

How to Build a Solid Foundation in Marketing



Climate tech startups face the same challenges that any other new business faces at an early stage. Budgets are often limited, employee time is constrained, and the pressure to get results is high.

Beyond these typical challenges, cleantech and climate tech startups often have the additional burden of trying to communicate value for a complex good or service. That makes finding marketing support a difficult task at such a critical moment.

In an environment where there is so much at stake, how should leadership approach marketing? The answer is that it depends on a given company's stage of growth. Over the past few years, the DG+ team has worked with numerous startups across solar, energy storage, grid software, green hydrogen, and many other segments of the greater industry. Thankfully, there are some best practices and trends that any leader can follow for success.

When should a leader look to hire in-house marketing support? Where should leaders look for additional marketing resources? Let's take a look.



About the Author

David Ganske is the CEO of DG+Design, a marketing and creative agency that leverages energy expertise, creative skill, and marketing strategy to empower clean energy and sustainable brands. Prior to founding DG+, David held leadership positions at ForeFront Power, SunEdison, and Astrum Solar as well as consultancy positions at the World Bank and UNDP. He is also the Director and Producer of *Front Range Change*, an award-winning documentary film on the transition from coal to renewable energy in Colorado, which is now available on Amazon Prime. David is a self-proclaimed energy nerd and environmentalist with a passion for the power of visual storytelling. He holds an MPA in International Energy Management & Policy from Columbia University and a B.A. in Economics from the University of Virginia.

For B2B Businesses, Needs Depend on Stage

The growth that we are currently experiencing across climate tech is truly unprecedented. If you subscribe to Climate Tech VC or Axios Climate Deals newsletters, there are tens of companies starting every day across our industry. Many of these are Series Seed investments, but there is also no shortage of larger investments as well.

The table below shows a breakdown of funding rounds for startups, employee count, and if there are in-house marketers. In addition, the table shows typical marketing needs at each stage. No two companies are alike, so there are certainly exceptions, but these are the general trends that we see across our clients.

| Stage | Employees | In-House Marketers | Typical Marketing Needs |
|-------------------------|-----------|--------------------|--|
| Pre-Seed or Series Seed | 1-3 | 0 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">> Initial Brand> Website 1.0 |
| Series A | 4-10 | 0-1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">> Key Messaging> Website 2.0> Sales Collateral> Brand Templates |
| Series B | 10-50 | 1-2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">> Content Marketing> PR & Communications> Social Media Strategy |
| Series C | 50+ | 2-4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">> Event Marketing> Marketing Campaigns |

Pre-Seed to Series Seed Companies: Just the Start

This is where founders truly get rolling, and bootstrapping is par for the course. For Pre-Seed to Series Seed companies, marketing is often considered an afterthought, and honestly, that's normally okay. Founders are often focused on forming a sound business plan and networking with potential investors.

Marketing needs for Pre-Seed to Series Seed companies typically revolve around creating an initial brand to show legitimacy. These needs include logo creation, web design and development, and some sales collateral items for target customers.

- > Company Size: 1-3 people
- > In-House Marketing: None
- > Typical Marketing Needs: Initial Brand, Website, and Sales Materials

Because budgets are extremely limited during this stage, we often find that founders look to family or friends to help with these activities. Some early-stage startups also look for marketing or communications support from initial investors, whether they are accelerator programs, incubators, or angel investors. If the budget does exist at this stage for external support, such as through a marketing agency, there are still project-based options available that keep costs down.

Series A: Build a Marketing Foundation

At this stage, a startup is quickly moving into action through business development of a given product or service. The company probably has a few employees (beyond founders) and it is going through the sometimes painful process of building systems and workflows to scale.

Marketing needs for Series A companies include building the first marketing systems and templates, or the "marketing foundation" as we call it at DG+. Specific deliverables include key messaging development to differentiate the company's products or services from competitors, an updated website that can scale, sales collateral, and branded templates for things like presentations, proposals, and business cards. Communications or PR needs might include a press release about the latest round of funding and outreach to industry- or client-focused media outlets.

- > Company Size: 4-10 people
- > In-House Marketing: 0-1
- > Typical Marketing Needs: Key Messaging, Scalable Website, Sales Collateral, and Brand Templates

Series A companies often have a wide variety of ad-hoc marketing needs, and because of new funding, this is when companies start to look at agency support. The goal of this support is to essentially "level-up" the company through a project-based scope that falls within a defined budget. Because of the complex products and services of many startups, leaders look for marketing agencies that understand the industry.

Series B: Tell Your Story

A year or two after a Series A funding round, many companies will look to a Series B for further growth and scale. Startups at this stage have proof points for their products and services in the form of happy clients. They also are beginning to form a well-structured, multi-disciplinary in-house team that likely includes a single person in charge of marketing. Unfortunately for that single person, that includes a lot of responsibility across web, social media, PR, sales enablement, and a whole lot more.

A startup's in-house marketer is usually tasked with a strategy to spread the word of the company's impact. This can come in the form of case study articles, press releases, social media management, thought leadership, and media outreach. The challenge is that it can take a village of skills to make all of these things happen, but the company is not yet at a stage to hire all of these team members.

- > Company Size: 10-50
- > In-House Marketing: 1-2
- > Typical Marketing Needs: Content Marketing, PR & Communications, and Social Media Strategy

Companies at this stage can significantly benefit from a full-service, or "full-stack", marketing agency with a team of varied skill sets ready to serve the in-house marketer(s). The goal of this arrangement is to create a regular cadence of content that consistently tells the company's story. Without support to serve as an extension of the in-house team, initiatives to start a blog or post on social media often have sporadic results because ad-hoc items always arise.

Series C: Scale Your Impact

If a startup reaches Series C funding, it's likely that it is already a huge success. Additional funding might be used to increase production capacity or scale to new markets. Because the business model is working and there is finally money behind growth, marketing evolves into formal marketing campaigns around target audiences and segments.

- > Company Size: 50+
- > In-House Marketing: 2-4
- > Typical Marketing Needs: Event Marketing, Marketing Campaigns

For B2B startups, marketing campaigns can include event marketing for conferences, webinars, or other activities as well as account-based marketing for high-value targets. These campaigns should follow a more sophisticated approach that understands a typical buyer journey, varied content and messaging by funnel stage (i.e. awareness, consideration, or decision), and what metrics should be met to achieve success.

