THE MINT
MARKETING PLAN
FOR ANY
BUSINESS LAUNCH

OkDork by
NOAH KAGAN

Quick Intro From Noah:

Hola,

I created this overview to help you launch YOUR business.

I hope this lets you Sumo-size your company and crush all your goals.

To make this SUPER actionable for you...

I've included outlines, templates, and checklists for you to fill out as you go.

Grab your *(free)* supplemental **ACTION GUIDE** here

Be epic,
Noah

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Why Mint Marketing?

"You're not good enough to market my company."
That was Aaron Patzer's first "no" to Noah Kagan.

Patzer is the founder of Mint.com — the personal finance tool that eventually sold to Intuit for $170 million in 2009.

Noah is the founder of AppSumo, the store for entrepreneurs. He and the rest of the team grew AppSumo to an audience reach of more than 750,000 people.

How? By using the same hyper-growth marketing tactics that Noah applied to Mint.com's initial public launch.

Noah's challenge back in the Mint days was to create a marketing plan that would deliver 100,0000 users within six months after launch.

The final results:

- *Mint.com grew to over one million registered users within six months of launch from an initial prelaunch list of 20,000 users.*

- *Mint.com quickly overtook its competitors to corner the online personal finance market within a year of launch. Mint was by no means the first to market – competitors like Wesabe had captured audiences with functional and multi-featured personal finance products well before Mint's initial product launch.*

- *Mint.com was acquired in 2009 by Intuit for $170 million.*

- *The Mint team followed their explosive initial success sustained innovations in product development, user experience, and marketing, which ended up creating immense value for Mint's users and the company.*

This Action Course will reveal, for the first time, the full Mint Marketing Plan that Noah developed and implemented with the strategic support of Silicon Valley's most influential minds, investor Dave McClure of 500 Startups, entrepreneur Hiten Shah of KISSMetrics, and Aaron Patzer of Mint.com.

Introducing Quant-Based Marketing

What is Quant-Based Marketing?

Quant–based marketing is a framework for acquiring customers and promoting your business.

It's defined by two main features.

1. A specific, quantitative top–line goal that says what and by when.

A quant-based marketing goal articulates both a quantitative result and the exact timeframe in which that result will be accomplished.

When Noah pitched the Mint Marketing Plan to Aaron Patzer, his quant-based goal was "100,000 users in six months."
Working backwards from 100,000 users in six months, Noah was then able to break down his next steps into feeder activities that contributed X users in Y weeks.

Instead of staring down the barrel of a single enormous goal, the entrepreneur who uses quant-based marketing views the top-line goal as an aggregation of many smaller goals. These goals can be rearranged, magnified, or dialed back in order to optimize for X result in Y time frame.

2. Eliminate hope by naming, measuring, and reacting to every feeder channel.

"What do you need to do to guarantee your success before you even start?"

Guaranteeing success means eliminating "hope marketing," where you carry out a handful of random tactics you've read about on marketing blogs, all while anxiously eyeing a highly unspecific goal, like "grow 2x" or "get more customers."

Quant-based marketing demands that you break down your marketing strategy into multiple tactics (your "feeder channels") that are all distinct, measurable, and easily magnified or minimized.

As the entrepreneur, you're able to see precisely what's working – and to what degree. No more guesswork, and no more wasting time and dollars on a losing bet.

Under quant-based marketing, growth isn't a gamble – it's a science.

Quant-Based Marketing in 5 Steps:

1. *Establish specific goals*
2. *Make your target list prior to launch*
3. *Find where your users are online*
4. *Test your messaging*
5. *Track everything*

The next chapter breaks down each of these steps in detail, including workspace sections that you should complete to design your own quant-based marketing plan.

5 STEPS TO QUANT-BASED MARKETING

1 ESTABLISH SPECIFIC GOALS

3 FIND WHERE YOUR USERS ARE ONLINE

5 TRACK EVERYTHING

3 MONTHS OUT   6 WEEKS OUT   4 WEEKS OUT   LAUNCH

2 MAKE YOUR TARGET LIST PRIOR TO LAUNCH

4 TEST MESSAGING
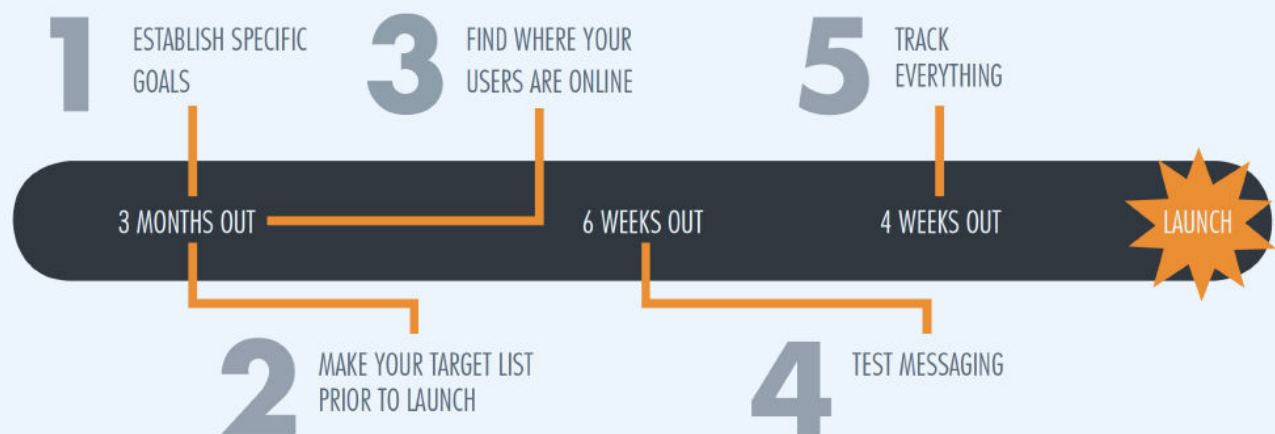
Your Own Mint-Marketing Plan from Zero to Launch in 12 Weeks

Roadmap Outline

The Mint Marketing Plan takes you from zero to launch in 12 weeks. Here is an overview of what we will cover in this chapter:

