

Principles of Marketing

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Module 7: Place (Distribution) + Customer Journey (How Customers Access You)

Module Overview

Even the best product at the right price can still fail for one simple reason: customers can't get it easily. If the purchase feels inconvenient, confusing, slow, or out of the way, customers don't just "try harder." Most of the time, they choose an easier alternative—or they choose nothing at all.

That's why distribution—often called "Place" in the marketing mix—isn't just about where something is sold. It's about access. Place is the system that answers:

- Where do customers find this?
- How do they get it?
- How long does it take?
- How much effort does it require?
- What could go wrong in the process?

In physical settings, "Place" includes things like store location, hours, shelf placement, checkout speed, parking, delivery options, and whether the product is actually in stock when the customer shows up. In digital settings, "Place" includes app usability, website navigation, load speed, payment options, shipping times, download access, and whether customers can find what they need in two clicks—or get lost and quit.

Convenience matters because it reduces friction, and friction is one of the biggest hidden “costs” customers face. Friction can look like:

- Too many steps to order
- Unclear instructions
- Long lines
- Limited hours
- Clunky checkout
- Slow shipping
- Out-of-stock items
- Confusing menus or links
- Forced account creation
- Lack of payment options

When friction rises, the perceived value drops—even if the product is great. Customers don’t usually say, “This distribution strategy is inefficient.” They just feel: *not worth it right now*.

In Module 7, you’ll learn how distribution works in both physical and digital environments, including the major ways businesses get products to customers (direct, retail, platforms, delivery, pickup, subscriptions, and more). You’ll also explore how companies compete through access—because sometimes the winning advantage isn’t “better,” it’s simply *easier*.

You’ll also learn how to map a simple **customer journey**, which is basically a step-by-step view of what customers experience from awareness to purchase to use. Journey mapping helps you spot where people drop off (abandon carts, get stuck, forget to return). Once you can see the drop-off points, you can fix them by reducing friction and increasing clarity—making the path to purchase feel smooth, fast, and obvious. Because in the real world, the best marketing doesn’t just persuade people. It removes obstacles so the right choice becomes the easy choice.



Distribution strategy is about making access seamless for the customer

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

1. **Explain what “Place” means in the marketing mix** (distribution and access)
2. **Compare distribution channels** (direct vs indirect; physical vs digital)
3. **Identify common friction points** that reduce sales or participation
4. **Map a basic customer journey** from awareness to action to follow-up
5. **Recommend changes that improve access**, convenience, and follow-through

Module To-Do List

1. Read: Module 7 Reading (Part A, Part B, Part C)

Key Terms

- Place / distribution
- Channel

- Direct vs indirect distribution
- Omnichannel (intro)
- Customer journey
- Touchpoints
- Friction points
- Conversion (intro)

Module 7 Reading — Part A: Place Isn't a Location—It's Access



Estimated Time

15–20 minutes

In the marketing mix, “Place” means **how customers get the product**:

- where it's available
- how it's delivered
- how easy it is to access
- how much effort it takes to buy or participate

Place includes physical locations, websites and apps, delivery and pickup options, ordering processes, and availability/hours. A simple truth: **people often choose what's easiest.**

Story: The campus bake sale that “should have worked”

A student organization runs a bake sale fundraiser. The products are good, prices are fair, and students like supporting the cause. But sales are low.

The club is confused—until they look at “Place”:

- the table is set up in a hallway with low foot traffic
- they're there during class times when students aren't walking around
- there's no mobile payment option
- there's no sign visible from a distance
- students have to stop, dig for cash, and wait

Nothing is “wrong” with the cookies. The access is wrong.

They move the table to a higher-traffic area, add Venmo/QR payment, simplify choices, and post one large sign: “\$2 cookies — scan to pay.”

Result: Sales jump. Same product. Better place/access.

Module 7 Reading — Part B: Distribution Channels (How Products Move)



Estimated Time

15–20 minutes

A distribution channel is the path a product takes to reach a customer.

Direct Distribution

Customer buys directly from the organization:

- Campus bookstore purchase
- Ordering from a restaurant’s website
- Buying from a brand’s online store

Indirect Distribution

A third party is involved:

- Delivery apps
- Retail stores
- Ticket platforms

Indirect channels can expand reach but often take fees, limit control over customer experience, and increase competition side-by-side.



Mini Case: The Pizza Shop and Delivery Apps

A local pizza shop is deciding whether to join a major delivery app. On the surface, it sounds like a simple question: Will we get more orders? But from a marketing perspective, this is really a **“Place” decision**—a distribution choice that shapes how customers access the product, what the experience feels like, and how the brand is perceived.

The Situation

Right now, the pizza shop relies on walk-ins, phone orders, and its own website. Joining a delivery platform would instantly place the shop inside an ecosystem where customers browse, compare, and purchase with just a few taps. That access can be powerful—but it comes with trade-offs that affect profitability, control, and customer relationships.

