

Advertising Your Business

Marketing your business should be a consistent priority daily. The importance of spreading the word about your product or service can be the difference between success and failure. As a home-based or small business owner, you will wear many hats. This will include worker, manager, janitor, receptionist, order taker and a host of other duties.

Sometimes, we can get so caught up in being the worker for the business that we forget we also have to be the visionary and the planner - the role that gives the business guidance and ensures its longevity.

Consistent marketing and promotion not only help in branding your business, but it can also help with the following:

- * **Keeping current clients/customers informed of new products/services**
- * **Bringing in a stream of new clients, which is vital for business growth**
- * **Encourages and motivates you to keep up with trends in your industry**
- * **Creates a vision for your business.**
- * **Adds professionalism and sets a standard for your business**

Commitment to your marketing efforts is key. A minimum of 2 hours daily should be given to marketing. This can include: calling current customers and updating them on product specials or new services; creating brochures or flyers to mail out to potential customers; participating in community events or finding new avenues of advertising.

Following are 8 ways that you can market and promote your business:

1. **Press Release.** When you launch a new business, product or service or you are involved in a newsworthy event, write a press release and send it to publications that your clients/customers read.
2. **Volunteer.** Volunteer a limited amount of your products or services to a worthy cause. For example, if you own a graphic design company, you might design a conference brochure or guide for the American Cancer Society or a local women's hospital. This not only gives you a great client reference, but it gets your work in front of potential clients.
3. **Advisory Team.** Create an Advisory Team of individuals in various professions. Include benefits: organize a bi-monthly or monthly luncheon, offer discounted services/products etc.)

4. **Web Site.** Web Site. A web site is a great way to promote your products and services. There are many companies that offer low-cost sites as little as \$7.95 monthly or free sites (plug in "free web sites" on your search engine and review which has the best offer and quality).

5. **Newsletter.** Create an 8 ½ x 11 one-page newsletter and send out monthly via email or US mail. Include service/product updates, informative articles that can be put to good use.

6. **Open House.** Have a quarterly open house or social where you display your products or provide an enlightening seminar on your services. Offer refreshments, samples or discount coupons and allow your clients to mingle. Also allow your clients/customers to introduce themselves and share information if they would like to.

7. **Advertise.** Based on the type of business you have, advertising with your local community paper or cable channel can be cost-effective. Call and ask for an advertisement kit or rates. Information should include: publication distribution including areas, number of readers or viewers broken down into categories etc. ** Never provide a dollar amount for your marketing budget over the phone. Review information and let them know that you'll get back with them.

8. **Join Projects.** Establish working relationships with other businesses where your services or products compliment one-another. Develop ways you will work together. This can include: providing cross-referrals to one another, doing presentations together and sharing ad space etc.

Advertising and promoting your website can be tough: it appears that there are many different ways to accomplish this task, but most of them take time or money with out guaranteed return. In order to make things a bit easier I have compiled list of ten really simple techniques to promote and advertise your website.

1. **Advertise in the general Media.** To this point, you may have already overlooked or discounted advertising in newspapers and magazines as too expensive, especially because chances are your target audience does not live in any specific geographic location. This fact usually rules out radio, and television advertising is probably even more likely to be outside of your budget. What you might not have realized, is that you should discontinue looking at the general media and start looking at the specialist media for your niche or target. For example, if you run a real estate leads website, you could advertise it in property magazines, and even on 'lifestyle' cable channels that broadcast programs about moving or home renovation.

2. Put your web address on everything. If your business has any physical objects, whether it's a product, an eBook or just as sign in the front of your office, make sure to show your web address every time. Even if people do not remember the exact address, it lets them know that your website exists.

3. Give Out Pamphlets. Just because you are a web based business or use the web to promote your business, there is no rule against using or distributing a bit of old-fashioned paper promotion: distribute your pamphlets to as many areas as you can. Chances are your website is targeted to a specific niche or demographic rather than your local area, but the post office will be very helpful when it comes to getting your pamphlets where they need to go. Bulk mail is relatively cheap and easy to use. Check out the post office for more information.

4. Go to lots of Events. If there's some kind of trade fair for the industry your website is in, take the time and go to it. While you are there, you can promote your website. Even if there might not be very many people there, the individuals that are there will be very influential in the market place, and can get the buzz going about your site.