Before You Begin — Set Goals

⮑ *Establish specific quantitative goals*

Week 1 –Customer Clairvoyance

⮑ *Make a list of eight targeted user groups*

⮑ *Write unique needs of each user group and how your product addresses those needs*

Week 2 – Set up Your Landing Page

⮑ *What made Mint's landing page work*

⮑ *Steps to create a simple landing page – minimal effort, maximum signups*

Week 3 – Understanding and Finding Your Users

⮑ *Find out where your potential users hang out online*

⮑ *Set up quant-based marketing spreadsheet*

Week 4 – Track Everything

- Set up Google Analytics and other tracking tools
- Engage in user testing

Week 5 – Test Your Messaging

- Test product messaging based on customer surveys, responses to landing pages
- Craft brand promises and benefits
- Set up landing pages to test messaging
- Start establishing relationships with reporters

Week 6 – SEO

- Find relevant keywords, input into Keywords Sheet
- Set up site using SEO best practices
- Begin drafting keyword-specific content

Week 7 – Content

- Begin building content strategy based on popular keywords
- Find popular posts in your niche, structure blog series around similar topics

Week 8 – SEM and Celebrity Outreach

- List top bloggers in your niche using the Targeted Blogs Sheet
- Begin buying several ads and directing them to landing pages
- Split test
- Reach out to bottom 20 personal bloggers in your niche to see if you can sponsor them or get them interested in your product

Week 9 – Social Media Marketing and Blog Advertising

- Start submitting your interesting content to sites and groups
- Guest posting
- Advertise on targeted blogs from the Targeted Blogs Sheet
- Engage with potential users via social networking channels

Week 10 – Launch Timeline and Beta Access

- ➲ *Formulate a launch plan and launch timeline*
- ➲ *Reach out to key mid-level celebrities and bloggers about becoming beta users*

Week 11 – Email Marketing, PR

- ➲ *Send your list pre-launch emails to get them ready to use your product*
- ➲ *Reach out to reporters and news outlets you have relationships with*
- ➲ *Potentially sponsor other email lists*

Week 12 – Launch!

- ➲ *Set up online community for users*
- ➲ *Launch to your email list*
- ➲ *Reach out to news outlets to get media attention*

Post-launch – Distribution

- ➲ *Focus on high-value distribution channels to reach more users*

Before You Begin: Set goals (three months before launch)

At Mint.com, Noah set two goals: get 100,000 users within six months of the public launch and a write–up in a major publication like **The Wall Street Journal** or **Wired**.

Start by writing two quantitative goals for your marketing.

Week 1:

Make a List of Targeted Users

At Mint.com, Noah decided to target several niche groups early on:

- ➲ **Young professionals.** *"They don't want to waste time and want an easy way to see their finances."*

- ➲ **Geeks.** *Noah suspected there were a lot of techies looking for deals and ways to save money: "We could easily get them as early adopters and then transition later to the mainstream."*

- ➲ **People in debt.** *"They want to find new ways to save more money and get out of debt."*

- ➲ **Moms & new families.** *"Moms like knowing they can save for their goals."*

- ➲ **Personal finance.** *People already interested in the niche topic of personal finance were likely to be great target customers.*

Now it's your turn to define your customer targets and what goes on in their heads. The next workspace asks you to come up with eight niche customer segments, each with a different problem and way of using your product or service.

The key here is getting inside the head of your customer. Who are they? What are their biggest fears and concerns? What excites and motivates them most?

What kind of personality do they have, and where do they like to spend money?

Customer clairvoyance – defining and deeply understanding the needs and personalities of your customers – is the foundation for bringing the Mint Marketing Plan to your business, so take extra care and time in this workspace.

Who are your users? | *What are their needs?* | *Why do they want your product? How does it solve their most painful prolem?*

Week 2:

Set Up Your Landing Page

Like every good landing page, the early Mint.com landing was set up to optimize for the conversion.

Seems obvious, but what defined the conversion of a product that hadn't even launched yet?

Noah knew the best marketers never turn a customer away, even if the shelves of the store are still being stocked. To capture inbound customer interest, the pre-launch Mint landing page featured a prominent email registration form: "It's coming! Sign up here and we'll let you know before everyone else."

Aside from capturing emails, Mint's landing page had another goal – to foster new users' trust of Mint.com and to reassure them that the site was a secure place to store sensitive information about personal finances.

Here are some examples of Mint's landing pages:

TELL YOUR STORY

Mint's front page featured Aaron Patzer's personal narrative describing the path that led him to create Mint.com. This personal story offered depth to what might otherwise have been just another web product. It was accompanied by a link to his live financial info, so users could "take a tour of the CEO's finances."

BE HUMAN. Here, marketers can take a cue from the maligned genre of reality TV. Whether you love it or you hate it, the "reality" style is an undeniably marketable and engaging format for TV content. Producers understand that we're magnetically drawn to the relatable human elements in content and products we use.

Next, write your own story. People like hearing stories about the people behind the products and sites they use. Why did you start your company? What solution do you want to provide with your product or service?

Write your story below and use "I."

PICK THREE MAJOR FEATURES TO HIGHLIGHT

Your homepage message should sell your service's benefits, but keep it short and sweet. Noah chose just three key benefits about Mint.com to feature on the homepage: effortless tracking, automatic categorization, and instant saving offers. To do the same, look at your customer surveys and your segmentation worksheet. What are the top three problems your customers have and how does your product or service solve them? Your benefits statements should speak directly to these problems.

List your three benefits in the [Action Guide](#).

GIVE USERS WAYS TO INTERACT IMMEDIATELY

The Mint landing page linked to CEO Aaron Patzer's live financials so people could play with the product. It also included bubbles showcasing the features of the site. Users could even enter the details of their cell phone plan (minutes and cost) and get recommended alternatives.

