client Team

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Issue Date

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Project Start Date

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### **Brand Background**

What is the context?

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### **Activity History**

What has had major impact, what has not and why?

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### **Overall Marketing Objectives**

What are the specific brand issues?

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### **Specific Activity Objectives**

What are the key objectives for the activity?

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How will the activity be evaluated?

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What will be measured and how?

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### **Target Audience**

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### **Message and Tone of Voice**

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### **Mandatories and Technical Considerations**

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### **Timings**

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### **Budget**

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### **Key Contacts**

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### **Suggested Attachments**

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[www.bankofireland.ie/business](http://www.bankofireland.ie/business)