5. Write your web address on Business Cards. This should go without saying, but once you have invested the time and trouble to set up a website, do not forget to show it on your business cards. If you're relying on them to get people to call you on the phone, why not give them the option of reading more about you on your website or even emailing you?

Although advertising and promotion for web sites seems very mystical and magical these are some very common sense approaches to making it easier. The best advice is work at it. No one ever got noticed doing nothing. If you are active and vocal about your web site you will get visitors. It is just that simple.

Potential customers aren't going to find your web site unless you tell them about it and give them a reason to want to visit the page. In other words, you have to market the Web site.

So what can you do to market your business at low cost? Here are 24 proven methods to help get your business off the ground without spending a fortune.

1) If you don't have a business card and business stationery, have them made up -- immediately. Your business card, letterhead and envelope tell prospective customers you are a professional who takes your business seriously.

2) Get your business card into as many hands as possible. Call your friends and relatives and tell them you have started a business. Visit them and leave a small stack of business cards to hand out to their friends.

3) Talk to all the vendors from whom you buy products or services. Give them

your business card, and ask if they can use your products or service, or if they know anyone who can. If they have newsgroups where business cards are displayed (printers often do, and so do some supermarkets, hairdressers, etc.), ask if yours can be added to the board.

4) Attend meetings of professional groups, computer user groups and groups such as the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, or civic associations. Have business cards in a pocket where they are easily reachable. Every time you start to say "My name is," reach in your pocket for a business card. By the time you get to "I run a..." (Type of business), your business card should be deposited in the hand of the person with whom you are speaking. Don't forget to ask what the people you speak with do, and to really listen to them. They'll be flattered by your interest, and better remember you because of it.

5) Become actively involved in 3 or 4 of these groups. That will give you more opportunity to meet possible prospects. But remember: opportunists are quickly spotted for what they are, and get little business. While you won't want to become involved in activities that require a lot of your time in very many organizations, you can -- and should -- make real contributions to all of them by offering useful ideas and help with small parts of one-time projects;

6) Look for something unusual about what you do, and publicize it. Send out press releases to local newspapers, radio stations, cable TV stations, or magazines whose audiences are likely to be interested in buying what you sell. To increase your chance of having the material published, send along a photo (but not to radio stations) with your press release. Editors of printed publications are often in need of "art" (drawings or photos) to fill space and break up the gray look of a page of text.

7) Write an article that demonstrates your expertise in your field. Send it to non-competing newspapers, magazines, and Web sites such as the Business Know-How Web site. Be sure that your name, business name, reference to your product or service and phone number is included at the end of the article. If the editor can use the article, you get your name in print, and possibly get your contact information printed for free, too.

8) Whenever you do get publicity, get permission from the publisher to reprint the article containing the publicity. Make photocopies and mail the copies out with sales letters or any other literature you use to market your product or service. The publicity clips lend credibility to the claims you make for your products or services.

9) Contact nonprofit organizations, schools and colleges, and even other businesses that have customers who may need your services. Ask for work or leads.

10) Network with others who are doing the same type of work you are. Let them know you are available to handle their work overloads. (But don't try to steal their customers. Word will get out, and will ruin your business reputation.)

11) Offer to be a speaker on subjects utilizing your area of expertise. Volunteer organizations, libraries and online forums often need speakers for meetings. After you've had some practice speaking (enough to feel comfortable doing it and to have gotten some positive feedback), look into working with speaker's bureaus to book speaking engagements for you. You'll benefit two ways from such engagements: the fee you receive for doing them, and the publicity you, your product or service gets as a result.

12) If your product or service is appropriate, give demonstrations of it to whatever groups or individuals might be interested. Or, teach others how to use some tool you use in your work.

13) Find out what federal, state, and local government programs are in existence to help you get started in business. Most offer free counseling, and some may be able to suggest possible prospects for your business.

14) Send out sales letters to everyone you think might be able to use what you sell. Be sure to describe your business in terms of how it can help the prospect. Learn to drop a business card in every letter you send out.

15) If you use a car or truck in your business have your business name and contact information professionally painted on the side of the vehicle. That way your means of transportation becomes a vehicle for advertising your business. If you don't want the business name painted on the vehicle, consider using magnetic signs.

16) Get on the telephone and make "cold calls." These are calls to people who you would like to do business with. Briefly describe what you do and ask for an appointment to talk to them about ways you can help them meet a need or solve a problem.

17) Get samples of your product or your work into as many hands as possible.