So, think of how you can give users a tour of the product. How can you let them "play" before committing to signing up or buying?

List three specific ways to let users test drive your product. (See Action Guide).

PROVIDE CREDIBILITY

Noah used three testimonials from users who have saved money to add credibility and social proof to the Mint service.

Contact customers and ask them if they'd be willing to give you a testimonial about how your product has solved one of their problems.

Your best salespeople are your customers, so be sure to treat them that way. How can you make them want to share your product? What can you do for them in return for a testimonial?

*Contact 10 customers (or more) and pick the strongest three quotes to use on your website. Use the **Action Guide** to keep track of this information.*

⮑ *Example Image: John Smith, "Using this product saves me 5 hours every week. Game changer!"*

GIVE SOCIAL PROOF

Noah suggested a savings counter, showing either the total savings for all Mint customers in the last hour or day, or the total savings to date, depending on activity and size.

No one wants to be the first to try something, so provide social proof to set your prospect's mind at ease. This can be a counter, progress bar, or some other method of showing that other users are successfully using your product.

MAKE REGISTRATION EASY

Noah set out to make Mint registration easy and informative, as well as to resolve privacy and security concerns. His plan was as follows:

1. *Ask for minimal information, get each user to enter their email, and prompt them for a password.*

2. *Take users right into Mint and make it easy to start using it.*

3. *Highlight the features they get from registering.*

4. *Highlight security measures that keep their information safe.*

So, write out your plan to accomplish the same kind of easy registration process.

- *What are the basic pieces of information you need from a new user?*

- *What is the process after they enter that information (hint: minimize the steps)?*

- *How can you get them immediately engaged with the product?*

- *Which features will you highlight after they've converted?*

- *What are your customers' fears (refer to your survey results)? How can you alleviate them?*

ADD EMAIL COLLECTION TO HOMEPAGE

Because Mint had a strong group of investors and some early interest, Mint.com was seeing traffic before they even began really marketing. To take advantage of this early press and exposure, Noah added the ability to collect email addresses on the Mint homepage with the following prompts:

1. *"How do you currently manage your finances?"*

2. *"What kind of things would you want in a financial product?"*

3. *"Would you like more money while doing less?"*

To persuade users to enter their email address, ask questions that will pique their interests, get a sense of their wants, or allude to a great benefit. This is a good step to take once you start seeing some traffic, especially before launch.

Write your own questions using the following three writing prompts, then use them to entice users to enter their email address on your homepage.

- *How do you currently [solve the problem your product solves]?*

- *What would you like in a [product description]?*

- *Would you like to be able to [benefit] while [avoiding a negative outcome]?*

Week 3:

Locate Your Users

The next step in this marketing approach is figuring out where your potential users hang out online. There are tons of tools you can use to find blogs and other places your target market frequents on the Internet. Here are a few of them:

TOOLS

YouTube – Doing a simple search for your product keywords on YouTube can show you the most popular videos, thus giving you an idea of what people are interested in and potentially revealing several influencers in a niche.

> *List 5 popular videos or producers for your niche (could be how-to videos, discussion videos, etc). See **Action Guide.***

Google Alerts – This is another easy tool that allows you to keep on top of conversations in your industry. It provides alerts when people are talking about something relevant to your startup. Use these alerts for very specific keywords that relate closely to your product — that way, you can engage in conversations tailored to you and see which blogs are discussing something you care about.

Twitter – Using Twitter search is another easy way to find influencers in a niche. You can use these tools to determine the top Twitter influencers for any topic you care about, and get a feel for the types of conversations going on in your niche.

> *Find 10 popular Twitter accounts related to your niche. Don't focus only on the top people, as often the mid-level influencers (less than 40,000 followers) are easier to reach. List these in the **Action Guide.***

Search engines – Search engines are a simple way to find the top blogs in a given industry. Simply search for things like "top blogs for x" or "best x blogs" to find different resources frequently linked to and discussed online. You can use these tools to search for "personal finance forums" as well.

Do the same for groups/forums.

Once you have a listing of several key blogs, forums, and influencers for a given niche, go through and input each blog's traffic information into your Targeted Blogs Sheet — separated by niche. You can also use the same spreadsheet to list influencers and forums where your audience is active online.

To collect this information, use Google Ads to collect traffic statistics about the number of unique visitors, pages viewed, and other key information for each blog. Be sure to write this information into your Targeted Blogs Sheet to track your target blogs.

Week 4:

Track What's Most Important

To measure progress, Noah tracked the following metrics: where users were clicking, user adoption, and homegrown metrics. What you're trying to do is validate one key metric that you decide is critical – that can be email signups, revenue, or the number of users. Then, play around with different marketing channels and tactics to improve on this metric.

Noah did it with this three-step process:

1. *Track where users are clicking*
2. *Track user adoption*
3. *Track homegrown metrics*

STEP 1: TRACK WHERE USERS ARE CLICKING*

To track where users were clicking on Mint's homepage, Noah used Crazy Egg (though there are other click tracking options). * = Less important when you're starting out

STEP 2: TRACKER USER ADOPTION

To track user adoption, Noah installed Google Analytics.

STEP 3: TRACK HOMEGROWN METRICS

Finally, Noah also kept track of homegrown metrics, such as the number of registered users, the number of users who enter bank information, the number of banks entered per person, and A/B testing for homepage conversion. He tracked these metrics using tools like a referral tracking dashboard and UTMs.

*List the metrics that are important for you to measure, along with how you can monitor them. A few prompts are filled in to help you get started in the **Action Guide.***

Most importantly, Noah also tracked various marketing channels using the tools above. He tracked confirmation of marketing channels, click-through rates for each channel, the number of users from each, and the cost per user from each site, as well as blogs and advertisements. This allowed him to determine which sites and channels were working best, and which ones he needed to work on or abandon.

