



**Prepping Your Materials
and Preparing Your
Business for The Year
Ahead**

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Prepping Your Materials and Preparing Your Business for The Year Ahead

Every new year is a chance to start fresh for your brand. Whether the previous year was one filled with successes or one plagued by setbacks, the 12 months ahead are your chance to set a course for growth and improvement—one that takes you to the next year with a new set of goals. Before you get too far into this year, it's important to take a moment to figure out what collateral you're going to need for success. It's a lot like planning a home renovation: you need to know what materials and tools to put on your shopping list. Not only will this keep you from having to make a few dozen trips to the hardware store, it'll also help you get a handle on your costs and timeline.

Taking a thorough, intensive look at your marketing efforts for the upcoming year gives you a chance to get your business' collateral in order. Knowing what kind of materials you're going to need next month, 3 months from now and later this year enable you to plan and act accordingly.

Plan Over the Short and Long Terms

With wall and floor graphics, the possibilities are endless. What image do you want your brand to convey? How do you want your organization to stand out? Use custom graphics to send the message you desire.

Be as unique as you want to be with graphics that tell the story you want them to. More than a simple paint color, graphics offer the opportunity to share your logo, slogan or motto, as well as depict the exact designs you want for individual spaces. Your custom-designed wall and floor graphics are the ideal solution to differentiate your building from every other organization.

- **Quarter 1: January through March**
- **Quarter 2: April through June**
- **Quarter 3: July through September**
- **Quarter 4: October through December**

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With your year broken into quarters, it's possible to look at just about any variable that might affect your marketing, including seasons, holidays, individual months and more.

Quarters also serve as good benchmarks for breaking things down on an even more granular scale. If you'd rather consider your marketing needs on a month-by-month basis, it's possible to extract each month from each quarter to plan at that scale. When you re-assemble your marketing plan, it becomes possible to look at your campaign strategies from an annual, quarterly or monthly perspective. This level of insight offers exponential benefits to marketers when it comes to budgeting and execution of campaigns.

Being able to see your marketing plan does more than just keep you on course for diligent advertising throughout the year—it also enables you to gather necessary materials ahead of time. If it's nearing the end of Q3 and you have prolific campaigns planned for the holiday season of Q4, you'll have the foresight to start designing and ordering materials upfront. You'll avoid delays and poor execution.

Take Stock of Your Collateral

When it comes to remodeling your home, your materials list is your guide to budgeting and execution. If you know you need drywall and screws for the next stage, you can estimate cost and gather those materials to move forward. The concept is the same in marketing.

In planning out your marketing campaigns ahead of time for the year, you'll be able to plan for materials well before you need them. Say, for example, you're attending a trade show in August. Planning for this event at the beginning of the year enables you to allocate budget for that event, while also giving you foresight to the materials you need. In June, you can order signage, banners, handouts, business cards and whatever else you need for the show, ensuring delivery well before the day of the event.

Specific marketing events aren't the only reason to plan ahead. Taking stock of your everyday, universal marketing collateral is also central to ensuring you maintain proper stock of supplies throughout the year—including during busy seasons. If your business sees more foot traffic in October, for example, you can stock up on marketing handouts at the end of August to meet anticipated demand.

There's also the question of design planning to consider. Targeted marketing campaigns require unique design services to create compelling collateral. Being able to look ahead for launch dates allows you to prep all materials, regardless of their custom nature. If you're launching an EDDM postcard campaign in mid-November, a look at the calendar will tell you that designs need to be finalized by the beginning of October, with your job hitting the press by the end of the month.

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Taking stock of marketing collateral isn't just a way to kick off the year's marketing efforts, either. This needs to be a continuous process to observe and adhere to throughout the year. At the end of each quarter, be sure to go back and see what materials you have leftover, as well as what's needed for the quarter ahead. You may be able to save costs or correct errors in the months ahead by learning from the months prior.

Plan Events and Campaigns

Every business' calendar is marked with special dates. Often, these are special events or campaigns that require an extra bump from the marketing department, including:

- **Sales events**
- **Trade shows**
- **Grand openings**
- **Community events**
- **Holidays**

No matter the nature of these events, knowing about them ahead of time will enable you to market appropriately. It behooves any business to take time at the beginning of the year to call out special dates, and plan for them accordingly as they create a marketing timeline and budget.

Sales events

These events can occur as frequently as weekly or as sparsely as once a year—even overlapping each other or other special events. It's important to gather sales-driven materials that are central to the nature of the campaign.

Trade shows

Trade shows are usually determined many months in advance, giving your business ample time to plan for your presence at one. Focus your materials on a combination of brand awareness and information communication. Get banners, flags and backdrops for your booth, as well as business cards, handouts, pamphlets and brochures.

Grand openings

You only get one chance to make a first impression! Be sure to mark this special date on your calendar and market aggressively right up to it. Plan mailers and flyers 60-days in advance to get people talking, alongside ad placements and more direct campaigns inside of the 30-day mark. When the week of the opening nears, deck out your location with banners, flags, window signage and anything else that will pique someone's attention.

