



MaRS | ENTREPRENEUR WORKBOOKS

Marketing Communications

THE MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS WORKBOOK GUIDE

1. Introduction: What to expect

The purpose of this workbook guide is to assist you in understanding the role of marketing communications (MarCom) and to help you plan your strategic MarCom approach. One of our key assumptions is that you have little or no prior knowledge of MarCom, but you have a desire to make it one of the underpinnings of your success. Another key assumption is that the MarCom field is too large and specialized for tech entrepreneurs to take on by themselves. Therefore, it is critical to identify people and companies that you can work with when implementing your strategy that match the size of your company and budget, as well as your aspirations. The final part of this workbook guide will provide practical advice about how to move forward and who to work with once you have completed the exercises we have outlined in this document.

In the process of going through this workbook guide, you will be preparing a document—your MarCom strategy—that will become an essential tool in managing MarCom and the various service providers that will help you to implement the strategy. The MarCom strategy includes decisions about target audience(s), key messages, media, and sales and marketing tools. The process of creating the MarCom strategy will prompt you to think through some key decisions that are fundamental to your business.

Part	Content
1. Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction• How to use this workbook• Practical definition of MarCom
2. Establishing your objectives	Understanding and formulating your MarCom objectives
3. Key elements of your MarCom strategy	Determining the key elements of your MarCom strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Target audience• Determining appropriate evidence• Key messages• Choice of media
4. Marketing to influencers	Understanding the role of opinion leaders in your MarCom strategy; how to target and work with influencers
5. Implementing your MarCom strategy	Translating the MarCom strategy into action; how to execute and manage your MarCom activities

How to use this workbook

1. Get your team together!

We recommend that you make the creation of your marketing communication strategy (MarCom strategy) a team effort and work through the exercises thoroughly, but as efficiently as possible. Developing your MarCom strategy can be very time-consuming, especially if neither you nor anyone on your team has any experience related to marketing communication. Our goal is that this workbook can help you focus your MarCom planning efforts on the parts that are essential to start-ups and thus make the time spent developing your plan as productive as possible.

2. Save time by using the accompanying workbook template

The MarCom workbook template, which accompanies this book, is tailored to the planning exercises we have outlined in this book. Not only does the workbook template save you time but, once completed, it represents a reference document that you can use to guide and manage your MarCom efforts.

3. Preparation

Planning your marketing communication is easier and will yield better results if you have a marketing strategy to build on. The Entrepreneur's Toolkit on the MaRS website contains a set of [workbooks](#) that can help you to create a solid marketing strategy.

4. Use the icons for help

The workbook guides are structured under the assumption that this is the first time you, the reader, has undertaken a marketing communications planning exercise. To help provide context for some of the ideas in these workbooks, we have clarified the ideas by defining key terms and offering real-world examples. In addition, we have provided links to articles on the [MaRS website](#). For this reason, you may find it easiest to use the workbook guides on a computer with an Internet connection.

Look for these icons:



denotes a key marketing term that will recur in these workbook guides



indicates an example drawn from a real-world business in order to illustrate an important idea



denotes a link to a more in-depth article, video or template on the MaRS website



appears wherever you are asked to record something in the accompanying workbook template while completing the exercises

Practical definition of MarCom

Marketing communications is an essential part of the commercialization of a new technology, but as a function it remains unknown to most technology entrepreneurs. This is despite the fact that we experience MarCom activities in our day-to-day lives.

Loosely defined, MarCom can be described as all the messages and media you deploy to communicate with the market. Typical MarCom activities include advertising, direct marketing, branding, packaging, online presence, printed materials, PR activities, sales presentations, sponsorships and trade show appearances—most of which we are exposed to on a daily basis. The Xerox example below illustrates that successful MarCom strategies do not always need to include expensive advertising campaigns, which is good news for cash-strapped start-ups.



Read more about [MarCom](#).



Example: Xerox Canada

It is important for entrepreneurs to understand that a brand can be built by using multiple MarCom tools. In *Marketing Management*,* Philip Kotler outlines the case of the world-famous brand, Xerox, where active use of a combination of media and public relations formed the core of their MarCom efforts.

The Xerox example illustrates the key benefits public relation (PR) campaigns can have. By focusing MarCom efforts on developing relationships with the right types of media outlets, you can earn free editorial coverage that generates brand awareness and credibility that reaches beyond what most start-ups can ever buy through advertising. Extending your PR efforts to include key opinion leaders as well as targeted events and conferences offers both the opportunity to build and enhance your brand value by earning third-party endorsements. It also offers potential customers a variety of ways to learn about you. The particular communication benefit that PR can yield is the credibility that non-commercial coverage such as editorials and third-party endorsements can provide. This kind of coverage establishes a great starting point for building a trusted relationship between your brand and the public.

*Kotler, P., Keller, K.L., & Cunningham, P. (2006). *Marketing Management* (Canadian 12th ed.). Toronto: Pearson Education.

Before beginning the planning activities, it is useful to go through a couple of brief exercises with your team to develop a practical sense of how MarCom works. Please answer the following questions (or simply discuss them with your team). It is not necessary to record responses to these questions in the workbook template, as this exercise is intended to help you understand the role of marketing communications in your customer's daily life in general and when it comes to making purchasing decisions.

- a. Think about the last major purchase you made.
 - I. Where did you look for information about possible options?
 - II. Who did you ask for advice or discuss your purchase with?
 - III. What was the role of the Internet in that particular transaction?
 - IV. What specific reasons did you have for choosing that particular item and not the competitor's offering?
 - V. Where/who did that particular information come from?
 - VI. Have you seen any advertising for the product you bought either before or after your purchase?
- b. Think about an area of great interest to you.
 - I. iList the key sources of information that help you find information about the topic
 - II. In seeking to stay updated about this topic, please list your favourite format to access new information (i.e., TV documentary, magazine article, podcast, newspaper article, discussion with like-minded people [online or in person], research report, conversation with friends).
 - III. When thinking about the information you absorb about this topic, do you seek out general information or do you look for anything in particular (i.e., information concerning new technology, news related to people, statistics or facts, local information related to the topic, politics or regulations on the topic)?
- c. Think about the last time you purchased something from a start-up or new business.
 - I. What was your main concern about that purchase?
 - II. What factors made you decide to buy something?
 - III. How did you gather the information about the factors that helped you to make your decision?