User Experience Monitoring

During this period, it's also crucial to get user feedback from people actually using the product. Get your users on the phone or in your office and do two things:

1. *Watch them use the product*

2. *Try to find out what they love about the product and what's missing*

You want to understand how users use the product, what they love and hate, and the problems they have. Add live chat to your website, call your customers randomly for feedback, and proactively email them to understand their thoughts on your product.

Having this information will allow you to improve your positioning, make a better product, and strengthen your relationships with your customers. Since your customers are your best salespeople, you want them to love you. Asking for their feedback and help is an easy way to do that.

Here are a few questions you can ask:

- ➲ *What do you love about the product?*

- ➲ *What features do you think are missing?*

- ➲ *What is confusing about the product?*

- ➲ *What would make you so excited you'd tell your friends about us?*

- ➲ *What problems are you struggling with?*

- ➲ *How can we help?*

- ➲ *How did you find us?*

- ➲ *How can we improve?*

Week 5:

Test Your Messaging

"Tell them what they want to hear."

Most of us know that marketing that "sticks" is marketing that makes sense to the customer, where benefits are quantified in the customer's own terms.

Before launching, Noah understood the importance of knowing exactly which messages would resonate with Mint's targeted audience. He knew that it wasn't enough for the messaging to be targeted; it also had to be articulated in the customer's own terms.

The most fascinating part about testing messaging is that it's a test. It's not permanent, and test results can and should be cycled back to the marketing and development teams to be built right back into the product.

Testing messaging with Mint allowed the Mint team to determine which features and benefits were most important to their customers — those were the foundational elements to stress and build upon.

Testing messaging means quantifying what is important to your users rather than just guessing.

Noah ran these tests using a two-step process:

1. *Make a list of features you want feedback about*

2. *Survey your target users*

STEP 1: MAKE A LIST OF FEATURES YOU WANT FEEDBACK ABOUT

Noah wanted feedback about the following features:

- ➲ *Transaction reporting/monitoring*

- ➲ *Income vs. expense management (limited budgeting)*

- ➲ *Goal setting or financial planning*

- ➲ *Offers to "switch" vendors or purchase products*

- ➲ *The Personal Financial Report Card (by category/importance)*

- ➲ *Comparisons with other Mint users*

*Start your survey. List the top features you want to ask users about in the **Action Guide**.*

STEP 2: SURVEY YOUR TARGET USERS

Next, Noah used surveys to determine which customer demographics were most important. These were the specific questions he asked:

1. *Please tell us your age, gender, location, and your favorite food.*

2. *How do you currently handle your personal finances? (Quicken, Money, Excel, nothing, etc.)*

3. *What financial problems/needs have you had in the past year?*

4. *What purchases/financial decisions are you likely to make in the next one to three years?*

5. *How much detail do you want to know about your finances? (a lot, a little, some, none)*

6. *What would make you feel comfortable/uncomfortable about giving your financial information to a third-party financial website?*

7. *Where do you learn about finance-related info?*

8. *Which sites? Who do you trust or not trust?*

To do this, come up with a list of questions that cover the following categories:

➲ **Demographics.** *This could be age, gender, location, activities, etc.*

➲ **Customer Profile.** *What are their current stats where your niche is concerned? This could be beginner/expert, low-performing/high performing, or in the case of Mint, people who were deep in debt versus those who were financially fit.*

➲ **Problems/Needs.** *What needs do they have? What are their pain points and fears?*

➲ **Current Solutions.** *What do they currently use to solve their problems?*

➲ **Buying Behavior.** *What other related products are they buying? How much? How often?*

➲ **Information Sources.** *What are their top news sources (related to your niche and not related to it)?*

Brainstorm questions to ask users for each of the following categories.
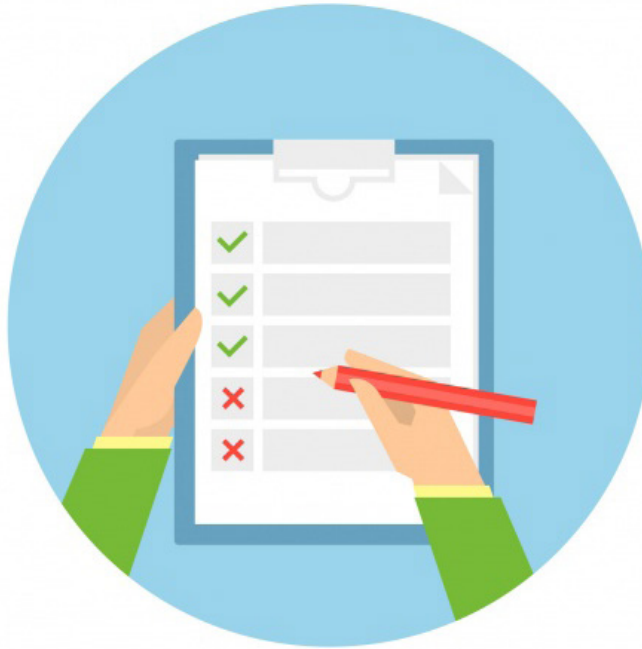
STEP 3: FIGURE OUT THEIR NEEDS AND SEGMENT, IF APPROPRIATE

Noah saw that there were three main groups of Mint target customers:

1. ***Underwater:*** *They need to get their act together, immediately cut expenses, manage debt, make money*

2. ***Treading Water:*** *They need to better understand expenses, make a budget, save more, and spend less to get their finances under control*

3. ***Above Water:*** *They're focused on saving money, getting the best deals, saving for large purchases, and learning more money tips*

To do this, look at your survey results and pay special attention to your Customer Profile and Problems responses. If clear differences emerge, create different segments for each group of customers.

*If you have two or more groups, describe them in the **Action Guide.***

To get this feedback, Noah placed some cheap Google Adwords (now called Google Ads) and asked individuals who had already given their emails to take a quick survey.