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Community events

For all of those community events on your calendar, it's smart to stock up on promotional print materials well in advance and to maintain a stock during peak events season. Apparel is always popular, along with knickknacks like pens, keychains, coozies and more. For business-specific swag, consult with your local print provider.

Holidays

Holidays are the mother of all marketing opportunities and they occur all year round. From the New Year itself, to Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Thanksgiving and the winter holidays, it's necessary to take an overhead view of your calendar to make sure marketing materials are created and printed well in advance of each holiday celebration.

Paying close attention to when marketing events occur throughout the year and the nature of each opportunity will give you the foresight needed to design and print necessary, effective marketing collateral ahead of time.

Pay Attention to the Details

Details lend themselves to the overall quality of a finished product. In a home remodel, it's the small details that add up to unique appeal for your home. When planning your marketing collateral for the year, it's these same details that will shape effective, alluring collateral.

Because you've taken the time to plan a year's worth of marketing, you'll have direct oversight into the nature of each campaign you plan. This gives you all of the necessary information to create applicable collateral:

- **Target audience**
- **Value proposition**
- **Timeframe for messaging**
- **Goal of messaging**

Using these key variables, you'll be able to get a jumpstart on planning campaigns that are weeks or months down the line.

For example, if you're running a summertime promotion targeted at driving in-store customers, you can create collateral that meets this need. Consider something like an EDDM mailer to local-area customers, containing a special punch card they can bring into the store with them. By defining the local audience, the reward for filling the punch card and the dates of the promo, you'll produce collateral that's ready to roll out when the campaign is set to swing into action.



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For special events and unique marketing opportunities, adherence to the details is especially crucial. Knowing about a community event months in advance lets you plan a unique value proposition and specific collateral to push that messaging. You can use calls to action like “visit us at the show” to drive engagement and expound upon this unique marketing opportunity.

Tailoring the details of your marketing collateral around the uniqueness of its application is only possible if you’re looking ahead.

Don’t be Afraid to Adjust

When developing a year-long outlook for your marketing collateral, nothing is etched in stone. Your proactive, forward-looking plan is meant to be a guideline for determining relative need and cost. This means it’s adjustable and adaptable! If there comes a time when your marketing efforts aren’t matching up with your plan, don’t be afraid to reassess and adjust, instead of trying to hammer a nail with a screwdriver.

Adjusting your annual marketing plan and collateral needs may seem like a daunting task—especially if it’s still early in the year. This is where the importance of segmented planning shines through. The beauty of a quarterly approach to planning your marketing is that you’re never too far away from the start or end of a quarter (~45 days). This gives you ample time to make an adjustment in the type of collateral you’re creating and the potential cost of that expense.

Sometimes, life will throw a wrench into your entire marketing plan. Market conditions change, customer perceptions shift and myriad other problems become apparent over the course of a year. If your plan needs a major overhaul, it doesn’t mean you need to scrap all of your hard work. Simply take it quarter-by-quarter or month-by-month, adjusting as necessary. You’ll quickly find that the bones of your plan are likely good. For example, even if you need to change the product selection for your fall catalog, you’ll still have budgeted the time and expense associated with that type of collateral.

Don’t become entrenched in a plan that needs to be adjusted. Instead, remember that your need for marketing materials is always in flux—even when you plan extensively. You never know when you’ll have to order extra of one thing and cancel another.



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Cultivate a Partnership with Your Printer

If you go through all of the hard work in documenting your marketing material needs over the course of an entire year, it only makes sense to align yourself with a printer who can aid you in staying on top of that plan. Working in tandem with a printer opens up a line of communication that keeps you on the path to success in your marketing efforts. Sharing your collateral schedule with a printer affords your business many benefits, including:

- **Quick turnaround:** If your printer knows a job is coming down the line, they'll be able to proof and run that job quicker. This means getting press time when you need it, so you can have your collateral in-hand faster.
- **Room for improvement:** If you're compiling print materials for an upcoming campaign, a printer may have advice or insight that helps you boost the effectiveness of your campaign, whether it's adding new materials or changing the nature of planned collateral.
- **Stock fulfillment:** For general marketing collateral, a partnership with a printer means access to your staple necessities quickly and without error. Your printer can simply cue up business cards or letterhead jobs so you're guaranteed the same quality, every time.

When it comes to getting the right marketing materials all year round, there's no substitute for a sound partnership with a local printer. You'll gain access to everything you need to successfully market your business, along with the many benefits that come with open communication and access to industry expertise. If planning for marketing collateral is like remodeling your home, a printer is the hardware store expert who helps you get exactly what you need.

Start Pursuing Success

You can't always predict the future, but you can take steps towards shaping it in the way you want it to play out. In terms of your marketing collateral and spend, looking 12 months out from today can give you all of the foresight you need to be successful in your many marketing endeavors throughout the year.

No one wants to start remodeling their home with no concept of the materials needed or the cost of the project. Planning a year's worth of marketing collateral gives you the peace of mind in knowing these details upfront. Instead of flying through the year by the seat of your pants or jumping from one marketing campaign to another blindly, you'll always know what's next—even if it's weeks or months down the line.

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