

## How To Set Marketing Goals You Can Actually Achieve: Advice From The Experts

By Chloe Mason Gray

One of the things I struggled with the most when I was a Marketing Manager at a SaaS company was learning how to set goals for our department. It sounds like a simple-enough task, but over time I came to see goal-setting as something of an art; it requires practice, constant refinement, focus and a little bit of playfulness (unless you want to drive yourself crazy).

Numerous questions swirled in my mind as I set (and re-set) goals for our marketing department:

How do you set goals that are challenging yet still achievable (is there an exact formula for this, like always shoot for x% more than last month)? How many goals should you set—one, three, six? Should you focus on a new goal every week, month, semester, quarter or year? If you're a small company and you need to achieve quick growth, how do you pick which goal is most important when there are a billion urgent things that need to happen? How do you stay focused on your goals (once you've finally decided on them) and not let other stuff get in the way, like tempting partnership opportunities or new tactics you want to try out?

Aaahh.

I got better at this over time, but it's definitely still something I struggle with. One of the best ways to figure out how to do something is to find someone more experienced or smarter than you who is already good at it and study how they do it. So I reached out to several top marketers to learn how they go about setting goals that are actually achievable, and then stay focused on these goals and execute like nobody's business.

Here's what they had to say:

### 1. Shanelle Mullin, Director of Marketing at Onboardly

Shanelle Mullin has been working as a marketer since she was just 15 years-old (because who doesn't decide to become an affiliate marketing expert at 15?), when she helped a three-person startup grow to a million dollar company.

Currently, she is the Director of Marketing at Onboardly, where she helps the company's startup clients create revenue-generating marketing strategies.

The key to setting achievable marketing goals is to **spend time evaluating your current position**. Many startups set lofty, unattainable goals and end up discouraged, which can be detrimental in the early days. On the other hand, some startups set easy, insignificant goals and end up missing out on growth potential.

Take the time to really understand your growth levels to date. If you run a popular blog and traffic has increased by 8-10% for the last four months, you know that a 12-15% month-over-month increase in blog traffic is a challenging yet attainable goal. **Don't be the startup that shoots for 20% or the startup that considers anything above 8% a win.**

**In terms of what types of goals you should be setting, it depends heavily on what stage your startup is in.** Early on, focus on engagement goals and collecting feedback to validate your product or service. Later on, focus on growth metrics. There are no universals when it comes to metrics, unfortunately. **What's important is that your core goals are tied to major business objectives.**

The single most important thing to remember about marketing goals is to stay focused. **Choose 1-2 core goals that impact the bottom line and 3-5 supporting goals.** Anything more than that will distract you from what's most important (as will changing goals too often).

## 2. Noah Kagan, Founder of AppSumo & the OkDork blog

Noah Kagan is Chief Sumo at AppSumo, a company that connects businesses with great products that will help them succeed—like SumoMe, a simple app that helps you rapidly grow your email list. He helped launch Mint.com as their Director of Marketing, and he was employee number 30 at Facebook. He also writes one of my favorite marketing blogs: OkDork, where he offers thorough, actionable advice on how to improve your marketing.

His posts on quant-based marketing and creating a marketing plan made me determined to know more about how he approaches goal setting.

The most important thing in setting a marketing goal is that it must be authentic. Two years ago I set AppSumo's goal to help 1 million entrepreneurs. I genuinely knew in my heart I didn't care about ever reaching that. This year with SumoMe.com we truly want our free marketing tool to reach a billion uniques. Why? Cause it sounds like a big, fun and huge challenge. That's really us.

Overall there's no "right" goal; you want something that isn't easily achievable but also something that's realistic so you don't feel overwhelmed. **We break our goal into a daily target so—even if our goal is a billion—we know on a specific day if we are on track;** for example, in January when we had to be at 10,000 uniques a day.

**A key thing with goals that I learned from Facebook is to only have one goal for a specific period of time. It helps with saying no to other distractions you will face during the year.**

One HUGE caveat about setting goals is not depending on the goal for your happiness. Instead, you should **enjoy the process of getting to the goal.** Last year our goal was to sell 3,333 memberships of our How To Make A \$1,000 A Month Business course, and on October 30th we got there. For the next two months I felt lost and unsure what to do since I had reached the finish line. It was a great realization—I learned how to focus on processes and enjoy the experience versus just trying to get to your goal.

**To stay on track review these goals with your team or by yourself every Monday.** If you're ahead of schedule, keep doing more. Are you behind? If so, what do you need to change?

Get to work!

### 3. Courtney Seiter, Head of Content Marketing at Buffer

Courtney Seiter heads up content marketing at Buffer, where she's taken their already-popular social media marketing blog to the next level—their posts consistently get thousands of shares. Previously, she wrote a social media column for Marketing Land and worked as a Community Manager at Raven.