Using the information from steps 2 to 3 and the above, you should have a good idea of who your users are and why they want your product. The next step is to use this information to determine what your company stands for (brand promises), your unique benefits, and several taglines for the product.

Coming up with brand promises and taglines is a two-step process. Ultimately, a good tagline or brand promise should answer one question – what should come to mind when customers think about your product?

STEP 4: IDENTIFY A UNIQUE SOLUTION YOUR PRODUCT OR SERVICE PROVIDES

Noah looked at the solutions Mint provided. One was automatic financial tracking, something that no other company offered. What makes your product special? What differentiates it from the competition? How do these features address customer problems?

*List five unique solutions your product or service provides in the **Action Guide.***

STEP 5: DEFINE A BENEFIT DRIVEN BRAND PROMISE

Next, Noah wrote a brand promise based on Mint's unique solutions. One of the promises for the financial tracking was, "Never pay late fees again." This is a strong brand promise because it resonates with the target audience — people too busy to track their finances who may end up paying late fees — and gives a clear idea of the value Mint provides.

Look at your unique solutions and write a specific, benefit-driven brand promise.

*Write down three brand promises in the **Action Guide.***

You can use the following templates as a guide:

- ➲ *We'll help you [specific accomplishment] in [specific time period]*
- ➲ *Make sure [bad action] never happens again*
- ➲ *Do [positive benefit] in [short amount of time that's appealing and only possible with your product]*
- ➲ *We are the [positive adjectives] to do [some desirable action]*

For example, Noah played with these brand promises at Mint:

- ➲ *Mint will save you 20% in the next 90 days*
- ➲ *Mint will save you $500 / month in the first 30 days*
- ➲ *Never pay late fees again*
- ➲ *Track everything in five minutes or less*

At Mint, Noah tested each of these brand promises and messages using Google Adwords. The company would set up landing pages and drive cheap traffic to the pages. Then, by analyzing which users converted based on the landing page they saw, Noah determined the most effective messages for each group of potential users.

Week 6:

SEO

SEO (Search Engine Optimization) is the process of making your site easily discoverable by search engines like Google. SEO is a deep topic, but thankfully it's relatively easy to learn the basics. A good resource to start with is Moz's Guide to SEO. Mint made sure that their site followed the SEO best practices (titles, headings, etc.) at the time.

SEO is a strong marketing strategy, though it often takes a while to see results. With Mint, Noah made SEO a major focus because of the delicate nature of the product. This meant churning out relevant, interesting articles related to personal finance (more on that in the Content Strategy section below).

Because Mint was asking for so much sensitive financial data, he felt that if people came from Google (a trusted source), they would be more likely to trust Mint.com. On top of that, Mint.com was really the first company to actively try to educate consumers about personal finance. They did it in an engaging, interesting, and fun way that a lot of people appreciated.

Mint also targeted certain keywords that they found were relevant to what their audience was searching for. For every popular personal finance term that people were searching for on Google, Mint created a piece of content that corresponded with that search term. This meant that the content would naturally rank highly, would be very targeted and informative, and had a higher chance of exposing a new customer to Mint's product.


KEYWORD PLANNER

In order to find the keywords that potential users were searching for, Noah used Google Keyword Tool (now called Keyword Planner). To come up with initial terms, try to put yourself in the mindset of your customer – what would you type into Google if you wanted to learn how to track your money online?

Example results from a Keyword Tool search:

☐ online accounting software ▾	High	14,800	6,600
☐ online accounting jobs ▾	High	3,600	880
☐ free online accounting ▾	High	12,100	5,400
☐ personal finance software ▾	High	60,500	33,100
☐ online accounting system ▾	High	2,400	720
☐ what is personal finance ▾	Medium	450,000	201,000
☐ online accounting software reviews ▾	High	480	260
☐ free accounting software ▾	High	110,000	22,200
☐ personal finance blog ▾	Low	6,600	4,400
☐ personal finance company ▾	High	8,100	5,400
☐ online accounting programs ▾	High	6,600	4,400
☐ free online accounting software ▾	High	2,400	1,000

GOOGLE TRENDS

Noah also used Google Trends to determine which keywords people were talking about and searching for more often. Using these two tools allowed him to understand the types of keywords his potential users were searching for, and create content geared towards each of those terms.
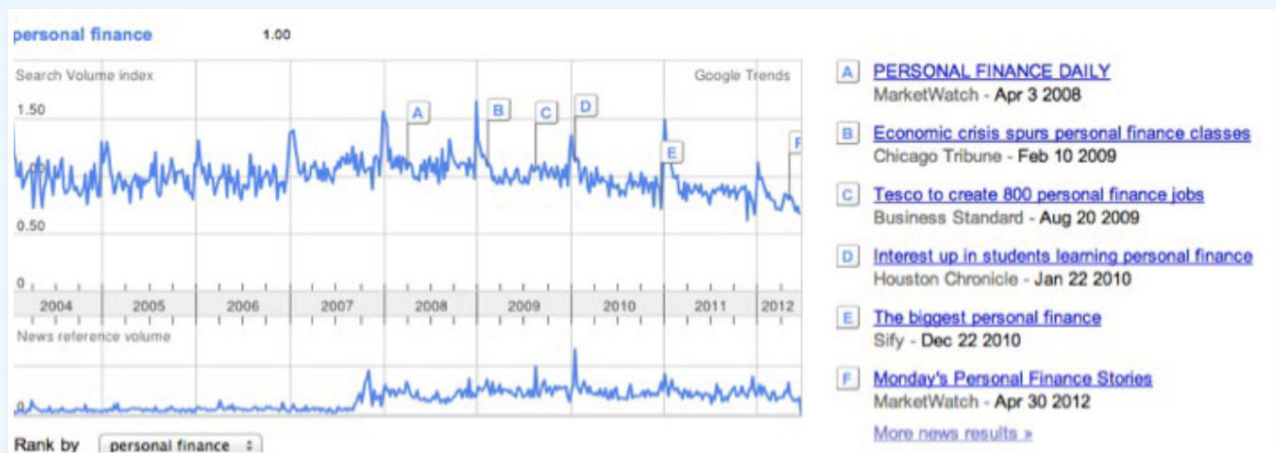
Week 7:

Content Strategy

Noah wrote a content strategy for Mint's blog for SEO in order to build trust and engage users. He assembled an elite squad of bloggers to create a library of content that could be indexed for SEO and provide a good source of financial information for users.

