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# Merger or Acquisition? 10 Essentials for Marketing

**By Megan Miller**

Open any industry newsletter or visit a news website and you'll see announcements on the latest industry merger or acquisition. Companies merge or acquire other companies for a variety of reasons, perhaps to fill product or service gaps, broaden their geographic reach, obtain strategic technology or grow revenue. Given the high rate of M&A activity in technology, those of us in the legal or accounting technology industries will likely be involved in an acquisition at some point in our careers.

A merger or acquisition presents unique marketing challenges. At the heart of it, the merging of two organizations, no matter how carefully planned, brings strategic, logistical and cultural pressures that must be recognized and addressed in order to avoid confusion, errors, loss of customers or loss of key employees. Whether you are a company founder, executive or marketer, it's important to plan the transition so that the two organizations smoothly combine as one.

### Create a transition team that includes all functional areas of the company.

This should occur when the deal is agreed on, but prior to the effective date. The cross-functional team will identify and make plans to address issues in the areas of products, services, support, human resources and more. Marketing is a key participant in that team; their role is to develop and manage communication of consistent messaging surrounding the event.

### Clarify marketing roles and relationships.

In an acquisition, every department faces the potential for confusion about overlapping roles, processes and responsibilities. Marketing leadership, as early as is practical, should communicate the roles and responsibilities to all members of the newly combined organization. Make it clear that "renegade" communications are not allowed. The message must be carefully controlled during the transition.

### Address branding/rebranding issues.

Review and update the parent organization's branding architecture, that is, the structure of brands within the organization.

In many cases the brands and corporate identities of the two organizations don't easily fold together. Work with the executive team to understand the strategic goals behind the acquisition. Let the longer-term strategy and your knowledge of the market perception of each company or product guide decisions on branding or rebranding. If a product road map or long-term product strategy is available at this point, consider that outline of future offerings in the brand architecture.

### Identify key audiences and tailor the message.

Most marketing organizations spend the lion's share of their time focusing on customer or client audiences and the messages we direct to them in advertising, product collateral, social media and the like. In the event of an acquisition, it's important to consider all audiences for whom this acquisition could be of interest or whose relationship with the parent company might be affected. Expand the messaging platform to include employees, sales channels, technology partners and prospective new hires, as well as clients of the parent company and the acquired company. A truly personalized message will be tailored for each of these constituencies. Work across the company with sales, support, HR and other departments to be sure that communications of the change are positive, detailed and offer additional resources for those who want to learn more. An internal FAQ document can be an effective way to quickly answer the most common questions.

### Plan website updates to announce the acquisition.

At a minimum, the websites for the parent company and the acquired company should be updated to announce the acquisition to each new visitor. These changes typically go live on the day of the press release announcing the acquisition. In addition, if the value proposition for the new combined organization has changed, copy edits will be in order. Consider how the website(s) will help educate the market on the merger or acquisition and on the branding changes. Determine a transition timeline, (typically 3-12 months) when both sites will remain live, while the site of the acquired company will encourage visitors to move to the parent site. At a future date, the site of the acquired company will have an automatic redirect, sending visitors immediately to the parent site.

### Take inventory of marketing assets.

The day the acquisition is announced, visitors to your website should find current content – product and service briefs, white papers, case studies and other assets that carry the current brand and contact information for the company. It's not unusual for an acquisition to involve review and update of 100 or more pieces of content. Prioritization is key here; be familiar with site analytics to understand which pieces are most frequently downloaded and therefore a higher priority for updates. Lower-priority pieces might be pulled and put in a work queue for updating.

### Build a PR and media relations plan.

All activities surrounding the launch of the newly combined organization will key off the PR announcement date. The messaging platform developed for the transition will inform the PR message and content as well. In addition to a press release on the acquisition, work with a media relations expert to strategize on garnering coverage of the announcement, including executive interviews or topical articles on trends or technology in your target market segment.

## Build a social media plan.

Review content and activity levels of both companies on all social sites. If the parent account will become the primary account for the newly combined organization, update the branding, description, logos, etc. Refine the list of hashtags and terms, and create a social media policy to reflect those choices. As the transition progresses, merge the accounts of the acquired company into the parent account. This is relatively straightforward with Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+. Instagram and Twitter are a bit more complicated. Set your bio to redirect all potential followers to your permanent account. Post a "We're moving" alert for several weeks to encourage followers to move to the new account.

## Publish a project timeline with assigned owners.

While juggling the first eight efforts on this list, be sure to assemble a detailed project plan with a list of tasks by category. Each task should include an owner, approving person (if required) and deadline. Regular meetings or calls with the transition team will keep everyone up to date and allow opportunities for new questions and tasks to surface.

## Plan the celebration!

In a well-managed transition, the real work and planning happen in the weeks or months leading up to the public announcement of the acquisition. Communicate continuously with employees about the strategy, messaging and changes they can expect to see. Engaged employees will generate great energy behind the transition if they feel they are a part of it. Be sure to add a line item in the project plan for an internal company celebration of the launch – icing on the cake, so to speak, after all the hard work is done.


## About the Author

Megan Miller is a senior consultant with Edge Marketing, assisting clients in development and execution of strategic marketing plans and implementation of marketing technologies. A global technology hound, Miller has built brands, trained teams and introduced successful products for global companies and startups. Miller has written on trends and topics in electronic discovery, consumer electronics and the internet of things – before it was even called that.


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