Our goal-setting process at Buffer is always in flux as we experiment, learn and change. But a few main principles help keep us on track throughout the process and **make sure our goals are the right mix of workable and challenging** (at least, most of the time):

#### **Have a hypothesis.**

We love testing and experimenting at Buffer, and we try to go into each new marketing goal with as much information as possible. We talk through what we want to change and why, study past patterns, perform audits, and consider all the possibilities. **When you've done all the groundwork, it's easier to have a good idea of what you think will happen as an ideal outcome.**

#### **Communicate more than you think you should.**

We review our marketing metrics every week as part of a Friday morning session we call "content visioning." The frequency of these sessions lets us revisit results right away and move quickly on new ideas to reach our goals faster and avoid surprises. **Frequent check-ins and smaller goals on the way to the big goals seem to help us all stay on the same page.**

#### **Be OK with failing (sometimes).**

Sometimes we make our marketing goals too challenging and we aren't able to reach them. That's OK; we don't know everything! We often can learn as much from those moments as we can from the big triumphs. When this happens, we'll set up some new experiments to try and start measuring again.

### 4. Rand Fishkin, Founder of Moz

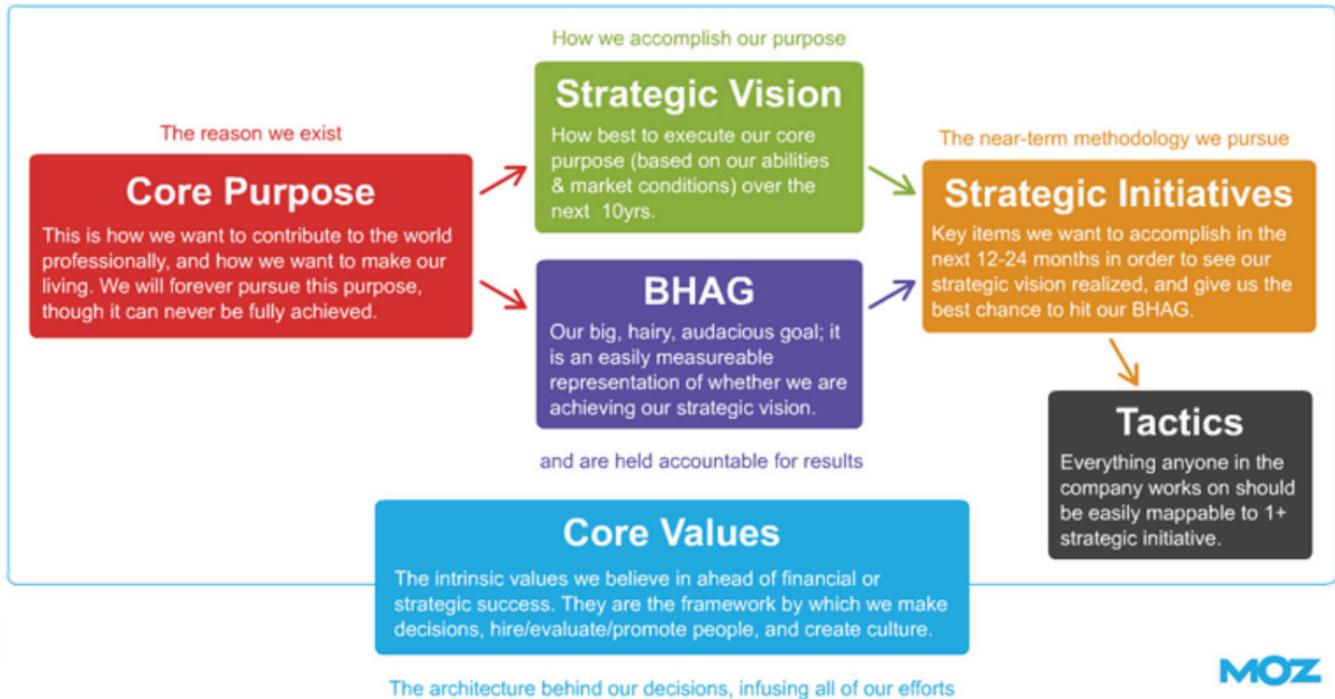
Rand Fishkin is the founder of Moz, which sells a powerful suite of inbound marketing tools and produces the popular Moz Blog. He's been tinkering on the web since the early 90s, and for the past decade he's immersed himself in the world of online marketing, from SEO to social media and content marketing. He now goes by the title Wizard of Moz.