To get started on your content strategy, first identify mid-level bloggers with an engaged reader base, using the tactics outlined earlier. Also, look at what your target customers are reading by going through their survey answers. Then use the Targeted Blogs Sheet to determine which blogs may be worth reaching out to for guest posts.

Noah outlined a content strategy that included two posts each week, organizing the posts in a series structure (e.g. top ten features once each week, personal finance terms explained every other week). Then he determined which keywords they needed to build content around. Mint's content strategy revolved around having their own strong content, working with other popular bloggers to do guest posts (and having bloggers write on Mint's site in turn), and making several content distribution deals. With this content strategy in place, Mint.com was the top personal finance blog within a year of writing.

Mint's content was consistently interesting and valuable, driving a lot of comments and engagement. Another important aspect of this strategy was that Noah set quantitative goals for content. His goal was to broaden awareness of Mint and to gain users. He also measured metrics (number of subscribers, incoming links, page views, etc.) and tracked how those metrics led to users of the product. In this way, Noah knew exactly how valuable each bit of content was and which bloggers/resources to spend more time working with.

Week 8:

SEM

Noah used Search Engine Marketing to test different features and benefits on his potential audience, as well as to build an early list of subscribers and users.

With SEM, Noah's goals were the following:

1. *Help create customer segments through search engine marketing*

2. *Save time and money by testing keywords prior to launch*

3. *Build up a user email list prior to launch*

To get keyword ideas, Noah searched online to see what competitors like LowerMyBills.com, geezeo.com, wesabe.com, and uswitch.com were doing. To uncover ads that the competition was using, he used sites like mixrank.com and spyfu.com. Both give deep analysis about which ads the competition employs. You can also check incoming links to your competitors on Alexa, and see the profiles of their customers via their Facebook pages and Quantcast data.

For Mint, Noah wanted to get financial heavyweight endorsers like Suze Orman and Robert Kiyosaki. Although he did many other things right, going for these individuals just didn't work.

Instead Mint saw great success going for mid-level, niche celebrities. Noah worked with people like Ramit Sethi, Hiten Shah, and Paul Stamatiou to sponsor their blogs and get them to endorse the product. He also worked with the top personal finance bloggers (like JD Roth from Getrichslowly.com), who were celebrities in their respective online circles. These people were far more accessible and happy to endorse and promote a product they believed in. You can find many of these smaller bloggers using the tools discussed in Week 3.

Week 9:

Advertising & Social Media

ADVERTISING

To ramp up marketing, Noah targeted small to medium-size bloggers who wrote for Mint's target user base. For example, Noah reached out to Paulstamatiou.com (a geek interest and productivity blogger) asking to sponsor his blog to promote Mint. Because Paul (and the other bloggers Noah reached out to) were relatively small names, this was a cheap and effective way to advertise.

To get their attention, Noah simply sent out an email titled, "Can I send you $1000?" In the body, he would give a quick rundown about Mint, and ask if he could Paypal the blogger $1000 in exchange for sponsoring the blog.

Noah used badges, like the one to the left, to sponsor targeted blogs in niches he was interested in. These visual cues acted like special attention flags for Mint and demonstrated consistent branding across many different blogs.

He also segmented potential users. If someone signed up and they wanted VIP access to Mint, they would complete several surveys and be asked to place the small badge on their site. This gave Mint an SEO boost, while simultaneously creating strong referral channels. The segmenting tactic was responsible for tens of thousands of signups, and the VIPs who answered survey questions allowed Mint to position themselves perfectly in regards to their power user base.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Early on, Noah spent four hours a day doing MySpace / Facebook guerilla marketing for female demographics and message boards. Mint also leveraged Facebook to start meaningful conversations with their customers. The Facebook page ran contests, shared user tips about saving money, and incentivized fans to share Mint with their friends. Leveraging these social networks, especially in their less crowded early stages, allowed users to have positive engagements with the Mint brand and contributed to growth.

Week 10:

Launch Timeline

Congrats, it's finally time to start implementing! At this point, you should have a clear idea of who your users are, where they hang out online, how to reach them, which types of messaging they respond to, and an idea of where your early sign ups/users are coming from. Now it's time to formulate a launch plan.

With Mint, Noah created a timeline for each launch (Alpha, Beta, and Public). He tied this timeline into outcomes for the business, which allowed for flexibility if changes were necessary.

ALPHA LAUNCH STRATEGY
(DAYS 1-16 OR UNTIL ALL PRIORITY I BUGS ARE FINISHED)

- *Satisfaction Survey - numeric questionnaire for all people testing the product. Must return 90% or higher.*

- *Survey should ask, "How likely are you to recommend this to a friend?"*

- *Launch to all investors, family, and select friends*

- *Metrics dashboard in place (see above)*

- *Make it easy to see A/B test results and make updates*

- *Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and Search Engine Optimization (SEO)*

  - *Reference one of these SEO checklist audit pages from Ahrefs or Backlinko*

  - *Focus on just the basics of SEO (meta descriptions, titles, link structure, etc.)*

- *Contract with specific bloggers different verticals of information to have library of content indexed for SEO and to provide good resources for users*

- *Initiate contact with celebrity endorsers*

- *Collect 1 to 2 user testimonials to feature on the site during public launch*

BETA LAUNCH STRATEGY
(DAYS 17-28 OR UNTIL ALL PRIORITY BUGS SQUASHED)