18) Offer a free, no obligation consultation to people you think could use your services. During such consultations offer some practical suggestions or ideas -- and before you leave ask for an "order" to implement the ideas.

19) Learn to ask existing customers, prospects and casual acquaintances for referrals. When you get them, follow up on the leads.

20) Use other people to sell your product or service. Instead of (or in addition to)

selling your products yourself, look for existing mail order companies that would be willing to include your products in their catalogs, or for distributors or sales agents who would be willing to take over sales chores for you. Be sure your pricing structure allows for the fees or commissions you will have to pay on any sales that are made.

21) Have sales letters, flyers and other pertinent information printed and ready to go. Ask prospects who seem reluctant to buy from you: "Would you like me to send information?" Follow up promptly with a note and a letter that says "Here is the information you asked me to send."

22) Run a contest. Make the prize something desirable and related to your business. It could be a free gift basket of your products, for instance, or free services.

23) Take advantage of any opportunities you have to get free ads, or to have your company and its product or service listed free of charge in a directory. Or Professional associations often publish such directories.

24) If your target market would be likely to use the Internet or online forums, participate in discussion groups and consider putting up a web page. But, if you do make it online, be sure to include your email address and your web page address (if you have one) on your business cards, in your promotional materials, in print ads and even on your letterhead.

How a website can promote your business

Regardless of the size of your business, your business can benefit by having a website. The Internet is quickly becoming the world's market place.

Businesses benefit from websites because it saves money and time, reach a wider consumer market, gives customers what they want and it will help keep up with competitors. Customers will enjoy better support, not be stuck by store hours, and a sense of professionalism from your company. In today's age, all businesses that want to go somewhere should have a website.

A web site gives your company world-wide exposure. 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, your site is available world-wide, and can be so for a very modest cost. A website can become a live on-line brochure. You can keep your web-content up-to-date and advertise new products as they come available.

Even if you do not plan to use e-commerce to sell your products or services, a web site will get your products and services advertised. By advertising your company name and product names, people will start searching for your company by name.

A local business, serving a specific geographic area, can benefit a lot from having a website. A successful local website depends on two factors - creating a convincing site, and promoting it properly. Of the two, the second factor is the one that is most often ignored.

Websites reduce the cost of printing. Most businesses distribute catalogs, brochures and fliers to their customers and their target market. These papers cost the company money each time one is used. By replacing these with a web site, businesses can store all their necessary information and refer customers to the site. You can expose a vast audience to your electronic brochure describing your company, its products and services. You can reach a far wider audience to inform them of your existence and what you can do for them.

Selling products and services via the web can make for higher profit margins, since there are much lower overheads and costs. You can provide feedback forms, e-mail links, and online surveys for your customers to communicate with you. You can use your website to provide support to your customers in a variety of ways designed to best serve their needs. You can receive orders for products or services from a vast audience of potential customers.

Internet users are online looking to shop. "If you build it, they will come." They are often on a mission to find something. They are ready to spend their money. E-mail is quickly rising as the preferred method of communication by customers. Many businesses rely on their online shop as a means of staying alive. Over 50% of small businesses using the internet believe it has helped increase their profits. Most all businesses have an internet presence. More than 2.6 million small businesses are online and almost all large businesses are online. If a business does not have a website by now, they are surely being left behind and missing out on huge potential to earn money. Websites are a convenient place for customers to shop and review products. Customers are looking for convenience. Having a website is a big step towards being visible to millions of people on the Internet. However, you still need to let all those people know that you exist. It is just like having a phone number. You need to give your phone number to people and list it in the telephone directory before people start calling. Website promotion is a similar procedure for your website.

Television ads are often prohibitively expensive for small businesses to produce and air. Magazine and radio ads are less expensive but still require a sizeable investment when part of an ongoing campaign. Although you can spend a lot of money on an Internet campaign, there are many ways to leverage the Internet and gain free advertising for your business.

Following are 20 ideas to consider.

1. Increase your visibility on search engines: Insert keywords that describe your business into the HTML < META > tags on your Web site pages.

Repeat these keywords in the text of your Web site's homepage. Strategic use of keywords can put your business name at the top of customers' search results. For more information, see our article "Optimizing Your Site for Search Engines and Directories."

2. Put your URL on everything: Maximize your advertising efforts by listing your Web site address on everything you do. Print the URL on your company's letterhead, on your business cards, on the front of your building or the door to your office suite. Use the URL in your e-mail signature. List the URL on any print advertising that you do, including phone books, brochures, flyers, and direct mail pieces.