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, they are simply designed to help you think about how you search and find information on topics of importance to you as well as when you make purchases. The questions are designed to put you in the place of a customer or someone who is looking for information in a particular technology area; in practical terms, that is what your customers will be doing as they go through the process of buying technology. Understanding the **customer's perspective** is key to developing effective marketing messages and selecting distribution channels toward achieving your business objectives. As you go through this workbook, these are important issues to understand in relation to the role marketing communications plays in your business.

What you might have noticed as you did the exercise, especially if you completed it with someone else, was how different people learn about new things in very individual and different ways:

- The types of media we consume vary depending on purchase.
- We have subconscious filters that make us aware of certain information but help us ignore large amounts of other information.
- Certain types of information, media and formats have greater appeal to you than others.

In general, our need/desire for information varies depending on product, relative amount of money involved and our familiarity with the type of product and the company selling it.

2. Establishing your objectives

The purpose of your marketing communication activities is to support two objectives:

1. Create/sustain demand and build preference for the product.
2. Shorten the sales cycle.

For early-stage start-ups with no brand recognition and a new, unknown technology, it is important to understand that there is a relationship between the two objectives in that demand creation and brand preference form the basis for any new sales cycles. The next paragraphs will explore the implications of each of the two objectives and how they relate to your situation.



Read more about setting business [goals and objectives](#).

2.1 Objective I: Establish preference and generate demand

Objective number one, “to create and sustain demand and preference for the product,” is directly linked to the desired [positioning](#) of your product or technology. This means that all MarCom activities must be designed to support your positioning as expressed by your positioning statement. The positioning statement is a short and succinct way of expressing why your target customer should prefer your product. Your positioning statement should include:

- **For** ([target customer](#) or market)
- **Who** ([compelling reason](#) to buy)
- **Our product is a** ([product's](#) placement within a new or existing category)
- **That** (key benefit that directly addresses the compelling reason to buy)
- **Unlike** (primary alternative source (i.e., [competitor](#)) of the same benefit)
- **We have assembled** (key difference or point of [differentiation](#))

The example below demonstrates how the positioning statement can be used to express your desired positioning. The format used in the Intuit example is based on a template developed by Geoffrey Moore in his book, *Crossing the Chasm*. We recommend that you try developing your own positioning statement using the same template.



Example of positioning statement:

Quicken (by Intuit)

- **For** the bill-paying member of the family who also uses a home PC
- **Who** is weary of writing the same cheques month after month
- **Our product is a** PC home finance program
- **That provides** automatic tracking of all cheques
- **Unlike** Managing Your Money, which is a financial analysis package
- **We have assembled** a program optimized for household bill paying

Source: Moore, G.A. (2006). Crossing the Chasm: Marketing and Selling Disruptive Products to Mainstream Customers. New York: Collins Business Essentials.

Please note that your desired positioning changes as your market matures, with increasing maturity of the target customer, any changes to their motivations, and with the nature and forms of [competition](#), all of which are key aspects of your positioning. To learn more about how to assess your market's maturity, read about the Technology Adoption Life Cycle and [how to use it](#).



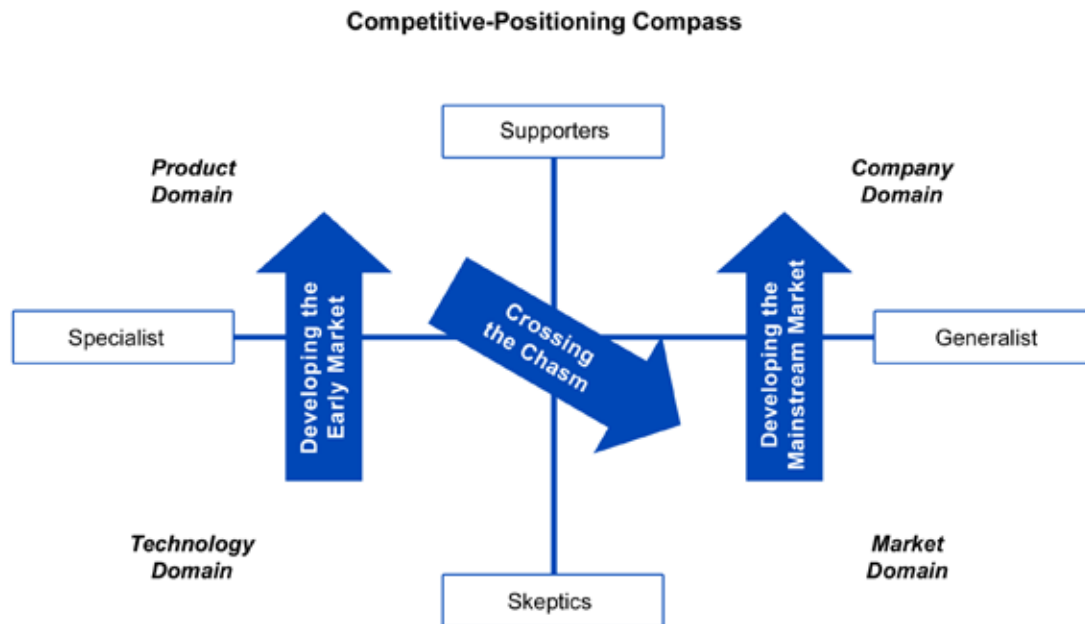
Record your positioning statement in the workbook template.

Note that if you have completed the [Market Strategy Workbooks](#), you will already have a positioning statement you can use in your MarCom workbook template.

