



Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado (ALCC) Landscape Contractor Marketing Toolkit Branding/Marketing Checklist

ALCC has developed this set of guidelines and a checklist to help our landscape contractor members develop a cutting edge in their branding and marketing efforts. **WARNING:** to be cutting edge in the marketplace, you need to take time, invest energy and think deep about what you do, who you do it for and what customers and non-customers think about your business. If you will roll up your sleeves and do the work, you will see results.

DEFINE YOUR BUSINESS

- ❑ **Write out a mission statement** outlining the purpose of your organization and what you value as a company. This should reflect your **business identity**—who you are as a business from the inside out. Your company mission comes from what motivates you as a business person and who you aim to serve and how well.
- ❑ **Define the four “P’s” for your company:**
 - **Product:** What are your products/services?
 - **Price:** What are your prices relative to the competition?
 - **Place:** Where are your best customers? What geographic reach do you/should you service?
 - **Promotion:** How do you promote your services? What is the best way to communicate with prospective and ongoing customers?
- ❑ Write down **the reasons why** people do business with you – and **the value you bring** to your customers.
- ❑ What is your existing company brand or identity? Do you have a recognizable brand or identity? If not, what would you like it to be? If so, is it the image you want to project; does it need refinement or changed? Think through these questions so you can best determine how to make modifications.
- ❑ **Check in with employees:** Do they understand how your mission statement, how you define your business, and your expectations for marketing and communications? Is the message they use the same as the official company message? And do they convey this every time they interact with clients? How do you evaluate if this is happening? Are you tracking customer satisfaction?

ANALYZE YOUR BUSINESS

- ❑ Write a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis of your business in a matrix. Strengths and Weaknesses are internal factors; Weaknesses and Threats are external factors.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">❑ Strengths: Products/services, competitive advantage, current/future contracts, marketing, communications, customer service, employee communications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❑ Weaknesses: Gaps in capabilities, reputation, reach, trends away from your product or service, price competition, marketing, communications, customer service, employee communications.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">❑ Opportunities: Market developments, new markets, competitors' vulnerabilities, new services, better pricing, geographic reach, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❑ Threats: Declining economy, employee availability and retention, loss of key staff, market demands, competition, lack of marketing budget, etc.

- ❑ Now use your SWOT matrix and **create an action plan** to address each of the areas.
 - ❑ List how you will build upon and leverage your strengths.
 - ❑ List how you will reduce or fix weaknesses.
 - ❑ List your top priorities for opportunities.
 - ❑ List how you will counter or minimize your threats.

UNDERSTAND AND CULTIVATE REFERRAL SOURCES

- ❑ Compile/maintain a database of all current and past customers.
- ❑ Compile/maintain a database of potential referral sources (customers, vendors, suppliers, etc.).
- ❑ Distribute customer satisfaction surveys when a job is done or annually for ongoing customers.
- ❑ Develop strategies for ongoing “care and feeding” of past and current customers. How can you touch customers regularly in ways that are meaningful and helpful to them?
- ❑ Properly thank customers and business partners for their business and their referrals (e.g., gifts, free services, thank you notes).
- ❑ Develop consistent, ongoing communications to keep relationships alive and healthy (e.g., personal phone calls/visits, e-mails, newsletters, postcards).

DEVELOP A MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

- ❑ **Allocate a marketing budget** and build a plan around that plan with goals/limitations.
- ❑ **Begin a marketing plan** that includes:
 - ❑ **Positioning Statement** – A Positioning Statement is a one to two sentence statement that conveys what you do for whom. It should help you identify, then articulate in a concise and brief statement your distinct value to your customer in relation to your competitors.
 - ❑ **Strategic Issues/SWOT Analysis:** Discuss your current business environment, and internal and external issues that are affecting or could affect your business. This section covers important factors that place limits on the marketing plan and details opportunities that should be exploited in the coming year, i.e., a major new service introduction, new competitor, industry consolidation or expansion, new distribution outlet, major change in industry pricing, etc.
 - ❑ **Competition:** Detailed analysis of your most direct competitors including their strengths and weaknesses. Also, look at the industry as a whole and “how you stack up.”
 - ❑ **Pricing:** Review past pricing trends and set the next year's pricing strategies. This section should tie in with your analysis of the competition and the industry as a whole. Keep in mind how pricing may impact how you are viewed in the marketplace.
 - ❑ **Marketing Objectives:** Determine three measurable objectives. It's important to keep your eye on the ball and these objectives should represent the key objectives for growing your business. For example: *Secure three new design/build projects each quarter.* Objectives should be easily measurable on a monthly basis and you should have specific reports that measure each one.
 - ❑ **Marketing Strategies:** Discussion of the strategies you will use to achieve the above objectives. The difference between an objective and a strategy is that the objective states *what* you will do and a strategy states *how* you will do it. Example: Use your past customer list to generate referrals for new business.
 - ❑ **Target Audiences:** Who do you need to reach to accomplish your marketing objectives (e.g., current, past, future customers, vendors, suppliers, other referral sources, etc.)?
 - ❑ **Marketing Tactics:** The specific action items you will take to execute your strategies. Example: Mail postcards to all past customers and follow up with a personal phone call to cultivate the referral strategy. Following are common tactical elements you should consider using in your company:
 - ✓ **Logo:** Do you have a logo? If so, does it adequately convey your desired identity?
 - ✓ **Tagline or slogan:** Do you have a short phrase or headline that conveys your value, differentiating features and sales platform?

