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Harness the Marketing Swell Theory for Stronger Results

Awareness



Consideration



Decision



This is a reprint of a series of blogs from 2024, back by popular demand in one succinct download.

Success in marketing is quite simply creating a focused energy people notice. This is *already* in motion:

- The referral and social networks for amplification already exist.
- The media outlets for momentum are already up and running.
- Your target audience is already intentional about finding your services.
- The internal and external teams for execution are at the ready.

Our job as marketers is to *notice* the swell and to *ride* it well.

What is a swell?

A swell, or long-term strategic marketing plan, is a series of relatively same-sized waves created by a storm or wind. The waves, or quarterly marketing actions, break in a rhythmic pattern once the swell reaches shallow water.

Swells happen naturally. They occur frequently. They are already in motion.

Jim Collins wrote in *Good to Great* about the Flywheel Effect. The premise is that with disciplined people, disciplined thought and disciplined action, we can achieve energy buildup then breakthrough in business. He suggests that business owners and executives must “relentlessly push a giant heavy flywheel in one direction, turn upon turn” (Collins, 14).

I pose that less pushing is necessary, more *noticing* and *riding it well*. Collect data to *notice* or identify where your marketing swell is occurring *right now*. Focus all marketing efforts on *riding it well*, first by getting your target audience’s attention and amplifying your message with the right calls to action. This keeps their attention and invites them to let you help resolve the needs they have *right now*.

Envision this...

It’s a sunny day at the beach. The beachgoers are lolling on their towels, in their chairs and under their umbrellas. The swimmers splash, play and laugh.

The beachgoers on the white sand are your target audience, those people who *need your care now*. The swimmers in the blue ocean are all your target audience’s options: don’t seek outside help, look for support but don’t act, consider all the competing options for supported help but don’t act. The beachgoers see all the swimmers, but no one swimmer stands out to them. Therefore, they do nothing. They loll.

Wait, what’s happening here? A swimmer notices a swell, catches a wave and is now riding it well. The beachgoers sit up, take notice and point. Some stand and move closer to the shore break. A few wade into the water, curious how they can join this swimmer.

This is the power of creating a focused energy people notice.

A swell, or long-term strategic marketing plan, is a series of relatively same-sized waves created by a storm or wind. The waves, or quarterly marketing actions, break in a rhythmic pattern once the swell reaches shallow water. *Swells happen naturally. They occur frequently. They are already in motion.* Our job as marketers is to *notice* the swell and to *ride it well*.

What exactly does *ride it well* mean? To find out, let's explore the three areas of each wave in the marketing swell: Awareness, Consideration, Decision.

Awareness

Brand
Website
SEO
Blogs
eBooks
Social



The swimmer (your marketing team) drops into the top of a wave and pops up on the board. The beachgoers (your target audience) are suddenly aware of your organization. Awareness marketing is typically amplified in strategies like brand, website, SEO, blogs, eBooks and social media, all of which *always include a clear call to action* appropriate at this place in the wave. Calls to action at the awareness phase may include "visit our website" or "like and share." Now, if the swimmer stops short at the top of the wave, neglecting to drop further in, the wave will break and the swimmer will wipe out without having gained the beachgoers' loyalty.

Consideration

Thought leadership
Influencer marketing
Recruitment marketing
Event marketing



By contrast, when the swimmer maintains focus and drops into the middle of the wave, the beachgoers take further notice, moving into *consideration* of your organization. Consideration marketing is typically shared via consistent thought leadership or influencer marketing, recruitment marketing and event marketing, all of which *always include a clear call to action* appropriate at this place in the wave. Calls to action at the consideration phase may include "read more" or "follow us." It is possible to gain the beachgoer's loyalty at this place on the wave, but dropping further in is advised to support the beachgoers in deciding to join you and become loyal to your offering.

Decision

Digital ads
Case studies
Promotional campaigns



Once the swimmer reaches the bottom of the wave, all sorts of options open: duck into the barrel to impress the most beachgoers, enjoy a long ride to keep the hard-earned attention of a few beachgoers, or do some turns and tricks to entice the most engaged beachgoers to revel in what you are doing. Decision marketing typically takes the form of digital ads, case studies and promotional campaigns, all of which *always include a clear call to action* appropriate at this place in the wave. Calls to action at the decision phase may include "schedule an appointment" or "call for details."

As the wave nears the shore break, the swimmer gracefully exits the wave. Remember, a swell is a series of waves. There is an equally powerful wave right behind the one just ridden.

Swells happen naturally. They occur frequently. They are already in motion.

More than that, the target audience is already present with a need you can support them in resolving. It's just a matter of getting their attention, keeping their attention, intentionally inviting them to join you and be loyal.

How to master all three?

To consistently invite the beachgoers (target audience) to join you and become loyal to your offerings, align the whole marketing team, internally and externally, on a simple one-page marketing plan.

Examples are provided here from two different organizations.

The Strategies column outlined in the center shows actions to be taken over and over every quarter, on each wave in the swell. Collectively, they cover all three phases of marketing: Awareness, Consideration, Decision. Strategies are evolved in team alignment sessions each quarter.

BIG: We will increase awareness to increase revenue from \$65 million to \$73 million by December 31, 2026.