Key points in establishing preference for innovations

One key aspect of establishing preference is to seek “domain leadership.” If your technology is disruptive—independent of industry—the job of creating demand and establishing preference is easier if you succeed in first establishing domain leadership. Achieving domain leadership means becoming a recognized authority within a particular field. This recognition might come from peers, industry leaders, as references in blogs, magazines and other media, and as invitations to participate in expert panels and deliver keynote talks at conferences.

The notion of seeking domain leadership might initially sound somewhat abstract so the paragraphs below are meant to explain what it means for you. Once again, a tool provided by Geoffrey Moore¹ will serve to illustrate the concept. The Competitive-Positioning Compass (CPC) below illustrates the various domains in which you seek leadership as your market matures. Below is a simplified explanation of how to approach positioning in the various domains.



Source: Wiefels, P. (2002). *The Chasm Companion*. New York: Collins Business

¹ Moore, G.A. (2006). *Crossing the Chasm: Marketing and Selling Disruptive Products to Mainstream Customers*. New York: Collins Business Essentials.

- **Technology domain:** Initially, domain leadership means being recognized for the particular approach you are applying to a problem. This is about promoting the sophistication of the core skills and technology you deploy, which in turn translates into **thought leadership**, making you a leader in the technology domain. *Example:* Google achieved leadership in the technology domain. In December 1998, only three months after Google Inc. was established, *PC Magazine* recognized Google as the search engine that delivered the most relevant search results² and ranked Google as their search engine of choice.
- **Product domain:** Domain leadership means getting recognition for your product and its full potential (as opposed to its actual state when you first launch it), which translates into **product leadership**. *Example:* Microchip developer Intel focused on providing high performance—high quality microprocessors to the PC industry—but lack of product visibility (literally) meant that they had very low brand and product recognition. The launch of the “Intel Inside” co-branding program in 1991 changed this completely by both raising consumer awareness about Intel and the importance of the microprocessor for the PC’s performance. Throughout the 1990s, the Intel Inside program served as a key differentiator for PC manufacturers that participated in the program, and established preference for Intel products in the minds of buyers.
- **Market domain:** Your objective is specific to a market niche or specific industry where you want your offering to be recognized as **the new gold standard**—the best way for the leaders in the market niche to go about their business. *Example:* Launched in 1992, Microsoft’s Office Suite is the clear market leader among standard PC software packages, having established the suite as the industry benchmark from the start. With a large installed base of users that know how to use their product, Microsoft Office has made it very difficult for competitors to grab market share, despite some of them giving the product away for free (e.g., StarOffice, OpenOffice), proving the importance of leadership in the market domain.
- **Company domain:** Leadership in the company domain means positioning your offering for broader market acceptance. At this point, you are selling a more mature product into different markets and industries. In other words, you have moved past your company’s “start-up” phase. In the company domain, you will face more direct category competition than you may have faced in the past, which your positioning efforts must reflect. This includes engaging with general business press and financial analysts, as well as seeking validation by landing world-class customers in different market segments.

Note that achieving domain leadership in one quadrant of the CPC first makes it easier to achieve domain leadership in the next quadrant, when this becomes an objective. In other words, it is worth making an effort to achieve thought leadership in one quadrant before seeking a new type of recognition.

² Google milestones. Retrieved November 29, 2010, from <http://www.google.com/corporate/history.html>

As noted above, for early-stage start-ups, the first objective is to achieve domain leadership in the technology domain, which is achieved by demonstrating thought leadership. There are two reasons why thought leadership is an essential objective for your start-up. The first reason pertains to the cost effectiveness of your interaction with the marketplace: as a thought leader, you will attract a lot of free publicity as well as potential customers without having to spend a lot of money on marketing. The second reason is slightly subtler, but is of significant importance to anyone with ownership in the start-up: as a thought leader, you are involved in redefining the marketplace, either by creating a new product category or new market niche, which may have significant impact on the valuation of your company.



This article describes the general steps involved in achieving [thought leadership](#).



Examples of MarCom activities that support an objective of developing thought leadership include:

- Identify all key opinion leaders that share your ideas or whose ideas implicitly support the approach upon which your technology is based.
- Produce a whitepaper that discusses the potential of your technology or your product.
- Get mentioned as a unique/leading technology by key influencers/opinion leaders in your technology segment.
- Be invited to deliver a presentation at a specific industry trade show.
- Establish a blog that regularly covers key topics of interests to your target customers. Remember to include links to other blogs in your field to maximize your search engine exposure.



Based on the positioning statement and the discussion of seeking domain leadership, formulate your specific MarCom goals. Examples of MarCom goals include: editorial coverage in at least 50% of the most respected technology publishers in the next quarter; among top two performers in next product review performed; at least two invitations to present at relevant industry conferences; 25% growth in number of page visits to our website; and 100% growth in the number of leads registered in our database. As with other types of goals, focus on making your MarCom goals specific by including measurements and deadlines. Note that, as you move through the planning process, you should expect to revisit these goals to refine them. Document them in the corresponding section of the workbook template.

It might help to define your goals by creating separate goals depending on the specific phase of your company and product development. This will make it clear that, before any product launch, your public presence will be limited to the technology you are working on; once you have a product, you will seek a broader audience and momentum.

Note: When designing your objectives, one good rule of thumb is that MarCom activities for early-stage start-ups should commence about 18 months before you can expect sales revenue to grow on a significant basis.

2.2 Objective II: Shorten the sales cycle

Throughout the buying process, customers make a number of critical decisions related to the potential purchase of your product. Your customers might ask themselves the following questions before making their decisions:

- Is this what I should be spending my budget on now?
- Is the proposed solution right for the problem I have or are there better alternatives?
- How does the proposed solution attempt to solve my problem?
- Is the cost of the solution within my budget?
- Is the vendor a credible player and will they be around if I need support going forward?