- *Satisfaction survey that is numeric and must return greater than 90% of reviews*
- *Invite key bloggers to participate and provide feedback*
- *Decide which exclusive publication will receive first press of the product*
- *Consider an exclusive video for certain outlets*
- *Leak to top websites details about the project to generate some buzz*
- *Provide link for feedback and bug submissions*
- *Collect 1 to 2 user testimonials from people using the product to put on the site during public launch*
- *Advertise on partner sites*

PUBLIC LAUNCH STRATEGY
(Day 30)

- *Provide the tool/product without a referral fee for people to invite friends (focus on referrals)*
- *Allow people to sign up for a monthly newsletter*
- *Find online groups to create a community*
- *Display content of preferred partners who list us as elite partners on their site*
- *Spend 4 hours doing guerilla marketing for the target market (Facebook Groups, Reddit, craigslist, etc.)*

POST PUBLIC LAUNCH STRATEGY
(Days 31 – 60)

- ➲ *Evaluate launching a referral fee at this point*

- ➲ *Message people in online community groups/forums*

- ➲ *Review traffic logs to see where referrals are coming from and what people are doing on the site, and then optimize site based on feedback*

- ➲ *If there are significant statistics (ex: savings or users), release a press release to the media*

- ➲ *Consider exclusive partnerships on specific things (ex: Wells Fargo for Banking, T-Mobile for cell phones)*

As you can see, Noah had figured out early on what he had to do in order to get 100,000 users within six months. Then, working backwards from that number, he came up with a plan to hit several of the marketing channels he found earlier. Because he figured out the user numbers he needed, he was able to design his launch plan around those numbers, and left room to re-evaluate and change things after launch.

Thanks to this quant-based approach, Noah guaranteed that Mint's marketing would succeed by securing his important marketing channels earlier. The Mint launch was structured to get customer feedback and influencers before going public, then to go big after its debut.

POST-LAUNCH

By now you should have a good understanding of the quant-based marketing approach Noah used at Mint (and again at AppSumo) to guarantee his success. As you saw, he created an extensive plan and conducted a lot of research to ensure that Mint would succeed. Now let's talk about the actual process of marketing something post-launch. Mint acquired over 1.5 million users by doing several things (SEO, PR, social media, email, distribution, content, etc.) really well after they launched. Below, let's dive into what Mint did, and figure out how you can do the same for your company.

INVOLVE KEY BLOGGERS

Noah invited key bloggers to participate in the beta launch of Mint and provide feedback with a survey. He targeted financial bloggers, a few mom bloggers, and a few women's interest related blogs. Noah targeted these bloggers because Mint was a product that would appeal to their audience. He knew they would appreciate being one of the first users to give the scoop on a cool new product that was very relevant to their audience.

For your startup, think of bloggers in your niche that cover new or interesting products – they are more likely to talk about an exciting product that you're working on. Next, start contacting the bloggers on your Targeted Blogs list, completing each of the following steps.

Steal This Email Template

Subject: Exclusive early access to [*product*]

Hey [*blogger*]

I'm launching [*product*] that solves [*pain points, or talk benefits here*]. I've been a loyal reader of [*blog*] for years now, and thought you might be interested in becoming one of the first users of a product I've been working on for [*time*] now.

It's completely free of charge, as I'm only looking for expert feedback and thoughts on how to improve. If you have any questions, feel free to ask!

Thanks,

[*info*]

Week 11:

PR, Media & Email Marketing

Unlike many startups, Mint decided to hire a PR firm to get coverage in several major publications. Given the sensitive nature of their financial product, the traffic that came from these media outlets was very high-quality and the branded media outlets lent Mint a great deal of credibility and trust. Mint's founder spoke with many different media outlets with the help of interviews set up by the PR group.

In addition to hiring PR, Noah gave an exclusive to The Wall Street Journal, an interview to The Scoble Show, and an early review of the product to Online Banking Report.

Here's how you can get media to pay attention to your product without hiring a PR firm:

- ⮑ *Choose three dream media outlets to get mentioned in*
- ⮑ *Find a writer at each source that covers your niche*
- ⮑ *Get their name, email, and phone number*
- ⮑ *Contact them before you need them – help them first by sending relevant articles or a new perspective on a topic they cover*
- ⮑ *Reach out to them (using the email template provided) for an article when the time is right*

Steal This Email Template

Subject: Exclusive for *[outlet]:* Launching *[product]*, *[quick description]*

Hey *[name],*

We're launching *[product]*, tomorrow at noon EST and *[outlet]* gets free reign on an exclusive before then. *[one sentence about your product and why it's important].*

Video demo: *[link]*
Live demo site: *[link]*
Feature overview: *[link]*
My contact information: *[link]*

[closing]

EMAIL MARKETING

Noah sent all registered users a monthly newsletter to capture people who weren't ready to use the product, but still wanted tips on saving and managing their money on a regular basis. Engaging with prospective customers via email kept Mint at the forefront of their minds, built trust, and made it far more likely that they would sign up for Mint at some point. Noah also leveraged the email list to ask customers to recruit other users and to survey them about how to improve the product.

On top of this, Mint also emailed users when interest rates went up, along with other relevant financial information. This made the Mint newsletter very valuable, which led to low unsubscribe rates and allowed Mint to use it occasionally as a marketing channel.

As part of your email marketing efforts, write a newsletter to send to prospects every month. For topic ideas, look at the needs and problems your target customers mentioned in the survey. You also can look at your descriptions of your segmented users – for example, an "underwater" Mint user would probably like tips on how to pay off debt.

> *First, draft a list of 12 topics to use each month for newsletters. List in the **Action Guide.***

Then, write each email that you will send for each month. Be sure to include several opportunities where customers can share the email with friends, or share the product in other ways.

