upliift
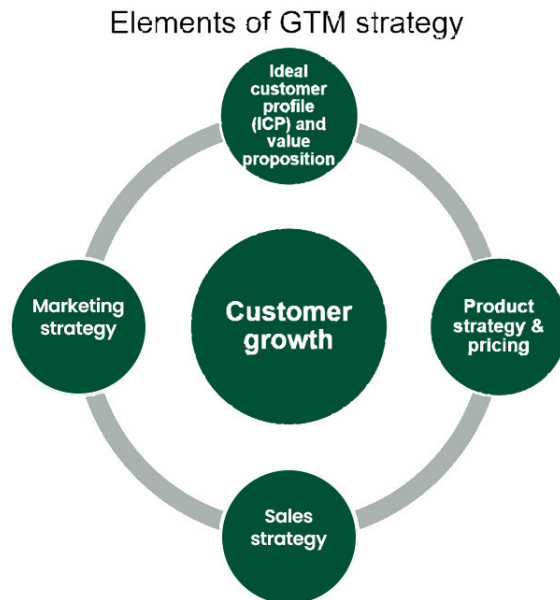
Founders' Guide

Go-to-Market: marketing excellence

Expert contributor: Lucy Jacobs, Upliift Chief Marketing Officer

Introduction

Once you've defined your value proposition, ideal customer profile (ICP), product and pricing, and sales processes (see previous chapters), it's time to consider your marketing strategy.

Elements of GTM strategy

Ideal customer profile (ICP) and value proposition

Marketing strategy

Customer growth

Product strategy & pricing

Sales strategy

Marketing is about raising awareness and your company's profile, as well as supporting sales by engaging, attracting and keeping customers. It's about communicating your value proposition and stories about why and how you help customers solve their pain points – and why you do that better than the competition. Marketing must be authentic, transparent and honest to build a credible brand image and trust, and to strengthen customer loyalty.

A strategic approach

Since niche software businesses often lack a dedicated marketing resource, the responsibility falls to the founder—typically squeezed into "spare" time. As a result, marketing tends to rely on word-of-mouth, personal relationships, and networks. Many businesses also rely on what they view as "tried and tested" marketing approaches, like exhibiting at trade shows or advertising in trade magazines or journals. While these channels are undoubtedly powerful, they have their limits. A single advertisement does not make a marketing campaign.

When it comes to scaling (see **Chapter 1: Ingredients of a High-Growth Business**), businesses need to think more strategically about engaging customers.

Strategic marketing can strengthen customer loyalty by shifting the focus from individual relationships to the company as a whole. It builds a brand that stands on its own, making your business more resilient and primed for growth.

Marketing ensures potential customers find you, understand your value, and trust your brand. It:

- **Drives growth:** *With more efficient sales, relationships and promotion*

- **Reduces risk:** *A stronger reputation is more resilient if things go wrong*

- **Builds trust:** *To make relationships stronger and sales more effective*

- **Lower costs:** *Stronger relationships mean more efficient marketing*

Marketing for a customer's journey

One way to think about marketing is how you help your target customer at each stage of their purchasing journey – from discovering their challenge, finding your product or service, to making a decision to purchase, and becoming loyal advocates.

This journey, however, isn't always linear. Using a marketing funnel can help break it down into manageable stages so it becomes easier to focus your marketing efforts where they'll have the biggest impact.

At each stage of the customer journey, you'll need to consider what you want to communicate:

- **Messaging and positioning:** *What do you do and why? Who are you? Why are you different? What pain points do you solve and how do you do it?*

- **Proof points:** *How can you prove what you're saying is true? Proof points can include customer testimonials, accolades and awards, growth, customer retention, R&D, expertise, unique selling points (USPs).*

- **Insights:** *What data do you have that demonstrates the need for your product, and what trends, predictions and insights can you share to help your customers better understand and navigate the market they operate in?*

Get this foundational model set up, and it becomes easier to grow, learn and adapt your focus.