At every stage, MarCom plays an important role in linking you to potential buyers and their buying process. It is very important to understand your target customers' buying process, as it might vary and it offers clues on how to appropriately build your marketing communications. Each customer might have a different way of going through the process of detecting that they have a need for a product or solution, researching how to satisfy that need, evaluating their buying options, and then purchasing and using the preferred product. In general, your MarCom objectives link to the buying process as illustrated in the figure below.

Marcom Activities and the Buying Process

Marcom Objectives



The workbook template provides an exercise that examines what kind of communication activities would typically align with each MarCom objective and the buying process.

Consider the following examples for illustration purposes:

Stage of buying process	Customer objective	Information need	Your information solution
Stage 1 Problem recognition	Understand if there is a need to change	Information that demonstrates new insight into a relevant problem	Keynote presentation, blog and whitepaper that allow you to outline your expertise on the subject and why this is a problem the customer must address now
Stage 4 Purchase decision	Understand if this is the best deal and a decision I need to make now	Information related to pricing, delivery terms and your value potential that addresses any uncertainty concerning the decision	Promotional material that articulates the value your product can provide (i.e., proposal, references and case studies that address the value question are also relevant)

While the previously depicted buying process illustrates the typical steps a customer goes through, we recommend that you analyze customer feedback and behaviour as soon as you begin the process of commercializing your product. The analysis will help you generate a more detailed and precise understanding of how customers go about buying your type of products. Specifically, you will learn what kind of issues they are concerned with, which in turn allows you to determine what kind of information you could provide through MarCom activities at each stage of the buying process.



Read more about the [buying process](#).



With respect to the role of MarCom in relation to the buying process, it helps entrepreneurs to remember two things:

- For most early-stage and innovative products, you can assume that there will be a general lack of awareness of your offering and what it can do for your customers. This is unlike more mature and well-known product categories, which can expect potential customers to recognize a problem and proactively search out a solution, creating a general pull in the market. Increasing awareness—which is what Bell ExpressVu intended in the example below—is one of the key objectives of MarCom for start-ups.
- Technology vendors possess infinitely more information about their product than potential buyers. This is especially true for new-to-the-market products that are often introduced by start-ups; for the potential buyer this introduces a sense of risk and uncertainty about purchasing innovative products. During the buying process, buyers seek to educate themselves so they can make a qualified decision and reduce the risk surrounding the purchase.



Example: Bell ExpressVu

A key aspect of generating awareness is ensuring that your communication is relevant to your target audience. Relevance helps you get their attention and deliver your key message. As described in *Marketing Management*,* Bell ExpressVu was keenly aware of this fact as they launched a marketing campaign for the Asian Television Network (ATN) that was targeting the Canadian South Asian community. In order to ensure that the advertising was perceived as relevant for the target audience, their advertising agency used copywriters of Asian descent and had them use vocabulary and symbols specific for the South Asian community, including an auto-rickshaw and a piece of sari fabric. (To avoid any perception that the ads were mockery, the copywriters identified themselves as belonging to the community, acknowledging and making light of their use of stereotypical diction and icons.)

*Kotler, P., Keller, K.L., & Cunningham, P. (2006). *Marketing Management* (Canadian 12th ed.). Toronto: Pearson Education.

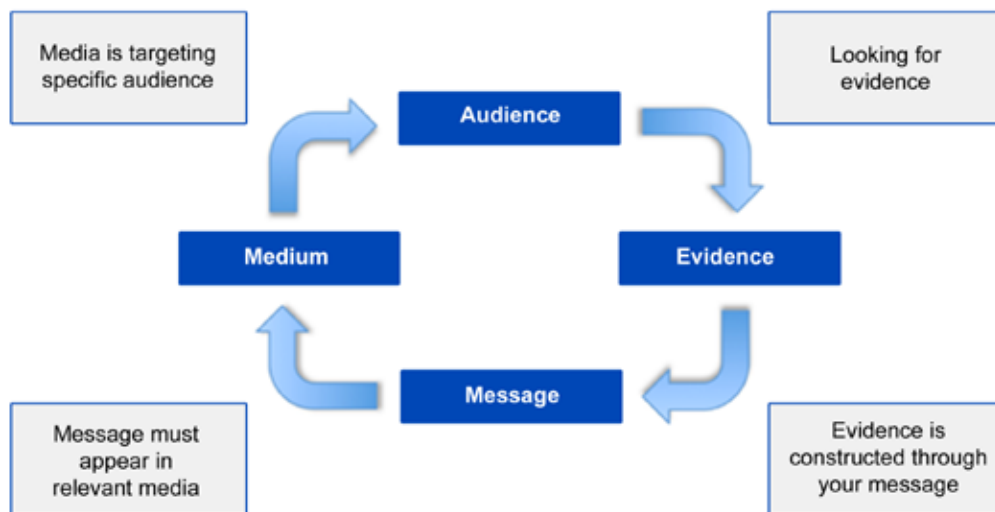


In the workbook template, describe the buying process for your customers in terms of how and where they would get information. At each stage of the process, try to understand what kind of information they seek and suggest ways for you to make that information accessible to them.

3. Key elements of your MarCom strategy

Having completed the previous sections, you now have a positioning statement, MarCom goals and an understanding of your customer's buying process to guide your decision about how to approach the market.

Your strategic MarCom approach has four critical elements: target audience, evidence, message and media. As shown in the figure below, the key elements are interconnected but ultimately depend on the target audience, which means that once you change your target audience, everything else will change too.



Your target audience is provided by your positioning statement and depends on the maturity of your market and the [corresponding customer mindset](#). Below we outline the key differences between the broad target segments for early-stage start-ups.

3.1 Target audience

3.1.1 Early market: Technology enthusiasts and visionaries

In the early market, there are two target audiences. First, there are the **technology enthusiasts**, who are always looking for “the latest” in technology and whose primary motivation is to understand the core of this new technology. Then you have the **visionaries**, who believe in technology as a way of advancing their business and whose primary motivation is the potential advantage they can create with your technology.