**We do our planning on a quarterly basis** and use a model that tracks our goals from core purpose → vision/BHAG → strategic initiatives → tactics when building our roadmap. *See graphic on Page 4.*

In order to make sure our goals are realistic but still challenging, **we use the Google model of OKRs, where the key results are always a stretch, and the minimum bar each quarter is to deliver on at least 70% of the planned improvements.** It means that we overreach and are always pushing ourselves to perform.

**Staying 100% focused on our goals is a constant struggle.** We're not great at this yet, actually :-)) I think it's one of the big challenges ahead and we'll need to find ways to be more disciplined and focused.

## How a Vision-Based Framework Works



### 5. Ryan Holiday, Director of Marketing at American Apparel, Author & Blogger

Ryan Holiday is proof that the well-traveled path isn't the only one that leads to success—he dropped out of college at 19 to apprentice under the strategist Robert Greene, and since then he has had an amazing career in marketing and publicity.

He is a media strategist for notorious clients like Tucker Max and Dov Charney as well as the Director of Marketing at American Apparel. He is also the author of *Trust Me, I'm Lying: Confessions of a Media Manipulator*, and my favorite book on marketing that I've read this year: *Growth Hacker Marketing: A Primer on the Future of PR, Marketing, and Advertising*.

Look, at the end of the day the goal is: asses in seats. **What's critical is that the ways you're doing it now don't make it harder for you later.** Look at Groupon and other such brands which grew terribly quickly but at the cost of the brand itself. As a marketer, rather than just some growth junkie, **your goal is to drive trackable real results without ever letting those aims kill your long term prospects.**

### 6. Kathryn Aragon, Copywriter & Digital Marketer

Kathryn Aragon is an award-winning copywriter, content marketer, consultant and product

creator specializing in social content and digital marketing strategies. She gets her clients results—like double the traffic and 6,300% more responses. She is also the editor of The Daily Egg, Crazy Egg's conversion optimization blog.

**I always start with my end goal, and work backwards.** Where do I ultimately want to be? What do I want to be doing? And why does it matter? Then I evaluate the tasks and skills I'll need to reach that goal and their priority. By deciding what needs to be focused on first, second, etc., **I essentially create a road map for reaching the goal I've set.**

Using my list of priorities as a guide, I focus on one step at a time. **New ideas may be considered, but if they could get priorities out of order, they have to wait their turn.** I generally jot those ideas in a project file, then return focus to the task at hand.

**For me, what matters is that progress is being made.** Small steps are okay. And so are mistakes. I just want to be constantly working toward the goal and to be able to hit all deadlines on time.

I've found this approach to work for new product launches, start-up businesses, as well as personal goals. **The key is to get everyone on board before you start and to clearly map out the milestones** that need to be hit as we progress toward the goal.

## 7. Brian Rotsztein, SEO Expert & Digital Strategy Consultant

Brian Rotsztein is an internet strategist and SEO expert. He runs Uniseo, one of the first SEO companies in the world, and RedstoneX, a top web design and development company. He's been working in internet marketing since 1997 and is a professor at several universities.

We focus on being realistic and **tailor the goal-setting process to each client.** Far too many clients initially want to "do it all" but then discover they don't have the staff, creativity, or budget to do what they had envisioned.

We divide projects into a step-by-step process so that clients don't get overwhelmed. By **establishing buyer personas and gathering data about where the target audience spends their time online**, we're better able to define objectives and anticipate consumer needs.

**It's important to understand what the realistic expected outcome could be for the campaign.** When you have mutual understanding and respect, it's significantly easier to collaborate and make adjustments to **achieve client objectives and get a better ROI.**

## Boiling it Down

There's a lot of great information there, so let's do a recap. Here are my biggest takeaways from the responses above:

- Take time to **truly understand your current position** in order to set achievable marketing goals.
- Choose **1-2 core goals that impact the bottom line and 3-5 supporting goals.** Anything more than that will distract you from what's most important.

- Alternatively, **try focusing completely on just one goal.**
- **Pick goals that you genuinely care about achieving** (be authentic).
- Don't just focus on the finish line; **enjoy the *process* of achieving your goal.**
- Set the minimum bar at delivering on at least **70% of the planned improvements each quarter.**
- Even marketing superheroes like Rand Fishkin have trouble **maintaining laser focus on their goals** (pew).
- Approach each new marketing goal with as much **data and information** as possible.
- Make sure your **short-term goals** always support your **long-term prospects.**
- Make sure **everyone from your team** is on board when setting marketing goals.

Hearing from other marketers about how they approach goal-setting shows that there is no one silver bullet or perfect formula; *how* you set goals—not just *what kind* of goals you set—will be different for each company, product, team, manager and client. Nonetheless, simplicity, focus, authenticity, systems and the ability to consider both your short and long-term vision are key.

Now it's your turn. What's one tactic that has helped you set achievable marketing goals, and then stay focused on them?

Source: Chloe Mason Gray