AWARENESS

INTEREST

DESIRE

ACTION

LOYALTY & ADVOCACY

The marketing funnel

Funnel	Stage	Customer experience	Strategy	Tactics	Measurement
Top	Awareness	Potential customers become aware of their problem and discover your company or solution	Introduce your business (increase brand awareness) Show how you solve their problems	Website, Blog and articles Social media and LinkedIn Google search rankings Events Email marketing and newsletters	Web traffic Social engagement Conference engagement
Middle	Interest	They find out more about your company and offering, and what your competitors are doing	Educate prospects about your products and highlight what sets you apart from the competition	Content, insight and research (e.g., how-tos, case studies/customer stories, tutorials, product overviews, informative eBooks)	Form fills, Engagement of email opens / clicks, Content downloads,
Middle	Decision	They like what they see and consider their purchase	Reassure prospects by highlighting benefits and customer success	Email nurture campaigns Website journeys and landing pages Content Social nurturing	Inbound requests to sales Email engagement Website engagement Social performance
	Action	They decide to buy (or take other action)	Make it easy for people to buy and continue to reassure customers	Nurture campaigns Content Landing pages Lead management (Pass leads to sales)	Sales RFPs
Bottom	Loyalty & Advocacy	Customers become repeat purchasers and advocate for your company and its products	Work with customers to help them tell their stories to prospect	Sales bid support Case studies and testimonials Joint speaker opportunities at industry events (company and customers) Customer referral scheme	Customer testimonials and joint promotion, Cross-selling Recurring business

Budgeting and resourcing

The first decision to make is about investment and resourcing. Adding either a permanent marketing role, external agency or fractional CMO, who can do the heavy lifting, can be effective ways building out a marketing capability.

As a rule of thumb, a business' annual marketing spend – including labour resources – should be between 6%-15% of their revenues. This will fluctuate depending on factors like economic pressures, but in 2024, the average European marketing budget was 7.4%, according to Gartner. However, niche software businesses often have different constraints and opportunities compared to larger or more generic software companies and therefore may need to tailor their budgets accordingly. Working with the right investors can help founders find the best marketing model for them.

There are several ways you can measure the returns you can expect for that investment.

Metrics and measurement

There are a huge range of marketing metrics and KPIs and tracking them is quite simple.

But which ones are the most useful? A good place to start is looking at the performance of your website and social (e.g. LinkedIn) feeds. Google and social platforms have analytics built in that tell a lot about how engaged users are with your content.

Look for data points like website traffic (and where the traffic has come from), page views, click-through rates, time on page, bounce rates, conversion rates, cost per lead, social media engagement (impressions), and keyword rankings.

By tracking these factors over time, you can get an idea of what's working in your marketing: have your LinkedIn posts driven more traffic to your website, for example? This way you can refine your marketing approach as you go.

Other useful KPIs include the following:
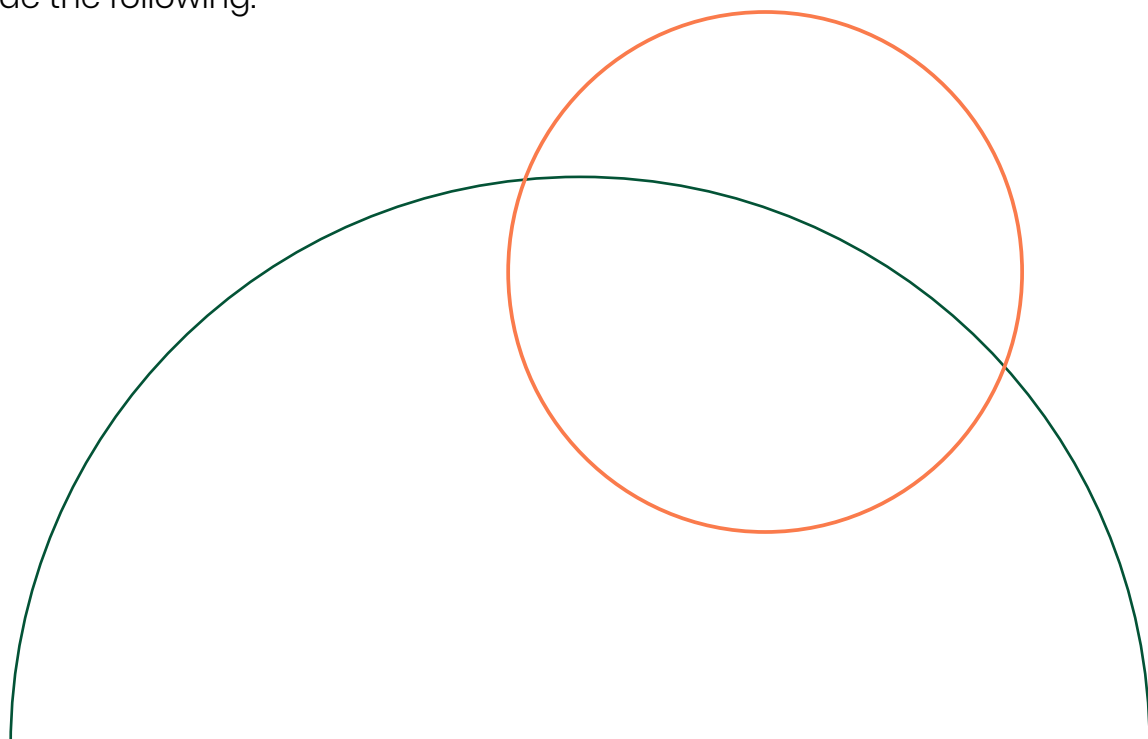
Marketing qualified leads (MQLs):