As you plan your MarCom activities, it is key to remember that your communication with technology enthusiasts is different from your communication with visionaries. For example, when your audience consists of technology enthusiasts, your communication goal and message will be to display technology leadership. Simply put, you must frame a “crisis” and then demonstrate how your technology presents a new and different way of resolving this situation.

When moving on to targeting visionaries, remember that they care more about innovative products than the underlying technology. Here, your message should inform visionaries about how your product can deliver a potential advantage within their strategy. At this stage, issues about the market and the company have little effect on your communication as the visionary's main interest lies in the product's innovativeness and potential.



Read more about [MarCom in the early market](#).

3.1.2 Across the Chasm and niche markets ("Bowling Alley")

While dealing with technology enthusiasts and visionaries can be both interesting and fun because they really care about what you do, it is important not to get seduced by their attention and passion. Your eventual goal is to reach larger markets; to do that, you have to cross the [chasm](#) and penetrate the niche markets populated by [pragmatists](#). Part of the reason a chasm exists is that pragmatists do not care as much about the sophistication of your technology and product. They want a polished product with clear and attainable business benefits. From a communication perspective, targeting pragmatists therefore involves a very different focus.

As your market begins to mature and you have a [whole product](#) that is ready to target the pragmatists that inhabit a specific market niche, the MarCom approach must evolve in all its facets. The most profound shift is from product-centric to market-centric communication, which means that your key messages must talk less about the content of your product and more about the value (as expressed by some variation of time, money, quality and risk) that using your product will generate. This shift is necessary because pragmatists are market-oriented and their point of reference is their immediate market; to make any headway with pragmatists they must perceive your offering as market leading for their particular industry or niche. The figure below illustrates how communication changes when moving from product-centric to market-centric.

Product-Centric to Market-Centric Communication		
Newest technology	→	Second-generation application
Elegant architecture	→	Emerging standard
Best product	→	Growing installed base
Easiest to use	→	Most third-party support
Attractive pricing	→	Cost of ownership
Unique functionality	→	Quality of support
The next big thing	→	Relevant alternative

Source: Wiefels, P. (2002). *The Chasm Companion*. New York: Collins Business.

In addition to changing the message for your new audience, keep in mind that pragmatists seek different types of evidence through media that are different from those of the early market. As pragmatists are market-oriented, they are guided by market validation rather than technology validation, as shown in the example from Microsoft Canada below. They obtain this information primarily from respected industry sources such as industry analysts and publications.



Read more about [MarCom across the Chasm and in the Bowling Alley](#).



Example: Microsoft Canada

When they needed to build awareness about their ability to deliver critical business technology solutions, Microsoft Canada sought an innovative advertising approach to reach their target audience. For them, the target audience was senior executives in medium- to large-sized Canadian companies. In other words, Microsoft Canada's target audience extended beyond technology enthusiasts and visionaries, and that had to be reflected in their choice of media. Philip Kotler* details how the Microsoft campaign, named "Agility", used print, radio and TV advertising. The core element of the campaign, however, was a 12-part weekly editorial series ("Canadian Competitiveness") that Microsoft paid to place in key mainstream national and regional print and radio outlets. A monthly case study which profiled a successful Canadian company also ran in a major Canadian business magazine (*National Post Business Magazine*).

This example demonstrates how a technology company can leverage mainstream media to broaden the appeal of their offering, because in this case both the type of media outlet and the type of evidence employed appealed to a more mainstream audience. While it's true that not many start-ups can afford the same approach as Microsoft, we find it valuable to highlight the interconnectedness of media, evidence and target audience.

*Kotler, P., Keller, K.L., & Cunningham, P. (2006). *Marketing Management* (Canadian 12th ed.). Toronto: Pearson Education.



Write your responses to the following questions in the corresponding section of the MarCom workbook template:

What is the profile of your target audience? Can you recognize and characterize your target audience by what they are trying to do, why it is failing and the associated economic consequence?

What is the proposed whole product solution? What is the value proposition that is relevant for this specific audience?

The next paragraphs offer more detail about communicating with the various audiences you may be targeting.

3.2 Determine evidence

The term **evidence** describes the particular artifact or wrapping that you want to present to your target audience. Evidence is different from **media** in that a piece of evidence can occur in many different media. In addition, a particular piece of evidence (i.e., product review or benchmark) will carry a certain connotation or value to the target audience, which makes it more suitable to use at specific stages of market development. The table below illustrates types of evidence by market stage and target audience.

Evidence by Market Stage

Early Market		Chasm Crossing & Niche Markets
Technology Enthusiasts	Visionaries	Pragmatists
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Architecture • Demos • Trials • Technology press coverage • Endorsements from technical luminaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benchmarks • Product reviews • Design wins • Initial sales volumes • Trade press coverage • Visionary endorsements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market share • Third-party support • Standards certification • Application proliferation • Industry press coverage • Industry analyst endorsements

While the table above is not necessarily a complete listing, it demonstrates some general differences between technology enthusiasts, visionaries and pragmatists that might help you when considering the suitability of other forms of evidence not listed above:

- **Technology enthusiasts** are texture-oriented; they like to touch and play with the technology to understand how it works. The more “tangible” evidence you can produce, the more suitable it is for technology enthusiasts.
- **Visionaries** are emotionally oriented; they are attracted to the grandness of the ideas behind the product and the product’s ultimate potential. The more a piece of evidence demonstrates the potential superiority of the product, the better it is suitable for visionaries.
- **Pragmatists** are rationally oriented; they are attracted to the cost-benefit ratio

offered by your product. Their frame of reference is their vertical market; any evidence that offers the best deal for that particular industry is ideal for this target audience.

Bear in mind that these are broad generalizations. However, the positive aspect of considering evidence by market stage is that you should not feel the need to produce “everything” listed in the figure above at once. Deciding on which evidence you should develop is primarily a practical matter. Factors to consider include:

- **Credibility and relevance:** What forms of evidence carry a lot of credibility with your target audience? What kind of evidence is relevant as a vehicle for the subject matter you are promoting?
- **Time and budget:** How much time do you have to create evidence yourself? How much money can you spend on hiring outside expertise?
- **Media and communication channels:** What types of channels will you use to connect with your target audience? How well do the various types of evidence lend themselves to the channels you are considering?