Benefits (Why joining can help)

1. **More visibility (built-in discovery):** Delivery apps function like a searchable marketplace. Customers often open the app without a specific restaurant in mind—they're hungry and scanning options. If the pizza shop joins, it can show up in searches for “pizza,” “late-night food,” or “best rated.” That visibility is especially valuable for new customers, students, or impulse purchases.
2. **Easier ordering (reduced friction):** Delivery apps remove steps. Customers don't have to look up your menu separately, create a new account, call and wait on hold, or re-enter delivery info. Less friction often means more completed orders—especially for customers who value speed and convenience over loyalty.
3. **Customers are already on the platform (habit and trust):** Many customers are “default loyal” to the app, not the restaurant. They already have saved addresses, stored payment methods, past order history, and trust that the process will be quick. So the pizza shop isn't just joining a delivery system—it's joining a *customer habit loop*.
4. **Potential for higher order volume during peak times:** Apps can boost volume on weekends, late-night hours, bad weather days, or during events. For some businesses, delivery platforms help stabilize demand and fill slow periods.

Trade-offs (Why joining can be risky)

1. **App fees reduce profit (and change pricing strategy):** Delivery platforms often charge fees that can significantly cut margins. The shop may find that a \$20 order becomes far less profitable after fees. This forces a strategic pricing question: Do we absorb the cost, raise prices, or change portion sizes/bundles? None of those choices are neutral.
2. **The app controls customer data (and you lose relationship power):** When customers order through the app, the platform often owns the relationship. You

may not get the customer's email or be able to market directly to them later. Loyalty may belong to the app ("I'll reorder through DoorDash"), not your brand.

- 3. Customers compare you instantly (competition is one scroll away):** In your own store or website, you control the experience. In an app, you're listed next to competitors with prices shown side-by-side. That means you're not just competing on taste—you're competing on speed, presentation, pricing, and ratings, often within seconds.
- 4. Ratings can punish you for things outside your control:** One late delivery can damage perception fast. Even if the pizza is great, customers may rate based on the driver being late or food arriving cold. Customers rarely separate "the restaurant" from "the platform experience."
- 5. Quality control becomes harder:** Pizza is especially sensitive to delivery. Joining an app may require the shop to rethink packaging, menu design, prep timing, and operational workflow. If they don't adjust, the product quality may drop in the exact channel that brings the most new customers—creating a reputation problem.

The Real Marketing Question

This isn't simply "Should we join?" It's: **What role do we want the delivery app to play in our distribution strategy?**

A smart approach might be: use the app to acquire new customers (visibility), encourage repeat customers to switch to direct ordering (higher profit), design app-only bundles that protect margins, limit delivery radius to protect quality, or invest in packaging so the experience matches the brand promise.

Key takeaway: Place decisions are strategic because they shape access and experience. It's a competitive advantage—or a vulnerability—depending on how it's managed.



Third-party platforms offer reach but reduce control over the customer relationship

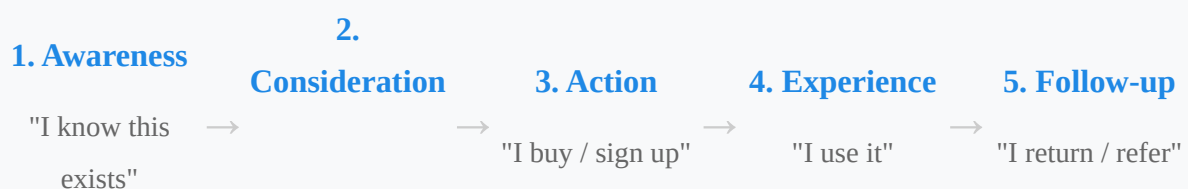
Module 7 Reading — Part C: Customer Journey: Where People Drop Off

Estimated Time

15–20 minutes

A customer journey is the path from **awareness** → **consideration** → **action** → **experience** → **follow-up**. The journey includes touchpoints like posters, social media, website, word-of-mouth, ordering steps, checkout/payment, pickup/delivery, and follow-up/retention.

Simple Customer Journey Map



"I'm thinking
about it"

Story: The tutoring center drop-off problem (journey mapping)

The tutoring center wants more attendance. Students say they “want help,” but they don’t show up. A journey map reveals drop-offs:

- **Awareness:** Students don’t know tutoring exists
- **Consideration:** Students worry it will feel embarrassing
- **Action:** Booking system is confusing
- **Experience:** First visit feels intimidating
- **Follow-up:** No reminder or easy rebooking

The solution isn’t one big change—it’s fixing the biggest friction points: clear “what happens” info, easy 2-minute booking, reminders, and a friendly first-time welcome.

Takeaway: Customer journey maps help you find the real problem.

Key Takeaways

- Place is access: availability + convenience + effort required
- Channels create trade-offs between reach and control
- Customer journeys reveal where people drop off
- Removing friction often increases participation more than “more advertising”

Next Steps

In **Module 8**, we’ll explore **Promotion and Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC)**—learning how to communicate value effectively through clear, consistent messaging across multiple channels. Understanding the distribution

channels and customer journey from Module 7 will help you ensure your promotional messages reach customers at the right place and time.