These are leads gained by customer marketing activity that fit your ICP and that show intent. Marketing can pass these to sales for conversion.

Leads to sale conversion:

How many MQLs are converted into customers. This metric shows the success of customer profiling and the activities throughout the sales funnel.

Customer lifetime value (CLV):

This is the revenue a company can make from a customer over the course of their relationship. Effective marketing can contribute to CLV by driving customer engagement, and retention and encouraging loyalty, repeat purchases, which maximises the total revenue from each customer.

Customer acquisition cost (CAC):

How much it costs to acquire a new customer. By accelerating relationship-building and widening your reach, marketing can help reduce CAC.

Return on marketing investment (ROMI):

The revenue that results from marketing activity compared to the cost of doing that activity.

Marketing glossary

Marketing can sometimes feel like a sea of jargon—terms like nurture campaigns, paid search, and engagement get thrown around frequently. Understanding their role in the marketing mix is key.

Here's a breakdown of some essential terms:

- **Nurture campaigns:** Automated or manual marketing efforts designed to build ongoing relationships with potential customers over time.

- **Paid search:** Advertising on search engines like Google to increase visibility for specific keywords.

- **Social media engagement:** Interactions (likes, shares, comments) that help build brand presence and relationships online.

- **Social nurturing:** Using social channels to guide potential customers through their buying journey.

- **Google search ranking:** Where your website appears in search results—strong SEO improves visibility.

- **Collateral:** Any materials produced in print or PDF (brochures, case studies, data sheets) that help customers make purchasing decisions.

- **Content:** Blogs, videos, articles, or social posts produced for digital channels that provide value and align with your audience's needs.

Marketing materials can typically be grouped into three categories:

- **Educational:** Helps prospects understand their challenges (e.g., blog posts, webinars, whitepapers).

- **Trust-building:** Showcases proof of success (e.g., case studies, testimonials, customer stories).

- **Promotional:** Highlights your product's benefits directly (e.g., product demos, feature announcements, comparisons).

By understanding these core marketing concepts, founders can make informed decisions and build a strategy that supports business growth.

Tips for success

Marketing doesn't have to be overwhelming. It's best to start small and let data guide your decisions. For niche software businesses, getting strategy and resourcing right is critical. A few core principles can help make the most of limited resources:

1. **Set clear marketing objectives.** Set clear but measurable goals for your marketing investment.

2. **Know your customers.** Be clear on who they are and how your product solves their problems.

3. **Prove your value.** Use case studies, testimonials, and data to build credibility.

4. **Get support.** Whether in-house or external, bringing in marketing expertise can accelerate growth.

5. **Prioritise what matters.** Focus on the marketing efforts that drive real impact rather than chasing every new trend.

How Upliift can help

Upliift supports its companies in building marketing capabilities that create awareness and generate leads. By working with the right partners and strategies, you can strengthen your market position and set the foundation for scalable growth.

upliift | upliift.com

About Upliift

Upliift is Europe's leading permanent equity investor focusing on niche European software businesses. We're software industry experts who work with founders to create better deals for better companies. We make long-term investments that unlock growth potential and enable founders to fully or partially exit, while preserving their business' brand and culture.

For more information, visit www.upliift.com