Consider what might be the most credible and relevant way of expressing your story. Think of the types of evidence that might appeal to your customers and leave the desired impression with them. Now, make a plan for how you would leverage the various kinds of evidence in your marketing and sales activities, such through your website, product brochures, direct (e)mail, sales presentations, investor presentations, newsletters and public speaking engagements. Document it in the corresponding section of the workbook template.

3.3 Create your key messages

3.3.1 Differentiate message by market stage

The word **message** essentially refers to the meaning of the content you create for the evidence you would like to develop. As with evidence, you must adapt the focus of the message to the particular market stage in which you are operating. The illustration below demonstrates the more general aspects of the message for each market stage:

Message by Market Stage

Early Market		Chasm Crossing & Niche Markets
Technology Enthusiasts	Visionaries	Pragmatists
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on underlying technology • Frame a 'crisis' your technology can solve • Demonstrate robustness of technology • Aim for thought leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on superior product • Frame issues that the product can solve better than anyone else • Demonstrate how your product helps realize visionaries' strategy • Establish product validity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the niche market for which the product is intended • Frame issues that pertain to the niche/market segment • Build credibility in that segment • Aim for segment leadership

By adapting your message to each market stage, you ensure that your target audience sees the message as relevant to them. Keeping the message relevant is essential but ensuring that your message is understood represents a potential stumbling block for start-ups. The following paragraphs concerning language explain how you can ensure that you are being understood in the right way.

3.3.2 The crucial role of language in communicating innovations

As an entrepreneur seeking to commercialize new technology, it is important to appreciate that MarCom provides an added dimension. All new technologies must stretch the boundaries of existing language either by inventing new vocabulary or by giving new meaning to existing vocabulary.

The above follows logically from the fact that if you create something that is truly new to this world, it cannot have been described before, so the precise vocabulary might not exist. Inversely, unless you create new language to describe your product, nobody will perceive your product as innovative because humans use language to make sense of things. Our vocabulary is only a social representation of the actual object. Imagine if the words “PC,” “email,” “software” and “browser” did not exist; Even simple, mundane office tasks would be very difficult to explain to someone else, yet many of us can easily recall a time when those words did not exist.

Please note that the words “language” and “vocabulary” are used here in their widest possible sense. They include all forms of communication that are at your disposal such as words, sounds, symbols, colouring, shape and texture to help facilitate your positioning. You will eventually have to find a way of using plain English to describe what you do and what is special about what you do.



Read more about how to [communicate innovations](#).

The following exercise will help you to explore the vocabulary and language that is particular to your domain and technology. Do not spend too much time on this exercise the first time around; however, be prepared to revisit some of these questions to perfect and add to your responses. The end result should be a repository of words, expressions, sentences, metaphors and anecdotes that forms the basis of all of your communications efforts. This repository will be revisited in section 3.3.3 of the workbook, when we will ask you to develop your key messages.



Please record the following in your workbook template:

1. List any patents, trademarks or other IP that is the basis of your product.
2. Document that you have named or branded this IP in a way that is easy to understand and recognize (Think: touch-screen, power steering, wireless).

3. Is the discovery that led to the creation of the insight or idea behind your technology or product documented? Can it be shaped into an interesting story that serves to support your technology and the value you can offer your customers? If so, record it here. Are there media available—photos, video, hardware (prototypes)—to support the story? Include those here as well.
4. Describe what your product does in relation to any major trends in your field. Is it an electric car that helps reduce carbon emissions? Does it help reduce overall cost of health care? If there is a link to a major trend, make that clear by adopting expressions and language that are used in relationship to that trend.
5. Describe the benefits your target customer will get from using your product. Use language that is clear and recognizable from the customer perspective so that you do not need a PhD in your specific domain to understand what's going on. Describe how your product affects/changes the customer's ability to achieve strategic objectives.
6. The domains of sports and warfare have been rich sources of business metaphors. However, when using metaphors, remember that they must aid, not hinder, potential customers in understanding your business. If possible, use metaphors from other industries or domains to describe the process or benefits of using your technology. If your technology has physical or process attributes that might remind the potential customer of something from a different domain or industry, then include them here.

Some examples: The sports terms “home run” and “slam dunk” are used to describe a success. The words “strategy” and “tactics” are traditionally used for military purposes. “Front line” and “the trenches” are military terms that refer to the marketplace in business settings. If someone is in charge of a project, their organization might say that they are “quarterbacking” the initiative. Wayne Gretzky's advice to “skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it has been” is used to describe visionary approaches.

3.3.3 Crafting your messages

Try to develop a message that is credible, concise and authentic. To gain credibility, avoid using a style that includes general phrases, clichés, catch phrases and language used in consumer advertising. It is important to emphasize that, in addition to form, the context of evidence within which you present it influences the credibility of your message.

The message should primarily emphasize and strengthen your desired positioning and draw on the results from the language exercise in the previous section. The latter point will help you stay close to the important facts to ensure the conciseness and authenticity of your message.

A practical way of creating a credible, concise and authentic message is to develop specific descriptions of your technology, product, company and founders. These

descriptions should have both long and short versions so that you can use them in many pieces of evidence and across different media, such as your website, brochures, fact sheets, sales and investor presentations.



Part I: In the corresponding section of the workbook template, describe the four to five key points that are important to convey to your particular target audience. Think: What is the impression I want the audience to have of us/our product/technology after reading our messages?

Part II: Wrap the messages into a fact sheet or FAQ that covers all of the following areas:

- *technology*
- *product(s)*
- *company*
- *leadership*
- *partners*
- *current customers*

Record this in the workbook template.

3.4 Media

The evidence and messages must be presented to the audience. Media describes the various channels and vehicles that allow you to reach your target audience. The table below shows examples of what type of media works at the various stages of market development.