- ✓ **Are you entering your projects for awards** such as ALCC's Excellence in Landscape Awards?
 - ✓ **Web site:** Do you have a Web site? Does your existing Web site convey the identity you want to present? Can people find it?
 - ✓ **Publicity:** Have you leveraged articles in the newspaper, magazines and TV coverage to tout your expertise?
 - ✓ **Capability brochure:** Do you have a brochure that explains the services you offer and business philosophy?
 - ✓ **Educational flyers and materials:** Do you have "leave behind" information that can be useful to prospective clients or give to a customer when the job is done?
 - ✓ **Portfolio:** Have you created a printed or electronic portfolio that showcases your best work?
 - ✓ **Newsletters:** Have you developed printed newsletters and/or e-newsletters that keep clients and prospects apprised of your company?
 - ✓ **Postcards:** Have you mailed postcards announcing business updates or services?
 - ✓ **Advertising:** Are you promoting your company online, or in print, radio, TV, direct mail, Yellow Pages?
 - ✓ **Scheduling ongoing personal phone calls** with past, current prospective customers and referral sources
 - ✓ **Exhibit in consumer trade shows**
 - ✓ **Participate** in community service projects/donations of services and time
 - ✓ **Book speaking engagements:** Horticulture attractions, local nurseries, homeowner associations, neighborhood associations, garden clubs
 - ✓ **Join and get involved in your professional industry association**, like ALCC, and let customers know about your desire to "give back" to the industry in which you work.
 - ✓ **Join and get involved** in organizations that are tied to the markets you serve, e.g., Community Association Institute (CAI), Colorado Association of Realtors (CAR), Home Builders Association (HBA), Building Owners & Managers Association (BOMA).
- **Marketing Budget:** Estimate the expenditures needed based on your planned marketing tactics/channels.
 - **Measurement:** Include systems to track how well strategies and tactics have worked.
 - ✓ Classify leads into different types of jobs or customers
 - ✓ Track leads by source—e.g, referrals, direct mail, etc.
 - ✓ Track sales by source
 - ✓ Track revenues and profits by type of customer or job type

IMPLEMENTING A MARKETING/BRANDING PROGRAM

- **Assign one person** to be in charge of marketing and others to assist – may be one individual for a small company.
- **Communicate** your value, in everything you do.

- ❑ **Be consistent** in your messaging. Consistent messaging and images should be included in your:
 - ✓ Web site
 - ✓ Logo
 - ✓ Tagline
 - ✓ Advertising
 - ✓ News releases
 - ✓ Employees and company images (trucks, employee uniforms)
 - ✓ Customer materials
 - ✓ Convey quality in all your materials and communications channels: be consistent in your messaging, how you talk about your company and the images you use to promote your company.

- ❑ **Plan to fine tune/course correct:** Have a plan for how you will fine-tune your marketing efforts or even change course based on customer feedback and other factors.

- ❑ **Proofread, proofread, proofread.** It may seem obvious, but nothing kills credibility faster than spelling mistakes, errors, and poor grammar. Make sure your marketing material is perfect. Have an employee or colleague give quick edit to your material before it's distributed. It will save time, money and headaches. And maybe even give you an edge over the company who doesn't.

Final reminders:

This marketing work will take some time and it's a project you need to work on, sleep on and come back to more than once. Involve key staff members or if you work solo, find another business person--in or out of the landscape industry--who could benefit from the same process. If you have the resources, marketing and communications experts are available to develop plans and help with implementation.

As the old adage says, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. ALCC has given you some tools and it's up to you how you use them. We truly hope you can use this toolkit to sharpen YOUR competitive edge. Let us know if it did.