Objectives	Strategies	Measures
1. We are the preferred holistic Christian senior care provider in the Puget Sound region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct voice-of-the-customer (VOC) surveys Use survey data to develop key messaging, visuals and direction Apply differentiating messaging consistently across all marketing channels 	Increase occupancy from 86% to 99% by 2025
2. We are the trusted authority on investing in senior care.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evolve sales messaging Build and deploy a social media strategy Refine and evolve the content marketing strategy Launch public relations, awards campaigns and review program 	Increase buy-in rate from 20% to 50% by 2025
3. We have strong internal sales and marketing systems to support sustainable growth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process map internal sales and marketing processes Apply the functional marketing team model Automate content marketing campaigns 	Increase SQLs from ____ to ____ by December 31, 2022

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BIG (Big Important Goal): Increase intent and nurture marketing in order to increase new patient numbers from 90 monthly to 110 monthly with 40 from online and 70 from internal referral.

Objectives	Strategies	Measures
1. We are known as the Indianapolis-area family dentistry practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Search Engine Optimization Content Marketing Strategy Social Media Marketing Strategy 	Up to 2,000 web sessions monthly
2. We have steady external new patient flow.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Google Ads Facebook Advertising 	Maintain NP from online marketing, mailers, drive-by, etc. at 40 to 45 monthly.
3. We have high production with peace and low stress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Referral Ask Training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daily systems running at a high level Go from 10 to 12 operators Increase internal referrals from 45 to 70 monthly

Objectives and Measures are updated annually after team alignment on what worked and what didn't in reaching those short-term goals.

The BIG, or Big Important Goal, at the top of the plan is updated every three years after team alignment on maintaining a long-term [SMART goal](#).

Year over year, constant communication and momentum equal consistent results.

It's widely known in professional surfing that measuring a wave is largely subjective. [According to Surfer Today](#), "the analysis is based solely on video and photo imagery." Additional data considered may include tides, sunlight and wave set-up. Still, it's not a precise science.

Just the same, no matter how much data is available, measuring marketing is subjective. Unlike in accounting, where all financial experts use similar measurement tools like the Profit and Loss and Balance Sheet statements, there is no industry standard in marketing. Google Analytics, launched in 2005, is most marketers' go-to measurement system, but measures only web-related activity. Second runners-up are marketing automation and sales CRM data platforms, yet with hundreds of platforms available none set the standard for reporting. Collectively, they only measure middle-of-the-funnel and bottom-of-the-funnel activity.

What's a marketer to do?

Let's go back to the one-page marketing plan, specifically the Measures column. Note in our examples there are three to five measures. *Keep it simple.* Align the marketing team on one to two measures for Awareness marketing strategies, one to two measures for Consideration marketing efforts and one to two measures for Decision marketing tactics.

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Remember to measure the swell, not the wave. While Strategies, or actions taken while on each wave or in each quarter, are updated quarterly, Measures are updated annually. This gives the team time, energy and momentum to notice the swell and to ride it well.

The quarterly alignment sessions are when disciplined people engage in disciplined thought. Without it, the plan is nothing more than a static to-do list.



In this publication, we looked at the inner workings of the wave, which is composed of Awareness, Consideration and Decision marketing.

What if we soared above the ocean to look at the set more holistically? Once we notice the swell and get good at riding each wave well, how can we sharpen our processes? Here is a system:

Once annually, hold a Kickoff and Focus meeting with the collective marketing team. Review the previous year's one-page marketing plan, including:

- Big Important Goal (BIG) – Is the organization closer to reaching this long-term goal? If not, what needs adjusting?
- Objectives – Is the organization closer to or has it reached its destinations along the road to reaching the BIG? If not, what needs adjusting?
- Strategies – Quarter by quarter, what are all the actions the organization took to reach its BIG and Objectives? What worked, what didn't?
- Measures – Did the organization reach its Measures every quarter? If not, what needs adjusting?



Proven Process

Each month, empower the team to complete the research and align in strategic thinking about how best to close any known gaps in the coming year.

Week after week, continuously create and implement marketing tactics that support the Strategies. Every quarter, align the team on the one-page marketing plan, analyzing, optimizing and evolving efforts to continuously improve outcomes

As American billionaire businessman and philanthropist Kevin Plank said, "Success doesn't happen quickly. It happens from doing the same thing over and over, becoming great at it, and delivering great value to consumers."

Here's to the many great swells before you!

Wendy O'Donovan Phillips
CEO, Big Buzz

Since 2007, Big Buzz® has helped [Stage II to Stage III organizations](#) systemize marketing to achieve growth goals. Founder and CEO Wendy O'Donovan Phillips is the author of two books available on Amazon, [Kaboom](#) and [Flourish](#), multiple data-driven [eBooks](#), has been published in [McKnight's](#), in [Forbes](#), and has been quoted in The Washington Post, ABC News and Chicago Tribune. She has lectured dozens of professional organizations in front of audiences ranging in size from 25 to 6,000. She has been honored by the American Marketing Association for excellence in her field and has been named a Gold Key Award Winner by the Business Marketing Association. In her two-decades-long career, she has consulted with hundreds of organizations globally to support improved marketing clarity, strategies and outcomes. Get details: visit www.bigbuzzinc.com and follow [Wendy](#).

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