Media by Market Stage

Early Market		Chasm Crossing & Niche Markets
Technology Enthusiasts	Visionaries	Pragmatists
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trade press • White papers • Application notes & web • Developer kits • Speaking engagements • Advisory councils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business press • Product advertising • Case studies • Seminars & trade shows • Web-based demos • Product demos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vertical market press • Market backgrounders • Application focused advertising • Reference customers/case studies • Analyst reports • Web-based advertising/search engine marketing

Independent of market stage, the first priority for early-stage start-ups is to establish a professional-looking website. When developing your website, consider the following criteria:

- **Design:** The site should have a simple and easy-to-use design. It should look professional to provide potential customers, employees and partners with confidence in the credibility of your organization.

- **Content:** It should contain information about your company, product (when ready), target customers and partners, as well as a newsroom for press releases and other public information, and background resources, such as whitepapers.
- **Marketing:** The website should include links to all the blogs and websites that cover the topics relevant to your technology and the issues that your technology addresses. Including such links is a free way of improving search engine rankings, but many companies should also consider paid search engine marketing.

Other media considerations for early-stage start-ups include trade show participation, speaker engagements, case studies and whitepapers. When deciding which media to use, many of the practical considerations are the same as when choosing evidence:

- **Credibility and relevance:** Which media are credible with your target audience? Do the media have an editorial profile relevant to your technology and the problem you are trying to solve?
- **Reach:** Which media provide the greatest reach in terms of target audience? Are you being asked to pay to reach an audience that is not part of your target group?
- **Budget:** Can you afford to pay for advertising or do you depend on getting editorial coverage?

Record the responses to the following two questions in the corresponding section of the workbook template:



1. Plan any changes to your website. List any proposed changes, why are you making them, when they are due and what the projected cost might be for each change.

2. List any other media you deem relevant at this stage of your development. Indicate your objective and the related evidence, as well as the due date and cost associated with the media.

4. Marketing to influencers

Unlike the market strategy, which initially focuses on one target customer, a MarCom plan might involve several target audiences. The logic behind this is simple: as mentioned above, if you have a disruptive technology, a key communication goal is to be recognized as a thought leader. However, this leadership position cannot be achieved only through your own claims of being the leader. It requires getting key influencers and opinion leaders (KOLs) to talk about you as “the next big thing.”

In other words, your communication is directed at the opinion leaders as well as your target customers. However, your target customers determine which opinion leaders to focus your efforts on, so the two are closely linked.



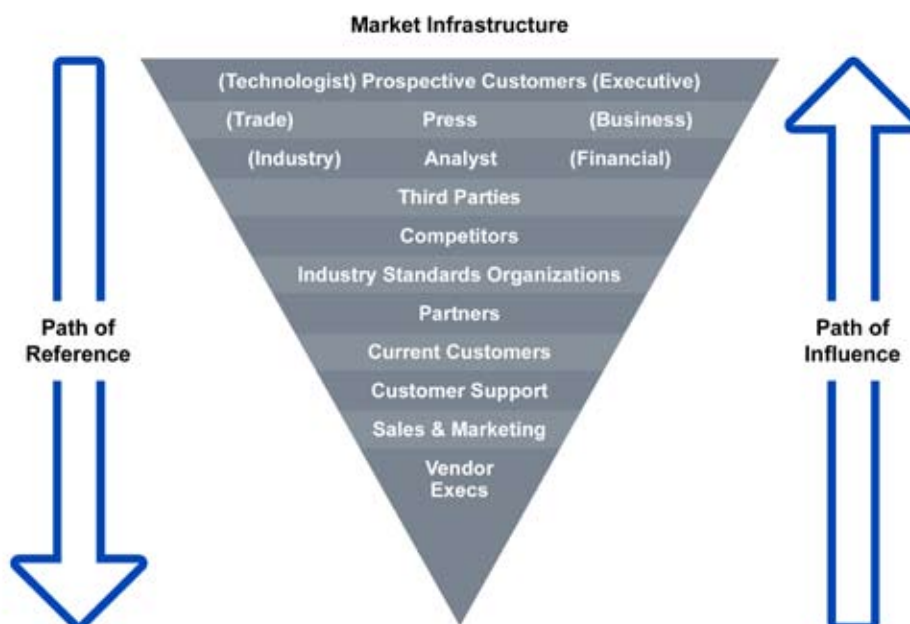
Read more about [marketing toward influencers and opinion leaders](#).



Examples of opinion leaders:

- Social media: Charlene Lee, Josh Bernhoff, Chris Brogan
- Business philosophy: Malcolm Gladwell, Thomas Friedman, Chris Anderson
- Investing: Warren Buffet
- Technology marketing: Seth Godin, Geoffrey Moore, Marc Andreessen

While the fields mentioned above are fairly broad, it is possible to identify KOLs that have a narrower scope in terms of geography and field of expertise. Also, despite the longevity of some of the aforementioned opinion leaders, it is worth noting that yesterday's opinion leaders might not be tomorrow's opinion leaders. In the heyday of the Internet boom, investment analysts such as Henry Blodget (Merrill Lynch) and Mary Meeker (Morgan Stanley) had enormous personal influence, but with the bust of the boom, their influence has shrunk significantly (despite the fact that Meeker remains in a central role at Morgan Stanley). Also, up-and-coming KOLs are more likely to care about you than the more established ones because the new KOLs are in the process of building their platform of expertise and influence.



Wielers, P. (2002). The Chasm Companion. New York: Harper Business. p. 236.

The emergence of social media has created not just a new army of bloggers with more or less expertise and influence, but it has also made it easier for influencers to connect with each other and their followers. To a degree, it is simpler to identify and locate an influencer; however, the large number of people approaching influencers means that truly influential people are somewhat wary of contacts that emerge from outside their networks. It might require you (either directly or through your PR agency or online community manager) to immerse yourself in a particular field for some time in order to earn the trust of the influencers you are targeting. While this will take time, it might be worth the effort because these opinion leaders are part of a self-referencing community. Once you are on the inside, you will benefit from the trust of the large number of opinion leaders. The example of Novartis below illustrates a particular scenario where marketing to influencers becomes a necessity as a result of regulations that prohibit direct customer communication.