3. Submit your site to every directory, specialty listing, industry organization, and yellow pages you can find: No matter what industry your business is in, there are online directories, such as Yahoo! Yellow Pages, that you should register with. Many business and industry associations allow you to list your business on their Web site. In addition, there are individuals who maintain popular lists of resources; use Web search engines to find these lists, and then create an entry for your business.

4. Utilize evangelists: Channel the energy of your most enthusiastic staff and encourage them to promote your company's product as they surf the Web.

5. Blogs: A Weblog, or blog, is a collection of short articles, essays, or loosely-formatted thoughts, usually written by one individual. Since the 2004 U.S. presidential election, blogs have become extremely popular as both a medium to get your message out and a vehicle for paid advertising. Blogs also encourage reader comments, making them a valuable tool for gathering customer feedback. Companies such as Blogger (www.blogger.com) will host your blog for free. You can also install a blog on your own Web site with free software such as MediaWiki (<http://wikipedia.sourceforge.net>).

6. Podcasting: Podcasts are audio files recorded in a radio talk show format. By posting podcasts on your Web site and other sites like Apple's iTunes (www.itunes.com), customers can subscribe to your podcasts, download them as soon as they are available, and then listen to them on their computers or portable MP3 devices. The software to create podcasts is free; for more information visit www.podcastingnews.com.

7. Join online communities: No matter what the topic, there are thousands of people discussing it passionately on the Internet. By contributing to these discussion groups, you can inform your customers and advertise your business.

8. E-mail lists: Cultivate a list of your customers' e-mail addresses and send them new product announcements, coupons, special offers, and useful information. See our article "Introduction to E-Mail Marketing" for more information.

9. Get the attention of the press: Pitch news ideas about your industry to local newspapers, radio stations, and television stations. Pitch ideas to Web news sites. Propose that one of your employees be the expert interviewed in the news piece.

10. Win awards: Research organizations that give awards for the products or services you provide. Apply for these awards and take the process seriously. When you win, make the most of the publicity.

11. Donate time or resources to a charity: Encourage charitable organizations to promote your business' donations and involvement. Try to get media coverage for the organizations and community causes you champion.

12. Publish information and reports about your industry: Provide consumers with free information about your business' industry. Invest in potential customers and they will invest in you.

13. Reciprocal links: Companies such as LinkLeads (www.linkleads.com) help businesses by facilitating an exchange of hyperlinks. By allowing a company to insert links to their products on your site, a company will allow you to insert links to your products on its site.

14. Reciprocal banner ads: Companies such as 123Banners (www.123banners.com) help businesses by facilitating free banner advertisement swaps. By allowing a company to advertise on your site, they allow you to advertise on theirs. Be sure you retain control over what Web sites carry your ads, and what ads you post on your site.

15. Coupons: Make coupons available on your Web site and e-mail them to your customers. Encourage them to give the coupons to friends and family.

16. Free samples of your product or service: Offer free samples of your product or service. Distribute these samples as widely as possible. Register your giveaways with Web sites such as A+ Free Stuff (www.aplusfreestuff.com) that act as a clearinghouse for free products. Before giving something away for free, ask customers to provide their e-mail address or fill out a short survey.

17. Free classified ads: Use services like Yahoo! Classifieds (<http://classifieds.yahoo.com>) to post free ads for your products and services. Also consider posting offers for free samples of your products, sweepstakes, and other giveaways.

18. Excellent customer service: There's no advertising like personal recommendations made between friends and family. The best way to encourage this type of "viral marketing" is to provide excellent customer service. Take the

time to properly train and motivate your sales people and do what is necessary to satisfy your customers' needs.

19. Business alliances and partnerships: Build partnerships with businesses that offer complementary products and services, and then promote each other. Make joint press statements about your industry, your partnership, and your products and services. Make sure your partners provide links from their Web sites to yours.

20. Ezine: Write an e-mail newsletter, called an ezine, with articles about your industry, your products and services, and related news of interest to your customers. Check out sources such as goarticles.com and ezinearticles.com, which provide free articles you can use in your ezine. Advertise your ezine for free with directory sites such as www.ezine-dir.com.

Not all these ideas may be appropriate for your business. The important thing is to think creatively and experiment. The Internet is an extremely flexible tool that gives your business many avenues for advertisement and enables you to react quickly to customer feedback.