MORE ON EMAIL MARKETING

> ➲ *You can easily set up automated drip marketing automations using SendFox.com*
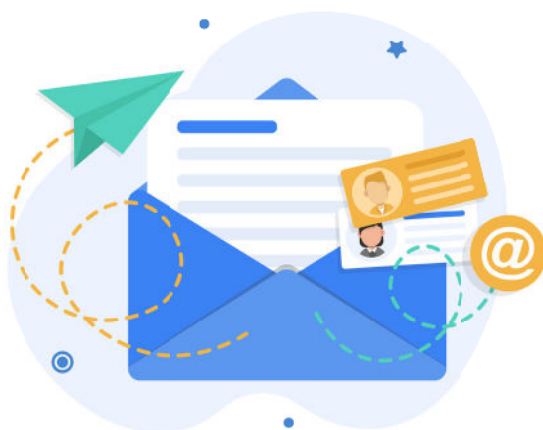
Week 12:

Form A Community

Noah wanted to build a community around personal savings, so he created a message board. Mint was one of the first online sites to pull together resources and information about personal finance. Noah wanted to build a community around the topic of personal finance to promote further conversations and engagement. Initially, Mint tried creating a forum using an out-of-the-box software solution like vBulletin vs. phpBB. Noah mentioned that this didn't work very well, but was worth trying out.

DISTRIBUTION (POST-LAUNCH)

Mint's iPhone app saw a large number of downloads when the app was released in the App Store. It quickly became the top app in the Finance category, and stayed at the top of the charts for a long time. Its longevity drove tens of thousands of downloads, and exposed Mint to a new set of users. Mint also participated in other distribution deals – though hit or miss. Overall, they were "worth the effort," according to Jason Putorti.

GET FREE PUBLICITY

Noah also wrote articles about how to save money on ehow.com and wikihow.com, posted free ads on Craigslist, and contributed to Digg and Reddit. His efforts were somewhat successful, but didn't drive many users for Mint. However, these are certainly tactics worth trying out – their success depends heavily on your target audience. Mint saw some great interest on sites like these with their informative infographics.

What did it take for Mint to win?

1. **Instant Value.** *This is easily the most important thing. All the other solutions required more work from visitors. Facebook preceded us, and luckily trained people to share their personal information online. Thanks, Zuck. Within three minutes of using Mint, you get your full financial picture and ways to increase your own money, all for free. That's instant value and basically, too good to be true. No other service came close to doing this.*

2. **Trust.** *Next to family and health, personal finance is one of the top three most sensitive subjects in life, not to mention online. The site was originally called mymint. com, and Mint's executive team spent months acquiring the Mint.com domain. This may seem inconsequential, but would you feel more comfortable entering your bank details on Wesabe.com or Mint.com?*

   The capacity to purchase and own a highly sought-after domain like "Mint.com" showed people that this team had money. They weren't as likely to steal information or engage in other scammy tactics. The conciseness of the domain in and of itself [chase.com, mint.com] signaled legitimacy.

3. **User Experience & Design.** *Similar to the short, premium domain, a highly optimized user experience and great design also built trust.*

A few other ways Mint Marketing increased trust:

- ➲ **SEO.** *People trust Google, so Noah knew they'd trust Mint even more if they came to Mint from organic search results. Search engine optimization ended up playing a key role in the Mint launch, and Noah's goal was to get Mint to the front page of Google searches for personal finance terms.*

- ➲ **Authority.** *Noah earned the backing of thought leaders in personal finance through the blogger network.*

- ➲ **Security.** *Mint.com actively promoted security front and center, immediately addressing most users' top concern.*

4. **Research.** *Noah and the Mint team spent countless weeks figuring out what people really wanted:*

"Guess who we found out Mint's biggest competitor was? No one. Apathy. This shocked me! Most people would rather not track anything and just see how they are doing when they go to the ATM. Guess who was #2? Ms Money, Intuit, Wesabe? NOPE. Microsoft Excel. Who would have believed that!"

Learning these surprising insights enabled Noah and the team to develop the right messaging, approach and branding to speak the audience's language. Their messaging ended up being, "Take back your money."

5. **Education.** *Dave McClure worked with Noah to architect the content (blogger) network, which was a huge traffic generator for Mint.com and still is to this day. It leverages infographics, ideas, interviews, and a wealth of useful information to users and to Google for SEO juice.*

By the time Mint launched, there was an outpouring of interest already built up, waiting to flood onto the site. Though it wasn't first-to-market, faced more than a handful of solid competitors, and still had a long way to go at that point, Mint won in the end.

Closing Words From Noah

When I first got the job at Mint before they launched, I committed to Aaron Patzer (founder) to get Mint.com 100,000 users six months after launching. Shit, I was a bit nervous.

Aaron was reluctant to give me the chance, and six figures was a big goal for a product that hadn't launched yet.

In the end, and fortunately, we hit one million users in the first six months.

How did I make that happen? First off, the product was awesome. That makes marketing less about "marketing" (whatever that is) and more about educating and sharing with people. Still, there is always that annoying quote about if a tree falls, blah blah...you know what I mean.

If your product is not awesome or you don't believe in it, you're not going to be able to market it to anyone. But if you are excited about your product, service, etc, then Mint Marketing will work for you.

Instead of spending time doing "social media marketing" and flailing around with random posts throughout the web, use Quant-Based Marketing to guarantee your success before you start. It also shows you exactly what streams are delivering leads vs. the ones that most people go after "just because."

One of my big feeder channels was the Blogger Network that I built to talk about Mint and share the content we published on our own personal finance blog. This directed organic traffic to the site. Plus, it showed users that we were a trustworthy place to go for tips on personal finance, which Mint still is to this day.

In addition, user experience, knowing our customers from customer research, segmentation, and testing our messaging kept us on track for what we were putting out through the channels.

There were, as you know, many more details behind the full Mint Marketing Plan.

Now that it's laid out in front of you, feel free to use what you've learned in pieces when it makes sense. Keep in mind that you can and should come back again and again to the core Mint Marketing framework every time you launch a new growth phase for your business.

From me and everyone at AppSumo, glad to have you as part of our Sumo family.

Till next time, game on!

OkDork by
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