Example: Novartis

Canadian regulations prohibit direct-to-consumer advertising of pharmaceutical products, and, as outlined in *Marketing Management*,* this created a challenge for drug company Novartis. When it became clear to Novartis that patients with high blood pressure did not understand how to use their drug, Diovan, the company had to take action. But rather than deploying online, print and television advertising to inform patients as they had in the American market, Novartis had to use an indirect communication channel to get their message across. The solution was to allocate the majority of the communication budget to educate physicians, who in this case had great influence in both prescribing the drug and instructing patients on how to use it. Armed with credible, scientific evidence, Novartis spread the message through golf tournament sponsorships and keynote speakers at medical conferences. They also used their sales force target hospitals and medical associations directly.

While the above approach was primarily triggered by a specific regulatory situation that Novartis faced in Canada, the example demonstrates how key opinion leaders constitute a legitimate target audience for a marketing campaign, regardless of the industry. Whether you are targeting a physician, a community of bloggers, a celebrity chef or a software sales person, the idea remains the same: you want your audience to recommend your product as part of their daily work. To win them over, you need to provide evidence that suggests it will be in their interest to do so, as did Novartis with the scientific evidence they provided.

*Kotler, P., Keller, K.L., & Cunningham, P. (2006). *Marketing Management* (Canadian 12th ed.). Toronto: Pearson Education.



Write your responses to the questions below in the corresponding section of the MarCom planning document.

Determine your target KOLs in two steps:

1. Begin by listing the communities, events and media channels where you would reach your target customers.
2. Next, map the KOLs that your target customers are referring to when making decisions. Use the categories outlined in the figure above to map the influencers that are important for you to identify. Research each KOL's public identity and document their profile. Prioritize them in terms of importance for your target customer's decision-making process.

The result of this exercise is that you end up with more than one target audience:

- A primary target audience, which essentially is your target customer
- A secondary audience, which consists of the various influencers that surround your target customer

Most technology buyers can never fully understand the technology they are buying. This information deficit means that buyers have to make a leap of faith when they place an order. In the absence of a well-known brand, start-ups rely on well-known opinion leaders to bridge the gap in customer knowledge through personal recommendations, blog writing, testimonials and articles, which in turn enables customers to make the leap of faith that is required for them to make the purchase.

In other words, marketing to KOLs is essential for your success.

5. Implementing your MarCom strategy

The exercises you completed as part of this workbook guide provide a great foundation for your MarCom strategy. However, marketing communications is a specialized field; unless you or someone in your start-up is a skilled copywriter or PR professional, you should hire someone to help implement certain elements of your MarCom strategy. There are many categories of marketing consultants to choose from; however, if you are not deliberate in the way you engage them, there is a risk of not meeting your MarCom goals. The following brief guide addresses several key issues when hiring professional MarCom help.

- Before you pick up the phone, identify elements in the MarCom strategy that you would like to keep in-house. Examples of work that you should do yourself either fully or partially include delivering keynote presentations and

writing technical descriptions and whitepapers. Remain closely involved in any work that requires in-depth domain expertise.

- Once you have identified the parts of your MarCom strategy that will be handled by you and your team, it will be easier to figure out what kind of expertise and capabilities you need from the external service provider in order to execute the remainder of your plan.

Types of MarCom firms

The most common categories of MarCom firms are listed below; keep in mind that there is a great deal of overlap between them.

Advertising agencies: Ad agencies help you to develop a brand strategy and implement it through paid media. The core competencies of a general advertising agency include strategic communication planning (account planning), copywriting and art design.

PR agencies: The primary job of public relations (PR) agencies is to earn you free press coverage, also known as media relations. PR agencies also engage in crisis management, and investor, government and community relations to enhance your reputation and credibility.

Interactive agencies: Interactive agencies focus on web design and online marketing. Increasingly, the scope of interactive agencies has come to include mobile and gaming platforms.

Freelance: There are many types of freelancers in the MarCom area. Some will have a background in PR advertising or interactive media, but there are also specialists such as graphic designers and technical writers. The risk with freelancers is that they cannot handle large projects and/or complex work as easily as the categories of agencies mentioned above because they normally have limited bandwidth. However, many freelancers work with other firms and contractors to provide the right mix of capacity and skills to finish any project.

For many early-stage start-ups, the natural starting point would be freelance contractors with a broad MarCom background and in-depth understanding of PR. They could take on some of the essential PR work and coordinate the project management of the other initiatives in your strategy.

Many start-ups hire marketing consultants based on recommendations from their network. However, take your time to interview a number of consultants before making your choice. Focus on the following areas in an interview:

- **Expertise:** This includes functional MarCom skills and industry experience. Have they worked in your industry or with related technologies before? Is their expertise relevant to your MarCom objectives?
- **Network:** Who do they typically partner with and do they have a track record of successful collaboration?

- **Capacity and flexibility:** How flexible are they in terms of taking on the variety of projects required by a start-up? How much time do they have available for you?
- **Cost and contract:** Are they charging a fixed price per project, per hour or per day? What about other engagement models like a retainer fee or a combination of project and retainer fees (i.e., draw down)? Whatever their business model, ensure that it matches your need and that they are willing to sign a contract to confirm the agreement.

Hiring someone to handle the implementation of your MarCom strategy does not mean that you are “off the hook” when it comes to MarCom work. To ensure that they are effective advisors, you should expect to spend time transferring knowledge to them about your company, technology, product, value proposition and the assumptions behind your value proposition. Whoever you hire should agree to develop key performance metrics based on your objectives and regularly report back on those metrics. Be diligent in addressing shortcomings on any of your performance metrics and discuss potential adjustments of your MarCom activities to ensure that you meet your objectives.